“Hunting … Sowing … Composing”: “A”-12

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“A”-12 is less a poem as we usually think of it than a textual environment. It is not simply that the movement is long—at 134 pages a substantial book-length poem in itself—rather, it seems to leisurely move along, somehow going from Shakespeare or Spinoza to current events or memories of Zukofsky’s father to reviewing old notes without seeming to develop any sense of shape or argument that would offer a comprehensive perspective. Instead we find ourselves always moving or floating inside the heterogeneity of the text. Indeed, if there is an overriding theme running throughout the movement, it is that of making the poem out of the miscellaneous materials that come to hand. “A”-12 set the pattern of composition for most of the subsequent long movements of *“A”*: Zukofsky gathered materials, quotations of all kinds, with little preconception as to how they might fit into the poem, and then worked up the individual movements out of these gatherings in an improvisational manner. Although it is not new in *“A”*, in “A”-12 there is a particular self-consciousness about the intersection of the personal and the textual, the idea of a “poem of a life,” in which the textual production (largely a matter of textual recycling) is both living a life and writing a poem, with both so intertwined that to privilege one as originating the other becomes self-defeating. When Zukofsky suggests that *“A”* mapped the course of his life, he means that the text was all the map that mattered.

“A”-12 was written in the summer of 1951 at the nadir of Zukofsky’s public reputation, and the prospects for publishing the poem were effectively nil.[1] There is a sense that Zukofsky simply put everything he had into the movement without concern for its public reception. Doing so and working on such a large scale allowed Zukofsky to let the relations between his materials, repeats, associations arise as he improvised so that there is no sense of boundaries or limits, rather the sketching of a larger and larger field with open, ragged edges. The poem works more through thickening, the compounding of associations, rather than through sequential or thematic development. There are also constant formal variations, so that at times there are stretches of fairly regular stanzas of diverse kinds or continuous meditative passages, while on the other hand there is what often seems a mere jumble of quotations. This formal elasticity is of course anticipated by the *Cantos* and *Paterson*, but nowhere to the degree that we find in “A”-12. Because of subsequent developments in American poetry, we have become familiar with longish unpredictable poems of the quotidian and consequently lose some sense of just how unusual “A”-12 was at the time it was composed.

It is useful to consider “A”-12 in relation to “A”-8, as these are the two large-scale, collage style movements on either side of the great divide in Zukofsky’s career: the supposed change of focus from politics to family marked by World War II, the poet’s marriage (1939) and fatherhood (1943). The need to respond to the world crisis of the time everywhere evident in “A”-8 gives way in “A”-12 to a casual manner and predominately more personal concerns—historical materials with implicitly objective relations are replaced by personal, literary and philosophical materials whose implicit relations are merely within the compositional space. As I will detail below, there are specific responses to and continuities with “A”-8 in “A”-12, but also an implied rethinking of “A”-8. To begin with I would suggest that if the continuous thread through “A”-8 is labor, the dialectic of matter and mind, in “A”-12 this is reframed as composition. “A”-12 is much concerned with the intertwining

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[1] Three passages from “A”-12 were published in the mid-1950s totaling less than 10 pages. The poem was only published complete with the Origin Press edition of *“A” 1-12* (1959).

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process of making art and the making that is living, and the large scale of the movement is in part justified by, not so much the argument, but the demonstration of making a poem out of whatever materials life happens to throw up. This is not for Zukofsky a distinct aesthetic act, but the recognition that composing is what we do all the time in any case, and we do so necessarily as social beings, constantly reworking the inherited materials of our lives with others. Or, as Gertrude Stein famously put it: "The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. […] The composition is the thing seen by every one living in the living they are doing, they are the composing of the composition that at the time they are living is the composition of the time in which they are living."[2] In this sense composing in "A"-12 is not essentially different from the labor of "A"-8. However, I would argue that the casualness of "A"-12, contrasting sharply with the urgencies of "A"-8, is crucial to the effect of the later movement and to a degree implies a critique, although not a rejection, of the earlier movement. The historical background of "A"-12, the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War, are explicitly present, but these events do not frame the presentation of the poem as a response to them, as is the case with the Depression materials in "A"-8. Or, the poem's response is not to be distracted by specific ethical demands of contemporary history in its effort to probe for and enact possible bases for a meaningful existence.

Both personally and historically there were ample reason for Zukofsky to write a poem of crisis and in a certain respect "A"-12 is groping for a new direction adequate to the dramatic change of circumstances that had taken place during the preceding decade. Since 1947 Zukofsky had settled into a steady position at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, but this security came at the cost of being harnessed to a most unglamorous job of teaching composition and basic literature courses to engineering students. The aftermath of World War II was now reconfigured as the Cold War, focused in the Korean conflict abroad and McCarthyism at home, which rendered Zukofsky's earlier political allegiances and hopes not merely still-born but irrelevant. Poetically Zukofsky had all but disappeared from public view while the conservative forces of modernism triumphed, creating a situation in which the public prospects for his work were dimmer than ever. Yet "A"-12 is not a poem of crisis and in this respect seems out of joint with the mood of the time as manifested, for example, in Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948), Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle* (1947) or Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* (1947). It is not that Zukofsky does not mention all the recent and contemporary traumatic events and in his own way comment on them, but he does not allow them to justify the poem nor to dramatize the poet as an angst ridden consciousness. One of the disconcerting aspects of Zukofsky's post-World War II work is its studious refusal to allow the events of the present and recent past to justify the poet, the horrors of which are evident enough without requiring the outbursts of the sensitive poet. Nor does Zukofsky leverage on cultural critique, an indictment of the inauthentic lives of his fellow citizens that allows the perpetration of these horrors and justifies the poet as a Rilkean messenger of a more authentic existence. Nevertheless, one could say that "A"-12 is as much as anything else concerned with precisely the question of how to live. The answer can only be enacted in the making of the poem as a positive renewal of cultural inheritance out of which is affirmed a belonging with others in this world, a collective space shared with and made possible by family and friends as well as society and history.

[2] "Composition as Explanation" in *The Selected Writings of Gertude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten Random House, 1946): 453, 455-456. Zukofsky owned this volume and quotes from it in "A"-12.

Returning to the question of "A"-12's form, the usual model, as explicitly suggested by Zukofsky himself, is that of the fugue.[3] Although some commentators have been vexed as to how precisely a verbal composition can be structured in such musical terms, there is little mystery as to essentially what Zukofsky had in mind: the interweaving of diverse motifs/materials, which can at any moment set off further strands via similarity or contrast. The first question for any long modernist work is how it coheres, particularly if it does not rely primarily on some narrative framework, if not story then at least sequential or psychological development. We no longer have so much anxiety about this, but for anyone writing in the first half of the last century, this was unavoidable and would be the first grounds upon which any such work would be dismissed. The most salient example for our purposes is the *Cantos*, which no one in the pre-war period, aside from a few friends such as Zukofsky and Williams, saw as anything but a mess, however impressive in certain details. Pound's fugal explanation as publically presented by Yeats in *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (1937) convinced neither Yeats nor anyone else at the time. The primary model of a successful modernist long poem was Archibald MacLeish's *Conquistador* (1932), whose deployment of modernist ellipicalness and imagistic suggestion was safely framed within a narrative storyline told from a stable viewpoint, or else *The Waste Land* read according to the mythic method that can only strike us today as naïve. The early major scholarly studies of the *Cantos*, beginning mostly in the 1960s, were all centrally concerned with addressing this question of formal coherence, pro or con, which today hardly worries us compared with other, entirely different problems that the *Cantos* pose. In any case, "A"-12 represents a fairly radical spatialization of the textual field in which the diverse themes and materials stand in relatively simultaneous relation rather than organized by any sequential logic. The result is not necessarily very much like a fugue as we normally think of it since "A"-12 has none of the rigorous working out of implicit patterns, that sense of an inevitable structural development one normally associates with fugues. However, if we think of listening to a fugue, to being inside of it so to speak, then perhaps reading "A"-12 has something of a similar effect of busy interrelatedness which pursues a working out of associative sequences.[4] Also it is clear that the concept of counterpoint was important to Zukofsky. Twice in "A"-12 we encounter the line: "Measure, tacit is" (131, 156; see also "A"-13.276) suggesting the constant play of otherness which allows for the various meanings of "measure": any given textual bit or cluster plays off others either elsewhere in the text or even outside the text to establish orders of tonal range, conceptual/thematic complexity, textual depth.

The most rigorous attempt to apply a specific fugal form to "A"-12 is that of Burton Hatlen, who, taking up the suggestion of Ahearn, sees the number four as fundamental (four elements, four seasons, four directions, etc.), particularly as played out in Bach's encyclopedic unfinished *The Art of the Fugue*, whose last fugue (contrapunctus) incorporates the notes designated by Bach's name: B-A-C-H. Indeed in the first few pages of the movement Zukofsky explicitly evokes *The Art of the Fugue* and introduces the B-A-C-H

[3] The main discussions of "A"-12's form are Mark Scroggins, *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge* (1998): 203-225 and Burton Hatlen, "From Modernism to Postmodernism: Zukofsky's 'A'-12" in *Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky*, ed. Scroggins (1997): 214-229. Barry Ahearn discusses "A"-12's form in terms of the four elements in *Zukofsky's "A": An Introduction* (1983): 211-222.

[4] It is worth keeping in mind that the enthusiasm for Baroque music of Pound, Zukofsky and Bunting coincided with an upsurge of interest in Baroque music during the early half of the 20th century, including the recovery of more authentic period performances. For these poets at least this interest had clear polemical implications against mainstream 19th century music: the preference for relatively intricate and objective music as against a music of emotional affect.

theme with definitional tags (Blest, Ardent, Celia and Happy) and then concludes 134 pages later by echoing these "notes" as a coda. However, this conclusion is strictly arbitrary: Zukofsky could have brought the poem to a finish at page 34, as there is no particular pattern or development that renders this conclusion inevitable—which is simply to point out the problem some commentators have had with the fugal analogy: that in a verbal composition, or at least in this verbal composition, there is no apparent necessity or logic as to how the work proceeds as would seem the very essence of the fugal form. Zukofsky was obviously taken with the idea of Bach composing a work (traditionally said to be his last and left unfinished) out of his own name as an emblem of what any composer must do: working with and out of the materials of the complex that is their life, the composition as very much a continuation of the enactment of that life.[5] But this does not amount to offering a formal structure for the poem, and the "notes" as Zukofsky defines them (blest, ardent, Celia and happy) are so baggy and overlapping that one could arbitrarily include just about any materials within one or the other or several. This is not meaningfully fugal. Similarly, it is easy enough to propose that Zukofsky states a "subject" at the beginning of the movement to which everything that follows could be related, but this subject—such as living as composition—would be so comprehensive that anything could be thrown into the poem higgledy-piggledy and claimed as relevant, rather like Spinozian substance.

