

The composition of “A”-13 in 1960 marks Zukofsky’s return to “A” after almost a decade, during which he was primarily preoccupied with the compulsive and exhausting gestation of *Bottom: on Shakespeare*. 1960 was a notable year in U.S. poetry: Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* was awarded the National Book Award, W.D. Snodgrass’s *Heart’s Needle* the Pulitzer and Delmore Schwartz the Bollingen Prize. Then there was the publication of Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* presenting Charles Olson and Robert Duncan as the primary heirs of an alternative poetic modernism backed up by the publication in the same year of Olson’s *The Distances*, the first volume of *The Maximus Poems* and Duncan’s *The Opening of the Field*. However, in this controversy of poets so heavily marked by the need to respond to an ethical and existential vacuum in the wake of the Second World War and under the cloud of the Cold War, it is not easy to figure out where Zukofsky fits in with his rigorous eschewal of mythopoetics, both personal and social, in pursuit of a restrained formalist practice.

“A”-13 ushers in the most prolific, ambitious and self-confident period of Zukofsky’s writing life, cut short only by his death in 1978. The nine years between the composition of “A”-12 (1951) and “A”-13 was the second of two extended breaks from working on “A”, both of which fell in the two decades (1940-1960) when Zukofsky almost entirely disappeared from public view. This was not because of any self-imposed withdrawal or diffidence about being published, so one imagines these hiatuses were due in part to a sense of discouragement, despite his insistence that he was in no hurry to finish “A”. However, there were other factors as well since in this period Zukofsky became a family man, which demanded a more settled income rather than the marginal job hopping that characterized the 1930s and early 1940s, so that finally, if reluctantly, he took a position at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute teaching literature and composition to engineering students. Also as the young Paul (born 1943) revealed his musical precocity, Louis and Celia increasingly organized their lives and resources to nurture his talent, including home schooling. Nevertheless beginning in the mid-1950s Zukofsky’s poetic isolation slowly changed as younger poets, first of all Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley, began advocating his work among their friends. Creeley published Zukofsky in several issues of the *Black Mountain Review* (1955-1957), Jonathan Williams’ Jargon imprint produced a beautiful edition of *Some Time* (1956), Duncan instigated an invitation for Zukofsky to teach a summer course at San Francisco State College (1958), and Cid Corman’s Origin Press brought out “A” 1-12 (1959). Corman would publish the individual sections of “A”-13 in the second series of his journal *Origin* (1961-1964), which featured Zukofsky throughout.<sup>1</sup> This was hardly the kind of support to bring Zukofsky mainstream attention, but it was the beginning of a slow snowball effect that would see a remarkable burst of publications and notice throughout the 1960s and beyond. Although the completion of *Bottom* was key to releasing Zukofsky to turn back to

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<sup>1</sup> Probably a key reason Zukofsky turned to “A”-13 at this time was as a favour to Corman, who had asked for and was promised the movement if he restarted *Origin*. The two had been in regular, intense correspondence since they first met during the Zukofskys’ European trip in the summer of 1957, and Corman brought out “A” 1-12 over the course of the final months of 1959 in Kyoto, for which Zukofsky was extremely grateful. Aside from “A”-13, *Origin* featured many of the *Catullus* renditions, which the Zukofskys were working on throughout the duration of the second series, and the final issue printed “A”-16 on the back cover. Their correspondence is held at the HRC; it is comparable in size to that of Duncan and Levertov but concentrated into six and a half years.

"A", this interest by younger poets and his rereading of "A" I-12 in preparation for its belated publication undoubtedly played a crucial role in renewing his sense of the poem's worth and thinking about where next to go with it. He had, however, already made a tentative start in 1958 on another large-scale project, *Catullus*, to which he would promptly turn after the three months spent composing "A"-13 (July-Sept. 1960). Nevertheless, "A"-13 decisively marks the start of Zukofsky's late period, and evidences distinct differences from the movements that preceded.

The movements of "A" from "A"-7 (1930) through "A"-12 (1951) alternate between pre-determined forms adopted from traditional models (sonnets, canzone, ballade, ballata) and more sprawling collage assemblages, with the 135 pages of "A"-12 representing something of an apotheosis of the latter, into which Zukofsky seemingly threw everything he had on hand. This in fact was the case, and "A"-12 established what would be Zukofsky's basic practice in composing the later long movements at least through "A"-19; that is, more or less random gathering of materials without preconceptions about how they would be used and then writing up the poems from whatever he had collected, the various interrelations within the movement arising in the process of working the raw materials.<sup>2</sup> To a remarkable degree, Zukofsky tended to use almost everything he had collected in whatever poem he was composing at the time on the assumption that anything and everything relates. Inevitably not quite everything was used so Zukofsky typically carried over any unused material into subsequent movements—he was never wasteful. Beginning with "A"-13 Zukofsky tends to blend pre-determined forms with assemblage; he would decide on a flexible form—often a word-count line (in "A"-14, -18, -19, -21, -22 & -23) and sometimes with regular stanza forms ("A"-13, -14, -19 and partially in -22 & -23)—and then feed in his materials (see Z-notes commentary on the Forms of "A"). Typically, the long movements are constructed from passages worked from a single source alternating irregularly with passages that use numerous source materials together, and inevitably there is a range of treatments of the source materials—quotation, paraphrase, transmutation, transliteration—which may characterize a given passage or be freely mixed together.

What broadly distinguishes the movements beginning with "A"-13 from those that preceded is an increased working or massaging of the source materials in order to foreground

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<sup>2</sup> Beginning with "A"-13, all Zukofsky's working notebooks and notes have been preserved, which appear complete as far as one can tell through to the end of his life. This is not the case with "A"-12 and earlier movements, for which only a few scattered notes and rough drafts survive, so how Zukofsky went about composing these works is more speculative. The evident reason for this discontinuity in the preservation of his working papers is that around 1960 he realized such materials may be worth something when he entered into negotiations with the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, although initially the latter were interested in his letters from Pound and Williams rather than his own papers. The notebook for "A"-13 (HRC 3.13) begins in 1952, shortly after the composition of "A"-12, and goes through to 1960, but includes various items, most notably rough drafts of many short poems of this period and some notes that ended up in *Bottom*. It is evident that Zukofsky did not think of this as specifically an "A"-13 notebook, since it tentatively suggests given materials or draft passages might go into a number of different future movements, although in the end most ended up in "A"-13. Subsequent notebooks are more disciplined in the sense that they consist pretty much solely of "A" materials and are generally used in the order that the movements were composed, which is to say, Zukofsky usually considered anything he had on hand could go into whatever movement on which he happened to be working.

verbal play.<sup>3</sup> In “A”-8 almost everything is quotation, which can be condensed but is rarely tampered with by paraphrase or transmutation. Although there are exceptions, similarly in “A”-12 Zukofsky’s sources are in the main not reworked, but are quoted, condensed or paraphrased in a generally straightforward manner and then assembled. As is typical in collage, we can usually identify the divisions between different sets of materials. With the later movements such clear divisions tend to be suppressed and the source materials more freely or aggressively manipulated—“*Mangling done here*,” “A”-13 announces (267).<sup>4</sup> As a result the text constantly turns on itself, deflecting attention away from theme, verisimilitude or argument.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the later works tend to fall into a species of elliptical idiolect, a deliberate subversion of grammatical statement.

It is possible, therefore, to argue that with “A”-13 Zukofsky fully realizes what he wants to do with “A”. The nature of the modernist long poem or what has sometimes been designated the “life-poem” is such that it is open to changes of trajectory and intention, even out-right revisionism. Zukofsky began “A” apparently rejecting any mythopoetic or other narrative structural principle underwriting the work at a time when the coherence of *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos* or even *Ulysses* was fiercely debated. This suggests that Zukofsky determined on a more immanentist conception of his poem, trusting that in time it would create its own sense of coherence, which later on he was satisfied to suggest was simply dictated by the rhythms and happenstances of his own life. But this really meant the interrelations or recurrences generated by the writing of the poem itself, the “life” that lives on with others (readers). From this perspective the increased foregrounding of the textual play with “A”-13 and after is a logical development. This is not necessarily simply a defensive maneuver against the inexorable forces of commodification or a turning away from the disappointments of politics (history) to more purely personal concerns. In the only public statement he ever made on his intentions for “A”, Zukofsky states: “not to fathom time but literally to sound it as on an instrument and so to hear again as much of what was and is together, as one breathes without pointing to it before and after. The story must exist in each word or it cannot go on. The words written down—or even inferred as written over, crossed out—must live, not seem merely to glance at a watch” (*Prep.*+ 228).<sup>6</sup> I take it that this implies a full awareness that words are always already saturated with the social and history, above all the intimate sense of living with others. The poem, then, will not represent history, contemporary or past, but sound it in the various senses of that term.

The three-line stanza of the first partita of “A”-13 is particularly notable since it is the first time this type of formal regularity is introduced into “A” aside from the templated movements “A”-7, -9, -11. The only real precedent for using a flexible regular stanza form in

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<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere I have argued that *Catullus* was crucial in Zukofsky’s foregrounding of verbal play in his later work; see Z-notes commentary on *Catullus*.

<sup>4</sup> This line is actually one of the many oddities quoted from the *Book of Fate* I will discuss below.

<sup>5</sup> The exception is “A”-15, which returns to the collage practice of the earlier long movements, although it starts off with a spectacular example of textual manipulation with the homophonic rendering from the *Book of Job*.

<sup>6</sup> This remark is actually quoted from Zukofsky’s sketch, “It Was,” written 1941 (*CF* 181-184), and included in a brief forward for the 1967 Doubleday reprint of “A” 1-12, but never reprinted in any other edition. In correspondence, Zukofsky offered annotations and local explanations of form, but never spoke of his larger intentions for the poem, despite frequent assurances that it had a plan. The closest exception is a long 1930 letter to Pound where clearly he is anxious to assure his mentor of his seriousness, but the sketchy trajectory that he offers bears little resemblance to what eventuated (*EP/LZ* 78-82).

a longish poem is “4 Other Countries” (1957-1958), deploying a restrained version of the variable foot, which is no doubt why Williams responded so enthusiastically to this poem. Zukofsky undoubtedly saw himself as allied with Williams in exploring flexible fixed forms, although Zukofsky never appealed to some natural principle, say American speech rhythms, as the motivation for such forms, and probably his propensity to think in terms of musical analogies, especially baroque forms, was decisive. The first *partita* opens by affirming the stanzaic form: the first three lines are distinct units, the first two are parallel both grammatically and semantically, while the third takes off in an entirely different direction and could be thought of as negating the first two, suggesting a dialectical movement. However, thereafter Zukofsky quickly breaks the form, syntactically writing across the stanzas, although periodically returning to reaffirm it. The reader has the short stanza form continuously before their eyes, only to see it persistently dissolving and reforming with respect to the syntax and sense. It is precisely such counterpointed forms that intrigued Zukofsky, a dynamic but unpredictable progression in the longer poems. Stanza forms will reappear in “A”-14, -19 and in the framing segments of -22 & -23, although in all these cases combined with word-count lines. Again the word-count line asserts a standard formal principle while at the same time tending to undermine conventional conceptions or expectations of the line—visually the general regularity of the line asserts itself, but syntactically and rhythmically the line as such appears and sounds superfluous.

