

Dear Pie,

Real to see thru the seasonal "extreme
of ache", no "extreme of joy" away — ?
no news really

Hope the passport came with
the delicatessens at Kobe

And so the happiest
New Year to you and Shizumi

and ever from all

Louis

line

number fourteen

A Journal of Contemporary Writing
and its Modernist Sources

the final issue

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As a journal published in co-operation with The Contemporary Literature Collection, *Line* will reflect the range of the collection. Contents will be related to the line of post-1945 Canadian, American, and British writers whose work issues from, or extends, the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson.

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Cover: Letter from Louis Zukofsky to Cid Corman, 17 December 1966, from Special Collections, SFU Library

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Contents

Editor's Note/Notes on Contributors	1
A LOUIS ZUKOFSKY SECTION	
LOUIS ZUKOFSKY Two Letters to Cid Corman	3
CID CORMAN "A"-11: 1300-1950	11
ROBERT MITTENTHAL Zukofsky's Love's Song a Circle Sent: The Valentine Written To-Two: Initial Period of "A"-22 and its Correspondence	32
CHARLENE DIEHL-JONES Sounding "A"	52
PAMELA BANTING Philtres	72
WARREN TALLMAN / ADEENA KARASICK Neo-Modern Is Coming On: A Dialogue	77
SHEILA WATSON By the Time I Got to University	98
DI BRANDT mother poems	103
ROY MIKI Self on Self: Robert Kroetsch Interviewed	108
WILFRED WATSON "Mettre en Conte le Dream"	143
MARGARET CHRISTAKOS New Writing	156
REVIEWS	
BRUCE ANDREWS	162
BILLY LITTLE	167

The end of the . . . no, that would be too much the expected line, so restrictive with that assumption of clichéd finality—going the fate of our linear national rail line. Some say it's the undoing of the last spike one desires (the turning towards emptiness as a graph of measure), but that's another matter. *Line* began in the spring of 1983 with no built-in agenda for longevity, and no long-term plan to establish itself as a fixture. The signs then appeared opportune to construct a kind of provisional framework with the strength and flexibility to permit certain literary contents to coalesce with their various similitudes and differences.

There was the perspective offered by the first site of the journal, the Contemporary Literature Collection, SFU Library, with its emphasis on the Pound - Williams - Stein - H.D. - Olson line of poetics. We chose the limit of contemporary North American writing connecting with that line, yet sought material that took issue with or otherwise altered or extended that line in new directions. There was also, in back of this, the west coast line—north and south—an important vertical geography for writing in our locality during the past 30+ years. This, in turn, drew in its counterpart, the horizontal border line, with the possibility it offered of tracking writing of shared concerns in both countries. And there were finally, perhaps even initially, the archival resources in the rich array of manuscripts and correspondence in SFU Library's Special Collections—that literary stuff often ignored as marginal but which in fact breaks open the boundaries of critical commentary. The inclusion of new writing came later, with number 9, when manuscripts we were receiving insisted on being published.

My own (vague now) intention at the outset, given the odds against surviving on limited funds, volunteer labour etc., was to attempt a run of 10 issues, which by coincidence would have concluded with the book-length issue on the late bpNichol's long poem *The Martyrology*. *Tracing the Paths: Reading ≠ Writing The Martyrology* was co-published with Talonbooks. But the momentum continued and another four issues resulted, with this number 14 as the final one. Number 15, forthcoming later this year, will be the Index issue. All current subscribers will be sent a copy.

The good news is that this final issue of *Line* as a journal does not signal the end of the As number 14 was assembled, I was offered the opportunity to assume the editorship of the *West Coast Review*, another literary journal in the English Department at SFU, but one which began in 1969 only a few years after the university was built. When I found I would be able to blend some of the literary matter of *Line* into an expanded *Review*, I decided to

accept. The new journal will carry on the history of the *West Coast Review*, but under the new title, *West Coast Line*. Watch for the first issue, Spring 1990, featuring new writing from a new generation of Vancouver writers, with guest editors Lary Bremner, Miriam Nichols and Lisa Robertson.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

For its final issue, *Line* is pleased to offer a feature on the poetry of Louis Zukofsky, including two letters from Zukofsky to Cid Corman. Corman's essay on Zukofsky's "A" complements an essay in *Line*, Number 11, both part of a lengthy on-going study; the first two volumes of his own large (five volume) collection of selected poems *Of* is forthcoming from Lapis Press . . . Robert Mittenhal is a poet living in Seattle whose *Ready Terms* is available from Tsunami Editions in Vancouver . . . Charlene Diehl-Jones is a promising PhD student in the English Department at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg . . . Pamela Banting is a poet living in Edmonton who is working on a study of Fred Wah . . . *Sheila Watson and The Double Hook* is a collection of essays edited by George Bowering and published by Golden Dog Press . . . Robert Kroetsch has had two major books published recently, *The Completed Field Notes* by McClelland and Stewart, and a collection of essays *The Lovely Treachery of Words* by Oxford Press . . . Di Brandt is a poet from Winnipeg whose second book *Agnes in the Sky* is forthcoming from Turnstone . . . Warren Tallman in his dialogue with Adeena Karasick talks about a recently completed collection of essays "Am in Can" . . . Adeena Karasick is a young Vancouver poet presently studying for her MA in the English Department of York University . . . Margaret Christakos is a poet from Toronto whose first book *Not Egypt* is available from Coach House . . . Wilfred Watson's *Collected Poems* was published by Longspoon/NeWest Press . . . Bruce Andrews' recent book *Getting Reading To Have Been Frightened* is available from Roof Books . . . Billy Little is the poet Zonko who lives in Vancouver.

RM
February 3, 1990
St Ein's Day

A

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

SECTION

A

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

SECTION

A



Two Letters to Cid Corman

The following letters are taken from the substantial collection of aerograms and postcards written by Louis Zukofsky to Cid Corman from 1964 to 1976, housed in Special Collections at Simon Fraser University. Thanks to Cid Corman for his letter of 4 December 1989 explaining some of the references and for his permission to cite him in the accompanying notes.

Oct. 19/65

Dead Cid,

We've been working 14 hours a day—I looking out of the window now and then sorry for myself and C to miss the good weather. The only cheer in the world the protests against the draft: maybe there's some point to working after all. (Aside: may "your" job be light—i.e. the school job.)

Business: print your Bottom essay on Z in Origin whenever it fits in—I'm glad you thought of it. And luck to the third run.

And I hope Nonce finds us less ant like.

The short Cats are finished—all of them. Only Peliaco left to do now. But spurred by Norton's taking up its option on ALL (vol 2, i.e. 1956-1964) and Cape's contract for "A" 1-12* [*i.e. the Origin edition with added acknowledgement to Origin on copyright page—my essay & Bill's omitted.] (to appear about a year after their English ed. of ALL-vol 1)—we've decided to clean up that massed mess of criticism you once glanced at on Willow Street—Prepositions (i.e. written for, with and about)—if and when there's a hurry. I don't expect it—but with that and Peliaco out of the way, I'll be free for "A" again. In fact, I've cleaned up the criticism—all that remains is proofreading the typing and I sit grieving over C. doing it with all our desire of having it out of our way—her typing on my conscience the only feeling I have about it (the opee—is that the plural of opus—what did I do it for.

So—P.Z. drop in briefly at midnight—his chores are endless—and we fall asleep only towards morning.

I couldn't guess when I started the Cats that I'd be hinting (or as you once said "explaining," if the reader is hep) what I do in the

Feb 21/74

Dear Cid,
I'm glad you wrote for my 70th, and in kind our late Valentine greetings—knowing you'll know even if I can't keep up answering as I used to. We expect more and more of quiet, including hushed complaints such as over root-canal work and feet sensitive to weather days ahead that sabotage the walks we once could take. But with so much sun, clouds, stars* (ice storms too) thru our windows, we should have left the city ten years ago. It's a pleasure even to carry out the garbage.

"A"-23, the actual writing accelerates as I go on—the "homework," notes, reading etc, has gone on at least five years—and I "hope" to finish my part to decently meet C's 24 this year—to clear the way for the next jobs—two in mind over the next 20 years.

You'll be seeing the rest of 22 in Poetry. Just omit "Part II" in reading (the editor's way out of his difficulties of breaking—I didn't even bother to correct it when I read proof some weeks ago.

Our kindest blessings too to you both
Louis

P.S. I've been meaning to tell you, when I saw Michael Loeb in Sept. before leaving the city (we haven't gone in since & don't intend to unless absolutely necessary) I helped him with addresses for permissions to speed your anthology. I trust it helped—a bit anyway. L.

Notes:

Valentine greetings: Corman explains, "LZ was an inveterate Valentine man & as it happens (as he knew) Shimizu's birthday & my wedding coincide on that day as well."

we should have left the city: Celia and Louis had moved out of New York city to Port Jefferson.

C's 24 this year: "A"-24, arranged by Celia, was completed before "A"-22 and "A"-23.

Michael Loeb: Corman explains, "Michael Loeb, I believe, was editor at Grossman-Viking—now Penguin—then & managed my *The Gist of Origin* [N.Y.: Grossman, 1975]."

So - Pz. dig in. dig at mid-night - hit class
and endless - and we fall asleep only towards
morning.
I couldn't guess when I started the card that
I'd be the editor (I was your second editor, I think)
is kept out of the picture at 9:00 - like the
first program. At 9:00 I'm off to my own horse races.
have a star - then



I'll be free for "A" again. In fact, I've cleaned up the criticism - all that remains is proofreading the typing and I sit grumpy over C. doing it with all our desire of having it out of our way - her typing on my conscience the only feeling I have about it (the open - is that the plural of opus - what did I do it for.

"A"-11: 1300-1950

The structure of "A"-11, as Ahearn (unlike Kenner) realizes, derives immediately from Cavalcanti's celebrated *Ballata XI*—written in exile in 1300. LZ's rhyme structure follows this poem precisely and his syllabics run very close also—with shorter lines after the first line's 11 syllables and after the succeeding stanza's 5 opening lines of 11 syllables also. The Italian is much swifter than the English—but hardly more liquid and flowing. Louis here prepares the ground for his much later sounding of Catullus—but it is worth reading him line for line against the Cavalcanti text for the many overlays. And there is also a certain resonance from the sense of the model—as Ezra's version may suggest. (This model—of course—gave LZ a chance to compete with Eliot AND Pound: two birds with one stone. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* liquidity of his characteristic—somewhat more sodden—liturgical style.)

Because no hope is left me, Ballatetta,
Of return to Tuscany,
Light-foot go thou some fleet way
Unto my Lady straightway,
And out of her courtesy
Great honour will she do thee.

Tidings thou bearest with thee sorrow-fain
Full of all grieving, overcast with fear.
On guard! Lest any one see thee or hear,
Any who holds high nature in disdain,
For sure if so, to my increase of pain,
Thou wert made prisoner
And held afar from her,
Hereby new harms were given
Me and, after death even,
Dolour and griefs renewed.

Feb 21/74

Dear Cid,

I'm glad you wrote for my Toth, and in
kind on late Valentine greetings—knowing
You'll know even if I can't keep up answering
as I used to. We expect more and more of
quiet, including hushed complaints, such as over
boot-canal work and feet sensitive to weather
days ahead that sabotage the walks we once
could take. But with so much sun, clouds, stars
thru our windows, we should have left the city
ten years ago. It's a pleasure even to carry out
the garbage.

"A"-23, the actual writing, accelerates as I go on—
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least five years—and I "hope" to finish
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You'll be seeing the rest of 22 in Poetry. Just
omit "Part II" ^{in reply} (the editor's way out of his
difficulties of breaking—→ I didn't even bother
to correct it when I read proof some weeks
ago. Our kindest blessings too to you both
L.C.

P.S. 9. I've been meaning to tell you, when I saw Michael back in Sept
to give leaving the city. (we have it since I don't intend
to unless absolutely necessary.) I helped him with addresses to
spread from Anthony's, I trust it helped—a bit on women, if
for the moment

Thou knowest, Ballatetta, that Death layeth
His hand upon me whom hath Life forsaken;
Thou knowest well how great a tumult swayeth
My heart at sound of her whom each sense crieth
Till all my mournful body is so shaken
That I cannot endure here,
Would'st thou make service sure here?
Lead forth my soul with thee
(I pray thee earnestly)
When it parts from my heart here.

Ah, Ballatetta, to thy friendliness,
I do give o'er this trembling soul's poor case.
Bring thou it there where her dear pity is,
And when thou hast found that Lady of all grace
Speak through thy sighs, my Ballad, with thy face
Low bowed, thy words in sum:
'Behold, thy servant is come
—This soul who would dwell with thee—
Asundered suddenly
From Him, Love's servitor.'

O smothered voice and weak that tak'st the road
Out from the weeping heart and dolorous,
Go, crying out my shatter'd mind's alarm,
Forth with my soul and this song piteous
Until thou find a lady of such charm,
So sweetly intelligent
That e'en thy sorrow is spent.
Take thy fast place before her.
And thou, Soul mine, adore her
Alway, with all thy might.
(from Pound's *Translations*)

I've scored some key words of contact. Perhaps some of EP's comments on Cavalcanti and poetry are worth repeating here—since LZ would have heard. He writes:

I believe in an ultimate and absolute rhythm as I believe in an absolute symbol or metaphor. The perception of the intellect is given in the work, that of the emotions in the cadence. It is only, then, in perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word that the two-fold vision can be recorded Rhythm is perhaps the most primal of all things known to

us . . . any given rhythm implies about it a complete musical form . . . Ergo, the rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony, which, had we a little more skill, we could score for orchestra. *Sequitur*, or rather *ines*: the rhythm of any poetic line corresponds to emotion . . . only when the emotions illumine the perceptive powers . . . we see the reality.

Back in May 1961 Gael Turnbull took me to visit Hugh Kenner—who at that time was living in the California hills back of Santa Barbara. It was the beginning of a sequence of readings of LZ's "A" (at that time only 1-12 done) across the United States. Kenner was disparaging about Zukofsky, and when I pointed to "A"-11 as a particularly beautiful and moving section, he disagreed. At that point I said—Let me read it to you. And with his acquiescence did. Suddenly he was in a different place. He asked me to record it for him—which I did. It marked the shift in his attitude towards LZ (some of whose work, as a result, appeared in Buckley's *National Review*—an outcome even LZ would have doubted some years earlier).

Later, in Brooklyn, likely the following year (my journals are too lost in chaos here for me to check the exactitudes), since my copy of "A" 1-12 was signed by LZ on 3 April 1961, "If ever a dedication ought to be"—I asked Louis to read the piece to me—to see if my interpretation was correct. To my satisfaction he read it in precisely the same way—granting our vocal differences: he much softer and with less pointed accents. His reading bore out my own often reiterated charge that "A"—and indeed all of his work—has to be sounded and heard to be understood.

LZ, unlike Pound, retained—to fine effect—all the feminine rhymes which—as in Cavalcanti (and in Dante—who seems even more drawn from in terms of thought/feeling—as is "natural" in Italian) creates a very flowing movement from line to line and gives sweetness to the rhymes. A great many lines open with strong-stressed words—giving the verses a lot of shaping. The rhythms—as if especially sensitive to Pound's dicta—are unusually rich and add to the sonorous depth of felt meaning.

Ahearn—picking up a cue from the LZ mss. at Texas (Marcella Booth remarks on it)—believes Louis was much indebted to a very minor piece of versification by a 19th century New York writer (possibly poetaster would be the right word) called "Bronx" and

poeticizing upon the river of that name.* The poet's name—Joseph Rodman Drake (1795-1820: given the short life I suppose I should go gentle)—Ahearn purports to think becomes involved in the blossoming rod that LZ flourishes in "A"-11. But LZ had introduced the old Biblical imagery much earlier (related to Ricky) and Drake's middle name would only have been a kind of psychic nicety for LZ and certainly nothing he was expecting readers to "catch."

Ahearn says "Drake's poem supplies the river and reinforces the tone"—but the river was already in "A" and the tone receives far more reinforcement from Dante and Spinoza, Pound and Cavalcanti. The two stanzas quoted will show you how little relation there is:

I sat me down upon a green bank-side,
Skirting the edge of a gentle river,
Whose waters seemed unwillingly to glide,
Like parting friends who linger while they sever;
Enforced to go, yet seeming still unready,
Backward they wind their way in many a wistful eddy.