In a couple of letters to prospective publishers of "A"-12, Zukofsky confirmed that its form was "prompted" by Bach's *The Art of Fugue* and that the fourfold B-A-C-H "subject" is developed in five parts plus a stretto and coda.[6] I will return to these subdivisions in a moment, but the fourfold subject does not offer a structural key to the movement in the form of four intertwined themes in a literary sense. This subject simply designates the utopian intention of Zukofsky's work, of Bach's music or of anyone composing their living out of the materials of their lives. That the C note is designated Celia emphasizes that this work arises out of a specific life with a specific other. The fugal patterns of "A"-12 are not pre-determined and hidden in the poem such that when revealed they would offer a definite form from the outside. Rather form, or perhaps we should say a sense of form, arises in the process of composition-reading which is essentially improvisational—"meeting by chance or design" as he says in a passage quoting Debussy (as M. Croche) on Bach's music (184). The rigor is in the recognition of similarities and differences out of which the collage presentation generates its relations and meanings. In this manner the poem plays out the desire for form, its transformations and disintegration, the dialectic of concord and discord that is not merely a theme or a determined formal structure but an action of the poem.

A few remarks should be added about the development of Zukofsky's compositional method within the broader context of collage. "A"-8 is almost entirely quotation, which

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[5] When *"A" 1-12* was reprinted by a commercial press in 1967, Zukofsky added the subtitle, "A poem of a life," which fortunately he dropped from all other printings or reprinting of *"A"*. Nevertheless, one can understand why he was momentarily tempted to add this explanatory subtitle for a volume dominated by "A"-12, in which the composition of the poem and the composition that is living are conflated. Also *"A" 1-12* represented close to 25 years of a still on-going poem, and it was with the original book publication of this volume (1959) that he began dating the individual movements in the table of contents.

[6] Unpublished letter to David Ignatow dated 17 May 1954 (thanks to Barry Ahearn for this information). See also a somewhat less detailed description but giving the same general description of "A"-12 in an unpublished letter to Marguerite Caetani, dated 15 Nov. 1951 (HRC 17.6). Caetani was editor of the Italian based journal *Botteghe Oscure*, which was one of the few places Zukofsky published during this period, appearing in issues 5 (1950) and 8 (1951)—the latter included "A"-11.

Zukofsky often condenses, usually marking the elisions with his standard two-dot ellipsis marks, but otherwise does not tamper with or reword. "A"-12 is also mostly quotations, but there are many passages worked from a given source where Zukofsky introduces a degree of paraphrase, although he almost always retains a high percentage of the original words, or radically recomposes using short bits of selected freely from throughout a text and then stitching them together. In the former (e.g. passages worked from Spinoza, Lucretius and Paracelsus) Zukofsky is concerned to retain the sense of the original, even if the result is often elliptical. In the latter case (e.g. Dante and Zechariah) the anchor to the local semantic sense is at best loose, and Zukofsky is moving toward a free composition of his own out of the source text. This latter method will recur in significant passages in most of the later longer movements of *"A"*—major examples being the use of Aristotle's *The Parts of Animals* in "A"-13, *Paradise Lost* in "A"-14 and Isaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* in "A"-21. With further complications, such as homophonic transcription, this approach will become the main compositional method of "A"-22 & -23. In a sense one could say that "A"-9 anticipates this radical composition out of a source text, but "A"-12 marks a significant loosening of a more documentary use of quotation (as used in "A"-8) to a more direct reworking of found materials. Partially this follows from Zukofsky's emphasis on the sonic potentials of his poetry, with which he had already been experimenting quite radically in his shorter poems over the preceding two decades, as well as in the patterned poems of "A"-7, "A"-9 and "A"-11. Also this method of composition with the words of another text follows logically from the central assumption of "A"-12: that writing is always rewriting and living is composing out of the materials at hand—but here the very method retains a high degree of self-consciousness that one is working with another. For Zukofsky these exercises are quite literally a living with another, sharing with and continuing that other, which is equally continuing oneself with and in that other.

The five parts plus stretto and coda that Zukofsky privately mentioned in his description of "A"-12 can be identified with reasonable assurance, which I will list with very rough preliminary characterizations in terms of dominant themes and materials:

1) 126-138: consideration of poetics and "composing"; the form of the poem and its relationship with life and the introduction of the B-A-C-H theme.
2) 138-161, beginning "My father dies in the spring…": Zukofsky's father with related Jewish materials, concluding with various Hasidic saying.
3) 161-189, begins with the prompt, "What shall I teach my son…": includes the major presentation of various philosophical materials: Aristotle, Lucretius, Paracelsus and Spinoza, plus a particularly important horse passage.
4) 189-213, beginning "Facing south, I looked…": the poet looks out over the New York harbor and meditates on history, particularly contemporary history, the relationship between the individual and history; and throughout there are significant quotations from Zechariah which continue through the following part.
5) 213-231, beginning "—You've got to be careful in the woods…": framed by what appears to be the poet and son taking a walk in the woods, this part continues the more expansive concerns of the preceding part, includes an important letter to Niedecker and letters from the common solider Jackie on his way to the Korean conflict.
6) 231-260, beginning "Blest…": what Zukofsky designates the stretto returns to questions of form and composing; the recurrence of the B-A-C-H theme introduced in the opening pages of the movement; quotations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* via Golding's translation; the inventory of still-born projects.

Celia's presence is particularly evident in this concluding part, which concludes with the inter-exchanging voices of the poet and his wife.

7) 261: a brief few words repeat the B-A-C-H theme as a coda.

It has to be said that in reading the poem, even repeatedly, these divisions are not likely to jump out at us, and Zukofsky made no attempt to overtly mark them. With the singular exception of "A"-13, Zukofsky never explicitly subdivided his longer movements, as is standard practice in other modernist long poems. Both "A"-8 and "A"-12, the longest movements of *"A"*, present themselves as single continuous poems with little indication of where one ought to pause for breath or identify sub-units. Which is to say that Zukofsky preferred the coherence of the poems—their thematic and counter-thematic threads, associations and recurrences—to make themselves felt over the course of the entire poem and not be reliant on a structure of subdivisions. In particular, I would argue, Zukofsky did not want a sense of narrative or hierarchical development, of an underlying logic, mythic or otherwise, that would motivate the sequencing of the poems. Rather, the conception is more vertical, a complication through layering or reworking the material with different dominants. With the accumulated relations of association and recurrence, "A"-12 can expand indefinitely and is more concerned with creating what I referred to as an environment, a density of the textual space than with sequential logic. My suspicion is that this rough division of "A"-12 reflects Zukofsky's working approach, that is, the need at any given time to focus on certain materials out of the very large mass he has accumulated, even while the poem remains open to bringing in anything at any moment. Similarly, for my own purposes, I will use the five part plus division of the poem as a convenient organizing principle for my examination of specific topics and passages below.

Within each of these main parts there is a dominant topic or question, more or less announced at its outset, but any number of other materials come in via analogy, association, dissonance or simply variety. Certain major materials—such as the passages of Hasidic sayings, Lucretius and Ovid—only appear within a given part, while other sources—such as Spinoza, Paracelsus and Aristotle—appear in several or all the parts. Although one might expect the B-A-C-H theme or threads to appear throughout, in fact it is only explicitly present in the first few pages and in the stretto. All of which is to repeat that it is futile to search for any overly systematic ordering of or framework for the materials as a whole other than the attention in the process of composing-reading to variation and recurrence that will find its orders. Although the idea of the "poem of a life" seems ultimately organic in the sense that the natural process of the poem will find its natural form, it is just as plausible to flip this around: the composition of the poem is the only meaningful form life has and is itself a made thing in which the poet continues to exist after he is gone. This latter view is more appropriate for understanding Zukofsky's work: the "deep need" with which the movement begins finds or makes its forms, but those forms are the only readable evidence that remain of that "need." Zukofsky did not think that his writing told the story of his life, but rather that the writing composed the only evidence of his existence. As Mark Scroggins' biography of Zukofsky demonstrates, Zukofsky was one of those fortunate poets who had no biography worth speaking of. Just think of the fate of poor Oppen whose biography has tended to dictate and swallow up the readings his poetry.

Beginnings & Horses

Before examining the individual parts of "A"-12, however, there are two key passages that encapsulate many of the central concerns of the poem as a whole: the opening passage which functions as something of an invocation (126-127) and a sustained horse passage that appears roughly at the center of the movement (175-176).

Skipping for a moment the first few lines that evoke Bach, the poet declares that we need to sing and tell stories to each other before everything becomes abstracted.[7] The opening passage continues by quoting from two paradigmatic creation myths, Genesis and the Rig Veda. The few lines from Genesis, significantly not the opening creation but specifically the (first) creation of man (Genesis 2:6-7), are simultaneously turned on themselves and translated into a tri-partite pattern: shape, rhythm, style. This pattern is immediately repeated in terms of writing-reading scripts—glyph, syllabary, letters—and then followed by a set of analogous truncated patterns, implying that the reader can finish the patterns for themselves or make up their own. In other words these tripartite patterns are stories (figurations), not authorizing myths. Immediately, then, Zukofsky demystifies the creation myth as an absolute grounds or origin for his poem (or anything else) for a view of retelling and reworking the cultural inheritance, endlessly the same and different. The passage continues by quoting from the Rig Veda, which it is possible also to break down into the tripartite pattern, although there is no explicit indication that this is implied. The Rig Veda version of creation as Zukofsky quotes it "begins" with simply nothing, then there is the void which consists of or contains being and non-being, out of which arise desire, which recognizes "the kinship of what is in what is not," and Zukofsky immediately translates this as referring to the heart and the head, feeling and thought. One assumes there is nothing or something, and if something then there is difference, negation, otherness, and simultaneously the proposal of something and non-something gives rise to or already implies the need to relate, find meaning, create orders which always necessarily imply their negation, dissolution or reordering. This is one way to state the main thread of "A"-12. Being and non-being reappear explicitly several times in "A"-12, including one instance where their status as mutually defining terms is emphasized (164). However, while being and non-being have a certain philosophical venerability as an ur-binary, it is merely one of innumerable variations: identity and difference, concord and discord, sensuousness and abstraction. But always one begins anywhere which is always somewhere, not simply nothing: one says "first" and "then" something follows, and in this manner we create and recreate our stories. So at the outset Zukofsky raises the problem of representation: how do we express an existence, whether a life or a society (history), where always already the "real" or the "actual" is left out in the very act of expression, in the inexorable transience of any unique experience or event. At one point Zukofsky quotes Gertrude Stein from *Lectures in America* on how writers used to present but then they started to explain. Stein identifies this historical turn as happening mainly in the 19th century but Zukofsky adds that "explication" was going on long before that, implying forever (168-169). Zukofsky's counter-effort is to emphasize meaning as performative over explanation, and so the evocation of singing and telling stories in the opening passage stresses the active binding or kinship of teller and hearer, author and reader rather than the more abstract "meaning" or communication of a specific message.