“A”-13 is one of the few movements of “A” given a title and the only one with distinctly marked subdivisions. “Partita” indicates that the movement is conceived on the analogy of a musical suite whose individual parts have different measures or tempos based originally on dances. A precedent is the suite of poems entitled, “Spook’s Sabbath, Five Bowings” (1952), which similarly brings together five distinct poems, each designated with a violin bowing term (*spiccato*, *martelé*, *grand détaché* and so on), although the reader will be forgiven for scratching their head over the precise relationships between these techniques and Zukofsky’s poems. Nonetheless, they display a gamut of different timings or tonal variations while all use content from the musical milieu of young Paul’s summer term in Connecticut (*CSP* 135-138).<sup>7</sup> Actually, in formal terms the distinctions between the *partitas* of “A”-13 are not as marked as one might expect since three of the five parts deploy a fairly standard flexible free verse form without any line breaks, while the other two parts (the first and fourth) are sharply different in being shaped into stanzas. There are tonal differences between the parts, although characteristically the later long movements of “A” persistently undermine any overriding dominant, and indeed dialectical or fugal dynamism is, as we shall see, essential to these poems. Nevertheless, Zukofsky does indicate general moods or keys for each part by at least starting with an identifiable setting: in *partita* i we have a father giving advice to his son, in *partita* ii father and son are out on a walk in the city, in *partita* iii the poet writes at night while his son sleeps, in *partita* iv the poet inventories the contents of his wallet, and in *partita* v the poet looks out his apartment window on the cityscape. We will examine the significance of these situations below and simply note for the moment that these frames are quite common in the later “A” but do not contain the poems or segments in the manner of, say, stream of consciousness—the settings offer a starting point and sometimes

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<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 1940s, Zukofsky put together a number of sequences of individually composed short poems that were both formally and in content highly various and seemingly unrelated, although close consideration will reveal a criss-cross of conjunctions. Major examples are “Light” (originally published 1948), “Songs of Degrees” (1956), “I’s (pronounced *eyes*)” (1959) and “The Old Poet Moves to a New Apartment 14 Times” (1963).

are circled back to but otherwise the poems textually wander without concern for psychological verisimilitude.<sup>8</sup>

“A” of course evokes the example of music from its very first words, but music takes on a range of significances, both thematic and formal, in the course of the work. The reasonable assumption is that music is formally a key model for Zukofsky, but precisely how is often vague. Although his immediate family were musicians, there is little evidence that Zukofsky bothered to teach himself much about the technical aspects of music or that his claims for adapting, for example, fugal forms in his poetry are more than general analogies. The idea of the fugue was of considerable importance to him, but boils down to a common enough modernist conception of a non-linear construction, not essentially different from other common structural metaphors such as collage or stream-of-consciousness, or the manner in which for example the form of expressionist drama or Kandinsky’s paintings were often characterized as “musical.” “Music” also designates a venerable idea of the essence of the aesthetic: a meaningfulness beyond or prior to that of the lexical or conceptual; “music” resists through dialectical interplay the propensity for reading to fall back on the instrumental or propositional reduction of language possibilities. The musical analogy was also useful for Zukofsky given his emphasis on the act of reading as an affective interrelationship between reader and poem or poem and the world that is non-teleological, that is, is an activation of the reader that is not motivated by telling them what is good for them. As has been observed, Zukofskian music, as evidenced by “A”, is not notably sonorous or lyrical by the usual standards of musical-poetic conventions. I would suggest this is because the music is in the dynamic of the poem, its self-conscious making out of the materials of the world, which always essentially implies making with others, both dead and living. “A”-12 conflates the making, and by implication the reading, of poetry with living one’s life, that the former necessarily always participates in the latter. In this sense “A”-13 follows directly out of its predecessor and is why each partita sets out from an arbitrarily designated everyday situation.

From “A”-12 on, the quotidian, as opposed to say history, dominates much of “A”, but is not to be understood as a matter of representing the ordinary or mapping the mundane attentions of the poet, rather the quotidian is the dynamic that one is always necessarily engaged in. The quotidian can be understood within the larger process of the breakdown of genre and other literary hierarchies which opens up the text to conceptually anything both in terms of content and rhetoric or style. Thus the importance of the conversational or everyday language for free verse in establishing a baseline wherein anything can come into the textual space in an egalitarian manner. As mentioned, Zukofsky generally composed “A”-13 and most of the later long movements by randomly gathering textual materials, the diverse, seemingly miscellaneous data of existence in modernity that nevertheless composes itself, takes on a felt order that is constantly composing and decomposing itself. This can be understood as an example of the privileged mode of modernist existence, that of living in the city, but Zukofsky does not contain the apparent infinite occurrences and intensities of city life within a subjective mind or within an arbitrarily chosen spot within the city complex. We will see that the city plays a major role in “A”-13, but not as moments of intensities gesturing

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<sup>8</sup> At some point, Zukofsky went through the “A”-13 notebook and designated in the margin the distribution of various materials into the distinct partitas using the standard musical terms: allemande, corrente, sarabande, gigue and chaconne. However, aside from the fact that not all the materials used in “A”-13 were so marked, the principle of assigning materials to this or that partita is oblique, and one can imagine he may have had a gamut of considerations in mind, none of which were necessarily dogmatic. In any case, the end result, simply on the level of content, gravitates toward diversity rather than overriding consistency in any given partita.

at the sublime but rather as a leveling background out of which anything can appear or come into the textual space. New York City for Zukofsky is not a site of excitements for the jaded modernist but more like a humming leviathan, ever-present and ever beyond representation.

Finally we should quickly recall that “A”-13 is written in the immediate aftermath of the long and consuming composition of *Bottom*, and at one point Zukofsky explicitly reads his “Shakespeare theme” directly into the poem (290-291).<sup>9</sup> *Bottom* can be understood as in the grand tradition of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy (a quarrel Plato tells us was already ancient by his time) and as such is concerned with the nature of knowledge. The eyes of Shakespeare are the eyes of the reader which is simultaneously the eyes of the text reading the reader posed against the mind’s propensity for semantic or conceptual closure, an abstraction of the dynamism of the read text. Neither eyes nor mind exist distinct from each other, their dialectic is mutually defining. But the poet (*the poet being Shakespeare*) comes from the side of eyes, the sensuous being or body situated in the world that tends to resist and elude concepts and laws. In these terms it is not difficult to understand the general appeal of the fugue as a formal model, which will be explicitly evoked in “A”-13. As the poem puts it, the present or immediate always implies “the tacit,” its dialectical other or more broadly all that is not “said.” Every reading necessarily resituates and particularizes the text. We will have occasion in the following discussion to note various intersections between “A”-13 and *Bottom*.

### **Partita i**

“A”-13 opens encouragingly enough with what appears a basic frame or scene, that of a father giving some worldly advice to his son – Polonius-like, as Barry Ahearn aptly puts it.<sup>10</sup> Given that this advice comes out in garbled maxims indicates the self-mocking fun, yet, given that this is Zukofsky garble, the sincerity is not necessarily cancelled out altogether. After a couple pages of this, however, the poem drifts and the precarious stability of the initial setting dissolves into disconcerting heterogeneity. The pseudo-maxims will resurface in another long passage somewhat later in the first partita (266-268), but the father-son scenario cannot convincingly be recuperated so that even this return seems more free-floating than its initial presentation. As is often the case with Zukofsky, it is more helpful to assume that it is not so much the voice of the poet that speaks as those of the poem, so the poem begins by directly addressing its readers: “What do you want to know / What do you want to do” (262). Then follows a parodic catalog of apothegms in response to a conception of poetry as offering deeper insight into life’s basic challenges—poetry of didactic intent. But the verbal playfulness already indicates this cannot be kept up indefinitely and soon enough the poem will pursue its own multi-directional leads. Since the opening setup, whether father to son or poem to reader, is a scene of instruction, it mockingly assumes a hierarchical relation wherein the reader is to be taught or otherwise led by the poem-father toward greater wisdom, as if the reader lacks something that the poem can tell or reveal, the poem as entrance into gnosis. But soon enough the poem of necessity settles into the typical Zukofskian manner where all such hierarchical relations collapse, the innumerable relations of words assert themselves and the reader is never too certain how to orient herself. Indeed the third line of the first stanza—“In a trice me the gist us”—already indicates the kind of response we can

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<sup>9</sup> The opening passage of partita iii (through to this allusion to *Bottom*) was incorporated into a late talk, “About the Gas Age,” where Zukofsky indicates it serves as an adequate statement of his poetics and is paired with another key passage from *Bottom* strongly favoured with Spinoza (*Prep.* 171-172).

<sup>10</sup> *Zukofsky’s “A”: An Introduction* (1983): 130.

expect to such initiating questions. The end of this partita will abruptly circle back to answer its opening: “As tho it is not known / As if it is not done” (274). The reader will not be instructed by the poem but will read what they know—as Gertrude Stein put it, “knowledge is what you know” (*Lectures in America*). The final stanza has only these two lines and lacks the expected third to finish out the stanza, suggesting the poem ends in silence or incompleteness. A similar skepticism will appear in “A”-19 in the words and authority of the 2nd century Skeptic Sextus Empiricus—“the subject / taught does not / exist, nor / the teacher / nor the / learner...” (428). Yet Zukosky’s inveterate skepticism is not nihilistic but rather guards against linguistic closure. Nevertheless, one has to note that the temptation of instruction remains—just as fathers are unlikely to resist the desire to give their children advice, even when they know better, the poem’s desire to convey pat knowledge will always be in play along with the counter-knowledge of its futility or partiality, which may promise a reconceptualization of what poetic knowledge might be beyond concepts.