And likely the last as against the preceding first:

Yet I will look upon thy face again,
My own romantic Bronx, and it will be
A face more pleasant than the face of men.
Thy waves are old companions, I shall see
A well-remembered face in each old tree,
And hear a voice long loved in thy sweet minstrelsy.

Where this poem is truly under levy is in the 1941 poem, "No it was no dream of coming death," and whose text may be worth seeing here—since there is relation:

No it was no dream of coming death,
Those you love will live long.
If light hurried my dream, I saw none:
Stepped from my bed and to the sill,
From a window looked down
On the river I knew set forth
To rise toward me—full after rain.

* At the time he wrote this poem—as Jerry Reisman tells me—the River was visible from their apartment in the Bronx (cf. *It Was*).

People watched, crowded the banks, thought
As with old words to a river:
(*Whose waters seemed unwillingly
to glide like friends who linger while
they sever.*) *Soon, as expected!*
A coffin launched like a ship's hull
Sped as from a curtain afire
Draped to the keystone of an arch
And—as at a burial at sea—
Sank. The displaced water rose,
Made the heart sound the coffin's grave,
Woke under the stream and in me
A set of furtive bells, muted
And jangling by rote 'What does this say?
What loss will make the world different?
Are they gathered to further way?
What sorrow do you fear?
Ask, will you, is it here
Distrust is cast off, all
Cowardice dies. Eyes, looking out,
Without the good of intellect,
Rouse as you are used to:
It is the bad fallen away,
And the sorrow in the good.
You saw now for your book, *Anew*.'

The feel of this is very close to *It was*, and of course it is the title poem of *Anew* (1935-1944). It is—with *che di lor suona*—one of his first dream poems and it isn't a "coming death" he projects, but an image of being dead. And an awakening (Dantescan) of vision—a visionary poem—as "A"-11 is.

It comes back to haunt his 1941 poem about a visit to Henry Adams's famed (Saint Gaudens) Rock Creek Cemetery stone/sculpture: "I am one alive while two see here with me." The relation is useful in telling us how long LZ would save up material for eventual use. (He had by this time a great deal of "A"-12 in his famed wallet.) The Drake poem was known already by 1941 and "A"-11 wasn't completed or worked on till they were at Old Lyme in the summer of 1950.

Ahearn feels the musical relation of the opening here to Spenser's famed "Sweet Thames run softly, till I end my song" and that's there. The lyric has an uncanny quality about it—one of the poems about which one says it is "inevitable"—that brooks no mere analysis and evokes a history of precedents. But it is dedicated to

Celia and Paul as title and we hear them—his wife of 10-11 years (LZ himself more than 45) and his already violin-prodigy son Paul of 6-7. We hear them listening and—in the poet's imagination—responding to his words. Much of the power of the poem lives within the clear sense of them we feel involved. (Kenner's overdone concern with the poem's being hermetic—which it certainly isn't—ends with him rather patronizingly saying—in a way that suggests a great deal of residual ambivalence in the critic towards the work of this poet: "If we do not wholly comprehend, it is not that our understandings are unfit; it is merely that we are not of the family, and are overhearing family conversation." As my friend Creeley might say—Wow!)

Louis himself was miffed by people who found him "hermetic"—let alone "difficult" or "obscure." I know he was not writing in order to become the pet of academic societies of elucidation towards doctorates—though there's no hiding the fact that he is liable to just this future. It may be that this very work—this labor of love—can cut through a lot of that. And I would say to anyone—and it applies to other poets' works as well—that if there isn't the deepest sense of respect and good will towards the work involved—whatever criticism is arrived at becomes a waste and a sham.

Once we recognize the structural base in Cavalcanti—there is nothing vital to us as readers in combing for other allusions and references outside of the poem itself: after all "A" is an immense context and LZ is never oblivious of that *act*. So that if we want to both savor and understand the poem—we have 1) to say the poem and feel it AS utterance, and 2) to hear each word as melody of meaning. The number of syllables—how many times each word is used—the proportion of n's to r's from stanza to stanza (and I've done all the homework and find it futile)—even the Cavalcanti frame—mean nothing unless and until the poem LIVES—not FOR us but IN us. WE are the family or poetry itself becomes the greatest meaninglessness of all.

Let me take the poem stanza by stanza—though it should be read in full spate, recited by any one interested at once and *then* returned to for a closer sensing—the detail of each word and phrase—to try to grasp *how* he did it!

That it is "A"-11—the lucky number out of "A"-7—from which it is generated—and that 11-syllable lines are the gravities of each stanza—are part of LZ's cabalistic thing—but no more than that. The first six lines—in this turnabout structure that Cavalcanti devised where the envoi is used as gambit—has a

somewhat symphonic or sonata-like feeling—with the theme so plangently uttered:

River that must turn full after I stop dying
Song, my song, raise grief to music
Light as my loves' thought, the few sick
So sick of wrangling; thus weeping,
Sounds of light, stay in her keeping
And my son's face—this much for honor.

If we are supposed to think of the Bronx river—I confess Louis would have missed his boat and us—and the whole tone would be brought down to Drake's banality. But at once I feel (and felt this the very first time I read the poem) that the word "River" is defined in these opening lines as "life's continuum" (the same force evoked in the *Anew* poem)—not unlike the Thames as Eliot evokes it in *The Wasteland* which—in turn—gives us the Spenser connection. Indeed—"A"-11—far more than *The*—is LZ's mature response to Eliot's great poem. (And this poem is as much a landmark of our century as that.) The poet is imagining life at the moment of his death, or more exactly "after I stop dying"—which means when "I am immortal" (when I am "liveforever"). So that he implores the poem itself—at the point when grief is most full for those who love him most (meaning—he feels—his wife and son; the very principles and principals of his life and his dying)—to lift (and the poem is one of exaltation and humble exaltation) sorrow to the degree of music (that order and ardor that can speak to all men).

The onrunning syntax—with only "my song" breaking it tenderly and lucidly—gives us again LZ at his verbal best—where adjectives become nouns and verbs—where words are dimensional beyond belief where life begins. (The poem works to a degree that nothing before it—but phrases and passages mostly tied to Ricky—did—and it works with almost dreamlike sureness.)

The word "Light" is exquisitely illuminating and gentle. His "loves" are clearly his wife and son. Both son and wife are musicians—this is something we would surmise even if we didn't know—since the poem itself implies as much. The "wrangling" has Ahearn in rodeo country—but it is a word that Shakespeare favors in just our sense and there are at least four passages that feel like LZ may have picked up from them:

1) In *The Tempest* when Prospero discovers the young people playing chess (V.i) and Miranda thinks Ferdinand may be

cheating and he protests he "would not for the world" and she replies sweetly "Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle, / And I would call it fair play."

- 2) In *The Taming of the Shrew* at the opening of Act III where fiddling is involved and Lucentio says: "Fiddler, forbear; you grow too forward, sir: / Have you so soon forgot the entertainment / Her sister Katharine welcomed you withal?" And Hortensio replies: "But, wrangling pedant, this is / The patroness of heavenly harmony: / Then give me leave to have prerogative; And when in music we have spent an hour / Your lecture shall have leisure for as much."
- 3) In *Julius Caesar* in Act IV Brutus trying to pacify a Cassius who feels wronged: "Cassius, be content; / Speak your griefs softly: I do know you well. / Before the eyes of both our armies here, / Which should perceive nothing but love from us, / Let us not wrangle: bid them move away; / Then in my tent, Cassius, enlarge your griefs, / And I will give you audience."
- 4) Desdemona in *Othello* (III.iv) being played upon by jealous Iago—after he leaves her troubled—covers for her dear husband to Emilia: "Something, sure, of state . . . / Hath muddled his clear spirit; and in such cases / Men's natures wrangle with inferior things, / Though great ones are their object . . ."

So too the word "honor" finds countless text in LZ's (and my) beloved Shakespeare—which—though *onore* also vibrates through Cavalcanti and Dante—provides ample "tradition" / ground.

Those who are wrangling would seem to be the trio themselves. There is no lack of corroborating poems. In poem 42 "You three" (the penultimate poem of *Anew*), which also has clear relation with "A"-11 and is from 1943, and has Celia saying: "Okay! poet / Did you ever get up / Without aching / Without looking grouchy?"

LZ himself varies the "music/Light" phrase into "Sounds of light" and feeds back to the end of "A"-10 and "the sailors who mistook their planet / for a light / And took the wrong soundings." The "weeping" then is both the grief at losing him and the tears (likeliest of the child) provoked by the wrangling (verbal fights). The "son's face" is also the sun's. He is saying that sorrow and ache raised to the point of song—song thinking of those he loves—transcends through them and stays in them and this is the fruit of honor—whose main meaning here is that given for Shakespeare (Schmidt, no. 6, p. 550) as: "personal integrity, elevated sentiments, a just claim to the respect of others felt and asserted" as well as "veneration" and "good name."

Actually the stress on "sick / So sick . . ." cutting through the rhyme is the most persuasive element here. We feel the poet trying to rise above both grief and grievance—to provide a deeper source of respect in the two people he most loves and respects.

LZ's manner was such that it is hard to imagine him arguing. He would complain but not debate. And often in a way that disarmed response. But Celia and Paul would surely have found themselves at loggerheads frequently in their very close environment. Almost claustrophobic. (One can understand LZ's fondness for long walks.) Ultimately he is wishing for his poetry to be the *peace* that will obtain between his loves after his death and that will remain alive in their abiding relation—as the evidence of mutual honor.

Freed by their praises who make honor dearer
Whose losses show them rich and you no poorer
Take care, song, that what stars' imprint you mirror
Grazes their tears; draw speech from their nature or
Love in you—faced to your outer stars—purer
Gold than tongues make without feeling
Art new, hurt old: revealing
The slackened bow as the stinging
Animal dies, thread gold stringing
The fingerboard pressed in my honor.

Some of the virtuoso violinist background can be picked up from *Little* (1962) where more than a few allusions to "A" occur. Dala Baballo—who is plainly LZ—after bemoaning his poor ear drums being battered by the coming prodigy in the nursery speaks with "casual sickness" and is written of thus: "Baballo ((put down by his wife's 'they can't always be tuned to your projected works')) had been put into his place, that is into his own mind, again. After all he thought: poems come as you live them. Life's long, time fleeting, lovers bleating lovers greeting, endure." This is virtually a summary of "A"-11. A summary summary.

Ahearn has a hard time believing this section was written in 1950 *only*—since he thinks he finds evidence of Jacobi's *Paracelsus* (1951) in it. I would think LZ might be able to find whatever little of Paracelsus filters into the movement in other books treating Paracelsus. The Bollingen volume he *would* have had for "A"-12 and it is manifest from the "four notes" in the final stanza that he has either begun the next movement already or had it fairly well mapped out in mind and possibly (his style) in a parcel of notes. And the mss. as Marcella Booth describes them reveal a change

from "new notes" to "four notes"—in fact. And she has another listing of corrections dated 12 May 1951. If LZ's library is largely intact—there may be dates of accession—which would be helpful. These are—however—minor matters.

The "r" sounds in this first stanza do protrude, whatever non-mathematical formula may be involved. The words occur with startling security. LZ's imitation of Cavalcanti's rhyme sounds is more prevalent in this stanza than any other: especially with "paura/miri/natura" against "poorer/mirror/nature or." And Louis has *listened* to his model and learned.

To follow LZ's thought/feeling you have to keep in mind that he is addressing himself to his "River . . . song, my song." The song is endowed with the poet's capacity and it must be capable of moving others to tears by its care and perceptiveness. The poem finds release in the praise of those who cherish its integrity and whose integrity (honor) itself becomes dearer because of such response. Again—the opening pattern of the long scarcely broken breath—though the first two lines could be each parenthesized in modification of "Take care, song"—makes the music part of the meaning. It is hard to think of another poem (you have to turn to Shakespearean sonnets or lyrics) where the rhymes are both so intrinsic to the sense of the whole and so embedded in the matrix of the rhythms/music. Where "A"-7 and "A"-8 showed moments of forcing in the structure—here there is sovereign control and persuasiveness.

The second poem in *Barely and Widely*—though written later—has some sounded contact here:

You who were made for this music
or how else does it say you,
move thru your fingers, or your bow arm, lead
to this glory: God has—God's—
but one's deepest conviction—
your art, its use—you, happy,
by rote, by heart. Is thought?
What was broken was sense
but is happy again almost seen,
the first trembling of a string a worth
whose immortal ground drops so often
you plait viable strands for your use.
Or so pride loving itself looks
to more fortunate glory, with a power
apart from the trembling sense
only glory restores.

This later poem only more says itself in a voice we have come to know is particularly and precisely his.

Ahearn (and his "western cattle drive" is his own aberration—though one can sympathize with how easy it is to wander if the mind is not fully engaged) says that "Whose losses show them rich and you no poorer" "is an iambic rendering of a sentence from Henry James' 'The Altar of the Dead'—'People were not poor, after all, whom so many losses could overtake; they were positively rich when they had so much to give up.'" He points out that the story deals with attitudes towards the dead and that Celia was partial to James. The appropriation is likely enough: something LZ would've excerpted in his notes and then "altered" for his own purposes. The phrase, "Whose losses show them rich," is a beautiful one for consolation and it takes nothing from the poem related to them. He urges his song to "take care" that its reflection of starlight—and projection—has the power to touch those who are most dear to tears—to make them feel the glory of such illumination and to be stars in their eyes too.

And as he says in "Reading and Talking": "Talk is a form of love / Let us talk." His song is to derive its talk from their nature—which is their love as it speaks through him—through this song. And facing to the furthest actual vision it is transformed into finer substance—greater value—than languages create without sensing that art renews (there is an echo of *ars longa, vita brevis* here) and the Marx statement repeated at the end of *Anew*: "the bodily substance of the gold counts only as the embodiment of value."

In his essay "Poetry / For My Son When He Can Read" he has also written: "Felt deeply, poems like all things have the possibilities of elements whose isotopes are yet to be found. Light has travelled and so looked forward. How do we know? We look at the stars and because the light from them has travelled we see them shining tonight into tomorrow."

Art—if it is what it must be—is the always new and renewing—whereas hurt and injury and destruction is always old—our oldest history. He then shifts into the image of music actually being made—Paul playing for him (whether asked to do so or unsolicited) and we see the sound "thrill" in the strings as Paul strikes the bow and then lets it fall away as the sound rides out. Why both Kenner and Ahearn miss the obvious analogy here I don't know. Perhaps the word "animal" throws them off—but LZ uses the word to get extra charge—as we FEEL the sounding.

The image is clearly that of a bee—which dies as it stings. And the hair thread becomes as it yields such music gold. There are feedbacks through all these lines to earlier movements of "A"—

giving a great deal of depth—whether we fully recall them or not. The lights of the bombers strung out. There is a sense too in which the bee sting—the hurt—is alchemized through music. Art making the hurt new and at the same time raising grief to music. (There is a touch of Paracelsus in that alchemy.)

Honor, song, sang the blest is delight knowing
We overcome ills by love. Hurt, song, nourish
Eyes, think most of whom you hurt. For the flowing
River's poison where what rod blossoms. Flourish
By love's sweet lights and sing in *them I flourish*.
No, song, not any one power
May recall or forget, our
Love to see your love flows into
Us. If Venus lights, your words spin, to
Live our desires lead us to honor.

The word "blest" cues us in to Spinoza. Which reads then: "Honor, song, (sang the blest) is delight knowing . . ." The opening here repeats—in perhaps clearer form—the sense of what has already been sung. The definition (Spinoza's) of honor here is apparently subscribed to by LZ. I would wish that my friend Olson had read and grasped: "Hurt, song, nourish / Eyes, think most of whom you hurt." "Hurt" is past participle. The song is adjured to see what damage it does and to heal by love—in all honor. Very much in the line of Cavalcanti's meaning. Not the flying sonnets of Dante and his "friends"—but his love poems of *La Vita Nuova* are being advocated. Keep in mind that Book XI of the *Odyssey* is of the under/after world—but bringing it up transcendently. So that we are moving from hell to purgatory to *paradiso*.