The tri-partite patterns that are introduced in this opening passage appear often in *Bottom* and throughout Zukofsky's writings, and the commonality among them is that they suggest a narrative trajectory from the concrete or phenomenological to the more abstract. The problem of abstraction in Zukofsky and modernism generally is well-known, but what needs to be stressed is that Zukofsky never simply condemns abstraction and clearly in many respects he is, as a poet, unusually attracted to various sorts of abstract discourses and formalisms. The tri-partite patterns are definitions, by which the abstract is always a relative and comparative term or state. Problems arise when the relatively abstract forgets or represses

[7] The closest reading of this opening passage is by Hatlen (220-224), to whom I am indebted. Also relevant are remarks written around the same time as the composition of "A"-12 in *Bottom* 104 and *Prep+* 55.

its necessary relation with the sensual, whereas the ideal would be some proportional balance. Surely this is one reason Zukofsky so frequently evokes music in his work: is music abstract or sensual? In Zukofsky's work music tends to represent a realized proportion where this question is rendered beside the point, although in many specific instances it may be more accurate to say music represents the desire for that state, sometimes called silence. While the emphasis or persistent reminder is of the sensual basis of knowledge, this never means a simple disparagement of abstraction or thought; indeed, the point is that there is no sense, but significant dangers, in talking about these as distinct. Just after the opening passage we have been examining, there is a condensed quotation from *Hamlet* whose sense is that sensation can never exist without thought or consciousness, "some quality of choice"—if Hamlet really did not care he would not "mope." This is a point Zukofsky finds echoed in Aristotle and Spinoza, both heavy traffickers in abstract discourse: that if the basis of knowledge is necessarily sensation (existence in the world), sensation is never merely passive empiricism but always already implies a degree of intentionality or interest in that world. This interest I take to be the "deep need" Zukofsky evokes in the opening line of the poem, apparently quoting Bach, which motivates the making of songs and stories and is the desire for concord, the sense of belonging in the world with others. This desire or need or love, as Zukofsky most often calls it, is what motivates whatever people do as individuals or as social complexes, but obviously if this means maintaining a sensual basis in the world that does not allow abstractions to become detached from that basis, then this means the acceptance of change, renewal, mortality.

The "need" evoked in the opening line of the movement is conceived by Zukofsky in Spinozian terms as the desire for concord. As Spinoza puts it, any being endeavors to continue its existence, which is the same as saying it strives to realize its maximum reality, power, activity, perfection. While a given being may realize a relative degree of power and activity within a relatively hostile environment (the "wracked cities" of "A"-9), this can never be as much as can be achieved in a relatively compatible environment. As Zukofsky paraphrases Spinoza, hate met by love can turn the former to love with the result that both beings are more than they could ever be while in conflict (233-234). In any case, this basic model crops up everywhere in Zukofsky: whatever humans do is motivated by an underlying aspiration for a sense of well-being (harmony, blessedness, music), and collectivities of humans (cities, societies, cultures) are manifestations of the same impulse. Our self-realization is not simply a matter of getting along with others, it is always already thoroughly implicated with all others, past, present and future.

The horse passage develops an elaborate conceit concerning cultural reproduction (175).[8] At a couple of points in "A"-12 Zukofsky equates hunting, sowing and composing (164, 175). If hunting and sowing indicate a basis in subsistence, cultures are never only that and on the basis of hunting and sowing even the "primitive" erect enormously elaborate social complexes that are about a good deal more than mere survival. So we compose, and "A"-12 is much concerned with how composing permeates our everyday existence and that of society. The horse here, as Scroggins has pointed out, represents Zukofsky's favorite image of himself as poet, although it can also just as readily be seen as representing anyone, or any horse. The horse here consciously and unconsciously repeats all past cultures, the active manifestation of an infinitely complex cultural process. The "shape of his ground" (note the echo from the Genesis in the opening passage) and certain activities seem constant with all past horses; that is, we assume there are certain essential commonalities between ourselves and all those who were before us as a ground for understanding them, which is their

[8] See Scroggins' discussion of this passage, *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge* (1998): 213-215.

continued existence in us. On this basis we recognize different cultures as interrelated, we recognize commonalities, although these relations are not necessarily or simply "influences" as commonly understood. The past as texts or memory exists in the present in common so that it is not necessarily Aristotle who influences Shakespeare but both look at each and affect each other—we read between them. Although the ground is worn and in common, individual horses' hooves give off sparks that are similar but unique, each spark different yet they form families, although their similarities may be arbitrary. These horse sparks might be interpreted allegorically in a number of ways: as the poet's poems, as the composing anyone does in work or in living, as the meanings each makes or sees. In any case each horse makes or sees according to his nature, which Zukofsky glosses as "Nothing but reason—love—" (179). The equation of nature and reason here is Spinozian, with love as Zukofsky the poet's additional translation. We are talking about the "deep need" of the opening line.

It is entirely characteristic of Zukofsky to present such a big view of cultural reproduction in a rather light manner, as an instance of metaphysical wit. We have here Zukofsky's assumption of a textual field in which questions of origin or priority are arbitrary: we find ourselves as a "center" already within this infinitely complex, interrelated and overdetermined space. It is within and out of this "center" that we compose, whether we call that composing subsistence or aesthetics there is no untangling their complex of motivations, and we repeat, recycle, rearrange what and where we find ourselves, we participate in cultural (re)production in whatever we do and in so doing repeat in the sense of continuing all the past. This, I have suggested, is the basis of what I have called the thickening method of "A"-12; that is, the poem does not cohere sequentially through development but by a constant complicating, retreading the same ground differently. An important aspect of this is that composing always implies that the part of the unique individual in any composition is minute compared to the material and formal cultural inheritance, so that one is always engaged in the renewal and perpetuation of others.

It is notable that each part of "A"-12 tends to begin somewhat off-hand, as if to suggest that one can start anywhere, or perhaps more precisely, one must simply start from wherever one happens to be. There is nothing inevitable about where one starts and where one ends up because in any case beginnings, middles and endings are always overdetermined, which is to say that where one starts and ends is absolutely determined (à la Spinoza). As we shall see, Zukofsky offers some quite explicit quotations from Spinoza on this matter. We always find ourselves here as an event in which all history and all presence is implicated. A starting question, such as "what shall I teach my son?" (161) accumulates possible materials, which may or may not be appropriate for a precocious eight year old, without ever coming to anything like a singular answer, since the answer is simply something like how to live in a world without prescriptive answers, or prescriptive forms-definitions for poems. Does a fugue come to an answer? Or does is simply tend to generate more fugues? Is the pleasure of a fugue in its total structure or in the experience of the movement of its texture? Hatlen has plausibly suggested that the appeal of Bach's *The Art of Fugue* for Zukofsky was simply that it is a compendium of fugal forms (220), but if its impulse seems to be to exhaust all possible fugal forms, it demonstrates the endlessness of their possibilities. Therefore from a modern perspective the fact that Bach broke off the "final" fugue as incomplete seems not merely appropriate but necessary.

Part 1

Part One is framed by the opening passage on beginnings and stories we examined above and by Zukofsky's well-known statement of his poetics as an integral of speech and music as lower and upper limits but otherwise seems quite scattered, even by the generally open standards of "A"-12. The first few pages are auspicious enough, with the opening

passage's themes of beginnings and creation, the announcement of the B-A-C-H theme and mention of *The Art of Fugue* promising the fugal ideal of a rational polyphonic structure, and finally a statement of metaphysical faith that the order of music is isomorphic with the order of the universe. In one sense, this last is simply a more grandiose statement of the inevitable intertwining of life and art. If it is assumed that this stands for a declaration of faith on Zukofsky's part, as in some sense it does, we might recall a much later complimentary quotation by the skeptical Henry Adams that all these manifold forms in the world ultimately manifest instinct, which while asserting a general order is a term that draws a limit to the rationally knowable (191-192). If we want to relate this to Spinoza, then "instinct" is the totality (Nature-God) within which we endeavor to endure and actualize ourselves but which remains largely beyond our comprehension except in formal terms—"the hidden" as he will paraphrase Spinoza later. In the only real interview he ever gave, Zukofsky says: "All you have to do is say 'yes' or 'no'" (*Pre*p+ 233); that is, you affirm or deny, and the stories you tell will necessarily follow from that assumption—not necessarily in what they say but in what they do. Although for Zukofsky if you say "no" but still say it in stories, you are actually saying "yes." As already discussed, Zukofsky's assumption is that we go about making order and sense regardless of our conscious intentions—call it instinct or "deep need." Despite this promising set of Bach related statements at the outset of "A"-12, Bach soon recedes and will only very intermittently make an explicit reappearance over the next 130 pages. Nevertheless, Bach has served his purpose as stating a certain stance or starting point whose implications will pervade the rest of the poem.

If we consider the disparate nature of most of part one in light of the pages near the end of the movement in which Zukofsky reviews his old notes and unrealized projects, then we might think of these early bits and pieces as further notes for possible development. In fact most of them do foreshadow themes that will be picked up later directly or indirectly, although often only after many intervening pages. We find mention of or materials related to Celia, Paul, Zukofsky's father, horses, polyphonic music, seeing, sensation, the *Odyssey*, history and transformation, Paracelsus, Niedecker. It would, however, be easy enough to note major players that are left out, such as Spinoza, Aristotle or Hasidic sages, and some pieces apparently remain dead-ends. There is, for example, at the bottom of page 129 a five line segment that seems a jumble, neither coherent together nor obviously introducing something to come. There are details that might be tenuously related elsewhere, such as the wood of the trees looking forward to the 200 year old spruce tree that through various transformations will become a violin and song (150, 157), or the mention of prophets anticipating the significant appearance of Zechariah in part four. But overall it remains an enigmatic, perhaps unfinished fragment. However, all of these segments might be taken as possible starting points, as one can or must start anywhere, and this should be understood not only in terms of themes or ideas but also of the diverse range of voices or verbal textures that will characterize the movement. The abrupt and disconcerting mixture of tonal registers is very characteristic of the later movements of *"A"*, and there is little doubt that by fugal form Zukofsky intended an attention to the structural possibilities of tonal similarities and difference as well as to thematic or imagistic variety. But some of these potential starting points appear to remain simply that: unrealized potential—a theme that will appear significantly later in the movement—which remain here as an indication that even a poem as compendious as "A"-12 cannot absorb everything. As large as "A"-12 is, we should keep in mind that it is placed within an even vaster work, so that what remains indigestible within the terms of the movement may (or may not) be picked up elsewhere.