The source text Zukofsky draws on in the opening two pages as well as another long passage at 266-268 and a few further scattered lines of a similar proverbial character is arguably the oddest he ever used: a 19th century oracle book, *The Book of Fate*, claiming to be a translation of a text by Hermes Trismegistus (thus the punning reference at 262.3<sup>11</sup>) discovered by Napoleonic soldiers during their incursion into Egypt, which then became the supposed secret of Napoleon’s subsequent successes.<sup>12</sup> This patent fake, frequently reprinted, consists primarily of lists or charts of proverbial epigrams, none of which seem to have any Egyptian or Hermetic flavor, organized so that by using a chance operation one can consult the lists to determine answers to basic life questions or problems: marriage, travel, jobs, children and the like.<sup>13</sup> Zukofsky went through the lists, paraphrasing and condensing whatever caught his eye and from these notes he worked these passages. That the oracle book is a jumble of miscellaneous saying which Zukofsky uses for the most part in the order he found them (he selected but used what he selected in the sequence as printed), partially explains the father’s mixed up advise. Aside from the typical manner in which he picks up materials more or less at random and deploys them in his poetry, the curious source in this case reinforces the parody on poetry (or any other text) as wisdom literature, offering answers

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<sup>11</sup> Possibly Zukofsky is poking a bit of fun at younger poets who took such hermetic and occult writings more seriously than he could—most obviously Robert Duncan and others of his circle. Two summers previous, Zukofsky spent five weeks as poet in residence at San Francisco State College at Duncan’s instigation, but according to the latter the interaction with the students (mostly acolytes of Duncan and Spicer) did not work out as he had hoped. See *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, eds. Robert J. Bertholf & Albert Gelpi (Stanford UP, 2004): 125-126.

<sup>12</sup> The full title of the edition I have used is: *The Book of Fate / formally in the possession of and used by / Napoleon / rendered into the English language by / H. Kirchenhopper / from a German translation / of an / ancient Egyptian manuscript / found in the year 1801 by M. Sonnini in one of / the royal tombs near Mount Libycus / in Upper Egypt* (New York: H. S. Nichols, 1923). Zukofsky almost certainly used a version of this edition, which includes substantial introductory materials explaining the supposed province of the original manuscript, as well as an overview of the Greek and Roman oracles copied (unacknowledged) from an encyclopaedia. Zukofsky’s notes from this work survive as a set of loose leaf pages with other reading notes used in “A”-13 (HRC 3.13).

<sup>13</sup> For example, to the question, “What Trade or Profession ought I to follow?” one may get a predictably vague answer such as: “Choose that for which thy genius is best adapted,” or rather more peculiarly specific answers such as: “Thou mayest write up, shave for a penny; cut hair for two-pence” or “Write on thy door-posts,—*Mangling done here!*”

to life's big questions (or how to conquer the world). Yet as always Zukofsky is not interested in mere parody and after all the materials are being put to good use, enacted so as to engage the son-reader and to amuse. The comicalness of this opening to a long poem, not least its self-deflation is typical Zukofsky, his resistance to earnestness or to the apocalyptic. He will open "A"-15 (1964) with a homophonic reworking of Job, among the most famous of all specimens of wisdom literature and as somber a source text as one would like, but in Zukofsky's hands it is impossible not to be amused as he generates his hinny.

Aside from getting "A"-13 off with the proper tone, avoiding moral earnestness, Zukofsky's playfulness with materials which present themselves as fundamental to everyday knowledge raises basic issues. Simply put, here poetic knowledge is presented overtly as estranging or as quasi-concepts, the aesthetic as the other than the given or taken for granted which enables the generation of the new or possible. Proverbial truisms are directly mangled and thrown seemingly higgledy-piggledy together so that the reader's reflexive reaction is no longer a matter of agreeing or disagreeing with their truth content but is deflected to a more disconcerting and fluid dance among possibilities. While as mentioned there is a satiric dimension at the expense of the father, this scenario itself quickly enough dissolves and disperses into the more headless dynamic of the text. If, then, the opening pages raise the question of poetic knowledge, that knowledge is never allowed to realize itself as full-fledged concepts but insists on a performative engagement with the reader. Again, we can readily recognize the usefulness of Zukofsky's analogies with music, an affective form we rarely expect to translate into conceptual explanations.

If the father-son framework and the use of the *Book of Fate* disintegrates or diffuses beyond recognition as the first partita proceeds, it nonetheless establishes the prevalent key for the whole which is predominated by this playful reworking of proverbial remarks or epigrammatic observations. Equally the topic of knowledge seems a running theme, even if the manner is more intent on destabilizing any expression of philosophical statement or confidence. So it is predictable that we have a characteristic turned-inside-out double-readable allusion to the Tree of Knowledge: "What knowledge forbids the tree—" (272). Similarly, there is no surprise that the other main sources Zukofsky reworks are classical and didactic: Aristotle and Hesiod. Aristotle by this time is an old friend, appearing prominently along with Spinoza and Wittgenstein as part of the philosophical elaboration of the Shakespeare theme in the second part of *Bottom*. Most significant for present purposes is Aristotle's prominent place in "A"-12, where he is supposedly one of the key fugal themes (the A of B-A-C-H), reworked in several substantial passages. In comparing the handling of this material in "A"-12 to "A"-13, the former generally attempts to convey in distilled form the actual gist of Aristotle's ideas, whereas in "A"-13 this is no longer the case and "Aristotle" functions more as mere fodder out of which Zukofsky generates his poetry. Assuming that re-situating these passages in their original texts will offer a key to their reading will only lead to befuddlement, although perhaps is of interest in considering Zukofsky's compositional process. Unlike in "A"-12 there is no cue that Aristotle materials are being used here, other than the oblique mention of the title, "*Parts of animals*" (268), which is not likely to set off bells in the minds of most modern readers. It is less important to ask why Zukofsky chose these two specific Aristotle texts, *The Parts of Animals* and *Politics*, than to note their considerable difference, which then supplies interesting variety with which to work. The former's emphasis on the eye, on precise description, likely appealed to Zukofsky, but invariably a text of supposedly pure description and categorization quickly strays into the figural, especially since Aristotle's attempts to categorize involve a constant crossing of categories, that is, of comparison. Ultimately this effort is not so much descriptive as exploratory, a means of observation and translation. But here the production of the poem and its reproduction in reading involves a close eyeing of words, a complimentary activity to

Aristotle's attempts to translate his own naturalist observations. If much of Aristotle's figural interpretation—for example, certain insects have a stinger because of their "fierce / Disposition" (269)—strike us as quaint, this is no different from the sort of "knowledge" we all indulge in all the time, such as reading the minds of our pets or for that matter of our friends. Of course Aristotle is in many senses the original critical philosopher of the West, so there is no question that he is simplistically reiterating the beliefs of his time but rather attempting to engage closely with his world.

Particularly in the passage worked from Aristotle's *Politics*, the mock and mangled proverbial manner asserts itself, the suggestion of propositions that undermine themselves or lead nowhere so that we are left bewildered, that is, left hanging between trying to discern a semblance of a sincere statement and its ironic dissolution. For example, consider the following:

Two rites burn for affection  
It is your own  
And you love it;

Touching community  
Let this  
Be the conclusion. (271)

These two stanzas contrast and complement each other with their respective emphasis on the personal and the social and appear to suggest an ideal where they should harmoniously fit together. "Rites" (or "rights" with perhaps a suggestion of "writes") express the desire for affection, love of and by another, which is enough to suggest the basic glue of any society at large—in other words, rites (or rights) are social forms or performances of individual affection which ideally they in turn renew and augment. Yet if we can pull such a thesis out of these stanzas, as such not terribly profound, there persists that mocking tone with which the movement began—a rhetoric that sounds as if it is attempting to lay down significant truths yet in a manner that eludes the definiteness and clarity such truths are typically assumed to wear. If one compares these lines with their supposed source in Aristotle, condensation hardly seems an adequate term to explain what has happened, even though half the words have been directly taken over from the translation. This might be considered a half-and-half example of what I have elsewhere called a punched out quotation, where all or most of the words are taken directly from the source text but seemingly little concerned with carrying over the lexical sense of the original (See Z-notes commentary on the Forms of "A"). In this case, it is conceivable that a possible gist of the passage has been retained, but this is hard to confirm because the passage itself seems conceptually unstable and in any case manages to ignore the general argument Aristotle happens to be making.

The relatively brief passage (12 lines) worked from Hesiod's *Works and Days* represents what will be a common compositional technique in the later long movements of "A": passages are constructed from bits and pieces of a given text with minimal tampering, as opposed to the relatively free paraphrase of the passages worked from, say, the *Book of Fate* or Aristotle's *Politics*. Such passages are almost invariably worked from literary sources—there is actually an example in "A"12 from Dante (136) and notable examples in later movements include from *Paradise Lost* in "A"-14 (319-325) and Isaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* in "A"-21 (477-480). One might say that Zukofsky quietly alludes to his source in this case, given that he begins with mention of the Pleiades that opens the famous section of Hesiod's agricultural advice from which Zukofsky extracts a number of details. But such alluding hardly seems the key here, and the difference from the manner of, say, Eliot or Pound is striking—there is a rapid shifting between details without the staged luminous detail or ironic epigrammatic thrust. *Works and Days* is very much in the

proverbial, advise-giving mode; indeed, much of it is quite banal, such as the council Zukofsky includes that it is a good idea to wear a felt cap in winter. The bulk of Hesoid's poem consists of such common knowledge, yet this suits Zukofsky's own perspective that it is in the saying or singing of the words where the pleasures of the text are to be had.

However, while I have argued that Hesiod serves Zukofsky's poetic machine, this of course is not simply the case—my essential point being to fend off the impulse to reinsert Zukofsky's passage into the source texts, in this case of significant canonical authority, in order to generate thematic interpretation. Taking the passage on its own terms, we detect a movement from the Pleiades standing in for larger cosmic orders to agricultural details and practical advice to what sounds like a final abstract principle: "Intention betters contention" (273). This last is more freely paraphrased from Zukofsky's source than is the case with the preceding lines or might even be taken as his summing up of the matter: "contention" he finds in the translation but "intention" is suggested by rhyme. We have another example of Zukofsky's retooling of the proverb—intention is preferable to contention (that makes some sense) or, more puzzling, intention improves contention, or is it that the conjunction of "intention" and "contention" is little more than a rhyme, which it has to be admitted is sometimes how proverbs seem to come about. Taking the more sensible option this suggests discerning intentions is better than highlighting conflicts—presumably empathy is a preferable ethical principle than trying to argue things out. Since this is immediately preceded by mention of rivalry between poets, we might divine a critical commentary: that poetry ought to be judged by principles other than more superficial differences in manner or content. Or, in the end the intention of all poems is the same: the desire to exist with others. It is questionable, however, whether this transcends the banal, and again it seems to me Zukofsky is working with the mode and rhythms of proverbial materials rather than sneaking in a particular argument. However the schematic allegorical narrative of the passage moves from origins or cosmic orders to labor and history to abstract, vaguely ethical principles. One might understand this as a parable of coming to self-consciousness, in other words a typical narrative of modernity itself, and as such recalls the argument of *Bottom*, which contains numerous such parable-like historical allegories. This would imply that the concluding precept can only be accepted with caution, as is the case with all generalization. As a comment on Hesiod, this simply points out that the value of the poetry is not in the didactic content, which even if unquestionably accepted by his audience was information they already knew. There must have been pleasures of the poetry beyond any such reiteration of received wisdom.