The rod blossoming here has the word "rod" as a scourge: not quite our "A"-7 "stump / That blossoms red." Or Arimathea's staff. Clearly he is saying that life itself or song is poison where injury or hurt is created and encouraged. (This is Auschwitz felt and the more local daily injuries imposed and suffered.) The flavor here is Biblical. But it isn't the comforting rod and staff we face here. Rather the polluting power of overbearing injury.

The "recall or forget" seems to run ahead of "A"-12's: "If love exists, why remember it?" There is a sweetness in the reiterated "flourish" as it is lit by love. Sweet lights by which we see best. And this too runs through all of *Bottom* as its theme. We feel a mingling of pure waters.

The allusion to Venus suggests the opening of the eighth *Canto* of the *Paradiso*:

Solea creder lo mondo in suo periclo
che la bella Ciprigna il folle amore
raggiasse, volta nel terzo epiciclo;
per che non pur a lei facendo onore
di sacrificio e di votivo grido
le genti antiche nell'antico errore. . . .

(Carlyle-Wicksteed translation: "The world was wont to think in its peril that the fair Cyprian ((Venus)) rayed down mad love, rolled in the third epicycle: wherefore not only to her did they do honor of sacrifice and votive cry, those ancient folk in the ancient error. . . .")

This passage also seems to lead into lines that enter into the final two stanzas. But Spinoza is felt and Cavalcanti too. Venus here is both planet and love. Canto VII also—dealing with love as a redemptive power—also pervades the lyric. The words spinning take on both the weight of planets and of making a tapestry. Or like the fates determine life's flow. The song is to purify our desires—which are towards honor—but also to bring us honor.

Graced, your heart in nothing less than in death, go—
I, dust—raise the great hem of the extended
World that nothing can leave; having had breath go
Face my son, say: 'If your father offended
You with mute wisdom, my words have not ended
His second paradise where
His love was in her eyes where
They turn, quick for you two—sick
Or gone cannot make music
You set less than all. Honor

His voice in me, the river's turn that finds the
Grace in you, four notes first too full for talk, leaf
Lighting stem, stems bound to the branch that binds the
Tree, and then as from the same root we talk, leaf
After leaf of your mind's music, page, walk leaf
Over leaf of his thought, sounding
His happiness: song sounding
The grace that comes from knowing
Things, her love our own showing
Her love in all her honor.'

These last two stanzas are bound by the refrain word "honor" closing each stanza and the poem—which leaps the gap as imperative—but retains some of its nominal strength too.

The word "Graced" is taken out of its normal syntax and given Horatian pride of place: it is perhaps clearer as: "Your heart in nothing less graced than in death" and yet—of course—it means "Song, graced . . . go . . . raise the hem . . ." The graced refers to honor—which is in no way diminished by death. Indeed—he implies that death enhances honor. The word "hem" here is a little startling and has a kind of striptease image effect—though it has many overtones—including that of clearing the throat—and the word "raise" curves back to "raise grief to music." The "I, dust" alludes to his being dead (cf. "Air"—next to final stanza: "My father praying at my mother's grave / Heard his father's song / Love and book / Not their dust where we don't pray. . ."). "Hem" often means merely "edge" but the image here somehow recalls to me the famous *Virgin of the Misericordia* by Piero della Francesca in the City Hall in Borgo San Sepolcro (which I have seen). The suffering Virgin kindly lifts her cloak and stretches out her arms to shelter all those who wish her to—including an executioner—I might add.

The one within the other imagery—which has run throughout—within the imagery of river and flux as well—occurs in Canto VIII:

Io non m'accorsi del salire in ella;
ma d'esservi entro mi fè assai fede
la donna mia ch'ì vidi far più bella.
E come in fiamma favilla si vede,
e come in voce voce si discerne,
quand'una è ferma e l'altra va e riede,
vid'io in essa luce altre lucerne
muoversi in giro più e men correnti,
al modo, credo, di lor viste interne.

("I had no sense of rising into her, but my Lady [Beatrice— and the "her" is Venus] gave me full faith that I was there, because I saw her grow more beautiful.

And as we see a spark within a flame, and as a voice a voice may be distinguished, if one stayeth firm, and the other cometh and goeth; so in that light I perceived other torches moving in a circle more or less swift, after the measure, I believe, of their eternal vision.")

The "his" here is of course LZ's—as maker—as one whose delight is knowing we overcome ills by love. He wants Paul to realize that he lived and lives by the light in their eyes—of love. The "grace" is the same as the song is graced by—in Paul's case it would involve his musical gift but only insofar as it too realizes what it's all about. The "river's turn" is that fullness at death and the word "turn" is also "time."

The four notes*—Kenner is lost and Ahearn almost beats them to death—unmistakably refer to the B A C H (final fugue) theme that sets up "A"-12. And the image of plant and music—song and thought and word and love—grow together in this unusually joined and building finale with its powerfully yoked rhythms. And the imagery flows back to "flower-cell, liveforever, before the eyes, perfecting" to "the moon, one afternoon . . . opening leaf within leaf . . . The music is in the flower, Leaf around leaf ranged around center . . . never topple from each other" (repeated in "A"-6) to "leaf on leaf."**

He is pointing the son towards the mother as the source of love and the dynamic of all they are and can be. Whatever we say or can say—even what he doesn't manage to say but feels—springs from this relation they share and that moves through and from her and which quietly is the delight in her honor's knowing love. The word "Things" also rings through Spinoza.*** A reality principle. Love is what brings it all full circle. The words keep spinning. And we are left to revolve them.

note to "A"-11

There is no point in "A" where Shakespeare is not somewhere—somehow—present. LZ grew up on the *Works* and has deeper contact there than even with the Bible or Spinoza.

* The "four notes"—you may recall—were first introduced near the end of "A"-8: "Plays till four notes give out there names: old Bach's / Here . . . (B flat—A—C—B sharp = Bach.)"

** The final stanza is effectively a vivid extension of "In them I flourish." It also is suggestive of the interwoven leaf in stem designs in ornamentation. E.g.: of an artist doing drawings of Joan of Arc's life: "frames salient scenes . . . in circles and ovals . . . with intertwined stems of flowers, leaves and grasses." (M. Warner, *Joan of Arc* [Penguin, 1981], 250).

*** In his original Henry Adams essay LZ had written: "For practical ethics, Spinoza turned to love substance which never loved in return." (*The Hound and Horn* [Spring 1930], 378.

Perhaps it was only natural that the Bard's first poem set forth as such—the *Venus and Adonis*—should be felt just below the surface here. As indeed it is elsewhere in earlier "A."

The most conspicuous overlay is between the use of the word "honour" in Shakespeare's dedication—where it "jumps" to eye and mind as nowhere else. And this was a poem that Shakespeare "set up"—a formal application to be recognized as a real poet.

Even the Latin epigraph (from Ovid?)—"Vilia miretur vulgus: mihi flavus Apollo / Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua"—suggests a poetic source for the river and not only the Bronx. The dedication reads:

To the Right Honourable
Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton,
and Baron of Titchfield.

Right Honourable,

I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your Lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden. Only, if your Honour seem but pleased, I account for myself highly praised; and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour. But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest. I leave it to your Honourable survey, and *your Honour to your heart's content*, which I wish may always answer your own wish, and the world's hopeful expectation.

Your Honour's in all duty,
William Shakespeare.

Of this poem LZ (in *Bottom*) has remarked: "the beginning of the end has begun." And of the dedication itself notes: "without the solidity of the words that any particular context affects, one cannot begin to speak of its prosody . . ."

But one thing is certain: the more you read "A"—the more resonances recur. The wholeness "that nothing can leave" only comes back—in time—as foliage.

a note on "Honor" ("A"-11)

That LZ came to see an affinity between his life's work and that of Stevens—and I helped to jog his elbow-memory in this (having sent him my extra copy of the man's *Letters*)—seems only right to me.

They both find analogous spirit in a predecessor: Joseph Conrad—who could write (*Notes on Life and Letters*, 107 and 194):

For the great mass of mankind the only saving grace that is needed is fidelity to what is nearest to hand and heart in the short moment of each human effort.

And

From the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the sense of right conduct which we may call honour, the devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth of which it was born.

Tradition for both LZ and Stevens—and Conrad—started from and ended at home. They found their lives extended into poetry—not at a tangent from the life, but rather as the finding/s of the life and the nearest dearest lives to which they were all devoted. All three were also committed to a sense of language as work and work as language. Although music is LZ's metaphysics, it is always a music, like the angelic figure Conrad adumbrates and Stevens finds necessitous, grounded in the lucid relation of person to person, day to day, dust to dust.

addendum to "A"-11

It is not only "A"-11 but also "A"-3 (where Arnaut is fully felt and entered into) and elsewhere that Dante flows through. The passage in Provençal at the end of Canto XXVI of the *Purgatorio* and its famous final line—recurrent in Pound and Eliot—suffuses.

Dante approaches Arnaut speaking of his desire to do justice on earth to him and receives in response "liberamente":

"Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman,
 qu'ieu no me puese ni voill a vos cobrire.
 Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan;
 consiros vei la passada folor,
 e vei jausen lo joi qu'esper, denan.
 Ara vos prec, per aquella valor
 que vos guida al som de l'escalina,
 sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor!"
 Poi s'ascose nel foco che li affina.'

Which quite literally goes: "So does your courteous request flatter me, that I cannot nor will I conceal me from you. I am Arnaut, who weep and go a-singing; reflecting I see my past madness, and see rejoicing the joy I hope for henceforth. Now I prithe, by that Goodness [: God/valor] which guides you to the top of the stairs, remember in time my pain! Then he hid himself in the fire that affines them."

"A"-11 addendum

Mary Midgely, discussing "Facts and Values" in her cogent study of *Beast & Man* (1979), writes of the "dilemma basic to so many seventeenth-century tragedies, of Love versus Honor. Here was an agonizing clash of ideals, the strain of which eventually produced its own partial solution in a revision of both notions, a better understanding of both love and honor . . ." She adds that "Both love and honor are essential elements in life everywhere. . . . We need and value love and honor in themselves, not just as means to any further and simpler good . . ." She points out how both Hobbes and Swift tried—without success—to get rid of one and the other. Ms. Midgely declares—and I am persuaded too—that human life wants both, as well as other "values." But Zukofsky in "A"-11 scores the deep relation that obtains between "love" and "honor"—both words occurring in each stanza and in the final one finally coming together in "her love our own showing / Her love in all her honor."

For LZ this is the theme—as these two values conjoin—transcending all others and flowing together in a music of poetry and a poetry of music—father and son as one and inextricable—met within her—mother and wife and woman—who is their grace and continuance.

addendum to "A"-11

The very musicality of "A"-11 evokes Spenser. From the *Epithalamion's*

. . . as ye her array, still throw betwene
 Some graces to be scene:
 And as ye use to Venus, to her sing,
 The whiles the woods shal answer, and your eccho ring.

And the *Prothalamion's* address to the river Thames must be regarded as the *locus classicus*, with its ". . . till I end my song" as precipitating.

Kenneth Muir in his book on Shakespeare's sonnets (1979) remarks that "it is characteristic" of the poet "that he should contemplate his own death, not from the point of view of his own extinction, but from the point of view of the survivor" (69). Here, river, song, and poetry are addressed in behalf of the poet's loves, from the viewpoint of eternity (river and song being representative of the abiding and the peaceful).

Despite, and even more by way of (through), the personal note, the Zukofskyan note attains a grandeur here—a magnanimity that is rare and immensifying. What in "A"-10 feels contrived, here profoundly persuades and opens the way for a deeper and more open poetry. Apart from brilliances and remarkable poetic adroitness and range—those notes of fullfledged feeling ("A"-3 and the Ricky page of "A"-8 excepted)—something was missing we now realize. "A"-11 clears the way for the largeness—the fugue—of "A"-12.

addendum to "A"-11

The sense of "A"-11 finds its "consort of viols" in Shakespeare's sonnet VIII (with a touch of the plangent prognostication of XI):

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
 Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy.
 Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not gladly,
 Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine annoy?
 If the true concord of well-tunèd sounds,
 By unions married, do offend thine ear,
 They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds
 In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.

Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
Resembling sire, and child, and happy mother,
Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing;
Whose speechless song, being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee: 'Thou single wilt prove none.'
(Booth's edition)

*
As LZ says in *Bottom*: "Measure, prose or verse, as I see it in Shakespeare's text [and he is discussing his favorite *Pericles*—which Celia set], is to deal with *heroes, honor, love*, these words, as a friend says, for the eyes that music knows . . . the tensions between love and reason of a life's craft . . ." (332). (The "friend" sounds like me.)

*
In the final stanza the "four notes" (B A C H) prelude "A"-12 and can be felt in "bound to the branch that binds," in "as from the same root we talk, leaf / After leaf," "The grace that comes from knowing," "her love our own showing / Her love in all her honor." And the "c" softened in an abundance of sibilance: "His happiness: song sounding / The grace . . ."

addendum: "A"-11

The specific Biblical allusion is to Exodus 17: 5-6—at the moment when Moses is facing rebellion from his followers and possible destruction:

And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.

Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink

The Biblical imagery is generally taken as resurrection/redemption. Or, drawing the best (grace) out of the worst, through faith and love—the worst here being "wrangling."

New York and the Bronx River can be taken as modern counterparts. The water itself is poetry/music. Source and resource. Love and honor creating grace.

addendum: "A"-11

The thematics of this song find ground in *The Winter's Tale* where Shakespeare also sounds variations on the theme of "honor" (the word itself much used in the play) and where Hermione is apparently brought back to life through love's music. The idea of a deeper reconciliation on a posthumous scale through a new son certainly illuminates the Zukofskyan effort.

Zukofsky's Love's Song a Circle Sent:
The Valentine Written To-Two:
Initial Period of "A"-22 and its Correspondences

To approach the end of the writing of "A", Louis Zukofsky harvests the grain of what in his lifetime he has written and read. This writing resows the field, initialing a path often designated obscure or hermetic. "[T]he Beginning comes only with the finish of what is Past" (*Propositions* 53). Zukofsky's *Initial*, the first 103 lines of "A"-22, reflexively deals with beginnings (or history) by harvesting and sowing seeds to let multiple songs bloom. The first three (two-word) lines of "A"-22 are the source for the next 100 (five-word) lines.¹ This three-line head of "A"-22, originally published as a postcard by Unicorn Press in May 1970, was written by Zukofsky on Valentine's day that same year. Its arrival marks a block of time:

AN ERA
ANY TIME
OF YEAR

This double right/left justification suggests that these three lines were intended to appear as a solid block or cube OF TIME. The parts of speech join duration, to form a place for correspondence, a place to locate letters so that words, like objects, may endure. The three durations formed in this head are modified by an article (AN), an adjective (ANY), and a preposition (OF); their purpose being to emanate from what a "year" occasions, to make a definite object of the infinite possibilities of language. The nature of duration is that of a sum, often thought of as an accumulation or continuity of units built one and one on finite units. "ERA" comes from the Latin "aer," counters, related to coppers and money. An "era" differs from "time" and "year" in that its duration is characterized by some special feature as opposed to the general duration-concept (i.e., time) or a duration of specific length (e.g., year). We can read the etymology "AER" vertically on the right edge of the block. RIME and ANY as

well as EAR are some of the correspondences immediately seen within the block's letters. "ANNO" can be read on the left side top to bottom. In-a-sense in his head, Zukofsky wants to total time, to create a sum of the various durations, bringing all times present. If we draw a line under the head of "A"-22 we begin to see the sum and to divine what follows.

The three duration-objects of *Initial*'s head may also be a source for the form of the subsequent three periods of "A"-22: (1) beginning 100 lines (specific ERA); (2) middle bulk, 800 lines (any or all TIME); and (3) ending 97 lines (specific YEAR). The third period circles back to the head's three lines, perhaps suggesting how a year fits into an era. The poem forms a kind of mirror or circle, or as John Taggart has recently suggested in a discussion of "A"-12, a valentine. Valentines are traditionally made by cutting a shape (resembling an ear!²) into a folded piece of paper. The shape of a valentine, one might even guess, explains why "A"-22's beginning and ending (of approximately 100 lines each) are in stanzas: the center-root of a valentine shoots two branches upward, till their trajectories turn down and reach the level of their initial horizon, where without stanzas, the attraction of one branch on the other exerts enough force to pull them together. Stanzas work as an organizing force to bring about an opening and closing.