The most sustained segment in part one is a condensed version of Act III, scene i of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Bottom directs the mechanicals in a rehearsal of their Pyramus and Thisbe skit in the woods, is transformed into an ass and becomes the beloved of

the Fairy Queen Titania. For Zukofsky this key scene of the play deals with the relationship between perception and reality. In his reading, the play satirizes the aristocratic characters obsessed with power, convention and a repressive rationality who would deny dreams or the imagination, whereas proper knowing resides with the lowly characters. Bottom makes no distinctions between the "real" world and that of the skit or of the world of dreams and fairies. He perceives them all equally and reacts to these shifting realities and also his own shifting fortunes with unfazed equilibrium born out of a balanced marriage of reason and love (133), which is simply love proper. Bottom, then, lays out the space for "A"-12 in which all will be allowed in on an equal basis but out of which the poet-reader aspires to compose harmonies, necessarily mobile and necessarily taking into account considerable dissonance. "A"-12 will offer some further versions of Bottom, one of whom is the young Paul, some of whose remarks could have been spoken by Bottom in fairyland, while another version is Zukofsky's father. Bottom might also be taken as a version of Zukofsky's ideal reader, never put off by strange and abrupt changes of context, always absorbed in the elaboration of detail and above all connecting with others—s/he loves.

The statement on poetics with which part one culminates offers another way to think about how "A"-12 coheres. The minimalist visual neatness of Zukofsky's statement no doubt largely accounts for its fame. However, it does manage to succinctly make a large claim about the poetics inherited from the Pound-Williams tradition, which does not so much reject certain conventions of poeticisms and poeticizing (proper poetic language) as reframe them in a vastly expanded field of language possibilities, indeed, within the full range of languages where poems can be plotted as an integral of speech and music. Zukofsky always insisted that all of his writings should be understood in such terms as a range of poetries, and "Poetry / *For My Son When He Can Read*" (1946) argues that there is no demarcation between poetic and scientific discourses. If this integral implies that poetry tends to aspire toward its actualization as music, it also insists on sensation or presence in the world as the grounds of any thinking, as evident for example very early in the quotation from *Hamlet*: "Sense sure, else not motion…" (127). If we chose to read this last quotation as an allusion (always risky in the case of Zukofsky), then this particular play is an apt example of the dangers of over-celebralization that forgets its own grounding in sensation. Hamlet's statement insists that bodily sensation always already implies choice, or in a Spinozian version also quoted in "A"-12 (and elsewhere): "the eyes of the mind are proofs" (130, 177; see *Bottom* 26, 94, 297, 325). "A"-12 will present many examples of the poetics of speech, such as the various remarks made by the very young Paul, as yet unhampered by thorough socialization. Near the end of "A"-12 there is a satiric quotation from a novel describing someone's effort at hyper-precise punctuation (259; see also *Prep+* 10, 147). Zukofsky was always interested in the creativity of the spoken vernacular, which is where one listens for the language's potential musicality—the play, the puns, the rhymes and the ungrammatically apt. Parole is where language endlessly generates variety and newness beneath its standardized forms. This relates to Zukofsky's vernacular version of Cavalcanti's canzone, "A foin lass bodders," as well as his later obsession with homophonic translation which listens to the possible mouthings of the texts. Music for Zukofsky, who begins by throwing off all the conventional ideas of musical technique in verse (especially meter), is these possibilities that lie latent within the language always waiting to become manifest and tried out. In this sense, it is not simply that poetry is speech that rises toward music, a kind of purification process, rather music is to be found already integral in speech—but music implies harmonies, the discovery of kinships in difference, a sense of the utopian. So the first part of "A"-12 is also a tuning of the reader to the range of tonal possibilities, which often in themselves sound rather trite and disconnected. But then it is the trite, mundane and ordinary that "A"-12 is very much concerned with

bringing into the space of the poem on equal terms with what would be considered more conventionally appropriate poetic and intellectual materials.

Part 2

The second major part of "A"-12 focuses on Zukofsky's father who had died the year before the poem was composed. Burton Hatlen is probably correct that the oblique two-line stanza that immediately follows the opening passage of "A"-12 refers to the death of Pinchos Zukofsky (127; Hatlen 227), although there it remains a strictly private reference except for the mention of a void, which echoing the Rig Veda passage must contain being and non-being. The second part falls into three segments, the first of which consists of various beginnings on the story of his father that seem to constantly drift off into seeming irrelevance (138-151), until finally the poet recounts the life of his father in a fairly straightforward narrative fashion (151-158), to which is added a coda of sorts consisting mainly of Hasidic sayings taken from Martin Buber. The first segment seems to be groping for a proper starting point and in the process sketches out various background or contextual dimensions that perhaps a straightforward narrative could not adequately accommodate. A high proportion of these "false" starts link Zukofsky's father with his namesake Paul. Beyond the obvious filial relations and continuities, with the poet situated as simultaneously son and father, Zukofsky is not simply attempting to grasp and express who his father was but is rereading his father in the present and living. Privately Zukofsky described his father as the only actual instance of Spinozian philosophy that he knew, [9] and indeed, he portrays him as a saintly figure who despite obvious hardships was full of life and seemed to instinctively communicate that sense to others. So Zukofsky begins by noting various instances when his young son (aged eight at the time of composition) sensed that quality in his grandfather and therefore to some degree carries it on within him (this motif appears in the early chapters of *Little*, which were composed the year before "A"-12).

One indication that "tradition" is not a sufficient term for the sense of social relatedness that Zukofsky evokes is that he makes no effort to identify himself with the Judaism of his father. Given his father's deep piety, Jewish themes figure prominently in this part of "A"-12 and appear significantly elsewhere as well, and because of the time at which the poem was written these themes necessarily take on added resonance. But the poet does not take advantage of the topicality of the poem by presenting the death of his father as the occasion for a rediscovery of his roots, much less a personal identification with the atrocities of recent history, the public revelations of which were still ongoing. This is not to deny that both are the occasion for the presentation of Jewish themes in "A"-12, but as a Jewish born poet writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War one could hardly imagine a more low key manner of going about it. At one point the poet says that he believes he would have said kadish for his father if he had asked him to (143). In the first instance this is, from the thoroughly secularized Zukofsky, an expression of respect and honor for his father, but at the same time it is a statement that he in fact feels no impulse to do so according to Jewish custom, and given the unassuming portrait he gives of his father, he knows perfectly well the latter would never have imposed such a request on him in any case. Of course one might take this part of "A"-12 as his elegy to his father, as it has so often been described, but one must note the lack of an elegiac or mournful tone throughout this part of the poem—his father is all about living.

I would like to consider one of those passages that makes a beginning at telling his father's story only to drift off somehow into seemingly disparate other topics. I refer to this as

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[9] Letter to Carl Rakosi, 6 Jan. 1931 (HRC 20.12); also 19 Dec. 1929 letter to Pound (*EP/LZ* 27).

an associative sequence because what seems disconnected has a logic of association from one stanza to the next, although this does not so much develop into an argument as compound complexity and relations. The sequence (140-143), which I isolate somewhat arbitrarily, is presented as 12 stanzas from 1 to 14 lines each, and I will begin by quickly tracing the associational logic between them. First Zukofsky mentions the Sabbath as a strictly orthodox Jewish observance, particularly the prohibition against spending money so everything must be prepared before Friday, which then moves to a specific observer of the Sabbath, Zukofsky's grandfather, who apparently had an outstanding singing voice that will in a sense manifest itself differently in the songs of his son, grandson and great-grandson. The following stanza jumps to the ark, the focus of Jewish prayer, and then the next begins somewhat abruptly, "The mind that proportioned in stone" (141), and segues into a scene of woods and flowers from and within which an alter is raised or "abstracted." We might detect here Zukofsky original tripartite pattern: a space or location in nature, a rhythm or prayer, and then stylization in rituals, alter and temple. While a primitive alter, made for example out of the trunk of a tree, can be movable or re-erected anywhere, like the ark or tabernacle of the Jews, eventually the tendency is to establish the symbol of the mind's proportions in a more permanent temple. However, instead of evoking the Temple of the Jews, Zukofsky moves in the next stanza to a distinctly Greek temple, which we might recognize is specifically the Parthenon, with the visitor-worshipper moving through it from the east and exiting west. This direction is the opposite of the direction which we were told Zukofsky's forefathers prayed, as they faced east toward Jerusalem, but this can as easily be read as complimentary as antithetical. As the worshipper exits the Parthenon and looks up at the western pediment, they see in the frieze the scene of the contest between Poseidon and Athena to decide the patron god(dess) of Athens. The next two-line stanza jumps to Odysseus, seemingly irrelevantly, until we recognize that this is an allusion to Tiresius' prophecy that Odysseus will, after returning home, again wander to foreign lands so far from the sea that the people will mistake his oar for a winnow—that is, the contrast or conflict between Poseidon and Athena, perhaps suggesting the contrast between a male warrior culture and that of a female agricultural one, although Athena is hardly an unambiguously feminine figure. Then we have a reference to contemporary fighting against communist insurgents in the mountains of northern Greece, traditionally believed to mark the entrance to Homer's Hades (where Odysseus finds Tiresius), followed by a one line stanza that summarizes the tendency of this larger sequence: division and conflict. Then follows a stanza mainly quoted from Joyce's *Stephen Hero* of some flippant remarks about Aristotle (with a parenthetical reminder that Aristotle fled Athens), followed by a reference to Philo, a figure who attempted to blend the intellectual traditions of Judaism and the Greeks, and then an enigmatic reference to Christ's passion, perhaps implying the intertwining of the Hebraic and the Greek in Christianity. The next stanza points out that the opening phrase of Genesis means literally in Hebrew "from the head" and seems to suggest that there are some unfortunate developments from this abstract starting point.[10] Finally the sequence comes full circle in a sense with Zukofsky's grandfather telling his father not to forget his faith when he emigrates and the mention that when he came to America his name, Pinchos, became Paul to those who found his original name unfamiliar, perhaps echoing the cultural confusion over Odysseus' oar.

There is much to chew on in this sequence, but nothing presents itself as fixed. This passage is learned yet does not require extensive knowledge or identification of specific sources to follow its associative logic. Its characteristic mixing of linguistic registers might be understood as a resistance to allowing a dominant tone to stand in as an interpretive key. There is a concern with the meaning of the Sabbath, of prayer, of alters and temples, as well

[10] On this and the preceding stanza mentioning Philo, see *Bottom* 104.

as a relation between Judaic and Greek religious-cultural traditions. The "mind that proportioned in stone" suggests that all this is related to a sense of proportion or of belonging in the world, but this sense of concord is countered with the introduction of the struggle between Poseidon and Athena, the contemporary insurgency in northern Greece and its inevitable consequence in refugees and "displaced persons" (D.P.'s). This displaced motif also shows up in wanderings of Odysseus, in Aristotle who at the end of his life fled Athens for fear of anti-Macedonian sentiment, in the immigration of Zukofsky's father and in the history of the Jews and their tabernacle generally. Further, there are suggestions of abstract tendencies: from the woods to a primitive alter made from a tree trunk to the portable ark of the Jews to the stone temple of the Greeks. But if there is a suggestion here of an imbalance of Greek reason and rigidity, this is complemented by the creation in Genesis that begins from the head and tends toward transcendence and aspirations of immortality, which may suggest not only that the Talmud is one of those foundational texts that establishes the idea of fixed law (a stone temple) but also that written texts generally generate such abstractions. The end of this particular stanza is enigmatic, but might be understood as suggesting that the Jews' prayers facing east toward the dawn attempt to preempt the "chaos" the sun reveals, that is, the overwhelming multiplicity of the everyday world. However, I have argued that we ought to resist the habit of reading definitive developments or arguments into Zukofsky's presentation and allow the bundling or constellation of the various elements to remain ambiguously, but fertilely interactive.