In the lines that immediately precede the Hesiod passage,

In your need  
Eyes search the voice  
Voice urges eyes

Sure love is seen—(273)

"eyes" and "love" are the two key terms in *Bottom*, which argues "sure love is seen." In reading we search for a voice, the presence of another, which is the need that brings us to reading in the first place. The presence of another (a voice) calls us out of its own need for another. "Your," "eyes" and "voice" all fold into each other, mutually assuming or defined by each other in an act of love (or affection), which is simply Zukofsky's preferred term for living. Or, in Spinozian terms, this is the desire to endure implying the need to maximize one's power or being, which necessarily depends on and is bound up with others. In reading (what you are doing at the moment) one seeks a voice which in turn urges seeing. All of this is readily identifiable as yet another iteration of the *Bottom* theme, a statement of what we are

doing in reading (eyeing) the poem which is in no way distinct from our need to exist and our sense of ourselves as necessarily bound up with the world.

Although in attempting to map “A”’s long movements it seems natural to focus on those passages identifiably worked from a single source, this obviously risks distorting the overall texture for the sake of grasping at deceptively solid clues to suit an acceptable thematic reading. There is always an alternation between such passages and those drawing on more mixed and seemingly random materials. For most readers much of the time the difference may not be very discernable, although with familiarity the modulations between more consistently worked passages and those highly scrambled become an important aspect of reading these poems. Given the nature of the materials from which Zukofsky is working, the mixed passages tend to include a significantly higher proportion of the personal and the newsy, if for no other reason than that these are pithily noted: interesting or witty remarks or succinctly indicated news items or details, as opposed to sets of reading notes. But this is only an impressionistic generalization that needs to be tested, and there is, for example, an extended passage in partita ii consisting of colorful remarks made by Khrushchev over the course of his two-week visit to the U.S. in 1959 (284), which was all over the news at the time and evoked hopes for a thaw in the Cold War that also inspired a euphoric poem by Frank O’Hara.

Taking a schematic look at the opening pages, partita i opens with the passage worked from the *Book of Fate* for most of two pages, which segues into another extended passage of objects, initially childhood toys (presumably the son’s) but including various knickknacks and family heirlooms, an abrupt switch to a thank you note, which then wanders into a mixed passage alluding to contemporary events, followed by a more ruminative passage that may or may not be taken as the thoughts of the poet, then a few stanzas giving details of an early U.S. satellite introducing the space race theme that will intermittently reappear throughout the subsequent movements of “A”, and then a few lines on a plant cutting growing in an inkwell on the poet’s desk. This covers almost exactly four pages, 39 stanzas or 117 lines. In this stretch there are only 11 periods, which for the most part do not correspond to the breaks in the segments as I have identified them, as if to establish a counterpointing segmentation. In many instances we can identify associative links at the points of intersection. The initial *Book of Fate* passage ends with the return of a prodigal son which evokes the remark that all his toys will be found as he left them, thus evoking the catalog of toys and other objects with directly personal significance. This catalog concludes with an inlaid walnut box handed down from the poet’s father but clearly in the family much longer since it evidences damage from one of Napoleon’s soldiers (presumably during the disastrous Russian campaign when the French army passed through what was then Lithuania in the Russian Pale of Settlement where both Louis’ and Celia’s families originated). This intrusion of history and its violence then gives way to reference to “a madhouse” and a thank you note for some chocolates shaped like babies, which leads into instances of the violence of contemporary history: Apartheid with its roots in the slave trade and the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> The following more ruminative passage (actually worked from Henry James) can be taken as a more philosophical perspective on the shortcomings of “the world.” I will stop here not only because the subsequent linkages, if they exist, become more obscure, and also what has been sketched is enough to give an idea of the textual diversity. Once a gamut of segments has been set out that vary in both materials used and discursive registers, further segments can be readily fit in, in one way or another

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<sup>14</sup> The thank you note, although not identified in the poem, is from Ezra Pound in the “madhouse” of St. Elizabeths—another such note from Pound appears later in the partita (288-189). See Z-notes commentary on Zukofsky, Williams & Pound for a discussion of these notes as well as the following punning political lines.

picking up linkages with previous segments even if these conjunctions are unpredictable, which is to say do not settle into a developing argument or overriding theme. So the satellite can be related to the previous mention of the Cold War and the various recurring mentions of contemporary history—mostly disturbing—throughout this and other movements. At the same time the satellite stanzas are noticeably replete with very large numbers and are predominately in a scientific-like register that has not previously appeared in the poem, although there is a fairly clear sardonic hum around this supposed objectivity. From these big numbers and mention of an entire mountain under the ice of Antarctica—which brings us back to earth but still on a very large scale—we have an abrupt zeroing in to the poet’s desk and the scene of writing:

Weed

Wandering jew growing

In two fingers of water in

Desk inkwell — a good thrust

For Bach’s partita. (266)

This “good thrust” plays off of the prior mention of the satellite but here brought down to earth in the form of a humble plant growing on the desk which is sufficient inspiration for the partita under hand—with the implication that Bach himself needed nothing more dramatic—a simple sample of growing life (cf. another growing shoot/root at 295.12-13). The mention of Wandering jew obviously is loaded with implications for all its apparent innocence as an ordinary plant and can be collocated with the previous mention of Apartheid and slavery, but perhaps more clearly with Zukofsky himself as both Jew and poet who is little interested in wandering except poetically. The primary point of all this is the manner in which Zukofsky allows a crosshatching to develop out of the words, as if at any given point or segment acts as a perspective point or window through which to read or recall any of the others.

In the passage describing the objects or heirlooms in the house, the interest is not actually on description, rather the close observation of and movement among objects generates the poetry, a verbal translation. We do not end up with a particularly vivid picture of objects or the room, and their descriptive accuracy is not important (although Zukofsky tends to be fairly literalist) because it is the generation of the poem as an intricate verbal structure that matters and the dissemination of possibilities among words. And this is what Zukofsky meant with his well-known remark about the poem situating itself as an object among other objects—consciously participating in and infinitely related to the things of the world, yet a distinct existence, or perhaps better, realizing itself as a distinct object in being read. We will encounter further examples of such list poetry in “A”-13 where what apparently begins as a simple account of what is seen quickly dissolves any firm stability as merely realist description. The emphasis on the eye here reminds us again of *Bottom*, where the eye is a synecdoche for the body, for bodily existence and the reminder that thinking is always with the body. Thinking’s error is its tendency to assume it can act separately from the body, forgetting or repressing the body and therefore the world, and no less so when it says that thinking must be in and with the body. The problem is not solvable solely by thinking and argument (contention), which tends to perpetuate it in its effort at denial, but is a matter of language use. This is why *Bottom* is written in its difficult, for many infuriating manner, since it must resist the closure of concepts or sentences. You cannot read *Bottom* if you think it is arguing that the physical eye is correct and the mind is the cause of error, which is merely a thought, because the text must be read as performative. This of course is to put it in purely thoughtful terms. These descriptive passages begin with the eye, an insistence on the physicality of the world and that thought and words are in and inextricable with that world. There is for Zukofsky, as for Aristotle (see opening sentences of the *Metaphysics*), an

axiomatic phenomenological assumption that existence is always already an interest in or orientation towards it. The physical eye cannot be disinterested. That interestedness we might call mind or thought, but not if doing so detaches from physical sensation. With these fairly simple ideas (?) in mind (?), we can understand Zukofsky's identification of seeing with love, our interested seeing is loving. This defines poetry's task, but a good deal more than merely poetry in a narrow sense since it defines the activity of living generally. The translation of the physical eye into a verbal construct is a form of loving, in which the tactile or object world is intertwined with what we might ordinarily separate out as mental associations, thoughts and the like. These words are more to the immediate point than the objects represented by them, but finally one cannot separate the literalness of the words from their associations, thoughts, metaphors, allegories, that is, their figurality. Yet Zukofsky will want us to remain with the words' tactile being, their sense of existence necessarily with and infinitely related to other existences. This at least is one way to understand Zukofsky's persistent deflection of ideas and themes in his work, and the frequent sense that the poetry slips through your fingers, full of interesting, witty, curious detail but puzzling as to what it all adds up to or even how one suddenly got from there to here.

What I have referred to as an associative logic in the organization of the longer movements of "A" is a familiar enough formal concept in modernist texts, but Zukofsky's distinctive handling of the principle creates problems for readers. His egalitarian approach refuses to privilege this moment in the text over that so there is a lack of building up to a point of climax or crisis or privileged meaning, nor is there much fluctuation between relatively relaxed and tense passages. On the other hand there is constant shifting between very different pieces of text—whether of tone, vocabulary, topic and so on. The fundamental immanentist assumption is that everything does relate, even though we are always to a considerable extent in the dark about the totality of those relations. We are engaged with the complexities of the immediate details of the texts—and this is the emphasis in Zukofsky's compositional method—how words mesh on a very local level, although with familiarity larger relations and patterns will invariably suggest themselves. Again, this seems to me a key aspect of Zukofsky's insistence on a musical analogy—that sense of always being in the experience of the music without much concern about larger structure or trajectory of the piece as long as it carries us along, even if that way is full of dissonance. Of course music is usually highly structured, but the point is that we do not feel we need to be aware of or understand that structure to feel it as meaningfully without meaning.