Zukofsky counts words and is accounting letters in *Initial*; five words measure the lines built of letters. This is not something unique to this section of "A" nor is it the end of LZ's accounting: the index of the complete edition of "A" includes words like "a," "the" and "an." The numerology that informs the structure of "A"-22 and "A"-23 is complex; words and letters are accountable to and fulfill the plan as Peter Quartermain explains:

The schematic for the whole of 'A'-22 has . . . numerological features: the poem is to be 1,000 lines long, divided into three sections, the first of 103 lines, the second of 800, and the third of 97. Adding these integers, Zukofsky noted, give figures of 4, 8, and 16 respectively. Adding the last two of these, Zukofsky got 24 (the number of movements in 'A'), while adding all three makes 28; $2 + 8 = 10$, which (added again) gives a total of 1, the same as the sum of the integers in the number of lines for the whole poem, 1,000. (960)³

Zukofsky was probably aware of the possibility that "A"-22 and "A"-23 would be incomprehensible without some knowledge of the whole project of "A". One subject of 22 and 23 is the

correspondence of letters to letters and to the author's life/work. *Initial* is a literal account of the lifetime of a poet. Zukofsky's investment of his life in each word is perhaps best expressed in its title, which literally says IN IT I[m] AL[L].

The music of the heading is that of a vernacular phrase, a deceptively simple sing-song valentine. Quartermain points out (960) that there are both nine consonants and vowels in:

AN ERA
ANY TIME
OF YEAR

By crossing out (six) pairs of letters, we are left with the six letters: "OF TIME." This valentine of time reappears in a slightly different form at the end of *Initial*: "now summer happy new year / any time of year" (see 19th stanza). Each of the five words "now," "summer," "happy," "new" and "year" can be read as a duration characterized by some special feature, similar to "AN ERA." The idea of these initials carved into trees (see 6th and 7th stanzas) coincides with the poem being carved into the page. "A" 22-23 is literally addressed to Zukofsky's family: his son, Paul, lived on Arbutus (see the last two lines of "A"-23: "p . . . / z-sited path are but us"). LZ's letters may have been posted from Old Field (see 1st stanza), a neighboring hamlet near the family home in Port Jefferson (Ahearn 185; Leggott 118-9).

While music pronounces its own death with the attack of each note, a song can resonate beyond its notes' decay in the minds of those with ears.⁴ The physicality of LZ's musical words is foregrounded, but if we look we see how focused the geological history, which serves as background, really is. In *Initial*, words are rock-like; nouns double as verbs, and verbs as nouns, words at times shift and grind against each other like sheets of ice, and at other times flow easily. There is sparse but very specific punctuation: dashes and an occasional comma. At first reading, the music of the line distracts signifiers from their signifieds. What is remarkable about *Initial* (and all of Zukofsky) is that it all does mean literally what it says. The odd thing here is that the literals are only initialled, which allows meaning to become multiple and particular.

Others letters a sum owed
ages account years each year
out of old fields, permute
blow blue up against yellow
—scapes welcome young birds—initial
[Stanza 1]

In "Others letters a sum owed" words implode self-referentially, the article 'a' referring (among Other things) to the whole poem, the sum of its letters. Its various parts married or owed to its initial project. The relationship between "Others" and "letters" is very involved. Are "Others" the various parts lettered into "A"? Are "Others" the letters owed to someone or oneself? Or are the letters of "Others" what are to be summed? Or perhaps all "Others" are all times summed, owed and to be herein repaid. LZ is infamous for answering questions like these with a single sweeping "yes." "A" is to be a multifarious whole, and a prime argument of the poem is the demonstration of its variety.

The "capital" letters of the head draw our attention to the first letter of the body of *Initial*: "O" of "OF YEAR." The "O" as a circle initials the form of both the poem and the cycle of a year.⁵ "A" began more than 40 years before with "A / Round of fiddles playing Bach." The capital "O" with which *Initial* begins is literally "A Round." Curiously, this first section of "A" ends with a Bach quotation that can be read as a definition: "'Open O fierce flaming pit!'" (5)

In "A"-12 (246-47), Zukofsky refers to:

Paul's first cursive
owing account to myself alone
of my hours

From Paul's initial cursive then, his hand already accounts for its time. Duration is "a sum owed" to (others or oneself) or a sum of letters wed to words, letters that permute into words, and into thought. "Sum" is also "I am" in Latin. (I'm thinking of Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum.") To sum or think, the letters of the poem must count and see. The poem presents itself as a physical body saying "here I am," a song arrived. The poem counts the age of the letters/son/poet as the poet accounts for letters. Old words field etymology to alter words—the field in which these new letters arrange, to which these words must attest. Instead of using etymology to incite or instill authority, Zukofsky uses it to implode

the subjects of the poem so as to produce numerous presents. LZ does not name names.

"A" 22-23 are, among other things, a geological and political history of the world, but one without names. ("History's best emptied of names' / impertinence . . ." ["A" 511]) (Quartermain 962)⁶

Initial deals primarily with geological history though Zukofsky's family history also plays an important role. Looking back at the "O" of "Others," there may be something there like an amoeba or the various different Ones that formed "human" beginnings.

As noted by Bruce Comens, the "old fields" line is linked to a quotation from Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, from which Zukofsky had earlier quoted in "Poem Beginning 'The'."

For out of olde feldes, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn fro yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good geyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.
(Cited by Comens 101)

Both the science of books and of the field must be learned. Newe corn like newe science comes out of olde feldes. LZ plows (*aerates* corn counts) Chaucer's old fields to raise new grain into the air. He literally airing Chaucer's "felde." An important change in geology's history occurs when the land is (dis)ordered with the plow. The letter is likewise an important tool if not the tool around which historical forces have become organized. Human history begins with the letter, moving forward and back in time from this initial summing or lettering. History becomes a record of letters sent and received, written and read. There is a correspondence of words and letters over time, "time" modified by the changes in the theories of physics, im-parted by a variety of articles, adjectives and prepositions.

Blue and yellow recur throughout the poem: blue has the quality of cold air/era/error; yellow of liquid flower/flour/flower. The blue all are born under. Yellow the flow-er alive, forever in air; yellow like the sun; yellow both above and below the blue. The blue letters of "AN ERA/ ANY TIME/ OF YEAR" stand out in the yellow field of the postcard on which they first appeared. Zukofsky is blowing the "blue" up, as words shattered ring, they scatter till "young birds" begin to sum, to account the letters. The blue blown up above the yellow is also a description of what LZ

(standing on the point of land in the neighboring hamlet of Old Field) sees looking out at the water-scape of Long Island Sound. The flow of blue may symbolize the glacial era ending; the blue up against the yellow allows the sun to melt the ice. Before there were landscapes, there was only an ocean of ice without "Land." Fleeing these "scapes," birds are our first sign of "welcome" to the approach of land.

With "A" 22-23 Zukofsky completes the correspondence to which he owes his life. He is seeing these sections sum up his lifelong correspondence, how he reads and is read. We "young birds," like Paul, are welcome to enter the poem where we may learn to sum these seeds, to complete a correspondence. So that in this era we apply our ear to permute "A" whose initial:

transmutes itself, swim near and
read a weed's reward—grain
an omen a good omen
the chill mists greet woods
ice, flowers—their soul's return
[Stanza 2]

Swimming near to land, mutating into something more and more complex, these words crawl up on land to taste the wild grain. (Edgar Anderson, in *Plants, Men, & Life*, a book from Olson's "Bibliography on America For Ed Dorn," argues that the history of weeds is the history of the human species.) On land the chill mists greet woods, the cold air happy to have something to condense on: trees or paper on which to leave a stain. This condensation of ice on trees presages the return of the soul of flowers everywhere in nature. "[I]nitial // transmutes itself" inscribes this return as well as some of Zukofsky's most important poetics. The stanza break is a lifting force. Zukofsky, fully vested in INITIAL (i.e., IN-IT-I-AL), is calling for us to read the solid of each word and to focus on the repeating or mutating letters. "A" is a poem of a lifetime, of variations on a theme. In "A"-1, he quotes Ezra Pound: "there are different techniques."⁷ The technique here is to transmute all others, to encompass all techniques.

The *Initial* refers to itself (a good omen; read a weed's reward), summing up its growth and its project. Celia Zukofsky is Louis's "good 'omen," his sustenance as his best, most important, reader. Technically, there are transmutations of various sorts: anagrams, e.g., AER/EAR/ERA; etymological puns, e.g., a sum (I am) o-wed. There are important (near) homonyms: ear/air/error; wood/word. In the above stanza, words and letters correspond wildly: "swim

near and / read a weed's reward—"grain" carries an imbedded anagram for ERA (ear) within its incessant rhyming: EAR read weed's reward. The weed's reward is the grain or the flour/flower/flow-er which is life's (bee-ing's) or poetry's stuff. Zukofsky addresses the reader with an invitation: take this, drink in, swim near, eat, let it rise, words in your mouth. The echo and taste of the words are the flower's good omen. The "chill mists" in one sense are what greet the three trees of the Zukofsky family. "[T]heir soul's return" like flowers to live-for-ever, to resonate and to hold. In Spinoza's *Hebrew Grammar*, vowels are described as the souls of words. Hebrew words, which are written without vowels, therefore are bodies without souls. The chill mists of these written words, like the missing vowels or readers, hover above us. It is up to us to enter the book or tree to allow the words to form around us. Zukofsky must work the words through the woods in all the seasons to make them sing, to make the words live. His goal: duration. The following invitation is as much a petition as a plea:

let me live here ever,
sweet now, silence foison to
on top of the weather
it has said it before
why that was you that

is how you weather division
a peacocks grammer perching—and
perhaps think that they see
or they fly thru a
window not knowing it there
[Stanzas 3-4]

LZ wants to linger with flowers, flowing in the present; he wants his silences to flow "on top of the weather" (in the sun). The ice on trees has melted and silence flows until speech interrupts to comment on the weather. Comens (100) and Ahearn (185) both note that the first two lines of the third stanza ("let me live here ever" and "sweet now, silence foison") are taken word for word from Shakespeare's *Tempest* (IV.i). Silence is the strength that encloses or surrounds each word; silence swelling in the harvest of words and letters whose resonances give one strength, make one feel "on top of the weather," and allow the poem to sing. The "it" that has said "it" is not only giving its own name but pointing to a language that would literally address itself. "[I]" could refer to the poem, the life, the words, their duration, an era any time of year. Zukofsky

wants this text to be its own test. In asking "how you weather division," the poem asks itself and its readers how this divided time ("years each year") stands up. What strength and/or resonance is found? When language addresses itself, it tests itself. Likewise speech, when self-conscious, is likely to be critical of loose talk. "[W]hy that was you that / is how you weather division" is such a spoken criticism. If allowed the privilege of writing, we must testify and be true to the occasion. LZ's essay, "An Objective," makes essentially the same statement: "Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody" (*Prepositions* 13). Care and responsibility are necessary if language is not to be misused.

If the meaning of language is how it is used, I have to be careful that language does not simply use me. Heuristic practice aims to reveal and guide as it discovers. Wittgenstein's exploration of language in search of "meaningful" or "useful" tests is the same program Zukofsky has written. In "A"-12 Zukofsky suggests Marx presumed to write fugues on a theme of Aristotle: "There's a natural use / And a use that's unnatural" (207). As unnatural as *Initial's* language may sometimes seem, when we take the time to see the words, Zukofsky's use of language begins to seem precise and sincere.

To test the poem's techniques one must pursue all "a peacocks grammer" ("grammer" here is archaic). The peacock's eyesight parallels its awkward song/squawk. Peacocks aren't known for their great agility; they don't fly, they stand, self-consciously putting themselves on display. There's a pun here on the peacock's "archaic" qualities; there is also a pun on peeing, a pun which recurs throughout "A". LZ may also be commenting reflexively here on the place of 22 in "A", equating this part of "a" to "peacock's grammer." Those who think that they see, rather than seeing what they think, end up flying "through a / window not knowing it there." If we fly through *Initial*, it is fairly obvious that we won't see what is in Zukofsky's window.⁸ Birds see and sing with more proficiency than we imagine them to think. The peacock's judgment here is punning back to the source: *Parliament of Fowls*. While the peacock may be a dysfunctional aberration, it does visually represent the whole spectrum of color. It is the variegated specie, diversified in external appearance, that which enlivens by variety.

The metaphor of the peacock's sight and flight relates to Zukofsky's theory in *Bottom: On Shakespeare* that love sees in different proportions to reason, that "when reason judges with eyes, love and mind are one" (*Bottom* 215). For Zukofsky, it is not a

question of a hierarchy of eyes over reason, even though one must first see and err before reason in time learns to temper the eyes.⁹ On their own, eyes (like reason) gain no privilege; eyes and reason must parallel each other and be as one. LZ's oft-quoted statement of his poetics, "upper limit music—lower limit speech," may also be seen as an attempt to set up a hierarchy. At one point, Zukofsky refers to this formula as part of what "'history' integrates" ("A" 349): the motion from body to dance, dance to speech, speech to music, and music to "*mathemata / swank for things / learned.*" These motions are related to how a substance changes from solid (body) to liquid (dance, speech, music) to gas (speech, music, mathematics) or vice versa. It's worth noting that geological history goes through these same changes. To avoid a hierarchy which these upper and lower limits seem to set up, Charles Bernstein (in *Artifice*) translates upper and lower into inner and outer (absorption and impermeability, respectively). Zukofsky sets music and mathematics above the solid of word-bodies for the purpose of integrating the poem with history, forming a kind of circle of integrating motion which rises above time. He attempts to encircle all time, to transcend simple duration, to conquer time by denying its lapsing, to make the poem sing forever.

'Like [Spinoza and early Wittgenstein], but unlike Shakespeare, [Zukofsky] deals with Time by not dealing with it, by denying its reality, by making it into an unfortunate and self-deceptive quirk of mind.' (David Melnick, "The 'Ought' of Seeing—Zukofsky's *Bottom*" in *Maps* 5: 58, as quoted in Bernstein, *Content's Dream* 150)

Bernstein's judgment of Zukofsky's "sight" theory is that it "is purely metaphysical and naively neo-positivist at that" (*Content's Dream* 149).

But perhaps, after all, Zukofsky's 'sight' is visionary, even Messianic . . . As Zukofsky quotes the early Wittgenstein, 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical' (*Bottom* 84). Radically limited by being in time and of time, words by song become solid, solace for the loss of sight of the world. So that poetry's vision is word's music, that liquid, frozen—jellied—into solid form. (*Content's Dream* 153)

In *Initial* we see Zukofsky's vision go beyond the word to the letter's music. Just as thought was abbreviated in pictograms, and

pictograms initialed into letters, Zukofsky's thought moves from the letter to the word and from words to music.

To demonstrate *Bottom*'s theory Zukofsky uses the peacock, whose abilities of sight and flight are similarly impaired.

is how you weather division
a peacocks grammer perching—and
perhaps think that they see
or they fly thru a
window not knowing it there

the window could they sing
it broken need not bleed
one proof of its strength
a need birds cannot feign
persisting for flight as when

they began to exist—error
if error vertigo their sun
eyes delirium—both initial together
[Stanzas 4-6]

Thinking doesn't make you see, but the other way around. Language sings when it succeeds in directly presenting itself. The birds in air (error) use or are used by language. In either case they sing. But to directly present, to break through the barriers with which they are born, the birds must test the air to learn by trial to see their error. The window mediates, interferes. Seeing mediated thru glass is a play on the theories discussed above, as well as a reference to Zukofsky's own bad eyesight. The birds hit the window as they err in their flight/sight/song. They see first and only, not thinking as much as feeling what they see. The error birds fly through is not the same as the error of the peacock whose given body is a barrier. The birds have enough true strength to recover if their flight is broken; if stunned or dazed (with "vertigo"?), they "need not bleed." The peacock is the amusing anomaly, for when they first "began to exist—error" was born. When other birds began to exist they were air/era-borne. The initial error of excessive love,¹⁰ flight without reason, is opposed to the grounded bird. The peacock has the advantage of not being distracted by seeing, of not seeing with all its eyes, though it does distract the eyes of others. Their thinking (they are believed to be stupid birds) parallels their seeing: the ratio is ONE with sight. The initial comes a-round.

they began to exist—error
if error vertigo their sun
eyes delirium—both initial together
rove into the blue initial
surely it carves a breath

one air then a host
an air not my own
an earth of three trees
sleep revives—night adds hours
awake to augur days impend
[Stanzas 6-7]

Everyone begins to persist through error especially when error overturns their given “sun.” Looking into their sun (Zukofsky’s “A Round?”) or smashing into some window “not knowing it there” causes the vertigo of “eyes delirium.” This flight through error sees deliriously—unreasoning sight “roves into” the world its initials. Father and son “initial together,” like writer and reader from when they began to exist. The first cursives initiated in the trees are the voices or breaths of an era persisting. Frozen back into the blue initial, this “air not my own” is the air of a bird leaving the nest to find its own air/era. But Zukofsky wants his family at home, down to EArth, where three trees in the woods greet the chill mists, where he can work all hours against the inevitability of the initial error/era coming to an end.