This passage evidences Zukofsky's anthropological interest, which manifests itself intermittently throughout his work. His interest is not in primitivism or some mythopoetic criteria of the more authentic, but in the manifold forms in which humankind objectifies a common desire, that "deep need." But "deep need," like instinct, is an empty concept, it is merely a beginning for the stories in which humans realize and act out their commonalities. In this passage we can recognize Hebraic and Greek versions of belonging and exile set in polyphonic relation, which may offer a degree of critique but without specifically privileging or identifying with one over the other. Although it appears to stray far afield, we can also recognize how this passage is part of the poet's portrait of his father, sketching the larger contexts, some of which he is unlikely to have been aware of, in which his own story of exile and home can be understood—at least from the perspective of his son. Although an exile as a Jew, as an immigrant, as a Yiddish speaker whose native culture all but disappeared during the Second World War, Zukofsky presents his father as someone who made a home, who was at home wherever and with whomever he happened to find himself and was in that sense blessed. But this segment also sketches a background and context for the poet himself and echoes the position he takes in "A"-4 of refusing to identify himself as a specifically Jewish poet and opting for a much broader confluence of inheritances that includes the Jewish as one among various strands.

The second part of "A"-12 is loosely framed by the references to Hasidic sages and anecdotal sayings, since very early there is mention of Baalshem, the founder of modern Hasidism, with a few of his remarks (139) and then the concluding section consists predominately of Hasidic anecdotes (158-161). Zukofsky's father was not Hasidic but strictly orthodox. However, Hasidism is not a homogenous movement, and what attracts Zukofsky in Martin Buber's small collection, *Ten Rungs* (1947), is specifically its anti-doctrinaire tendencies and its joyous acceptance of life in this world.[11] Quite a few of the anecdotes that

[11] On this section of "A"-12, see John Taggart, "Come Shadow Come and Pick This Shadow Up: On Louis Zukofsky," *Songs of Degrees: Essays on Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* (1994): 200-201. Except for the use of this small book, I am not aware that Zukofsky otherwise evidences any particular interest in Buber or Hasidism.

Zukofsky selects pose questions by disciples or students implying a more orthodox perspective to which the sage gives an unexpected response. These anecdotes often have something of a Zen koan quality about them, in that they are clearly intended to humorously jolt the listener out of their set habits of thought, although their wisdom is generally practical rather than esoteric. If the specifically Jewish references were removed from the quotations Zukofsky uses, their essential content might be found in many cultural contexts. In part one a "best man" passage composed from Chinese sources clearly express a related attitude (135-136). It is those manifestations of an attitude that asserts this worldly life is worth living that interests Zukofsky, and the account Zukofsky gives of his father is a concrete example of that life-view in action.

"A"-12 unquestionably gives greater prominence to Jewish materials than anywhere else in *"A"*, with the obvious exception of "A"-4. We will examine the use of Zechariah in parts four and five, but also notable is a passage on Jewish dancing instructors during the Middle Ages teaching Christians to dance in church (186), which clearly chimes with Baalshem and his followers who were known for their celebratory dancing. The Hasidic passages that conclude part two implicitly function as a homage to the general heritage of his father, the East European Yiddish culture that had been recently decimated, so that the death of Zukofsky's father and the perpetuation of his memory has larger than mere personal implications. While there are a few brief mentions of aspects of the Jewish catastrophe later in the poem, on this and other large socio-historical issues Zukofsky's manner after World War II is rarely to confront them head-on or to express condemnation or outrage. In the account of his father's life, Zukofsky gives no hint of why he immigrated to the U.S., and there is barely a hint of the anti-semitism he must have encountered. Mention of a jeering Italian might be such an incident, but Zukofsky's quite elliptical presentation puts all the emphasis on how his father's good nature apparently won over the mocker (153)—an instance of Spinoza's claim that love can negate hate into its opposite. Nevertheless, the first lines of the early Baalshem passage indicate clearly enough this harsher context of Jewish experience: "To get out the world alive / Despite, despite—" (139). Interestingly, the primary expression of injustice and prejudice in part two appears in the first substantial passage from Paracelsus, who complains of being "despised by the pack" and the hardships of his life, yet the passage ends with a strong affirmation of this life which is a "second paradise" (146).

Part 3

Part three is prompted by the question "what shall I teach my son?" (161), and the poet even sketches a possible course of study. However, although the philosophical materials that predominate could be taken as schoolish, the poet knows his son will have to learn for himself. The obvious overlap between "A"-12 and *Bottom* has often been noted, and presumably Zukofsky was working on the philosophical Part Two of *Bottom* at roughly the same time. Not only do many of the same quotations appear in both, especially from Aristotle and Spinoza, but Shakespeare is explicitly inter-related with the philosophers in this part of "A"-12. For most readers, however, "A"-12 is likely to serve as a better commentary on *Bottom* than the other way around. The latter's thesis that the eyes are to be trusted over the erring propensities of the mind appears a bit more straightforwardly in "A"-12 in four philosophers who affirm this world and the body, so that all knowledge must maintain its basis in sensual perception.

Before turning to these philosophers, it is worth looking at Zukofsky's course of study, which can also be taken as one of the many statements of poetics in this movement. Unfortunately the diagram with notes did not come out on facing pages (163-164), and consequently its layout is visually obscured. The diagram is organized in three categories—Man, Earth and Worlds—and underneath each are definitional expansions that indicate we

are dealing with: 1) the human, both individual and social, 2) the physical world that we perceive and in which we locate ourselves, and 3) the invisible, such as the laws of physics. These categories also outline spheres of discourse, all dealing with the "real" but manifesting different emphases and styles. As mentioned, all the philosophers featured in this part insist that these "Worlds," seemingly beyond immediate sense perception, can only be known through and in terms of our sensation of the physical "Earth." Separate from the diagram are added some notes positioned under the third category, although this could be simply because that is where there is free space for them. First there is the Biblical God in the Old Testament formula, "I am that I am," and then an alternative name, Euhius Euan, who the classicists inform us is Bacchus and will appear in the Lucretius passage two pages later. Beneath this we find that primordial binary of being and non-being stated three times: once in numerical terms (1, 0), once with simply a line drawn between the two terms, and finally repeated inside a circle labeled Substance. This is all rather elliptical, but I take it as significant that these notes, as I call them, are not directly connected to the diagram by a line yet are placed under the "Worlds" column. If the language of modern physics is one way to say the invisible that nonetheless we take to be a formulation of absolute reality or being, then the two notes offer different but not unrelated languages saying the "same" thing: first what we would usually call religious discourses (Biblical and classical or Hebraic and Greek), and then philosophical, "substance" being the great ontological term/question in the Western tradition (it is the necessary starting point for both Aristotle and Spinoza). The numerical formulation I take to implicate mathematics as the language of the real in modern physics. The fact that both of these notes feature a primordial duality recalls us to the basic interplay that is not only the theme of "A"-12 but its formal principle. Perhaps this is not immediately clear in the God-Bacchus note, but surely it is not happenstance that Zukofsky juxtaposes Judaic and Greek deities, one an absolute assertion of monotheistic being, the other a principle of polytheistic transformation (non-being). These do not represent alternative choices or truths but structurally generate each other. Finally there is an additional note that presumably applies to all of the above: that the texts of this course of study are things and the axiom or fundamental assumption is composition, and we have here the key equivalence mentioned previously between composing, hunting, sowing and making things—quite simply what anyone necessarily does in living. Of course hunting and sowing are also apt metaphors for Zukofsky's compositional practice. And so we have a poetics, as Zukofsky insisted in "Poetry / *For My Son When He Can Read*" (1946), that includes everything, that makes life present (*Prep+* 3), and this includes the multiplicity of discourses as manifold efforts to realize that presence.

The philosophers of part three appear in order of Lucretius, Aristotle (who is at times, as in *Bottom*, antithetically paired with Plato), Paracelsus and Spinoza, with the latter two presented more extensively then the others and to a degree alternating with each other, although not surprisingly Spinoza gets the final emphasis and will later lead off the stretto. It has become conventional wisdom to follow Barry Ahearn in identifying the "notes" of the B-A-C-H theme with Spinoza (Blessed), Aristotle (Ardent), Celia and Paracelsus (Happy) respectively, although these identification are not made in this part where the philosophers appear together.[12] Zukofsky reminds us that Lucretius' family name was Carus (164), so he might serve as the C note in this part, which makes a neat four philosophers. On the other hand, the identification of Paracelsus with H on the basis that his surname was von Hohenheim is nowhere alluded to in the poem or anywhere else in Zukofsky as far as I know. The identification is possible but strikes me as improbable, and the tagging of Paracelsus as

[12] *Zukofsky's "A": An Introduction* (1982): 125. Ahearn merely references Peter Crisp for these identifications of the B-A-C-H notes.

"happy" is rather incongruous. Undoubtedly Zukofsky does intend a fugal interplay of the four philosophers in the sense discussed above, but there is no need to find a neat fit with the B-A-C-H theme, which in any case is a suggestive model rather than a formal pattern. As one would expect, all four philosophers express variations on the diagrammic schema in which invisibilities are only knowable through sensual perception. These philosophers, as Zukofsky presents them, all retread similar ground, so it is not surprising that the horse passage discussed above appears at the center of part three. Besides representing a considerable historical span, these philosophers also vary significantly in verbal textures, so that if in one sense all say the same thing, they do so in a range of voices, which when juxtaposed offer an example of that thickening method I have suggested is characteristic of "A"-12 generally. Lucretius is introduced immediately following the diagrammed course of study with a quotation directly from Zukofsky's source translation: "[…] just as if what each of them fights for may not be the truth," which points out the variable ways of saying the real indicated in the preceding diagram.[13] Zukofsky would have appreciated Lucretius' ironic implication that the very insistence of any given argument betrays a self-doubt—with good reason since in the figural possibilities of language truth remains forever unfixed and what matters is each effort to performatively situate oneself in the world with others.

The first of two extended segments worked from Lucretius is a mythological allegory presenting a pageant of the seasons led by Venus and including Euhius Euan, who is associated with autumn and the turn toward mortality. In *Bottom* Zukofsky notes that although Lucretius presents the rational atomistic philosophy of Epicurus, he begins with an invocation of Venus, as if to evoke the tactile, sensual and procreative basis of what may seem a highly abstract philosophy (*Bottom* 112). These different ways of verbal seeing are central to the concerns of *Bottom*. Lucretius' allegorical pageant moves from spring to winter, in other words it is also an image of transformation and mortality, and, as Zukofsky's following segment emphasizes, Lucretius locates the source of superstition and irrationality in the fear of death and the attempts to avoid it. That the acceptance of change and mortality is simply normal and nothing to fear is the underlying moral message of his philosophy (for Zukofsky's critique of the limitations of Lucretius' approach, see *Bottom* 112).