## Partita ii

Even more than the first partita, the second has a readily identifiable setting, in this case father and son take a walk together; however this framework is itself framed by two found poems: a nonsense poem and a lightly modernized medieval poem about the man in the moon. The opening poem is a mildly satiric take off from an image in Psalm 68 of hills hopping in delight at God's presence. The final word of each of the three stanzas plays variations on *bishop*, *bishop*, *bishop*, which in turn determine or are determined by the key verb in each stanza: hop, skip, jump up respectively (274-275). The subject of this activity is hills, the earth, the world where we find ourselves, seemingly inert but set into action and to music by human song. We have then in this seemingly innocent bit of rigmarole a paradigmatic poetic enactment, the poem generated out of its own verbal possibilities in order to create a sense of measure, of existence in the world. In "Poetry / *For my son when he can read*" (1946), Zukofsky begins by recalling an instance of the playful babbling of his baby son, "Go billy go billy go billy go ba," which jerks the poet out of an apparent poetic lethargy, a reminder of the primordial or instinctual basis of poetry in the play of words to

“fill the vacuum I abhorred in my life” (*Prep.* 3), a socially performative sense of language use. Bits of nonsense verse or songs appear now and then throughout “A”, even before Zukofsky became a father (e.g. “A”-6.34.5-8, “A”-10.122.25-28), and in “A”-23 the long chronology of reworked poetic texts begins with an example of an Native American nonsense “poem” (539), literally non-sense syllables, which of course is not without sense.<sup>15</sup> But all this reminds us that this primal impulse to what we call the poetic is grounded in our everyday or “natural” activity of sense making, of negotiating the world with others. Proverbs, such as those that appear in the first partita in somewhat degenerate form, have a similar primordial appeal—whether metered or not, it is their performance rather than their too predictable meaning that counts, although the aptness of the meaning in context is key to the performance. In any case, proverbs have the feel of an archaic relation with language.

The complimentary closing poem on the man in the moon serves as a comical portrait of the poet. Formally, its rather plodding clumsy lines contrast sharply with the bouncy opening lyric, yet its appeal is similar in its child-like manner. Aside from all the conventional associations of poets with the moon and lunacy, “A”-13 will introduce what will prove a recurring topic throughout the later movement of “A”, the space race (265, 289, 301), which will culminate with mention of the moon landing early in “A”-22 (510). On the same page with the man in the moon lyric, we find mention of the Soviet spacecraft Lunik Three (and more obliquely a note from Pound in the madhouse at St. Elizabeths). The moon and the race to get there are equally intriguing and absurd, equally a figure, both temptation and caution, for the poet. In the walk of partita ii, the son is generally of a more skeptical or sarcastic mind than the poet-father and functions to help ground the latter, and in fact both the poet’s wife and son frequently fill this role at various points in the poem, as well as in *Little*. As in the first partita, these framing poems of the second set a tone that deflects the temptation of over-earnestness on the part of the poet and the reader—not the banishment of seriousness but a ludic tone always self-aware of turning on itself.

As mentioned, the predominate scenario of this partita is a walk taken by the poet and his son, primarily along the Brooklyn Heights Promenade with its excellent view of New York harbor and the lower Manhattan skyline, under the Brooklyn Bridge, and more sketchily extending across the bridge to the lower East Side (and thus a journey to the neighborhood where Zukofsky was born and grew up), and then back to their Brooklyn Heights apartment. The asymmetrical relation of instruction with which the first partita begins has here modulated into a more egalitarian relationship—we not only hear the voice of the son but he clearly gives at least as good as he takes, and at times it is quite difficult to confidently identify who speaks what lines.<sup>16</sup> The walking scenario further enhances this horizontal perspective since not only do the pair register details they randomly encounter but more generally there is the sense of a dense, mobile cityscape constantly impinging. But as

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<sup>15</sup> Taken from C.M. Bowra’s *Primitive Song* (1962), although characteristically Zukofsky has re-transcribed Bowra’s transcription. Bowra presents this as an example of primitive song without lexical sense, but of course it is performed within a specific cultural context, in this case associated with the peyote cult. Zukofsky’s autobiographical novel, *Little*, includes a number of his own nonsense poems, which are not unrelated to the homophonic renditions from medieval Welsh poetry that are scattered throughout, and there is also a dialog-game between father and son quoting bits from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (26-28)

<sup>16</sup> Zukofsky also staged the long “Definitions” chapter of *Bottom* (266-341), which reads through the entire Shakespearean corpus, as a dialog between “I (pronounced *eye*)” and “Son,” with the latter taking a sceptical role vis-à-vis his father’s arguments. When Zukofsky finished *Bottom*, Paul was 16.

usual there are limits to explaining the various details of this partita in terms of verisimilitude, as one might in reading of Leopold Bloom's wanderings and meandering thoughts through Dublin. While on the one hand there is the suggestion that the poetry is generated out of the seeming happenstance of the walk, on the other it is always strongly composed and follows its own textual logic and associations. Ultimately it becomes quite impossible to parse inside from outside, the narrative of experience and the process of writing. In other words, Zukofsky is rarely concerned to maintain whatever dramatic frame he might initially suggest but allows the compositional process its own head. The walk provides an underlying rhythm or cadence, which can then wander and be counterpointed in unpredictable ways. Zukofsky had little interest in psychology or characterization, as he makes clear throughout his readings of Shakespeare in *Bottom*, but rather is concerned with the verbal (musical) detail of the text.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously the scenario of father and son walking and talking establishes a dialectical narrative, both between the protagonists and between the pair and their environment. Typically Zukofsky, who even during the 1930s scrupulously eschewed the terms "dialectic" or "dialectical" as too tainted by Party orthodoxies, prefers the musical analogy with the fugue. We are not far into the walk before the poet explicitly evokes the fugal structure as two melodies running counter to each other with the "tacit always present and apposite" (276). These two counterpointed melodies are of course in one sense father and son, but this structure spirals out and is found everywhere, thus offering a structural principle for the poem itself. The "tacit" is the world, the totality that for a good Spinozist always already imposes itself at every point in time and space. This introduction of the fugal motif is immediately followed by an anecdote of someone being thrown out of Carnegie Hall because he shouted against the performer's unnecessary flourishes, exclaiming that he is "needed but not wanted" (276).<sup>18</sup> The reader of "A" has to learn to cope with these seemingly jarring transitions and recognize that the initial ideal or utopian presentation of the fugal structure in rather abstract terms is then itself counterpointed by this in-your-face example of dissonance in the form of a protest literally interrupting a musical (or poetic) performance. The dissonant protester is indeed needed but underappreciated as the necessary outside or other of any overly euphonious and closed harmony, or, as the skeptical counterpoint to the impetus to compositional wholeness. The protestor's interruption reorients the performance and its potential significances. At this point Zukofsky sticks in a personal note remarking on his own difficulties in feeling needed during the previous few decades of neglect or rejection of his own work, thus fugally placing himself as the tacit or the dissonant vis-à-vis the dominant poetry of mid-century America.

Next there is a bit of the exchange between father and son, in which the father-poet plays on "measure," "bean," "pulse" and "heir" (the dashes function, Joyce-like, to indicate change of speakers):

—A penny for?  
 —Measure woo't burst the bean  
 Mere pulse is heir to  
 The bush of twigs in flower  
 The budding nuts elucidative stage  
 —Wha-at [...] (276)

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<sup>17</sup> This helps explain the prominence Zukofsky gives to *Pericles* in *Bottom*, as well as the odd choice of Plautus' *Rudens* for "A"-21, both plays thin on psychological depth so that the action is in the musical organisation of the text or in the repartee.

<sup>18</sup> The ejected protestor was Sadakichi Hartmann at a performance by one of Franz Liszt's students (Moriz Rosenthal), who he felt unnecessarily augmented the master's "Hungarian Rhapsody."

Zukofsky quite liked the possibilities in the word “pulse,” meaning edible seeds such as lentils or chickpeas, in other words “beans,” which can become gas, as well as its more obviously relevant meanings for poetry having to do with measure (musical or poetic) and heart-beat. These somewhat enigmatic four lines suggest an organic model of poetry and art: “measure” as heir to nature’s pulse or seed, which begins to manifest itself in a scrap of nature lyric with flowering bush—except that he ends with the deliberately clunky and inorganic phrase “elucidative stage,” as if to firmly cut short or counter this overly euphonious impulse. “Elucidative stage” is as historio-sociological a phrase as one could wish for, but here is it semantically equivalent to “blossom.” There are any number of instances where Zukofsky speaks of his work as grounded on an underlying pulse that moves through all of his writing. However, this cannot be taken in isolation as the ideological basis of his work, as it is always self-conscious of its figuralness—one has only to think of his work in comparison with the organicist claims of some of his contemporaries (e.g. Levertov, Olson). His poetry is perfectly natural because it is of the world, a natural growth of the seeds he has inherited, yet simultaneously it is thoroughly social and historical, that is, linguistic. For this life-long urbanite poet, there is no strict line between nature and the social, concepts that always play off and mutually define each other.<sup>19</sup>

The son’s response (as is the propensity of sons) seems to take no notice of his father’s enigmatic lyrical outburst (what might be imagined as the poet composing on his feet), other than a momentarily “What?” but follows up his own anecdote on the Carnegie Hall episode, adding that the version of the *Hungarian Rhapsody* that elicited the protest must have been the same as the recording he played ad nauseam when he was three years old, seriously trying the patience of his parents. Again we have an example of dissonant counterpointing with at least implied protest on the part of the parents. This is how people relate where the dissonance is necessarily part of the harmony, and where a child’s annoyance becomes bound up with being loved. Or, on the level of the poem, the relations between words and between words and their world is an infinite composed play of similarity and difference. The discussion between father and son continues in its seemingly aimless fashion: the father (presumably) mentions a facsimile edition of Shakespeare’s *Pericles* prefaced by “Mr. P. Z. Round,” to which the son responds that such aimless research is simply an excuse for laziness or else the blind hope in the “harmony of chances,” to which the father undeterred continues with his bibliographical sleuthing.<sup>20</sup> By this time we notice that the two often seem to be talking at cross purposes or failing to pay close attention to the

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<sup>19</sup> The opening phrase-line, “A penny for?” is presumably the son’s prompting of his father, “a penny for your thoughts,” but also rhymes with the line in the previous partita, “*Shave for a penny—THOTH*” (267). As mentioned, this oddity is taken from the *Book of Fate*. Just about everything a poet needs is ascribed to the Egyptian divinity Thoth, the inventor of writing and even the ultimate author of all books, god of judgement (especially of the dead) and of wisdom. The joke here, I believe, is the importance Zukofsky gave to shaving, that is, condensation and deletion as fundamental to poetic practice. In partita iv, the poet also mentions Thoth in connection with the barber’s receipt—apparently the price has gone up for a haircut (308).