This valentine carved in the trees is one of love and labor. LZ must follow the trajectory through its initials to the end. “[S]leep revives” him for the hard work of this verse, to drill into the three trees this error/air/era. Three—the number of the family, of the different durations. Three trees rooted in an arbitrary (AN ERA) and the definite (OF YEAR). The state of trees in different seasons, at “ANY TIME.”

the trumpet ice edges shrill,
twigged heart flounce the Land
be not fought—greatness remain
what avails the life to
leaf to flower to fruit

the season’s colors a ripening
work their detail—the perennial
invariance won’t hollow it, no
averaging makes their tones—Paradise
the swept brain blood warmer
[Stanzas 8-9]

The trees resist the elements, as a bird’s warm-blooded heart resists the ice, and the “Land” resists the scape. The ice resists the “Land,” which is severed from the “—scapes” which open the poem (see 1st stanza). This severing is emphasized by the use of a capital letter, perhaps hinting that the “Land—scapes” of the family are broken by Paul’s e-scape, “Paradise” no more.¹¹ The “twigged heart” takes off from the “Land,” an action exaggerated by its location on the shrill edge of a line. “Twigged” has both the sense of “understood,” as in a father understanding a son who has flounced his family, and the sense of a small shoot or branch, the heart of the flower in its natural motion away from earth. But “greatness” remains, what makes the work go on, what takes the “leaf to flower to fruit // the season’s colors a ripening / work their detail.” “A” ripening with the seasons’ colors—the fact of different techniques working. The words shifting form, from gas to liquid to solid throughout the seasons. Words persisting through winter; LZ holding the difficult song of his heart in hand, a song he knew would be hard for readers to hear.

invariance won’t hollow it, no
averaging makes their tones—Paradise
the swept brain blood warmer

There must be some variance in a hollow tube to make different tones, to make the tube sing. Likewise, to make a poem sing it needs varied voices and tones. To accomplish this work, LZ must plod the path like a horse—always working the proper cadence, to make the varied whole. The “swept brain blood warmer” separates birds and humans from the “lower” vertebrates. Without gravity the brain’s blood moves only with the heart’s pump. Leaving Paradise, the human/bird takes an initial step into error/air.

leaving it eyes' heat stars'
dawn mirror to west window
binds the sun's east—steersman's
one guess at certainty made
with an assemblage of naught—
[Stanza 10]

The eyes make myths of the stars. The sky is their window. Since tied to seeing, dawn and dusk become the sides of a mirror that rule life and/or time. Steersmen make decisions based on their sight of the suns, not on some magnetic gadget. An assemblage of numbers is used to steer the boat. LZ opposes one and naught ("O") at the midpoint of *Initial*. The dash breaks the "naught" from the second half in which we see a mirror of what's been initialed. Time suddenly changes as we watch the earth chase the moon. A rock-et leaves earth to exchange time with the moon. *Initial* counts down from one, and at "naught," the blue really gets blown up.

yet in cells not vacuum
recórds as tho horses rushed
definite as an aching nerve
pleads feed and feed back—
spine follows path once born,

to arrogate it small eloquence,
an affair with the moon
it looked as if it
looked up someway above earth
a hectic of an instant
[Stanzas 11-12]

There is something in cells (not just "naught"). Those Others sent, crawl out of the earth's atmosphere. The horses must rush to push them out. An incredible power and nerve is needed to attempt this. Technological jargon enters the poem: cells, vacuum, feedback. The spaceship follows the trajectory of the spine, into the air/error pointing moonward. Rushing to definitive conclusions, we are about to appropriate the moon. The "feed back" indicates an exchange of time and place, an exchange which perhaps metonymically indicates a harvesting and resowing of words. Time implodes and we ache when a "nerve / pleads feed and feed back." An affair with the moon? How excessive is our love, and what do we fail to see? Signals become predictably vaguer with time's increase. Yet

cells like words carry a memory or a history that will not disappear, even when forgotten.

until computed in the metal—
tidal waves also timing it
moon's day and earth's month
figured closer—blazed sun, white
under weightless dancing after the

predictable vaguer with time's increase,
seemed to say: the same
earth gaze returns to them
weightless, inking of outlines, unearthing
always only their past futures
[Stanzas 13-14]

The planets exchange time as men dance on the moon, unearthing samples of its soil to compare to our own geology. This "un-earthing" does not hear what is going on in the present, but mirrors or marries the future with the past. With our own past, science (or fate) decides the future. Weightless, gaseous letters (like the "O" in "Others") rush forward to outline new perspectives. The "same / earth gaze returns" to clash with a self-centered past; the gaze becomes eccentric.

hearing iron horse scrape me
begging so to speak, stay—
history their figment of miracle—
young led, painting a standpipe
seeing it swan or stork—

fish purl in the weir:
we are caught by our
own knowing, barb yellow hard
every yet—*oink* little jangler
thrums—sigh, prattle sea flood—
[Stanzas 15-16]

The iron horse was the future in Zukofsky's past, the cadence of his era, the railroad that now technology had surpassed. The past begging to stay is a resistance to "progress," a resistance which enables someone to speak.¹² There were press reports of people not believing ("figment of miracle") the (fed-back) television pictures of the moon landing. Technology affects history and the

imagination of the young, who are misled to "painting a standpipe" (a high vertical pipe for water—used to secure a uniform pressure—the invariant hollow referred to above). The "fish" (or "dupes") edge to the embroidered borders made for their own taking. Seeing without reason, the fish see their song "swan or stork" (beautifully bend or procreate). Writers/readers are the fish caught, hooked by their own knowing. There is the sudden sound and feel of a fish caught or brought up out of its world: "Barb yellow hard / every yet—*oink* little jangler." The jingle "jangler" may refer to Paul's (*Little*) childhood, and "sea flood" to what little ones are likely to do. The future being unearthed here, Paul's future unknown.

The blue and yellow themes return, the blue blood colder than the yellow of the flour/flower so soft to bite.

shard porcelain learned blue veined
by wreathed penny in ice—
coo (where?) dig or not
piece dig who with what
what with ninth year's gait

of eight, weird's lettered pebble
a pan plinth table of
law—noon wait a weight
wait it is very right,
sink killick read the kelp—
[Stanzas 17-18]

The blue is the opposite of yellow, sharp and clear. Biting hard and broken ("shard porcelain"), the blue is turning back to ice, only blue veins remain. "[C]oo (where?) dig or not / piece dig who with what" is explained by the era in which this was written: 1970-73 vernacular, popular since the late 1960s. This mirrors the vernacular of the 3rd stanza, though instead of the weather, it talks of "digging" the moon's weird pebble. The "wreathed penny in ice" (which recounts the copper AER of *Initial*'s head) and the sunk "killick" (an anchor formed by a stone usually enclosed by pieces of wood) are related events: solids with growth attaching; liquids surrounding the solid beginning to join the song. Similarly, the Apollo astronauts will circle the moon before landing to read its surface. A penny is a copper counter, not unlike the astronaut's moon, which they approach to learn its sum. We are encouraged to "read the kelp," the solid song slowly forming on the stone/wood/penny.

cherries, knave of a valentine,
were ever blue of yellow,
birds, harp in three trees—
now summer happy new year
any time of year—so

no piper lead with nonsense
before its music don't, horse,
brag of faith too much—
fear thawed reach three-fingered chord
sweet treble hold lovely—initial
[Stanzas 19-20]

The valentines (to two) are the cherry-red rounds for Paul, and for Celia (née Thaew), whose harp leaps by thirds back to Louis's air (solid blue of yellow—liquid flow-er) to sing a new valentine. Finally we reach the coda that beginning is an end in itself; not begun or leadened with nonsense, it's not time to brag before the music is done. The family must hold its era in the blue air/error, hold the chords of its song, and in fact complete it. "A"-24 at the time of the writing of *Initial* had already been presented to Louis by Celia so that "A" would be completed by following "AN ERA / ANY TIME / OF YEAR" to its destination: "z-sited path are but us." The familial chord becomes the means to A, the initial note for tuning with which "A" began.

The symmetry and precision in *Initial* may well make us shake our heads in disbelief or delight. I would like to compare two comments on Zukofsky. John Taggart speaks to the difficulty of responding to such involved work:

There is, in response, no denying the uneasiness that anyone may feel—trapped, grasped utterly—in reading Zukofsky. First there is a bafflement with his musical conception of the image and his extreme concision, then there is incredulity and a proportionate discomfort with the realization of just how absolute his reflective symmetry is. There is a feeling finally, of being trapped in a circle, all of whose 'sides' mirror all the others. . . . for there to be a way out, a liberation, the circle of Zukofsky's poetry must be entered as a dwelling (66).

Bob Perelman grapples with the same problem, contrasting Zukofsky's critical writings to his poetry.

Compare 'A' to *Prepositions*, which are gnarled and 'perfectly' responsible to the supposedly true ('Strabismus may be an object of interest between two strabismics; those who see straight look away') eternal ('The good poems of today are not far from the good poems of yesterday') natural order of poetry. Zukofsky's definition of objectification as a 'rested totality' has always called 'toast' to my mind: toasted coconuts, macaroons. Language is never total. Whereas 'A' lets anything in, finally. All its structuring (form) is just bait for superegos. The sense of poetry as a science is repellent. We're all strabismics, or else solipsists. ("Criticism" 147)

The structured form of "A" does force a guilt vs. satisfaction dichotomy upon us as readers. It begs us to stand in awe of its rightness or to reject it outright as too hermetic or too obscure. It is difficult to have a foot in the world when trying to stand under the circle of "A". Either we enter this circle as a dwelling or are baffled and remain outside Zukofsky's world. While the poem's structure may allow multiple interpretations in, Zukofsky does not let just anything (e.g., any arbitrary music) in, without making it his. He lets in only what he is able to subjectify, and he subjectifies everything that he lets in.¹³ Likewise, as a reader, I bring a certain prior knowledge to the poem and take something away; I am free to misinterpret, taking my "one guess at certainty made / with an assemblage of naught—," which sounds as much of a critique of a rival poetics or of potential readers as it does a critique of any leap (perhaps its own) to completeness or certainty. "A" 22-23 is a world aware of its own imminent completion, intentionally withholding a final signature, choosing instead to initial its conclusion. Ironically, the "success" of "A" as a completed project will for some readers be its most glaring problem. Zukofsky's scientific poetics and the formal completeness of "A" may well exhibit the superego's tendency to "aid in character formation by reflecting parental conscience and the rules of society" (*Webster's 7th New Collegiate*), but the multiple mirrors of Zukofsky's science are not there simply to set up binary oppositions. Any poetics would encourage the drawing of lines, but the divide—between those who see straight and the strabismics who would focus only on themselves—wants to be broken in time. A poem is an attempt to find readers. It does not divide, it invites. To publish is to advertise. While styles of advertising change to suit the times, Zukofsky's in time became embittered; his "style" became solipsistic; its main goal to survive. It would have been different

had he been part of a bigger and more powerful group of strabismics. For the isolated there is no better slogan than *Time* (except perhaps its variation: *Death*). A poem cannot "succeed" (nor "fail," nor "exist") without bait.

fish purl in the weir:
we are caught by our
own knowing. . .

The bait is tied to what we know, which changes over time. The line I am tied to is a "we" that I cannot completely control; it is a "we" that tries to control me. Whether the bait is the stuff of ego (conventional narrative or personal poems?), or superego (formalist?), or id (Perelman's apparent preference?), or of some less Freudian paradigm, it is still bait. Some fish vary their diets because they have to, others vary not at all.

Notes

I would like to thank Herb Levy for reading this essay in an earlier version and for pointing out the air beyond the errors in which I was and may still be flying.

1. Both Michele Leggott's and Peter Quartermain's essays (in Works Cited) are crucial to my understanding of *Initial*. Their research shows that the postcard's six words are what Zukofsky used to generate the following poem. This generation from a few initial notes, as John Taggart suggests in a discussion of "A"-12, may be Zukofsky's answer to Webern's question re Bach's *Art of Fugue*: "what can I do with these few notes?" (Taggart 45). *Initial* is on some level an exploration of the notes in "A"-22's head.

2. Bruce Comens has pointed out that in the head "TIME" is bracketed by an anagram for ear ("ERA") and the ear in "YEAR" (97).

3. See also Leggott (115, 116 and 119) for other numerological examples. My mathematical projections link the dimensions of the head (2 x 3), which can be summed in the project of what "A"-22 and "A"-23 (2 and 3 for short) are to be: 2 + 3 = 5, to the number of words in each line below the square-(or cube-)shaped head. 22 and 23 are to be the same length so: (2 [poems] x 5 [words/line])³ = 1000 or the number of lines in both 22 and 23. It is also interesting that 22 and 23 add up to 45 or 4 + 5; both reducible to 9 or (3)² which may be inverted to (2)³ or 8. This might have something to do with the puzzle in stanzas 17 and 18: "with ninth year's gait / of eight."

4. The best I can hope to do here is to give a close reading with certain disclaimers: in deciphering hidden or obscure references, one in some ways has to become the poet. The problem with this is that it unavoidably involves distortions. Absorption in (easily distorted to: of) an author's life

and work as a method has the danger of dealing with a subject as an object, serving only to pacify or fix a "text." My purpose here is to suggest or stimulate possible readings, and to some extent to demonstrate possible projections from the text. The poem will remain its own best mouthpiece.

5. See both Comens and Taggart for the suggestion that the poem forms a circle.

6. Re "history," Leggott notes that "Zukofsky was planning the nature of 'A'-22 and 'A'-23 in terms of history expressed through song, and song as history; that this included private history (and or as song) is clear from a revealing comment about 'the / main 'hidden' melody: family as / developed thruout 'A'-11 thru 'A'-24'" (123).

7. This quotation shows up as an inscription to "A"-7 when first published in *Poetry's* Objectivist number, though Zukofsky deleted it in later published versions.

8. Worth investigating is the possibility that every occurrence of the indefinite article in the poem carries a specific reflexivity. "A" is a window, a peacock's grammer, a sum owed, a good omen, a weed's reward, a need birds cannot feign, a breath, a hectic, and a valentine. Note that Zukofsky's index of "a" in the back of the complete edition includes pages "508-11," where *Initial* is printed. I would guess that every indexed entry can be read as a comment on the whole project of "A" as well as a contextual statement regarding the section in which it appears.

9. Charles Bernstein's treatment of this theorem in relation to Blake is useful here: "Zukofsky opposes eye to the shortcomings of mind . . . while Blake finds only ratio and logic in the eye" (*Content's Dream* 147).

10. See *Bottom: On Shakespeare* and the discussion re excessive love in Taggart (58).

11. See Comens, 100. The context of Zukofsky's use of *The Tempest* ("let me live here ever / sweet now, silence here . . .") omits Ferdinand's: "So rare a wondered father and a wise / Makes this place Paradise." This implies a familial sense of "Paradise." In a poem based on capital letters the only use of capitals in the text are: "Others," "Land" and "Paradise." That these capitals initial Louis and Paul is quite possibly not coincidental.