The main passage from Lucretius (165-167) summarizes key topics of the original: particularly fear of death and the ground of sensual perception. According to Lucretius fear of death gives rise to all manner of false knowledge, particularly religion and the belief in the afterlife. The flip side of this fear, the desire for or belief in immortality is an abstraction that attempts to cancel through repression the mortality from which it necessarily arose. In the central segment of this passage Zukofsky finds in Lucretius the most explicit echo of his *Bottom* thesis, that the senses must be trusted and not be overridden by the mind. Again, the point is not the outright rejection of abstraction, which would be as odd a way to characterize Lucretius as it would be Zukofsky, but that the mind must remain sited in the body. The way Spinoza puts this, as the poem will quote a bit further on, what the mind thinks is the body (232), in other words the only content that thought can have is what the body perceives. Although this lengthy Lucretius passage is almost entirely constructed from bits of adapted quotations from Zukofsky's source translation, at the crucial moment asserting that the mind and eyes see together he interpolates the phrase, "the shape of their ground," explicitly echoing the Genesis passage at the opening of the movement. Perception-thought cannot happen in a void but is necessarily grounded in a given site. The figure-image itself is interesting in that from a certain perspective, from above or relatively abstracted, a ground

[13] Zukofsky's source is Cyril Bailey's translation of Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)* (1910). The immediate context of Lucretius' remark is a consideration of various indeterminable theories explaining the phases of the moon.

has no shape and is simply the foundation upon which one bases anything, but if you are actually situated on the ground, that is, are in it, then it does have shape and contour that very much effects one's perspective and always implies or is contiguous with other grounds.

Aristotle's significance in "A"-12 and elsewhere in Zukofsky's work (most notably *Bottom*) is hardly puzzling. Here (169-170) Zukofsky gives a condensed quotation of the famous opening sentences of the *Metaphysics*: by nature humans desire (= love, Zukofsky interpolates) to know and at the same time delight in their senses for their own sake, above all in sight because it reveals differences. This emphasis on sight segues immediately into another well-known passage from the *Nichomachean Ethics* that states that seeing and pleasure are formally analogous in that both are experienced as complete in themselves. In other words, existence is necessarily in the world and is not merely passive but interested in the world in which it participates. In *Bottom*, seeing for Zukofsky, following on Aristotle's suggestion, is a figure for existence in the world generally, which is always an affirmation of the world, and it is only when thought splits itself from this being in the world that it posits an eternal lack. Again we see this problem of abstraction that would posit some real beyond the world that is necessarily the ground of any such real in the first place. The point is anything but original and appears endemic to modernity generally. In any case we have Aristotle's authority asserted here against the Forms of Plato. However, Zukofsky apparently qualifies this critique of Plato by suggesting the latter wrote a "double palimpsest," at times erasing and at times enlivening nature—in other words we have here an explicitly figural reading of Plato in which the argument for the Forms is countered by the sensuous manner of his writing.[14]

Paracelsus is a major player in "A"-12 with three substantial passages worked from his writings (the last some five pages in length) and there are numerous other scattered references and quotations. This is somewhat surprising given Zukofsky's general disinterest in occult or esoteric writers—usually he is the most canonical of readers. The selection of Paracelsus' writings that he used was given to him by Edward Dahlberg on its publication in the Jung oriented Bollingen Series in 1951.[15] Dahlberg, who certainly was interested in such writers, was for a short time a colleague of Zukofsky's at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute. Aside from his habit of putting everything he read to work, Zukofsky was clearly intrigued by Paracelsus who he used in both "A"-11 and "A"-12, but thereafter Paracelsus disappears and even in *Bottom* he is only mentioned once in passing. Compared with the other philosophers, Paracelsus offers the richest verbal texture to work with, and this is integral to his style of thought. Like most esoteric writers, Paracelsus' thinking centers on the interrelations of the microcosm and macrocosm, and therefore his style of argument is fundamentally metaphorical, an endless series of analogies. This readily translates into the relationship between body and mind: on the one hand the "Little World" is that of the human, the body, the elements, the earth, and on the other the "Great World" is that of the heavens, light (elsewhere Paracelsus speaks of three worlds, which might fit with Zukofsky's tripartite diagram). These worlds are distinct but interpenetrate and so become an image of the proper proportion of sensation and thought that is Zukofsky's perennial concern. The individual

[14] In *Bottom*, Zukofsky makes a similar move with Aristotle and Plato: first, as we would expect, agreeing with Aristotle's critique of the latter, but then turning this around by suggesting that the mytho-poetic manner of Plato's *Timaeus* is something of a linguistic critique of Aristotle's own abstract tendencies (74-75). Cf. the following remarks on Paracelsus. See also *Prep+* 55.

[15] Zukofsky's sole source for Paracelsus is *Selected Writings* edited by Jolande Jacobi (1951), which compiles and organizes into topics short selections from throughout Paracelsus' copious writings.

mirrors the macrocosm but in limited form, whereas the sky, closer to but less than the totality of heaven, is a collective image of humanity within which the individual can realize a greater self (178). In Paracelsus' endless spinning out of analogous images, Zukofsky reads an active effort to realize a proportional being in the larger world. If Paracelsus is the least philosophical of the four philosophers as conventionally understood, it is because he is the closest to being a poet as traditionally understood, albeit a rather verbose one.

There are three substantial Spinoza passages in part three, of which I will briefly consider the latter two.[16] The second passage (184-185) quotes perhaps Zukofsky's favorite Spinoza passage on "merriment." For Spinoza, any entity strives to maximize itself according to its nature, to increase its power, activity, reality, being, perfection. To the degree its existence moves in a positive direction, it experiences pleasure, and pain is simply the lessening of one's being, activity, power, etc. Physical pleasures are not only good but necessary to realize one's power and being, and this extends to society ("cities"), which to the degree it enlarges rather than deteriorates one's endeavor to realize one's nature is a positive necessity. We cannot realize ourselves without others. The common stereotype of Spinoza's philosophy as aspiring to an ideal of isolate stoic intellectualism has little to do with Zukofsky's Spinoza. The next Spinoza passage, which concludes part three (187-189), takes up another favorite and famous argument: the dismissal of free will, that is, that we can never be fully conscious of our actions. Spinoza rises to his wittiest when pointing out how the functions of the body, dreams, sleep walking and so on demonstrate the absurdity of free choice, and Zukofsky often quotes from these passages. As mentioned, for Spinoza we by definition always strive to maximize ourselves by and according to our natures, regardless of whatever we consciously think we want, but this endeavor to endure and maximize ourselves is immanent in and therefore determined within the totality. We can never have more than a very limited perspective on the infinite complexity that determines our existence. Zukofsky refers to this overdetermination at the beginning of this segment as "the hidden" (in Boyd's translation Spinoza has "latent external causes"), so that according to our nature it is impossible to desire to commit suicide, as our nature by definition is the urge to maximize oneself. However, our imagination can be overwhelmed by external factors into believing it must or desires to extinguish itself, but this is contrary to our nature or definition, in which existence is necessarily integral.

In part four where Zukofsky expands the poem out into these cities, into the social world and history, he at one point explicitly echoes Spinoza's rejection of self-willed suicide ("that a man/men out of the need of their nature should try not to exist" (187, 197)). This leads into a short catalog exemplifying perversions of human nature during or immediately after World War II: the brutal suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the *Exodus* refugee ship incident involving Holocaust survivors, and then some oblique images of frozenness and desperate hunger (197-198). All of these are picked up from newspaper accounts, with the frozen images combining a report on a "human icicle" (a man rescued from an icy lake) with one on the winter retreat of the Germans from the Soviet Union, while the final bit is from an account of a liberated POW camp. In Spinozian terms, both perpetrators and victims suffer degradation of their natures, that is, the realization of their proper being, reality, power, perfection, which ultimately must be realized in common: "Nothing human in common / After being lashed in common" (198). The punning pivot on "lashed" is typical Zukofsky—

[16] Zukofsky's Spinoza prior to 1960 was the Everyman Library edition of the *Ethics*, translated by Andrew Boyd, which included "On the Correction of Human Understanding." Given how much Zukofsky composes directly out of his source texts, it is unfortunate that a number of commentators on Zukofsky's use of Spinoza prefer more contemporary translations of Spinoza.

we are necessarily lashed (bound) together, so that to lash (whip) others is ultimately to lash oneself: degradation is mutual. The ideologies of hate and violence are themselves species of suicide, as they undermine the very grounds for one's own self-realization in the necessary commonality of our fate. This is the simplest implication of the insistence on this-worldliness and sensual perception.

Part 4

The fourth and fifth parts of "A"-12 expand out beyond the familial and intellectual relations that predominate in the previous parts to considerations of history and society, although this is a matter of relative emphasis rather than something new. These two parts are tied together by the significant scattered presence across them of the prophet Zechariah, with a sustained passage near the beginning of part four and then another, strongly utopian passage at the end of part five. Part four opens with the poet looking out at night across the East River from Brooklyn to Manhattan and the New York Harbor. Specifically he focuses on the ferry terminal at the south end of Manhattan, an area not far from where he grew up that evokes childhood memories (Castle Garden, Aquarium) and even earlier history (Jenny Lind), as well as being a transport link with Brooklyn that he no doubt often used. The harbor is a subjectively experienced nexus to elsewhere, both spatially and temporally, one's necessary connection and participation in the totality. Images of waters flowing out to the rest of the world and ships that pass over them recur periodically (see especially 211-213); trains are mentioned as arriving only to go out again (193). Even more important is the broader connections represented by friends: both Reznikoff and Niedecker make significant appearances. Spinoza reappears to reiterate our immanent condition, that our actions and thoughts are determined by innumerable factors largely beyond our conscious knowledge and control. Also these two parts include by far the most references to contemporary history—the Korean War, the atom bomb, McCarthyism and various other residual consequences of World War II.