<sup>20</sup> The bibliographical details in this passage are actual and were found in the introduction to a facsimile edition of *Pericles* edited by Sidney Lee (1886) which had been given to Zukofsky by his former Columbia University teacher, Mark Van Doran, and used extensively in *Bottom* (294, 322-324, 328-329). Zukofsky specifically thanks Van Doran for this volume on the copyright page of *Bottom*, but unfortunately this note is missing from the reprint editions. However the inside joke is the play on Paul Zukofsky’s initials, and I have always heard a pun on Ezra Pound as well.

other. This might be taken as simple verisimilitude since this is often enough how people, much less fathers and sons, generally talk to each other—talking to and for themselves as much as to or with the other. However, whatever it is that goes on between people, especially people who are close, does not necessarily have much to do with what is said rather than with what happens (the phatic). I have already indicated that this is how the fugal model operates—different yet together, everything relates (or in the version of the second half of “A”-9, “equated is related”). Again, the relationship/conversation between father and son is here a figure for the poem itself.

Any reader of this part of “A”-13 will at times find it difficult to confidently identify who speaks what during this conversation, and ultimately it is not imperative to sort it out. This odd bibliographical exchange first mentions an edition of *Pericles*, whose appearance is hardly surprising given Zukofsky’s fascination with this particular, often denigrated, play as evidenced in *Bottom*, which he had just completed and whose second volume is Celia’s musical accompaniment to that play. In *Bottom* we find Zukofsky is quite intrigued with textual and bibliographical details of Shakespeare’s texts. The son’s response might hint at a bit of weariness with the whole *Bottom* project, which had been obsessing the poet for over a decade, but at the same time the son expresses yet another version of Zukofsky’s fugal poetics in the phrase “harmony of chances”—an instance of which is the coincidence that the editor’s initials are the same as Paul Zukofsky’s. The father continues with further bibliographical minutia that connects the owner of one such facsimile with Handel and another with Thomas Jefferson—both figures of some interest to Zukofsky. This bibliographical note with which the father is boring his son and is the result of “blind research” manages to textually relate Shakespeare, Paul Zukofsky (by a kind of punning implication), Handel (music) and Jefferson (the subject of Zukofsky’s aborted doctoral thesis)—a harmony of chances. As mentioned, everything relates, and in this case we have poetry generated by or discovered in bibliographical details. The son’s remarks interpolated into the middle of the father’s note are counterpoint that simultaneously questions and confirms the coherence of the note, inserting, so to speak, a pulse or measure into the dry and inert bibliographical facts.

Particularly in *partitas* ii and iii, there are various examples of dissonance related to music, as in the instance of the young man thrown out of Carnegie Hall and young Paul’s incessant playing of the Liszt recording: there is the early morning banging of trash cans to which Paul assigns musical notes (293); an instance of young Paul playing despite the racket of a nearby sound test (290); an auditorium in Memphis that is divided in half so that during a classical music performance the thud of pro wrestling can be heard from the other side (297); there is the complaint of a man (William James) riding on a streetcar about a boy’s loud singing to which his mother is oblivious (278); a quip by Paul on the blaring of radios and phonographs embedded in a page and a half passage consisting of extracts from Wanda Landowska’s *Music of the Past* (286-287).<sup>21</sup> Especially for a New Yorker dissonance is everywhere, and one can deal with this by being annoyed or recognizing it as an inevitable consequence of diversity, the presence of others. That all of these instances are presented

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<sup>21</sup> Wanda Landowska (1879-1959) was a Polish-French harpsichordist, primarily responsible for the revival of this instrument in performing Baroque music, above all Bach. She fled to America with the fall of France in 1940 where she remained until her death. The long passage of snippets taken from her book primarily relate to the theme of dissonance or “loud noise,” but intertwined with the degradation of music and poetry by spectacle or the business of music, a topic that will much preoccupy Zukofsky during the 1960s as both his son’s and his own careers become endangered by such temptations (see especially “A”-19 and *Little*).

humorously indicates Zukofsky's inclination toward tolerance rather than cultural critique as the primary task of the poem. In the midst of his walk with his son, the poet reflects:

I pulse to notes a ten year dance  
And let your dissonance counter them  
How mean of me ridden by words  
Always to think at first of being disturbed  
by the dissonance

When the years make their order. (277)

The characteristic first line refers to the ten years of notes he had gathered for "A"-13 and to which he now sets dancing, or is being danced (ridden) by, and which in turn are counterpointed or further complicated by his son. If this is an admonition to himself, it is equally so to the reader, who quite likely will experience the poem initially as dissonant and necessarily brings to its reading their own interference. But dissonance is that which eludes ready framing, the always present principle of difference, the outside that presses upon the relatively miniscule point of subjective experience. It is "mean"—miserly, petty—to react with irritation or displeasure to momentary experiences of difference and change when a larger and longer perspective can and must negotiate such disturbances. This is a perfectly Spinozian perspective, but it is not to claim that everything will order itself in time—it is only from a retrospective perspective that experience smooths itself out, while the present is necessarily open to dissonance and there are always painful disruptions—especially of history, the sufferings of and by others—that impinge, primarily via the news. If the poem or the reading of the poem strives to achieve an ideal equilibrium (Spinozian blessedness), this ought to be understood as coterminous with absolute dissonance.

Zukofsky stages this problem as the interaction of father-poet with son-reader, which in one sense should offer the best possibility for realizing harmony, a case of maximum empathy for the other. Yet as the first partita suggested this can also be the most difficult case as that very empathy readily takes on impulses of imposed identity, the son as projection of the father bound up with all the invariable hopes fathers tend to have for their children rather than recognizing them as distinct. The poem's elusive resistances, therefore, are as much invitations as distancings of the reader.

### Partita iii

The initial setting of the third partita takes place at night with the poet alone and so contrasts with the duet of the preceding partita—the tone or mode is more ruminative than the preceding sections. But if the poet is here an isolate figure, this is explicitly defined with and against the presence of others: the son is sleeping, and as always the world presses on the poet's sensibility and thoughts, which will swarm the page of the poem. This setting is indicated only obliquely but is returned to at the end when the poet apparently hears his wife awakening while the son continues to sleep (303). The opening line offers a heavy-handed pun on son/sun, although it has the authority of Aristotle.<sup>22</sup> This punning on son/sun sets off a tangle of intertwined rhythms: night and day, father and son, sun and earth, the beat of the heart, the heart as the need for others. This is one of those passages that seems to persistently deflect semantic senses outward rather than allowing them to settle into a neat set of metaphors, and the opening lines primarily function to gesture at the totality that necessarily leans on and is embodied in the poet even as he sits alone in the dark. Intimately intertwined with all this is time, the sun as the great clock, even in its absence, our most common and

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* II.2: "Man is begotten by man and by the sun as well" (qtd. *Bottom* 76, 86; see also "A"-12.236.11-12).

routine sense of duration and change. The persistent reiteration of “earth” keeps us grounded, we are not with the sun up or out there but always here where we measure out our senses of everyday existence. Steps, specifically those of the poet’s wife, will appear near the end of the partita as one manifestation of measure stepped out on the ground. Sun and earth together imply growth or generation, and there will appear some sprouts and green shoots as well. Broadly speaking this partita is more somber than the first two, refers more to the hurt of history, that dissonance that is more difficult to accept or absorb into the project of living or writing the poem, even as it is inescapable.

If much of this suggests a falling back on a species of mythopoetics underwritten by the sun as a synecdoche for reassuring cosmic orders, the foregrounding of the pun in the first line reminds us of the seeming arbitrariness of figuration. The pun on sun/son goes back in Zukofsky’s work all the way to “Poem beginning ‘The,’” long before he thought of himself as a father, where it functions as the crux of the sketchy narrative: the poet must move from the role of son to an embrace of the sun or the “myriad,” the world at large, as declared in the concluding hymn to the sun (see Z-notes commentary on “Poem beginning ‘The’”). Thus, Zukofsky’s persistent emphasis on the eyes and light, whether the optical definition of “an objective” or light as representing the ubiquity of labor in “A”-8 or Shakespeare’s (and the reader’s) sensual eye in *Bottom*.

Within the framework of this nominal setting where the poet presumably writes his poem alone at night, there is another, strikingly different framework calling on materials from East Asia. A half dozen lines into the partita there is the fable of a Korean king, which will be matched by further examples of East Asian music and dance near the end of the partita (Zukofsky works with examples from Korean, Chinese and Japanese cultures). The Korean king sails off to an island where he transforms his boat, made from the trunk of a tree, into a “harp.”<sup>23</sup> No motivation is offered for why the Korean king sets off in the first place, although we might see this as analogous to the poet alone at night. In any case we have here a little tale of making music (poetry) literally out of what is at hand, and Zukofsky emphasizes the king’s isolation which presumably is filled, or at least compensated for, by his music. In Zukofsky isolation is always defined or measured by what is lacking or at a distance, that is, by others or the tacit—if you posit a void, you necessarily imply the need to fill it. Nothing is said about what or why the king plays, but implicitly he does so because he must in order to compensate for the lack, creating relations with others, which can extend beyond the human and social to the cosmological. Music or poetry or any symbolic action produces measure, a situatedness in the world.

Ten pages later this is drawn out in the extended *k’in* passage, describing a musical instrument whose every physical detail embodies or manifests traditional Chinese ideas of cosmic and social orders. The fact that the *k’in* physically manifests the ratios of the cosmos presumably explains why it is capable of its music or harmonies, echoing at least glimpses of

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<sup>23</sup> What is here designated as a “harp” is a plucked zither-type instrument played on a table or the ground and is related to the Chinese *k’in* (*ch’in* or *qin*) described in detail later in “A”-13. Throughout East Asia such instruments were closely associated with the literati, and it is for this reason that they are often translated as “harp” or “lute,” although visually and aurally this is quite misleading. Although many famous poets were accomplished players of the *k’in*, this instrument was not played to accompany singing or recitation, but was believed to be capable of evoking exceptional states of transcendent harmony in player and listeners. A different instrument, the *pipa*, is invariably and more aptly translated as “lute,” as it is a guitar-type instrument and used to accompany singing, especially by women. There are a good many classical Chinese poems, as well as a famous play, about the *pipa*.

ultimate orders.<sup>24</sup> If the *k'in* reflects “principles from nature” (300), this nature can be either the cosmos or the individual self which ultimately fold back into each other: what individuals are necessarily about is actively situating themselves within the totality, or, the totality situates the individual. This is a ceaseless negotiation of producing space, of relations, which is what these various cosmological symbolizations of the *k'in* boil down to: an expression of the multiple self-reflective relations within which we are sited. Zukofsky ends this descriptive catalogue with a list of “notes” or tones which symbolically reflect a hierarchical social order from rulers or rules down to objects, to which Zukofsky adds or extends to the “household,” remarking: “Each art deals from the structure / of its own house—“ (301). It is difficult not to hear some sense of Heideggerian dwelling here. In any case, there is the image of any given art defined within a structure both inherited or given and under constant reconstruction. The passage or sentence continues by emphasizing that such realizations of harmony (music) are grounded more in the body (space) than the head and culminates with the wonderful image of this music achieved as when the venetian blinds stop rattling. But of course they never stop rattling for long and there is always dissonance. The experience or creation of dissonance is integral and necessary to such music, often its primary spur—such as whatever it is that sends the Korean king off to an isolate island. This *k'in* passage is immediately followed by mention of one of Zukofsky’s favorite episodes from Shakespeare, the exchange between the fishermen in *Pericles*, who in fact are talking about social injustice but in doing so make a kind of music—a verbally playful mode of grumbling that is an active bonding between the characters, as well as with the audience-reader.