12. This "someone" could be read to be one of Zukofsky's contemporaries, e.g., Pound. Leading the young with his history (figment of miracle), Pound may be in several ways caught by his own knowing. I refer readers to New Directions' recently published Pound/Zukofsky correspondence and suggest that they draw their own conclusions.

13. Bob Perelman, in a review of Andrew Ross's *The Failure of Modernism*, suggests that "'A' demonstrate[s] Zukofsky's acceptance of his own subjectivity" (*Poetics Journal* 7: 119). Ross calls "A" "exceptional only inasmuch as it acknowledges the subjective source of its artifactual construction" (213). He sees the "modernist" long poem as a window which opens long enough to let history in. The notion in the modernist long poem "that history can articulate itself" without subjectivity is presumably more problematic to both critics than Zukofsky's "acknowledgement."

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Sounding "A"

"A". A sound, long or short. Part of a word, a word on its own. The beginning of the alphabet. A vibration, the pitch of a violin string, the pitch to which an entire orchestra tunes. An indefinite article, a vibrating word, an inclusive, accommodating word, a (sly) answer to Wallace Stevens' "the the" (203). The title of Louis Zukofsky's sweeping long poem (and of its subsections), an inclusive, accommodating book, a series of vibrations, another answer to the Moderns' desire to gesture to (some) meaning.

Zukofsky's poem, on one level at least, is an exploration of the experience of reading (and writing) poetry. For him, the poetic experience is largely a sensual one, a musical one, a complex response to the sound of the language and to its formal presentation. "The order of all poetry," he writes, "is to approach a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently" ("An Objective" 18). Both writing and reading trace "an exchange between an intellectual portion / Of head and that part it calls music" ("A"-13 297). As Peter Quartermain expresses it: "The Text is a movement of languages, of a number of frames of reference, held in the language of the poem, simultaneously, at once. And it is a *felt* world . . ." (223). Music—experiential, provocative, possessing—stands as a balance to the press of the intellect for sense, for meaning, for narrative path. Music, miraculously, can sound and resound ("music / Meaning something some time to come back to a second time" ["A"-13 297]). And this is poetry's magic too, its "musical horizon" ("A"-24 567). Zukofsky's "A" asks to be played—as a piece of music, an elaborate game, a poem—to be approached with the anticipation and openness of a child who desires and expects pleasure in his/her play, yet with the seriousness of a performer who understands the difficulty and necessity of giving voice to another's (mute) notations.

1. music in language

Zukofsky's work is characterized by "the thrust toward getting us to *SOUND* the words and discover sense—to bring us into play—to participate" (Corman 306). Often difficult syntactically (even approaching nonsense), often conspicuously crafted and textured, this poetry frustrates the drive (through language) toward meaning—"the sound and the pitch emphasis of a word are never apart from its meaning" ("A"-24 575); it asks the reader to experience the language itself, to sound it—to give it voice, to check its depth—to play (with) it. And the experience is strongly sensory, the richness of the poetic artifact issuing not only from its aural qualities (voices one hears) but from its oral (voices one sounds) and visual (voices one sees) components as well. "Audibility in two-dimensional print" ("An Objective" 13). The sound of the poetry—its melody, rhythm and texture—requests the reader's sensitivity over a range of response. The voluptuousness of a sound in the ear, on the tongue, in the eye.

Zukofsky posits the relationship between music and speech as "An integral / Lower limit speech / Upper limit music" ("A"-12 138). His own language in "A" pushes toward the upper limit. He allows his words to sound, to reverberate against one another, sounds generating elusive patterns. Assonance and alliteration, for example, bind together "read a weed's reward—grain" ("A"-22 508), *reward* a kind of conflation of *read* and *weed* (with a recollection of the *a* sound that separates them?), *grain* a new collection of sounds, but tied by the recurrence of the *r* and the strength/length of the vowel, the long *a* balancing the *es* that precede it; *grain* emerging from the complex of *rs*, *es*, *ws*, and *ds*, is as surprising as grain from the apparently worthless weed that bears it. Zukofsky always gives his words room to vibrate: "No air stirs, but the music steeps in the center" ("A"-2 7); "How would you have known to hum" ("A"-15 360); "Twilight when all seams sun / The same" ("A"-13 309); "Bare arms, black dresses" ("A"-1 1). Zukofsky's attention to sound links reaches its apex, perhaps, in the first 70 lines of "A"-9 where, as he describes in his *First Half of "A"*-9, the distribution of *n* and *r* sounds conform to the formula for a conic section (quoted in Quartermain 214).

He can be unashamedly playful, pulling words apart into their sound components: "dichotomy / Dick and a cot and o me / Isorhythm—I—so rhythm" ("A"-13 281), "Surcingle-Sir Single" ("A"-13 310). The visual aspect of such sound relationships interests him, too: "People people people" ("A"-10 113), for example, is an identical visual rhyme, though no sounding is

identical with another, each altering one's experience of the others; "Isorhythm—I—so rhythm" and "Stand-under . . . / Under-stand . ." ("A"-13 313) are more complicated, exploiting punning potential. And "ait, aight, eyet, / eyot, eyght sing the same" ("A"-23 557), Zukofsky notes, but their visual shape makes them distinct one from another. He is aware of the impact of notation in the poetic experience: "... most western poets seem constantly to communicate the letters of their alphabets as graphic representations of thought—no doubt the thought of the word influences the letters but the letters are there and seem to exude thought" ("A"-24 579-81). A clue to the curious scoring of a year: "1935" and

Nineteen

Thirty-five

and

35

("A"-8 86),

illustrating, perhaps, "print and the arrangement of it [helping] tell how the voice should sound" ("A"-24 578). A clue also to the alphabet game that closes ("A"-23 562-63).

Daring to ask

Why

not 'speech
framed to
be heard
for its
own sake
even over

its interest
of' (de-
'meaning'
("A"-14 331)

opens to Zukofsky curious territory. The dance of the sawhorses in "A"-7:

Bum pump a-dumb, the pump is neither bum
Nor dumb, dumb pump uh! hum, bum pump of shucks!
(Whose clavicembalo? bum? bum? te-hum. . .)
Not in the say but in the sound's—hey-hey—
The way to-day, Die, die, die, die. . .
("A"-7 41)

Relationship between words becomes sound- rather than meaning-centered; the poetry moves into the realm of chant (experience) rather than explication. One encounters what Hugh Kenner calls "Weightlessness . . . : precisely as in music, where there isn't a burden of 'meaning' and play can seem like play" (190). Pushing toward the upper limit of speech's range pushes also toward the limit of sense. The opening of "A"-22 (508-11), exquisite in sound and texture, at once promises and frustrates syntactical logic; the opening of "A"-15 is even more elusive:

He neigh ha lie low h'who y'he gall mood
So roar cruel hire
Lo to achieve an eye leer rot off
Mass th'lo low o loam echo
How deal me many coeval yammer
Naked on face of white rock—sea.
("A"-15 359)

Thwarting the press for meaning, such language insists that one settle into its sounding. Indeed, the opening of "A"-15 is a version of the sounding in Hebrew of a portion of the book of Job (Kenner 188), an enterprise that speaks of the complexity of Zukofsky's attitude toward language: his transcriptions—and he uses the same technique in the Rudens section ("A"-21)—are an intricate blend of translation (transfer of meaning) and transliteration (transfer of sound); in Kenner's words, "the structural eloquence is phatic, a graph of breathings and intonations" (188).

Hebrew ("A"-4, "A"-15) and Latin ("A"-21) are among the many voices in "A". Though his Jewish forebears denounce the "jargon" of their children ("A"-4 12), Zukofsky celebrates the medley of speeches of his world. The formal ("poetic") voice, characterized by archaic words or inverted syntax, is only one of many—"Whom / fliest thou? / whom thou // fliest of / him thou / art" ("A"-14 321), "Then did the sun on dunghill shine" ("A"-8 88)—and even it is often a borrowed voice, lifted from the Bible ("Come, ye daughters, share my anguish" ["A"-1 1]), from Ovid ("I am he that meets the year" ["A"-12 243]), from

Shakespeare ("How comes this gentle concord in the world?" ["A"-12 128]), and others. And the formal voice is also borrowed from thinkers and academics: Marx, Ford, Spinoza, Einstein. The richness of the poem issues in part from the inclusiveness of this formal voice, in larger part from its interaction with other kinds of speech. "A" teems with versions of informal speech, including the naturalized personal speech of the poet-voice ("I wonder how far he's got / In that newspaper" ["A"-13 280]), the particular regional quirks of rural American ("By golly, Bob" ["A"-8 84]), the speech of the barely literate ("Tell Paul, that I am all right and if God is willan I will see him someday" ["A"-12 217]), and the ethnic cadences of blacks ("bro'" ["A"-7 39]), Germans ("First time with repetition!" ["A"-8 59]), Scots ("poor-souls / knit to bairn now name / themselves" ["A"-23 557]), and others. Among the informal voices are parodic versions of the formal voice—verses, light or bawdy—sometimes intended seriously, often comically or satirically: "Go splintered rondel" ("A"-8 86); "The world had better be thrifty / I am approaching fifty" ("A"-12 241);

I beg your pardon
I've a—"h" begins the rhyme here,
Shall we now?
("A"-6 23)

The wild conglomerate of speech Zukofsky hears and retrieves—the only possibility after a loss of faith in a single true Speech ("A"-4 12)—may be jargon, but it is vibrant, almost tactile; sounds and voices rub against one another, gaining significance (and gloss?) through contact/context.

In both poetry and music, the pitch component—the melody, the voicing—tends to be most immediately apparent, overshadowing the rhythmic profile of a work. Perhaps this is another product of our hysteria for meaning: the contour of a melody, its shape, structure, logic (syntax, grammar, idea?) implies a promise of some (hidden) meaning. Rhythm, on the other hand, no matter how elaborate superficially, is always reducible to pulse—blood through the heart, breath through the lungs—not without a kind of logic, but entirely without meaning. But rhythm is critical to both music and poetry, providing the propulsion, the energy that arranges sounds into discernible units; without rhythm, we could perceive only noise. Language is inherently rhythmic (another reason why the syntactically difficult passages in "A" are palatable, even delightful), and the poet has always the option of utilizing the rhythm of the language—building verse around

language—or pressing language into pre-established metrical structures. Not surprisingly, considering Zukofsky's respect for language, much of "A" builds patterns around inherent rhythms—

The music is in the flower.
Leaf around leaf ranged around the center,
Profuse but clear outer leaf breaking on space,
There is space to step to the central heart:
The music is in the flower
("A"-2 7)

—though he is equally adept at utilizing strict metrical frameworks (such as the sonnet) without sacrificing the rhythmic integrity of his language:

Horses: who will do it? out of manes? Words
Will do it, out of manes, out of airs, but
They have no manes, so there are no airs, birds
Of words, from me to them no singing gut.
("A"-7 39)

His bawdy verse, words crammed into jogging metrical patterns, serves as a foil in "A", pointing up Zukofsky's exquisite sense of the rhythm of language, and his skill in capturing it.

One's sense of poetry's rhythm is not entirely aural; it may be visual as well, implied by the poem's scoring on the page. Zukofsky is meticulous in designating pace: "love—so—divided—" ("A"-15 363); "Nature says, this wet, vine" ("A"-22 527). His control approaches the virtuosic:

Don't scan
It is simple
To measure the dance
The foot up
Must come down
Unsaid appears said
And four feet standing together

In wish be raised
A lover's body turned as a phrase
And its multiples.
But clumsy
If you count and stress 10 in a row
You have also the time of 10 not stressed
Not seen
How does that work out as a system of 10.
("A"-13 302)

"Don't scan"; counting makes for clumsiness, since no system can define and contain the rhythm of language (the last five lines consist of 2, 9, 10, 2 and 11 syllables respectively: "How does that work out as a system of 10"?). The measure of a poem is (in) one's sensuous experience of it; Zukofsky turns his phrases as a lover's body ("Cite . . . Sight . . . / The body" ["A"-8 90]); his language dances.

The interaction of melody and rhythm (and orchestration, voicing, volume), of sound and pulse/pace, produces the texture of a work, a quality as essential to the poetic/musical experience as it is difficult to define. Texture encompasses the aural and oral and visual dimensions of a poem: the density of the language links, the tempo and rhythmic complexity, the length of the line, even formal structure. The five sections of the partita ("A"-13), for example, have particular and varying textures, the fourth and first more spare than the others, the second dense with the overlapping of voices, the third and fifth with the play of language, the sound texture. Counterpointing the heaviness and pressure of the textural denseness of such sections as "A"-18 and "A"-7 is "A"-3, a song for the dead boy, Ricky, where several voices collide but are suspended in the intimacy of the setting (in the cemetery, on the page). Even strong emotion—"Wish I had been broken!" ("A"-3 10)—is muted, approaching the extremity of language where speech is swallowed in a cry. "A"-16 is an even more striking study in sparseness of texture: four words delicately bound by filaments of sound, filaments of suggestion, a latticework through which to view the whiteness of the page. Visual texture may mislead, though in "A"-19—

No ill-luck
if bonding
tohu bohu
horsehair mends
azure mane
flogs cold

faces rut
shards the
perverse desolate
with pride
who curse
misfortune Place
it futile range
("A"-19 409)

—the difficulty of the syntax and the foregrounding of the sound potential of words belie the simplicity of the visual layout, yielding a curious textural quality, at once open and tensile. Like baroque music: spare and complex.

2. music in form

Both poet and composer are engaged in constructing, in making patterns and forms; they shape their material according to elaborate (if arbitrary) rules, sometimes conventional—the fugue, the sonata, the sonnet, the epic—sometimes generated by them. Form in music or poetry is based on patterns, on repetition (or suggestion) of metrical or melodic units and divergence from these motives. Even freer forms depend on conventions, on patterns—defining themselves by what they are not, generating new criteria by which to be read—and posit (only) another (possibly new) structural framework (however amorphous, however unorthodox) with its own logic, its own challenges, its own gifts. Since to hear, to (make) sense, is essentially to perceive shape and structure, and since music and poetry are both intrinsically sensible sound, structure is integral to the functioning of musical composition and poem.

Zukofsky's forms and formal control are as musical as his language. Some sections of the book announce themselves as musical forms: "A"-13 is entitled "partita," meaning an air with variations, especially in connection with Bach, though it may denote a suite of dances as well (Scholes 429); "A"-20 is, as promised, a "Respond" ("A"-20 435), a song or chant in answer (to a priest) (Scholes 480), and it is also (cleverly) a tone row itself, a series of twelve "tones" repeated but reordered. Though not explicitly musical in form, "A"-12 attempts what "A"-6 had asked:

Can
The design
Of the fugue
Be transferred
To poetry?
("A"-6 38)

A fugue is a complicated form, a structure arising out of the precise interweaving of a given number of voices which speak in turn, which overlap and dovetail as they reveal the potential soundings of the subject(s) and countersubject(s)—rhythmically extended or diminished, melodically inverted or even turned end for end—an incredibly dense and complex and controlled form, a baroque form given greatest eloquence by J.S. Bach. Zukofsky's "fugue" honors the master: it begins

Blest
Ardent good,
Celia, speak simply, rarely scarce, seldom—
Happy, immeasurable love
heart or head's greater part unhurt and happy,
things that bear harmony
certain in concord with reason.
("A"-12 127)

The acrostic outlines Bach's name (a pattern Bach himself adopted as a melodic signature) and defines the four "voices" of this fugal construction; each successive voice is more extended than the preceding one, and a kind of harmony is generated by the alliterative quality of the last two voices (the sibilance of the third voice, the concentration of spirants in the fourth). Toward the end of "A"-12 (231-61), the B-A-C-H grouping is reiterated, each unit extended and developed—especially C(elia) which stretches over twenty pages—except the final one (H) which is deleted altogether. The fugue closes with restatement:

Blest
Ardent
Celia
unhurt and
Happy.
("A"-12 261)

As Zukofsky notes, though, there is a difficulty in translating a musical form into a non-musical (quasi-musical) medium: "print / Must not overlap, but the notes of the voices would" ("A"-8 53). "A"-12 explores one possibility, arriving at a form that works within the confines of the medium, an analogue of the fugue; "A"-24 explores another, subjecting language to (explicitly) musical handling. In this last section of the poem, several voices sound simultaneously; though the strategy is musical (overlapping of different verbal patterns occurs often in vocal music, the Renaissance madrigal an accessible example), and though one voice is indeed instrumental (a harpsichord playing Handel's *Pieces pour le Clavecin*), the texture of "A"-24 is more dramatic than choral. Indeed, the shape of "A"-24 is controlled by the dramatic line, each subdivision labelled by act and scene, titled by character ("A"-24 564). But this section is not clearly drama, either: too many voices collide to allow for a central narrative path, and connections between voices tend to obscure rather than clarify narrative direction; furthermore, the drama that serves as the basis, Zukofsky's *Arise, Arise*, has been deliberately dismantled, separated into discrete, parallel narrative units. Rather, Zukofsky seems to be interested in the effects—dissonance, harmony, texture of sound; suggestion, frustration, confusion of meaning—generated by the juxtaposition of voices and language patterns. Not quite drama, not quite music, *L.Z. Masque* is a daring experiment in musical handling of poetic form.