The handling of Zechariah is characteristically Zukofskian and therefore characteristically disorienting. Interestingly, the introduction of Zechariah, a few pages into part four, is simultaneous with the first reference to Reznikoff, and the two lines mentioning fathers and prophets seem in one sense clearly related to "A"-4 and the role of the Jewish heritage in Zukofsky's work (193). Zechariah certainly strikes a very different chord than that of the Jewish materials in part two related to the poet's father and the Hasidic sayings. Zechariah's mixture of apocalyptic denunciation and utopian hope, however, is well suited to this part's concern with current history in the aftermath of World War II. Many of the short bits from the prophet seem merely slipped into the larger continuity of the poem, as if substituting for the voice of the poet or related in some way to this or that momentary point. However, the two sustained passages are worth examining more closely. Zukofsky selects mostly short phrases or punched out sentences from throughout the book of Zechariah, stitching them together without concern for the order or local meanings of the source text. As mentioned, this is distinct from his handling of, for example, Spinoza, Lucretius or Paracelsus where for the most part he is intent on being faithful to the meaning of the source, even if highly compressed. While Zukofsky maintains Zechariah's broad alteration of utopian promise and denunciation, his arrangement is determined by the interests of his own poem. The first long passage (194-195) mentions the joining of nations "by my spirit" rather than by might, but otherwise the imagery of this passage is of social disaster, including conflict between the sons of Zion and Greece, looking back to previously examined relations between the Hebraic and the Greek. Also here and in the passage shortly following, Zukofsky draws out the theme of natural and unnatural use of language that will recur prominently in part four. Here he finds bits in Zechariah to condemn language as power, the control of all

languages by a few, which is contrasted with the language of the prophets that defined a way of mutual living "according to our ways." This passage ends with an image of utopian promise, children playing in the streets, which will then immediately be picked up by other materials (in this case from Delacroix's *Journals*) as an image of singing children and various music related details—in *"A"* the crushing of children's dreams is a frequent figure for social failure (see the end of "A"-10). This utopian image is immediately preceded by a line, "*Guile helped forward the affliction*," which will be repeated twice in the next two pages but with variations of the first word that make the relation with the unnatural use of language explicit. In fact, "guile" is added by Zukofsky, a rare instance of tampering with the otherwise strict quotations from Zechariah. It should not surprise us that these repetitions with slight variations—"false words…," "whoever speaks / is ready / to …"—frame one of the low points of "A"-12, the passage discussed earlier (but appearing in part four) involving the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, displaced persons, the human icicle and so on—images and examples of a debased humanity.

This use of the more apocalyptic aspect of Zechariah near the beginning of part four is counterbalanced by a two page passage at the end of part five that is explicitly utopian. The horses that appear in Zechariah would naturally attract Zukofsky, and in the last passage he draws on their prominent appearances in two of Zechariah's dream visions plus another mention of horses to finish off with. Both images of four different colored horses represent guardians of peace who patrol in all directions—a final emphasis on the concern with the wider collective body. In between these two visions Zukofsky places the appearance of "my servant the BRANCH," a symbol of the messiah or simply of utopian promise. In the concluding segment Zukofsky the poet identifies himself with the words of Zechariah: there is an emphasis on seeing "grass in the field" (immediately preceding this final Zechariah passage is a stanza on Whitman and the *Leaves of Grass*), on Beauty, a declaration that he is no prophet and finally horses with bells, which might be taken as an image of poets making music. The entire passage is quite wonderfully done, but the foregrounding of such heavily allegorical language, quite unusual in Zukofsky, marks its self-conscious utopianism. Although this is necessarily the proper task of the poet, as Zukofsky sees it, the gap between this language and present reality is all too glaring.

Part four falls into two main segments. The first is presented as one continuous 18-page meditation without any stanza breaks that begins with the poet reflecting on historical change, specifically the pattern of changes in the cities of Boston and New York, and somehow wends its way to more political reflections that obliquely comment on his work and self of the 1930s (189-207). The second segment begins with a couple stories Zukofsky heard from Reznikoff then breaks up into more miscellaneous pieces among which are several referring to ships and the sea, thus looping back to the opening harbor setting. I want to focus particularly on the last several pages of the first long segment, which includes a substantial passage on Stalin that segues into a poem by Mao Zedong and then a couple pages later winds up with Zukofsky's last explicit reference to Marx (203-207). These pages are surely intended as a reflection on his earlier politics of the 1930s in light of subsequent history. The Stalin passage consists of a catalog of remarks by the Soviet leader picked up from newspapers that are oddly miscellaneous, even trivial, and not as unambiguously self-indicting as one might expect. Stalin is not here specifically condemned as the betrayer of the revolution or the committer of atrocities, which no doubt Zukofsky felt was evident enough without adopting a stance of moral righteousness—not to mention that Zukofsky himself had often enough defended Stalin's pragmatism prior to World War II (see commentary on the late 1930s). Rather Zukofsky's point is not that this or that remark is intrinsically self-damning as that taken as a sampling they evidence a purely opportunistic ethos, a speaker who habitually sings whatever tune best takes advantage of the given circumstance. Here and

elsewhere Zukofsky refers to this as diplomatic or "ambassadorial" speak (201, 205). This critique is not merely focused on Stalin but designates a significant historical shift from the 1930s. That period was an era of ideology in which public political discourse seemed to represent three distinct political visions and versions of the future that were struggling to destroy each other, and it was specifically within that context that Zukofsky necessarily conceived his work. In the aftermath of World War II this gave way to an era of propaganda in which public political discourse no longer represented a political vision but was subsumed by the Manichean struggle that was the Cold War in which everything was merely a reflex in response to its other. In the case of Zukofsky, the disappearance of politics as previously understood means the evaporation of historical narratives, about which he was skeptical to begin with, as a vision of an improved society. For all its modernist presentation, "A"-8 nonetheless works with historical materials and thus necessarily implies historical narratives, however complicated by the dynamicism of the collage method and the effort to create a polyphonic text. In "A"-12 those materials and their implied narratives have disappeared in a situation where there remains no viable representation of a utopian politics.

However, the Stalin passage segues into and is explicitly contrasted with a version of Mao's most famous poem, "Snow," which rejects the great figures or leaders of the past to assert that the real heroes are to be found today. That is, the age in which great leaders, such as Emperors or Stalin, are viewed as the driving forces of history must now give way to a history determined by common people. It is difficult for us today, particularly in light of subsequent events, to read this passage of "A"-12 as other than naïve—less because of the implicit judgment of Mao as the faith in poetry as a convincing expression of political sincerity. The comparison here is stacked against Stalin who is represented by a cluster of media sound bites, while Mao by a poem. But it does express a belief that whereas the political discourse of Marxism was currently dead in the West, there was still a viable revolutionary politics possible elsewhere, and Mao's poem suggests the possibilities of new historical narratives.[17] Although this certainly does not mark the end of Zukofsky's interest in China, it is his last political mention of China, as well as of political Marxism.

The lengthy first segment of part four concludes with the last explicit reference to Marx in *"A"*, stating that Marx wrote fugues on a theme from Aristotle that boils down to the claim that there are ethical and unethical (natural and unnatural) ways of relating with others (207).[18] Zukofsky's reference is to a famous footnote in *Capital* in which Marx states that Aristotle intuited the distinction between use and exchange value. Zukofsky's characterization of Marx's writings as fugues aligns the latter with the poet and his motivation as that evoked in the "deep need" of the opening line of this poem. On the one hand this passage indicates that Zukofsky has not simply repudiated the underlying

[17] When Zukofsky found this poem in the *New York Times Magazine* (19 Dec. 1948), it was probably for him and most other readers the first inkling that Mao was a poet. Mao did not allow his very slim body of poems to be published until 1957, when they were immediately translated and widely disseminated in the West. The Chinese Communists came to power in the latter part of 1949, and reliable information on Mao and his movement was scarce or difficult to assess given the Cold War climate, particularly since most news about China in the West was filtered through the lenses of the Nationalist Chinese, who still officially represented China in, for example, the U.N. and who referred to the Communists as "bandits." The article in which Zukofsky found Mao's poem, entitled "The Man Who Would Be China's Lenin," was an effort to figure out just who Mao was. The People's Republic had entered the Korean conflict the year previous (Oct. 1950) to the composition of "A"-12.

[18] Although it is sometimes claimed that Marx entirely disappears from the later Zukofsky, he is used for at least a couple lines in "A"-22 (532).

understanding of Marx's thought expressed in the song to labor presented in "A"-8. On the other, however, Zukofsky has shed Marx of any revolutionary efficacy, at least as regards the West, and turned him into essentially an ethical thinker, and in so doing aligned Marx with Spinoza. To point out that this mention of natural and unnatural use refers to the distinction between use value and exchange value is true but reductive, unless we recognize this articulation embodies a larger social analysis that attempts to account on the most fundamental level for human interaction. The problem is abstraction in its more nefarious forms. Immediately preceding the Stalin passage is an extended passage explicitly addressing the familiar problem of abstraction, and Zukofsky calls on the authority of Spinoza for a definition of the source of abstraction, which is simply that the imagination, overwhelmed by the bombardment of images from the infinite affects experienced by the body, becomes confused and so blurs the differences and imagines many images under one attribute (202-203). For Spinoza such generalizations or abstractions are both the source of knowledge and of error. As such this is a simple enough explanation of the necessity of abstraction, in which can be recognized the unavoidable problem of representation. The insistence that natural and unnatural use is a matter of relations between "bodies," clearly echoes the opening passage of "A"-12. This emphasis on the physiological basis of existence with others, is not only characteristic of a poet atuned to science but also of those philosophers highlighted in part three: Aristotle, Lucretius, Spinoza and even Paracelsus. For all the differences in their articulations, all understand the self as recognizing itself in and enlarged by others. Ultimately, unnatural use is the subsumption of particulars and differences under generalizations that results in interacting with people and things as if they were ideas, which has the paradoxical effect of making things appear autonomous and self-contained, distinct from ourselves and each other. This tendency must be countered by an enlivened sensuousness of others, not least the sensuousness of ideas.

The disappearance of viable historical narratives does not entail the rejection of history, which is embedded in the material writing itself constructed so as to release or activate the dead in the present. From this perspective, Zukofsky simply pursued with ever more rigor the implications of his poetics so that the location of history or politics necessarily resides within the body of the text understood as quite literally going down to the somatic elements of the language and their articulations. However, there is little value in expecting to extract an explicit political position from any of this since the action is immanent in the texts, that is, enacted by the reader combining with the force field of the poem in the endeavor toward self-realization, which is identical to bonding with or taking on the potential social energy embodied in the language construct. I would argue that there remains here an essential continuity with the position articulated in "Modern Times" and the idea that the text is performative in the act of reading (see commentary on the later 1930s).[19]

Part 5

As mentioned, part five is marked off by references to a walk in the woods taken by the poet and his son (213-231), which might be taken as having Dantesque connotations since this part will rehearse a descent into the underworld—the poet actually slips at the beginning and makes a reference of sorts to God at the end. But at the same time, we have to recognize the self-consciously humorous and mundane manner such an allusion is handled, which as we

[19] While Zukofsky always felt a tendentious politics was antithetical to poetry, after World War II he would flatly reject any suggestion that poetry is or could be political. In this he was a man of the 1930s for whom politics necessarily meant affiliations and practical action, as embodied in such figures as Jefferson and Lenin in "A"-8. See 12 Nov. 1959 letter to David Ignatow (*SL* 262).

will see is characteristic of Zukofsky's use of allusions, particularly to Homer, in the latter parts of "A"-12. The most significantly features of this part are the incorporation of a number of letters: one addressed by the poet to Lorine Niedecker, which is closely followed by a section of letters from the common solider Jackie as he makes his way toward the conflict in Korea. In one sense these latter letters function simply to bring the major news event of the day, the Korean War, into the poem in an everyday manner—letters as an example of affected and affecting bodies. The incorporation of letters into the modernist long poem was of course already well established by the *Cantos* and *Paterson*, but it is notable how low-key, even banal these letters are. They are ordinary letters from a typical working-class acquaintance describing the hum-drum life of a common soldier being trained and shipped out to war. There is little introspection or expression of anguish, only hints of anxiety in the off-hand humor of letters written more out of a sense of dutifulness than by someone who considers writing a vehicle for self-expression. As such the letters remind the poet and the reader of the grim events taking place in the larger world beyond the predominately intellectual and familial sphere of "A"-12 in what might be described as a neo-realistic mode: banal, non-heroic, non-professional and without even anything that qualifies as an event (the letters approach but break off before Jackie actually arrives in Korea). This point is both emphasized and complicated by counterpointing the letters with brief snippets from Book XI of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' approach to and descent into the underworld. Clearly this counterpointing is not intended as a typical bit of modernist irony at the expense of Jackie, the theme of how far we have fallen from the heroic days, and therefore might be read in an equally modernist manner as drawing out the heroicism of the common man. There seems to me a small truth in this latter reading, but if we recall Mao's poem, then the emphasis becomes somewhat different, as the entire representation of history as determined by heroes and leaders is jettisoned for history as a density of common bodies.