The *k'in* passage, as well as its related instrument at the heart of the anecdote on the Korean king, is then augmented by a description of or elaboration on Japanese court dances. The description of the *k'in* is static, so it is appropriate to counterbalance this with a dance (or perhaps two different dances) that explicitly “makes space,” a complex or structure of relations. It helps if one has a visual image of classical East Asian dance, opera or drama (e.g. Noh or Chinese opera) to understand the image Zukofsky is attempting to gesture at in the poetry of this passage—a minimalist performative aesthetic that tends to emphasize discrete gestures and implications, one might even say produces a context, which may involve a good deal of standing still or a type of stop-action. In the fourth partita of “A”-13 Zukofsky approvingly evokes Chinese drama’s minimalist use of props, relying instead on mime and suggestion (308). In the dance passage, the Japanese dancers are contrasted with Western ballet, which Zukofsky disparages as “frittering,” merely moving through rather than making a space. The dance, music or drama here is by Western norms jerky, stylized, “disturbed” Zukofsky suggests, yet it evokes an entire world by focusing attention on seemingly trivial details: standing still or raising a foot, which paradoxically expands the sense of context.<sup>25</sup> If

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<sup>24</sup> Zukofsky’s source for information about the *k'in* is J.A. Van Aalst, *Chinese Music* (1884).

<sup>25</sup> Zukofsky’s familiarity with East Asian music and dance was probably not very extensive, but his interest was long-standing as both he and Williams saw the great Beijing opera performer, Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), in 1930 (*WCW/LZ* 60-62). In her memoir, Mary Oppen mentions that Zukofsky did fair imitations of Mei’s gestures (her account is a bit garbled as she has no idea of who Mei Lanfang was but it is clearly his performance she is referring to); *Meaning a Life* (1978): 94. Even earlier Zukofsky extensively compares Reznikoff’s plays (collected in *Nine Plays*) with Noh, presumably based on what he had picked up from Pound and Fenollosa (this is from an unpublished section of Zukofsky’s original essay on Reznikoff published in truncated form as “Sincerity and Objectification,” written in early 1930) (HRC 10.6). On more than one occasion, Zukofsky described his own play, *Arise, Arise*, as a Western play meant to be performed by Chinese or Japanese dancers (e.g. 25 May 1959 letter to Cid Corman; HRC 18.1). The dances Zukofsky describes in “A”-13 are largely based on a

the connection is not already obvious, he explicitly carries this over into poetic measure: if you count a row of ten stressing each count, you also imply ten unstressed counts (the tacit), which is negatively contrasted with merely counting stresses in order to repeat or continue on and on. In the former case each stress as well as the relationship between them is given emphasis and integrity with the implication that the intervals vary, whereas in the latter the regular beat runs roughshod over distinctions. Zukofsky suggests this embodies a distinction between an experience of relative fullness of the moment as opposed to rushing to one's grave. Here he is primarily concerned with defining by enacting the poetic values he espouses, and much of this dance passage deliberately breaks up the sentences, so that while recognizably remaining within the longer syntactical units, it is as if each line begins again and has a discrete integrity.

The implication is that this sense of poetic measure is more natural, not because it replicates some cosmic orders as might seemingly be implied by the description of the *k'in*, but because it is more willing to accept the irregularity of everyday experience on its own terms. This can all be related back to Zukofsky's *Bottom* thesis, the privileging of the eye, of sensual situatedness in the world, over the abstracting tendencies of the mind, although there is no question of simply choosing the eye at the expense of the mind as each necessarily always implicates the other—"Only in Shakespeare is there / Such reconciliation of the abstract and the actual" (291). It is a question of the relationship and proportional balance between them in a historical period that tends toward a disproportionate emphasis on the mind and its forgetfulness (repression) of the eye, that is, being in and accepting the world. The eye's sensual pleasure in the world recognizes and lingers over its discrete irregularity without thinking that the world is therefore merely discrete, less than a whole. In "A"-18 Zukofsky quotes Walter Savage Landor to the effect that we encounter the world of nature as a seemingly random assortment of very miscellaneous details, yet at the same time as "natural," that is, as having a sense of composition (402).<sup>26</sup> It is in this sense that the third partita begins and ends by suggesting there is an isomorphic relationship between the rhymes of nature (night and day, sleeping and waking, growing and dying), everyday life and the poem because it necessarily participates in the acting out of a life in the world with others. The Asian manifestations evoked here are overtly artificial from a naturalist perspective, but "naturalness" is not a matter of imitation but of presentation. In concluding this partita Zukofsky suggests that the poem simply says that in the end it wasn't a bad life (303), which is a perspective from after he is dead, in other words that of the reader. This is not about a message or moral of the poem or about the poet's life except in the sense that the reader as reader participates in the poem and in doing so affirms the value of living—otherwise they would not go on living, much less reading. The poem's obligation, therefore, is to enhance or enlarge this sense of existence, to create that space of attention.

#### **Partita iv**

The nominal subject of this brief partita is an inventory of the poet's wallet and as such is recognizable as one of the numerous heirs of Williams' wheelbarrow. The point is not descriptive per se but precisely the verbal translation of the literal eye as a means of making poetry, but characteristically verisimilitude does not contain the presentation. Indeed the

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performance of Japanese court dances he saw in 1959, see Z-site annotations to "A"-13. However, at this time Zukofsky had been corresponding regularly with Cid Corman for several years, who lived in Kyoto and was keenly interested in Noh, which he attempts to describe in some detail in his letters.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the related remarks on "Found Objects" (*Prep.* 168).

partita opens not with the wallet itself but with a related object that is never named, as if to deliberately deflect a too literal visualization. This object is a very small pad of note paper the poet keeps with or in his wallet—quite a few of these small pages of notes survive with Zukofsky’s main notebooks which were pocket-sized loose-leaf notebooks. The emphasis on the verbal as opposed to imagism is highlighted by the visually odd stanza form Zukofsky invented for this section: four-lines of 3-1-1-3 syllables. This form overtly distorts the usual visual presentation of the words, so that the lines and stanzas work against the syntax, however elliptical, and even the discrete words, literally putting stress on the individual syllables, as particularly the single syllable lines require a certain amount of hyphenation. At one point Zukofsky refers to his compositional method here as pouring each syllable into measure, indicating that this was suggested by the notes, which are so cramped with his miniscule handwriting that some have to be heavily hyphenated to vertically fit along the edges (306).<sup>27</sup> The syllables are to be intimately eyed and mouthed one at a time, which here creates a dynamic cross-tension with their conventionalized subsumption into the forward movement.

The choice of a wallet functions as a typical Zukofskian conceit since it is a repository of one’s identity. The items cataloged—notes for poetry, family snapshots, a label that has apparently come from his son’s violin, his brother’s phone number, a blank check for \$2, a receipt for a haircut—offer a typical collage of metonymic implications, with the key elements of the personal accounted for: family, music and poetry (or poetry as work), with other details such as the blank check possibly suggesting the lack of material success or lack of concern for it, despite the rising cost of haircuts. One can read the hints of a story or a biographical sketch in this seemingly random collection of objects, but more to the point is the generation of a poem out of them. The work of the poem—the poet writing it or the reader reading it—is the enactment of intimacy and love of what matters most to the poet and what makes up his world as a living. So not surprisingly the section ends with his wife—who I take to be referred to by the ladybug—and son, in the form of a note and a musical clef visually suggesting a cat (by the time of composing “A”-13, the Zukofskys had already made a tentative start on *Catullus* which they routinely referred to as “Cats”—here Paul has his own cat). The literal inclusion as a finale of the musical notation neatly sums up this section’s concern with visual eyeing that sees more than mere notation (letters, words) and enables the generation of poetry or music. For Zukofsky this very seeing with and in writing/reading is enacting love—for his wife and son, and for the things of the world including words—which is what poetry does.

Incorporated into this partita are three passages (or one interrupted passage) marked off in italics, which in “A” typically designate quotation—in this case they are all from Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (304-305, 307, 308-309). These could be understood as transcriptions of working notes from his wallet, but if so the poet is taking the opportunity to use them for composing on the spot passages of new poetry. All the quotations used are taken from a chapter on that play in *Bottom*, and therefore a condensation and reworking of his earlier selection (an extended horse passage in “A”-14 (351-352) is similarly worked from Shakespeare quotations found in *Bottom* using the index). In the first and longest passage (304-305) he works with six different quotations, trimming, rearranging and stitching them together, as we have already seen him perform with Aristotle, Hesiod and others. In the relevant chapter of *Bottom* (“Forgotten” 348-351), the argument is that this play, which scholars consider of doubtful authorship and at best only a small percentage actually written

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<sup>27</sup> Another poem, “(Ryokan’s scroll),” written within a few months of “A”-13 similarly suggests visually the idea of “dripping / words,” which in this case were suggested by a scroll of Japanese calligraphy (*CSP* 203).

by Shakespeare, is genuinely Shakespearean. This is not a question of the biographical author who composed this or that line or play since “Shakespeare” in *Bottom* is a body of texts so designated, and if we read *The Two Noble Kinsmen* it is as part of that body of texts. Zukofsky discerns and quotes passages that evidence his Shakespeare thesis on eyes, but then the entire long “Continents” chapter finds this thesis, that is “Shakespeare,” throughout Western and even world literature and thought. Which is not really surprising since writing is always rewriting, so that authorship in the conventional sense is a misreading and arbitrarily limited conception of the texts. We are familiar enough with such arguments now. We can recognize in all this a defense or expression of Zukofsky’s poetics which so literally rework found materials, such as in these passages composed quite directly out of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

What Zukofsky makes of these bits from play is recognizably related to the *Bottom* theme in characteristic elusive Zukofsky manner: in the first passage, there are eyes and “her eye,” this world, love, reason and wit. There are bewildering shifts of pronouns: your, me, we, I, my, me, his, her, since all these subject points interrelate and fold into each other—identities are not intrinsic but relational. Settled sense is carefully kept at arm’s length; instead there is, as throughout this partita, a sense of sinuous speed. We recognize the familiar horse metaphor which the poet (or reader) is apparently riding: the poem runs and carries the poet as he writes/reads – the familiar inextricability of the poet writing the poem or the poem writing the poet as a necessary enactment of love.