Even the sections of "A" that are not explicitly musical speak of Zukofsky's move toward Don Byrd's sense of "mousike"—the poetry of total musical organization (178)—"a music of content" (179). Conventional forms like the sonnet, for instance, exhibit the strictness characteristic of musical form. Zukofsky shows himself in full command of the form in "A"-7, manipulating the sestet rhyme pattern, and ending the sequence with a kind of stunt: the penultimate word—"manes" ("A"-7 42)—belongs in the rhyme scheme; the final word (a visual afterthought)—"words" ("A"-7 42)—is thematically critical. "A"-9 is perhaps Zukofsky's tour-de-force of strict formal structuring—a double canzone (Kenner 140), the second set of stanzas appropriating the rhyme scheme of the first. Each stanza is packed with internal rhymes which occupy the same position stanza to stanza, borrowed almost word for word by the second set of stanzas.

Zukofsky's interest in formal control is evident in the many unorthodox structures in "A": for instance, the third section of "A"-13 consists of four-line stanzas, each line controlled syllabically:

the size of
a
vis-
iting card
("A"-13 303)

"A"-19 opens with eight four-line stanzas,

An other
song—you
want another
encôre I
("A"-19 408)

and proceeds with thirteen-line stanzas, all left-margin-aligned, each containing two words but the last, which contains three. Both "A"-22 and "A"-14 are roughly sonata-shaped, beginning and ending with the same material: twenty five-line stanzas of five-word lines open and close "A"-22 (the last stanza is abbreviated to two lines), and enclose a long passage of undemarcated five-word lines; "A"-14 opens with four groupings of one-word lines, the first six lines long, the others ten, and closes with a six- and ten-line stanza of the same line length, with the middle section essentially consisting of three-line stanzas of two and then three words per line. Even the free verse sections of "A" exhibit an internal structural logic: both "A"-8 and "A"-17 are organized chronologically; "A"-15 includes a sequence of seven stanzas, each a line longer than the preceding one ("A"-15 366-68); "A"-4 is punctuated by "Yehoash" ("A"-4 14, 15), "A"-6 by "the time was" ("A"-6 28-31), "A"-5 visually by the indented "Have seen:" and "The answer:" and "The answer:" ("A"-5 19).

Such linkages work structurally across sections of "A" as well. The final section is most obvious, perhaps, its poetic line drawn from previous sections of "A". "A"-23 prepares for the masque to follow in "music, thought, drama, story, poem" ("A"-23 563), and more subtly, "thought's rarer air, act, story" ("A"-23 539), where *air* may be read in its musical sense; the end of "A"-19—"nine / so soon twenty" ("A"-19 434)—links it to the following section ("A"-20) which begins "Respond for P.Z.'s tone row / At twenty" ("A"-20 435). The last eleven sections, "A"-14 through "A"-24, are tied together by beginning with *An*, a pattern announced explicitly partway through the first of the group ("A"-14 315). And fragments of the text appear and reappear in the course of the work: "The music is in the flower, / Leaf around leaf ranged around the center"

("A"-2 7) resurfaces as "The flower—leaf around leaf wrapped around the center leaf" ("A"-6 23), for example. A passage in the midst of the play,

this
is
my
form

a
voice
blown
("A"-21 445)

is cobbled from "A"-2—"This is my form" ("A"-2 8)—and "A"-8—"Voice a voice blown" ("A"-8 52, 104). The first stanzas of "A"-23,

An unforeseen delight a round
beginning ardent; to end blest
presence less than nothing thrives:
a world worn in whose
happiest reins preempt their histories

which cannot help or hurt
a foreseen curve where many
loci would dispose and *and's*
compound creature and creature together.
Each lamp casts its shadow
("A"-23 536),

echo earlier soundings: *a round* opens the work ("A"-1 1); *ardent* and *blest* figure in the fugal section ("A"-12 127); *reins* suggests the horses of "A"-7; *loci* and *dispose* recall "disposing our loci" ("A"-9 106); and *creature* suggests the *creator-created* and *creator-creature* complexes examined in "A"-6 (22-23) and "A"-8 (43).

The intricacy of the interweaving between parts of "A" reinforces what the tiling implies: the individual sections are not (only) discrete units, but essential parts of a larger design—waves, vibrations, resoundings of "A". Not surprisingly, Zukofsky had conceptualized the overarching form of this work—"an intuition of the poem without any words in it, a silent structural eloquence . . . a sequential table of difficulties to be overcome" (Kenner 187)—long before its parts were complete (Celia in interview, Terrell 64); the latter half of the book is a chronological mine field (Table of

Failing to acknowledge the complexity of the interaction between the outside and inside world, even actively maintaining its invisibility, is a far easier task, a far commoner condition, Zukofsky maintains; "The lyric poet made an art of violating" ("A"-13 291), after all, and surely the epic poet's art violates as well. "The whole of "A" is," as Byrd argues, "an investigation into the inadequacies and limitations of the single vision and the single voice" (179). In Zukofsky's poetic universe, there can be no ultimate (Orphic) song, but only poems and more poems (A poem and A poem and A poem), each a formal and conceptual experiment/experience. The poet is not (only) teacher but learner ("What else can you tell me [about "A"]?" he asks a friend. "I wish you would so I may know" ["A"-12 215]), not Creator but borrower and discoverer and maker. And there can be no ultimate (epic) narrative, either, but only stories and more stories; musical, economic, racial, personal, imaginative (hi)stories overlap and coexist within the frame of "A". Zukofsky even includes (boldly) what he cannot include: "A"-12 ends with poems, jottings, ideas for plays, novels, operas, stories,

some things I wanted
To get into a poem
Some unfinished work
I may never finish,
Some that will never be used anywhere
("A"-12 251)

The common—what is shared, what establishes community and communication, also what is deemed unimportant (unheroic, unepic)—Zukofsky foregrounds, deliberately and forcefully: as well as singing "without stopping and without commas of the redundant commonplace action of the species" ("Poetry" 10), he "giv[es] some of his life to the use of the words *the* and *a*: both of which are weighted with as much epos and historical destiny as one man can perhaps resolve. Those who do not believe this are too sure that the little words mean nothing among so many other words" ("Poetry" 10).

In "A", many voices, many stories are present, have presence; they are now and they are here. This quality of presentness (inherent in music as well) issues in part from the temporal nature of poetry: because the poem is time-bound, because it unfolds in time, one experiences always its present moment, knows (only) its *now*. "The sense of eternity folds in, and we are in the fragmentary present" (Byrd 181). Though the focus on the present may unsettle—

"Shakespeare skeptical of most music / Considering the longest preparation of it turns out / fleeting" ("A"-13 301)—Zukofsky welcomes it because it deflects pressure away from an ultimate voice or story and onto the experience of the work, its sensuousness, its presence ("without poetry life would have little present," he has written ["Poetry" 3]). Even remembering, recollecting, reflecting on earlier material in a poem involves making present an experience of its past (re-presenting). The poem (or song), then, describes a present that encompasses any number of pasts: numberless histories (not all compatible) are (made) present in the course of "A"; Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*—a completed performance—is more present to the speaker at the opening than the usher and the exit door ("A"-1 2). As Zukofsky points out, "every time I read Dante, it's not dead. The poet is dead, but if the work is good, it's contemporary" ("[Sincerity]" 275).

Zukofsky's interest in the potential of the artistic construct to overwhelm history by moving beyond conventional historical demarcations relates to his handling of the form of "A", its spatial rather than temporal dimension. This poem, like a musical composition, is characterized by both resistance to and press toward closure: each section is defined structurally by subsections, phrases, internal cadences, and worked through according to its own laws, but there is always the animating presence of a melodic and rhythmic movement that possess the work and reader. (The pulse of a composition beating into the silence after the work's completion; a melody in the head, in the throat, as one leaves a concert, as one works). Closure becomes impractical; vibrancy subverts the implicit claims (and assurance) of structure. Poised against the explicit structural design of "A"—its numbered sections, its varied and often complex forms—is this reverberating quality, an insatiable playfulness that refuses to be bound or constrained. The poem begins, for example, at the end of a cantata, at the end of an event, an experience; it closes with a dedication to Celia

the gift—
she hears
the work
in its recurrence
("A"-24 806)

which presses open the ending by playing with reversals: this work is not finished (completed) as long as it (re)sounds for his wife, and it is not even Zukofsky's gift to her but (apparently) hers to him. Between the poem's opening and closing pages are stories

interrupted by others, stories left unfinished, stories full of gaps, stories without heroes, stories without morals, stories with multiple readings. And even such a (tenuous) pattern as this is not exactly cyclical repetition—Zukofsky is not positing a world in which some pattern surfaces and resurfaces and resurfaces, the Eternal Return; it is more like reverberation, each story exciting sympathetic vibrations in others, so that all sound simultaneously. As Byrd argues, “the structure of history is not to be found in logic or mythologic, these informants of language, these skeletons, but in language and the complex web by which language is involved in perception. Zukofsky is almost alone [among the poets of his time] in this realization” (173).

The open-endedness of such a philosophy of poetry makes finishing a poem a practical impossibility; its “desire for inclusiveness” (“An Objective” 15), its demand to encompass “nothing less than the world” (“Poetry” 9)—“The song—omits? / No, includes . . . Anybody” (“A”-6 23)—explodes any belief in the possibility of structural closure. “Nothing is ever finished, / Complete” (“A”-12 181). The only option left the poet, then, is to reconsider the nature of the poem, to let go of the concept of (spatial/formal) wholeness and recognize the poem as process. Zukofsky does this unabashedly. Not only does “A” span his lifetime—“I feel that life makes the curve [of the poem],” he says (“[Sincerity]” 280)—not only does he live his poem, in this sense, but it also contains explicit references to its own making: “—Look, Paul, where / The sawhorses of “A”-7 / Have brought me” (“A”-12 228), for example, and

I’ve finished 12 “books,”
So to speak,
Of 24—

A kind of childlike
Play this division
Into 24,
Enough perhaps for
12 books in this one
All done in a summer
After gathering of 12 summers.
 (“A”-12 258)

The closing section, “A”-24, frankly borrows from earlier sections of the poem, as does “A”-17, “A Coronel / for Floss.” In a sense, the poem as a whole recollects (re-collects) itself (and other poems,

other voices, other possibilities) even as it speaks itself; it is always in process. And the poet acknowledges his presence in the poem as maker (and bystander)—“An animal’s scratching? / I forgot—the coffee *perking*” (“A”-12 162)—without arrogating any superior understanding of the artifact he crafts: “he whose design includes / whatever language can express must often speak of / what he does not understand” (“A”-18 396); “Each writer writes / one long work whose beat he cannot / entirely be aware of” (“A”-12 214). Neither poet nor poem is ultimately an authority, and Zukofsky underscores this by “Looking into and out of the frame” (“A”-12 185) and asking his readers to do the same. Quartermain writes: “The poetry is not . . . a proposition about the world. It is a play, a play of words, a play of content, where play becomes song, becomes colour. Melody, *forced* by writing” (212).

Zukofsky’s poetry, challenging the conventional flags of poetry—structure, meter, authority—posits new criteria by which to be judged, criteria like musicality, pleasure, play, love, which speak of his insistence on poetry’s sensuousness:

The idea
Is not
In the mind
That can cut off
Our bodies
 (“A”-12 234)

he declares, “Our bodies know more than our heads” (“A”-13 301); “No knowledge but / intimate pleasure” (“A”-22 517). The body, replacing the head for Zukofsky as the center of knowledge, of knowing, is also the seat of the poetic voice: “It joins mouth and heart, / The place and its presence / Where each creature sings its song” (“A”-12 159).

In “A”, Zukofsky invites the reader to experience physically his text:

From my body to other bodies
Angels and bastards interchangeably
Who had better sing and tell stories
Before all will be abstracted.
...

First, dance. Then
Voice. First body—to be seen and to pulse
Happening together.
 (“A”-12 126)

What emerges in the course of the poem from this characteristic insistence on physical, sensuous awareness and experience is a kind of rhetoric of desire, a rhetoric that can encompass the pleasure and play in poetry, its sensuousness, eroticism, its power to possess, its presence/presentness and intangibility, incomprehensibility, its promise of contact, of communication, its expression of our yearning for order and completion ("Desire longing for perfection" ["A"-1 2]), and of our recognition of the undesirability, impossibility of such order. When such desire is motivated by love—love of another (lover, friend, child), love of music, love of craft (word-working, violin-making)—its expression is infused with energy and power. "If you want to live, you love," as Zukofsky puts it with characteristic simplicity ("[Sincerity]" 278). Love is the force that moves "Speech . . . to sing" ("A"-12 151); in its absence, "The song pass[es] out of the voices / As freedom goes out of speech" ("A"-10 112). The devaluation of people through unjust labor practices and the atrocities of war threaten to choke his music—"Song? / After bread" ("A"-8 69), "Let a better time say / The poet stopped singing to talk" ("A"-10 120)—but ultimately he is sustained by the love that envelops himself and his wife, son, and art. "As I love: / My poetics" ("A"-12 151). Love fortifies him to speak even as he faces the ultimate depersonalization of death—his father's ("A"-12), Ricky's ("A"-3), his own ("A"-11); love moves him, strengthens him, animates him. It is his artistry. As he himself writes in *Bottom: On Shakespeare*:

. . . the great poet, like the great violinist, marries his instrument, syllable or fiddle, so his recklessness sees him thru—never deterred by the barometric pressures of virtuosity and doctrinal accomplishments of trite interval and tone. Tho he no doubt has all of the virtuoso's technique for radiating polish its calculated evidence as mere accessory to life must largely appear—to him, if you wish, he says, to his foolishness—loveless and unreasonable. His necessary love, a recklessness having no earlier comparable end is about all there is for him in art or performance. (Quoted in Corman 322)

"As I love: / My poetics" ("A"-12 151). The poet as lover. And as Roland Barthes points out,

It is the very principle of [the lover's] discourse (and of the text which represents it) that its figures cannot be *classified*: organized, arranged with a view to an end (a settlement): there are no first figures, no last figures. . . . [T]he monster . . . would have been . . . a 'philosophy of love' where we must look for no more than its affirmation. (7-8)

The fluidity of "A", its multiplicity of voices, its multiplicity of stories, its presence, its sensuousness: this is a lover's text. If "Each time has Love's way with music" ("A"-12 180), surely "A" is an affirmation—eloquent, musical—of love for our time.

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Philtres

•
a room lit by a plum
blouse
dropped in a pyramid
on the floor
the presence of a wintering fly
the lover in absentia

scales of the marvelous

relax the wrists

•
strawberries a red
candle a flame
afame your black hair against
the pillow the bliss
alphabet

mornings
glorys
envelope

•
the sheets smudge the silent

S of a black hair in the bathtub

a figure pinned into daylight, coronas

plums coo

ling in the fridge?

•
Cutting glass my father said is all in the way you hold your
mouth

I am 4 and my dad and I are
standing, hand in hand
waiting for a red
tulip
to close for the nighttime

Frogs in my ears. Streetcar noise below.
The prickly pear aglow. The tamarack also.

Lovers!