## Partita v

Of all the partitas of “A”-13, the last adheres most consistently to its initial setting, but then as if in reaction, it breaks off at its conclusion into five discrete, seemingly free-floating units. The nominal setting has the poet gazing out his tenth floor Brooklyn Heights apartment and describing the cityscape. The trajectory of this section moves from the subjective outward. Sketchily it proceeds as follows: beginning with the poet apparently waking up, sitting or lying in bed naked with a confused or sleepy sense of night and day and of the others he lives with, he goes to the window and gives a catalog of the architectural features that he surveys, which eventually takes him to glimpses of the river between buildings, bridges, piers and boats, then over to Manhattan dominated by the Empire State Building, up to the top of this structure and its searchlights which can be seen far beyond the city, such as by “the young” (lovers?) in the woods (presumably upriver) and then down to some specific flora and concluding with grass. This sketch is a simple movement out to encompass the totality that bears on the individual poet-subject in all its complexity, mostly well beyond his ken or knowledge, and as such the poem is a type of sweeping gesture to implicate the self in the world. The final image of grass in what is predominately a catalog of urban details carries significant implications, especially in the American poetic tradition—a common, egalitarian simplicity that presumably underwrites all the massive manifestations of human effort and history that the poem has been listing.<sup>28</sup> I do not think that for a life-long urbanite like Zukofsky this final nature image is meant primarily as a pastoral critique of the babel of the city but rather as a reminder of history, that the seeming permanence of the city is transitory—a topic already evoked through personal memory particularly in partitas ii and iii. The image of grass immediately evokes a literary allusion, specifically Shakespeare’s

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<sup>28</sup> At “A”-12.228.15-27 Zukofsky mentions that Whitman haunted the same neighbourhood in Brooklyn Heights where the Zukofskys lived for almost two decades, both the printshop where the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was produced and the office of *Brooklyn Eagle* where he worked as an editor.

Cleopatra, from a play and a character very much taken up with historical impermanence while to a degree the work itself transcends that mutability—the specific allusion evokes a famous remark about Cleopatra’s eternal beauty (“age cannot wither”), eternal in the works of Shakespeare and others as long as they are read.

However, this overtly literary turn reminds us that the preceding passage is not a mere experiential description but a passage through words. At one point the poet’s description becomes a catalogue of architectural terms—quoins, stringcourses, ogee arch, spandrel and the like—whose specificity has less to do with visual precision than as vocabulary, as itself a human development every bit as elaborate and odd as the physical accretions they designate. This becomes all the more evident as the list proceeds to a string of geographical designations—Veronese (parapets), Florentine (towers), Siena (marble), Moorish (fretwork)—indicating the cultural hybridity manifest equally in the cityscape and its verbal description. At one point the poet calls his description a “bestiary,” with the Empire State Building as the crowning animal fable, the intertwining of description and allegory implicit in any language use. As mentioned, the main body of this partita ends by overtly evoking the theme of mortality and a sense of human scale. With the mention of grass that “must outlast” Cleopatra:

—age cannot wither  
So brief is not brief  
Not brief is so brief  
Quiet once taught to speak (312)

One imagines that this emphasis on “brief” immediately following the allusion to Shakespeare’s Cleopatra has in mind Macbeth’s “Out, out, brief candle!” but the poem, as is the case with any poem, is written against such a sense of extinction. The overly self-cancelling couplet will remind us of the proverbial saws of the first partita, largely empty of content, so that a paraphrase such as time is relative or experiential seems trite, yet performatively it is significant, not least in its touch of humor or its evocation of a childlike sense of linguistic play. The final line also has a proverbial ring and expresses a characteristic Zukofsky thought that the horizon of all words or speaking is silence, which might be understood as either an understanding beyond or beside anything that might be said (the sense of the presence of others) or as the futility of words. However, the latter Beckettish perspective is never seriously entertained by Zukofsky, despite his general skepticism, if for no other reason than the Wittgensteinian view that it is rather pointless to talk or write about the ultimate inadequacy of words. In fact, when we read more closely there is no suggestion of silence here, “quiet” becomes possible once one is taught to speak, which will be picked up in what follows.

What follows is five brief, narrow lined units that initially seem to have little enough to do with the preceding cityscape and imaginary journey out to the grass and Cleopatra, as if the poem simply acknowledges its open-endedness by trailing off into fragments. Nevertheless, they can be read as summarizing the movement and Zukofsky’s poetics. The first of these final units, immediately following the main cityscape passage, has lovers in an embrace (possibly the young out in the woods). Although the reader could not be expected to recognize this, the passage is worked from a famous bit of the Upanishads. The subject is actually not the lovers but the embrace, beyond which those in it know nothing else. This is an image of the relationship between poem and reader or anyone and their world, an absolute of attention or engagement. But if this seems solipsistic, it needs to be read against or with the preceding account that expands outward indefinitely, or alternatively, the oneness of the embrace necessarily implies the inexorable impingement of the totality. We might suggest that the movement of the main body of the partita from the poet out to the larger world is itself an embrace (Zukofsky is quite fond of the image of a curve of land embracing the sea,

as both the sea (=C) and the curved land suggest Celia—see “A”-12.183, 187, 213). Here knowing is not something located within or without but is the embrace itself, an image of active love in which those embracing are “Incapable of / Conspiring / Together,” which I take to express a certain definition of absolute trust, but again it is expressed socially since “conspiring” necessarily implies others. Zukofsky characteristically words this such that “conspiring” can ambiguously be read as the embracing couple unable to conspire against others or against each other.

The next two units go together as they both refer to Spinoza, who as a philosopher of immanence supports the sensibility of the main body of this partita, as well as the image of the embrace, even while working in a radically different discourse. The first refers to the eight definitions and seven axioms out of which the *Ethics* is constructed in its geometrical method, and the second lists each of these fifteen definitions and axioms as a single term.<sup>29</sup> What is foregrounded here is Spinoza’s philosophy as a verbal contraption. That contraption is an effort to say the totality, in this sense another way of saying what the cityscape passage attempts to say. Of course, the importance of Spinoza in Zukofsky’s own work was already well established, most explicitly and elaborately in “A”-12 and *Bottom*, the major works of the preceding decade. So in this sense Spinoza informs the poet’s cityscape, which might be elaborated on at length in terms of Spinoza’s sense of existence among the density of other, constantly impinging bodies. But then this is true of the entire movement with its fugal and dissonant concerns and enactments. However, here Zukofsky begins both these units by apparently denying Spinoza: “Not of words...” and “Does not think....,” which I read as referring directly to the passage of the embrace, as well as to the larger cityscape passage, as a gesture against abstraction, a resistance against the split of self-consciousness (which is how one might understand the embrace as well). This is consistent with Zukofsky’s privileging of the eye over the mind in *Bottom*, yet this is not an either/or choice but necessarily always in dynamic and proportional relation. After all, by “naming” Spinoza here, he puts him clearly on the table so to speak. If the list of Spinozian terms might seem reductive, a gesture of devaluation, this is not the intent but rather as the reminder that “Spinoza” is words in all their complex possibilities, which should not be reduced to concepts. Both “A”-12 and *Bottom* explicitly attempt to poeticize Spinoza, which is as much a matter of how “Spinoza” is collocated as the specific quotations presented. Yet Spinoza is not the philosophical underpinnings of these works or of “A”-13, but a verbal contraption Zukofsky found particularly attractive while ultimately not distinct from what he finds in Aristotle or Wittgenstein or Shakespeare or an account of a walk in New York City.

Following Spinoza’s *Ethics* condensed to a list, we have a Shakespearean clown (Launce from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) remarking that to “stand-under and under-stand is all one” (Act II.5.29)—a quip that particularly intrigued Zukofsky.<sup>30</sup> This might be taken as

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<sup>29</sup> Zukofsky has systematically gone through the list of definitions and axioms with which the *Ethics* begins and picked out a single word for each, although not always exactly echoing Spinoza’s key terms. For instance, Zukofsky’s “Absolute” corresponds to Spinoza’s definition of God, and the single term equivalences for the axioms are interestingly interpretive, e.g. “Negation” (a term Spinoza or his translator never uses) for axiom VII: “The essence of that which can be conceived as not existing does not involve existence.”

<sup>30</sup> Zukofsky discovered what he took to be the same remark in Hesiod as quoted by Plato in one of his epistles. In “A”-22, which includes a good many early Greek philosophers (primarily via Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*), the remark will appear in the Plato passage worked entirely from the *Epistles* (519), while in “A”-23, which is predominately worked from literary materials, it will appear in the Hesiod passage (544). For quotations of or allusions to Launce’s quip in *Bottom*, see 51, 55, 66, 178, 190.

directed against the abstracting tendencies of Spinoza's terms and concepts. Zukofsky, like many other readers, was attracted to Shakespeare's clowns as anti-philosophical philosophers, who above all function to turn the language of the more earnest propositions of the "main" characters against themselves and prevent the plays from becoming vehicles of moral or social arguments in any straightforward didactic sense. Again we return to the concerns of the opening of "A"-13. But if we risk translating Launce's remark into a statement, it is a reminder that the sense is in the action of the words, in what happens in writing and reading rather than in fixed or abstracted meaning. The clowns keep the language in play in the plays, which suggests they stand in as Zukofskian poets.

The "all one" that concludes Launce's quote leads directly into the culminating four-line unit:

Or two, three

Numerous

Only the image of a voice:

*Love you* (313)

This final "*Love you*" can be taken as the poet simply signing off with an address to his immediate family and by implication indicating what he has been saying throughout the entire preceding poem. True enough, but more to the point this is the poem speaking to the reader, or, the reader to the poem, the intertwined activity of the writing-reading of the poem as coterminous with the activity of living one's life with others. In this sense too the poem loops back to the opening of "A"-13 and its questioning of its readers as to what they expect of the poem. This unit begins by succinctly saying one implies two implies many or the "numerous," a point I have stressed often enough as always implicit in Zukofsky's poetry. The "all one" and the "numerous" fugally play off of each other. The next line seems a non sequitur, "Only the image of a voice," which then leads immediately into the final, "*Love you.*" Yet a script is precisely that, an image of a voice, of other presences, of the numerous.<sup>31</sup>

1 August 2019

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<sup>31</sup> "The image of a voice" comes from II Esdras V:37, see *Bottom* 36 and 92. Cf. the passage immediately preceding the Hesiod passage I discussed as a variant of the *Bottom* argument.