Synchronize your watches.

a magpie ladders the wind

your mouth "flowers" into mine

S and S and S and S and S and over and over your mouth

fish star
star fish
estar
s-tar

•
disappear!

egyptian musk

alphabet

coming

go hieroglyph go

cuneiform

My love, we are dangerous. Angels
catch their propellers
in our mini-halos
as we walk along

Paradise lost
and found
and lost
and found and
and

Shooting stars tonight Annie Oakley would kill for

Ride off with any test-pattern Indian
or cowboy
and let the chips fall

Two-name cowboys and their one-name companions cross and re-
cross
the screen in the descriptive mode until transfixed tomboys grow
into incurable women with boot and mustache fetishes

Fucking Leroy red Toyota front seat passenger side bucket o what
a feeling!

He rolled the window down further and as if he were flicking away
a cigarette tossed the condom out onto the sand of his
grandmother's driveway at 5:00 a.m. with the sun just coming up
over the lip of her scarlet geraniums such decorum I knew he was
beyond me and I wanted to fuck again

If only Newlove were more domestic
or less
what would come true?

(to be read in English, but with Spanish ere doble)

purr

purr

purr

reading excerpts

from the real world

thinking about you moving

inside me this pony chariot ladies

and gentlemen is driven by the legendary Cliff

Claggett's grandson ReAlity Repair

let's have a warm glance

up from the page

out the picture window there

floats an inflated bucking

bronco glazed with rain water

graze in the ether/or

•
Moving across horse terrain, without a horse
wrists (relaxed) on the reins.

Cowboy spurs adorn the heels, gun
and holster at the flank.

Riddled with paranoia the tanagers
fracas in the cacti. In their pueblos
the Hopi compose oblique
poems. Two Spanish question marks
perform sexual stunts. Orphan Annie
eyes. Posit oases, palm

trees cut from javex bottles
planted in the blurry sand.

Star badges. Star maps. Star moves.

Neo-Modern is Coming On: A Dialogue

In June 1988 Adeena Karasick and Warren Tallman began selecting various instances of Tallman's writing during the past decade, 1978-1988. In the months that followed they assembled and arranged a collection which reflects the range and active reaching-out of Tallman's imagination. Titled "Am in Can," it comprises essays, notes, introductions, sketches, word-refrains and letters. The following dialogue, edited from taped conversations, began during the selection process, in Victoria, September 22-25, 1988, at which time, unbeknownst to AK and WT, bpNichol was dying. He figures prominently in the dialogue and in the weave of "Am in Can" which will be dedicated to his living memory.

AK: In *Tracing the Paths*, you called your tribute to Barrie Nichol "a Neo-Modern blurb." Why?

WT: Hearing the language arguments that swirl confusedly around, I've felt the need for a context within which we can locate and, as Ezra Pound said, "understand what is happening." I feel the Neo-Modern is what is beginning to happen. In "Portrait of a Lady" (*Anerca* 1, 1986) and later in a lecture at Naropa (summer 1986), I proposed Mother Tongue as the most readily intelligible figure for what language is and suggested that the various "periods" in poetry are, as time goes by, phases in her life.

So for context I listed Pre-Modern, Modern, Post-Modern, and in the bpNichol tribute I hint at the Neo-Modern coming on. Pre-Modern is Old and Middle English and carries from the beginnings to around 1500, perhaps a thousand years. The Modern phase begins with the Elizabethans, for convenience 1600, and carries through to 1900, which is a long time for a mode or mood or phase to hold. During these 300 years the sentence doesn't change, likewise with the line in poetry. The Post-Modern begins circa 1900 and the guy who was more or less in charge was Pound, a tremendously confident American giving spontaneous advice to anyone and everyone (Yeats included). And it was all fired from the hip—bullseye, bullseye,

bullseye—he happened to be the most conspicuous and vital literary intelligence of that time. Pound felt that toward the end of the 1800s poetry had gone dead—300 years of repetition, Mother Tongue was very tired. Hence his “resuscitate the dead art of poetry.” And he had a lot of company, Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, H.D., Stein, Williams, and a little later, Hart Crane, Zukofsky and Bunting.

The Post-Modern, Pound’s great generation, spent some 45 years in literary exile, 1900-1945, because our schools had no resources for teaching the language used. Mother Tongue’s new array wouldn’t wash in the classroom. The sentence changed, the line in poetry went wildly wonky, and Mother Tongue was on the loose feeling a wild exhilaration, something like Wordsworth’s “bliss were it in that dawn to be alive”—which made the schools pretty dull. And the poets that I’ve mentioned were not alone. What was done by Pound in *The Cantos*, Eliot in *The Wasteland*, Gertrude Stein in *The Making of Americans*, D.H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow*, H.D. in her poems, Hart Crane in *The Bridge*, Williams in *Kora in Hell*, etc. was matched by the Dada and Surreal artists in Europe and their Russian counterparts. It was during this Post-Modern era that the prospects and possibilities of poetry and prose were re-examined, re-appraised both in theory and in practice, led on by Pound’s great battle cry, “Make It New.” Because Charles Olson gave Post-Modern as a name, misunderstandings have poured in. Some assume that Post-Modern begins with him. Others feel that Post-Modern means the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, say Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Steve McCaffery, Lyn Hejinian, Clark Coolidge, Bruce Andrews. But “language poets” can be a misnomer since every poet is a language poet.

AK: Yes, but their interest is in decisively calling attention to language itself, playing upon its hyper-referentiality, its endless signifying potential, and its self reflexivity, how it bends back upon itself. It’s an interest in the production, not the product, the way language moves—participating in its motion. It’s a celebration of “writing” devoid of particular context, specific reference. In this way, we are also able to receive it as physical; a material thing—operating almost as hieroglyphics, pictograms.

WT: Or as Charles put it, “History is what we say”. . . but all of them court Mother Tongue. When we say “language poets” I would prefer to say “poet-linguists.” When poetry and linguistics began to cosy up to one another, there was a problem. The first wave of effective linguistics came with university academics. They

occasionally used poems as footnotes for their theories. Which was small help for poetry. University linguistics had not much feel for poem as poem.

AK: Yes, but now I think it’s difficult to separate the work of the “linguist” and that of a “poet.” We’ve entered a kind of “boundary blur.” We are no longer interested in traditional modes of meaning production. Metaphor is not measured by similarity, but an annexation of differences, each negating the other, leaving only a gap, a desire. Language is mechanistic, a system of signs. We can manipulate, assemble, play with moving combinations within a system. In “Creative Writing: Myth and Reality,” a note you wrote for George Woodcock (*Canadian Literature* 1967), you argued that we indeed need poet-linguists. And, as mentioned, now in 1989, we have an active flock of them.

WT: Let me put it this way: see a schoolhouse and in the schoolhouse is a room where the poet-linguists hold sway. Their talk of that room’s patron saints, Zukofsky, Stein, the stronghold of Post-Modern poetry. It becomes a kind of centre for what Pound wanted years ago. And every student who attends our school must attend these classes. But there are also other rooms known to Olson, known to Creeley, known to Duncan. For sake of argument, see Zukofsky as one of the presiding spirits of the poet-linguists’ classroom. But from my view the presiding spirit of the school—all the rooms—is Charles Olson. It is Zukofsky’s limitation that he does not contain (encircle) Olson. But Olson contains (encircles) Zukofsky.

AK: Unfortunately I can’t see Olson encompassing anything except the head of lettuce he ate at bedtime. Olson, dancing in his field, perceiving through the body. But his “I” is not interrogated, does not posit itself as intersubjective, a social intervention of a social consciousness, but looms as “Maximus,” tyrannizing, standing firm. And yes, he may receive the environment, but we are faced with having to receive his environment, locked inside his perceptions. Also, he never acknowledges at what point you become a passive part of the field and get acted *on*. This theory lacks Foucault’s sense that participation and awareness and occasions change.

WT: In the 1930s the most important education philosopher of that time, John Dewey, gave a baseline proposition: “Man is the measure.” And this led to Humanism: look to the human being for your answers. Not so for Olson who sees the human being as one of

nature's many creatures amidst which he/she are not the measure. But we are the measurers. "Projective Verse"—"dance the man"—is his quick-handed word-mechanics if you will, showing how the poet can be measurer. "One perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception" sounds like a high-energy proposition but is basically nothing more than what we do when we walk down the street and are alert. Perception might well bid us pause, turn, walk into whatever house and stay awhile, as Creeley does.

AK: Yes but I can't see how Olson *contains* Zukofsky. If one perception immediately and directly leads to another, though there is resting there is no stopping. Perhaps at our death there is ultimate end, completion, where we reach some core. But with constant movement of perception, of text, there is no centre, no Lacanian phallus, no transcendental signified to reach for, no mysterious truth revealed at the end of *Maximus*.

WT: Adeena, in my intro to *New American Story*, following Olson's thought, I say: "In the new writing there are many wisdoms, truths, realities and moralities and all of them stand about for writers to use in their attempts to gain footing on the high shores of the word world." But at Naropa I suggested that the great Post-Modern debate on language, the new prospects and possibilities of Mother Tongue, have been by now somewhat resolved.

AK: Resolved? Resolved implies end, fulfillment. With resolve no further signification can occur. Nothing has come to a close . . .

WT: What I mean basically is that some 80 years of discussion, thought and argument have caused—within the manyness of things—one most important result of all. Post-Modern now *is* in our schools. Joyce is read and taught. So is Pound. So is Stein. So is Eliot. So is H.D. So is Williams. So is Crane. So is Zukofsky. And they no longer are thought of as odd or impossible to teach and read as was the case in 1945 when, as Post-Modern pioneers, most of them were circa 60 years of age, which is a long time to go unread, except by one another and a few select friends, usually younger poets. Olson, Creeley, Ginsberg, were a delight for William Carlos Williams. But he provided a good example for them.

Remember now, my definition of the Modern is simply what gets taught in school. When a Post-Modern poet of Williams' magnitude moves into our classrooms it means the Post-Modern poets have won the battle. Since Modern is the main tradition,

because it is at heart what we learn from our teachers, that great surge which began in 1900 has made it home. Not entirely of course since there are lots of clunk professors, all too many, who still can't read Joyce, Pound, Stein, Zukofsky or G-d save them, Charles Olson. But they pay a heavy price exacted by another magnitude known as youth, known as students, the best of whom can't abide their classes. Or if they must attend, smile at such profs with pure contempt, well aware that Mother Tongue—wild she—has turned her back on them, leaving them inutile.

If the Post-Modern has been characterized by a need for the study of language itself—the Neo-Modern will be characterized by a need to come to terms with the thought and poetry of Charles Olson. A surprising number of persons who should know better see Olson as simply watered-down Ezra Pound. Duncan said "Maximus taught us to dance the man." As a pioneer Pound provides a scattered series of brilliant observations and suggestions concerning the linguistics of poetry. Olson takes these up and makes them coherent with what one might name a linguistics of the individual human physiology—dance the man. Mother Earth, Mother Tongue, and one's own Mother Mine are interchangeable as the three most important muses of the Neo-Modern. Olson consistently, insistently emphasizes a physical intelligence, physical soul, physical poetry. The various branches of linguistic study are considered in this light. Semantics are of the body, phonics are of the body, syntax is of the body, grammar is of the body. Vowels, consonants, junctures and stresses are of the body. Words are of the body. The alphabet is of the body. Mother Earth, Mother Tongue, Mother Mine are of the body. Which heavens you might know, which hells, are of the body with all its ordinary days, days of doubt, and glory days. His "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe" spell these matters out in that wonderful haystack way of his.

AK: Since the early 1950s, the "big fire source" has been influential to everyone. The problem for me lies in that what he is proposing in "Projective Verse" does not extend into *Maximus*. He is writing a one-way linear poem. He never looks back, so in this sense death doesn't enter its form. Death doesn't enter in. As Steve McCaffery says, it was not until Olson's writing re the Mayan glyphs that he returned to a non-temporal truly field vision. As a theorist Olson is indispensable, but what he was writing, he wrote 35 years ago. As you say, we now have the ability to understand it in a way we couldn't when it was written—whether it's the vocabulary, a universal Post-Modern consciousness, or just the fact that it's been alive long enough for enough people in enough fields to process the

information and have it available for those that want it. And, regarding his language sense, though he continually stressed “thing-in-itself,” beyond the fact that language is a physical object, we can never “peel back its outer layers” and get to some secret essence or origin, because it’s completely codified with historicity, ethnicity, sociality, dialects. Every letter, word, sound is subject to infinite semiosis.

WT: I understand what you’re saying but will repeat Olson’s answer: language is not a thing-in-itself. Language is of the body. Hence Charles’ emphasis upon a proprioceptive language, “sensitivity within the organism.” I see Zukofsky as the most brilliant poet-linguist of that era (“A” 1-9 appeared in 1940). But the schoolroom in the schoolhouse comes back. He’s bookish. A bookish sensibility. In a sense an isolato. And Charles with that extraordinary sociable sensibility of his, “wild reachings,” is more than that. When Basil Bunting was at UBC, fall 1970, he told a group of graduate students, “Poetry is nothing but sound.” Having learned what they had learned, they were dumbfounded. “But what about ideas?” “It’s all sound.” “But what about abstractions like liberty and freedom and beauty?” “It’s all sound.” Gradually it began to dawn on them that Basil was pointing to the human voice as the base-line reality for poetry. Thus, if you say “liberty,” which is abstract—you can’t put it on the mantle over the fireplace as a family treasure—it will be the accent, the fever, the fervor with which you voice the word *from within* that signals its reality—“Give me Liberty or give me Death.”

AK: Yeah, so he’s prioritizing phonocentrism. The Zukofskian upper level music/lower level language. Sound’s important, but if we must speak in terms of “essence”—it’s only one. If poetry is all sound, where does concrete poetry enter? What about the physical “thingness” of letters on the page, how they’re sensually received—the duration between words, letters, where they’re placed, how they’re placed? Taking into account foregrounding, backgrounding, type, style, maybe even colour, shifts meaning, shifts implication. Did he mean by “all sound,” a Derridean reversal, synthesizing the eye and the ear in “sound,” seeing both the oral and the written as “sound?”

WT: There is a paradox with Basil. He had a passion for medieval illuminated manuscripts. I suppose he would say that if you look at them at a certain point, you’ll “Listen to the sound it makes.”

You’re going to have to say something and what you say will be their reality.

AK: “By ear” indeed! . . . Regarding sound and non-sound, would you say that more important to you than the word or the syllable is stress, juncture and duration?

WT: I think I would add tone also. Neo-Modern for me is looking for simplicities . . . what everyday man/woman can read. I feel that certain present-day works cry out not for footnotes but an alphabetical gloss of words. I have a reasonably good vocabulary, but for certain texts I have to spend as much time consulting a dictionary as I do reading the article. A typical Post-Modern denouement: “He’s great, but what is he saying?” I tend to throttle my terminology to certain base-line elements of poetry—Mother Tongue—which students know and understand because they are implicit in daily speech and in poetry. In any line of any poem there will be vowel stress, consonant stress, primary stress, juncture (that is, the intervals between sounds), duration and, when the poem is read aloud, tone of voice.

AK: In applying the terms Mother Tongue, the numenous, *duende*, even Neo-Modern, you are using a specialized vocabulary which would send many readers not only to a dictionary but to alternative informational sources. For every word there are endless implications, both in the author’s mind and in the mind of the reader, and each word is deeply codified and can be attributed to almost anything the reader chooses to bring to it. It’s a matter of intentionality on the part of the reader. For, if there’s an urgency to reap a “first order” reading, indulge in a form of sourcery, and tie it to the artist’s referent, then go find some “grounded” information, but it’s *limiting*. The artist may employ a specific terminology to highlight an (arbitrarily) associative bond—not to dominate, but for added pleasure. Glossing is great perhaps for non-English terms, or uncommon data, references so there’s searching involved. Yeah, we have to work for our art, imagination. Incorporating dialects of various speech patterns opens up the text further. Every speaker’s speech differs. What is simple for you, is not necessarily so for say Steve. Working from different vocabularies, associations and experience differ, “Mother Mine” differs for all of us, as do her sisters. We understand homolinguistic translation. The homogenized transformed. Mother Tongue’s infinite variance. And if we don’t or can’t locate some semantic meaning, then can we not just jump inside the calligraphy, the absence, see it as physical,