This takes on added coloring since the Odysseus snippets obviously echo Pound's famous opening to the *Cantos*—even beginning at the same point in the narrative.[20] Certainly there is an implied critique of Pound—the heroic propensities of his poem, as well as his conception of the poet and reading of history. When Pound began the *Cantos* with his adaptation from Book XI, the historical implication was the need to seek knowledge for a new direction that would break out of the cycle of wars and finally come home, whereas of course Jackie's descent is straight back into yet another war. Jackie is more like one of the rowers with their ears plugged so that Odysseus can pursue his privileged experiences. We might also read this counterpointing as an integer roughly analogous to the definition of Zukofsky's poetics as an integer of speech and music, which here becomes the integer of banal letters and high literature that will not allow the latter to repress and forget the former. What is typically unsettling about Zukofsky's presentation is that it is difficult to settle on a tone or perspective. In Zukofsky's conclusion to this segment, Jackie's last letter is followed by a stanza that first quickly introduces Jackie by recalling the first time that Zukofsky met him, then continues with the Odyssean narrative: now in Hades the adventurers pay their respects to the dead, make their blood sacrifice (a detail not included here) and the dead come rushing forward, at which point Zukofsky breaks off with a comma. Here the Homeric narrative stands in for and continues that of Jackie, whose specific fate we are not told, although obviously he represents those sacrificed in war generally (the real-life Jackie did not in fact die in Korea). Where Zukofsky drops Homer with a comma, the Odyssean narrative reaches a climax with the appearance of Tiresius who will prophesize Odysseus' future: his

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[20] Zukofsky's *Odyssey* in "A"-12 is an abbreviated version of his own adaptation included in *A Test of Poetry* (4-5), which he came up with when he did not receive permission to use Pound's translation from Canto I.

return home but at the cost of losing all his men. It is a characteristic example of Zukofsky's wit that he introduces his Tiresius in the form of Gertrude Stein, who surveys the devastation of a bombed German city and then advises young GIs that the arrogance of victory will ensure the repetition of war.[21]

Jackie's letters are in a sense framed by another from Zukofsky himself to Niedecker, which marks a key moment in the movement as a whole. This letter explicitly responds to another we do not see from Niedecker that announced the death of her mother (echoing the recent death of his father), which Zukofsky acknowledges in the opening of his letter but then somewhat unexpectedly turns to a discussion of poetry generally and his own in particular.[22] Zukofsky's main point echoes that of the horse passage: that the poet can never fully know nor predict the impulses and consequences of his poem, and it is this lack of full consciousness that determines that all of one's works are in a sense one, both interrelated and driven by an underlying pulse. Therefore the poem is never fixed, never lifted out of the complexes from which it arose and continues to re-arise in reading. As Zukofsky rereads his own earlier work, in part guided by Niedecker's critical response to it, he finds that he cannot recover what he originally meant except after several rereading, when the original intention becomes a present intention. Zukofsky talks about this in terms of "facts" (the quotation marks are his), which he finds in rereading are not fixed, in other words are not "facts" as that term is conventionally understood. Zukofsky concludes by encouraging Niedecker to continue reading back to him his own work so that he himself can better understand it. The work, then, exists and lives in its rereading, the composition constantly recomposing itself, which to the degree that it expresses that "cadence" peculiar to the poet lives on in the reading by others. The paradox of this "cadence" is that it is what marks a given poet's work as absolutely unique and individually coherent, while at the same time originates absolutely beyond the conscious intention of the poet—in other words, it is determined by the infinite complex in which the poet is a moment or event.[23] As Pound had emblematicized with his layered translation of Homer in Canto I, the souls of the dead who come crowding from below are the texts embedded in any writing who insistently assert their presence. The abrupt turn from the opening mention of the death of Niedecker's mother to the discussion of poetry is meant to console Niedecker by first turning attention to what lives between them as friends, their mutual composing together as poets in which they participate in and extend the life of each other's work—at this time virtually each other's only outside readers. But by implication Niedecker's "cadence" includes the extended existence of her mother, and it is there that whatever consolation for Niedecker's sense of loss is to be found. In relation to this point, it is worth recalling "A"-11, in which Zukofsky addresses the poem (the address is the poem) to console his wife and son after he dies by reminding them that he continues to live in or as the poem and therefore in them as they read it (the opening of "A"-18 returns to this idea).

This letter to Niedecker is further complicated by the presence of the poet's young son to whom the letter is being read. The continuation of this setting appears several pages on the other side of Jackie's letters (actually twice, at 224 and 226-227) where the poet explains that what he means is that when someone sees something they want to share it so that there is

[21] Zukofsky quotes directly from a piece of reportage Stein wrote for *Life* magazine, "Off We All Went to See Germany" (6 Aug. 1945).

[22] Niedeker's mother died in July 1951, which means her letter almost certainly arrived when "A"-12 was well underway.

[23] In the brief preface to the 1967 edition of *"A" 1-12* that he subtitled "a poem of a life," Zukofsky immediately added "—and a time," explaining that his poem attempted to sound its time and "hear again" what of then echoes in the now (*Prep*+ 228).

more of it. The poet is actually cribbing from Plato's *Protagoras*, but it is perhaps even more relevant to recognize that this echoes Spinoza on merriment: that there can never be too much of it because one's increased actuality or self-realization implies a maximum sharing with others. Or one could evoke Aristotle on friendship (*Bottom* 91-92), which means something much broader than the usual definition of this term to cover the innate desire to bond with others (Zukofsky prefers the term love) on the basis of which humans are the political animal. In any case, here the poet spells out the intention of his letter (of any letter) and his response to Niedecker's announcement of her mother's death. An enigmatic detail is the appearance of the line, "A voiced look gone" (227), interpolated between the poet's quotation of his letter for the second time and his explanation to his son. This echoes a phrase that appears in both halves of "A"-9 (107, 110), but what does it mean? One possibility is that a voice (letter, poem or any expression) expresses a look (experience, thought) always already gone—the gap between the real and its signification, a permutation on the death motif. Yet at the same time that voice is the afterlife of that look, and the more so that anyone hears, repeats or otherwise participates in that voice. Again we can recognize Zukofsky's interest in bodies affecting bodies, the endless process of interchange and transformation that is the social.

Another, half hidden detail of the poet's letter is of interest because the earlier work Zukofsky refers to and that Niedecker is reading back to him is pretty clearly "A"-8.[24] This would also explain why Zukofsky's letter puts particular emphasis on the term "fact," since we can readily enough identify "A"-8's propensity for "fact" in its preoccupation with history, science and materialist thought, which are formally manifest in the broadly documentary style of the movement. The epic argument of "A"-8's presentation inevitably tends to commit the text to debates concerning "fact," to tendencies toward tendentious assertion of what cannot be questioned as "fact." I have argued that "A"-8 attempts to present history as diverse discourses and also that there are curious holes in "A"-8 that mark the subjective, which cannot be represented yet makes itself felt as a challenge to the historical and is textually enacted as a dissolution of representation (see commentary of "A"-8). Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that for both poet and reader there remain powerful pressures to take the text in a more statically factual manner, as striving for a authoritative reading of history, urging and assuming specific historical outcomes. This difficulty seems inherent in the very nature of the predominantly historical materials—as also evidenced by the *Cantos*, *The Maximus Poems* and even *Paterson*. This is one way to understand Zukofsky's stated difficulty in reading back over "A"-8 and getting to the "fact" he wanted, which he now recognizes is not "hard-set" but constantly renewable, the same but different. Again, then, we see evidence of Zukofsky's rethinking of this past in terms of the present. As already mentioned, it seems to me not correct to understand this as self-revision in the sense of changing his mind, although necessarily that plays its part, but an effort to take into account the shifts of history, of that always mobile and infinite context in which the poet necessarily finds himself. The later reading does not correct the earlier, but each remains marked by its circumstance. Whether one puts this down to stubbornness or honesty, Zukofsky rarely if ever changes his mind but instead adapts and responds differently to the changes in his life and times.

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[24] Zukofsky simply says Niedecker's comment was made 13 or so years ago and so it is possible she was remarking on the first half of "A"-9. However, "A"-8 seems to me to make better sense, especially since Niedecker was the typist for this movement and queried Zukofsky on details as it progressed.

Stretto & Coda

In some respects what Zukofsky designated the stretto seems as scattered as part one, although much of it is explicitly framed as the presentation and sorting through old notes, which allows the reader to contain the very arbitrariness of the materials. As already indicated, Zukofsky's adoption of musical analogies should not be taken too strictly, and what he seems to mean by designating this part as a stretto is simply the overt return, suggesting a modulation toward the conclusion of the movement, to the B-A-C-H theme that up to now has remained merely implicit since the opening few pages of the movement. The opening line, "Blest," with an oversized capital B, cues us that the B-A-C-H theme is being sounded and several pages later this is confirmed with the expected oversized "Ardent" and then "Celia." Here for the first and only time in the movement these first two notes are clearly identified with Spinoza and Aristotle and their sections are predominately made up of quotations or adaptations from their respective texts. Indeed, each could be taken as a compendium of what Zukofsky found most valuable in the two philosophers, and there is little reason to belabor these two philosophers further. However, the opening stanza is worth a closer look. The first line, "Blest," happens to be Spinoza's given name (Benedict or Baruch) and the definition of "blessedness" is the culminating proposition of his *Ethics*—thus we have another work written out of the author's name. Then follows a repetition of Spinoza's description of the mechanism of abstraction: the overwhelming effects of infinite things causes the imagination to fudge their specificity. On the one hand this leads to "noise," an inability to hear how everything has its order in the totality, or on the other the imagination projects a harmony (music) of the planets which cannot be heard but is taken as real. In other words we either feel passively helpless to cope with the infinite complexity of the real, or we project abstractions beyond the knowable that repress and contain the real's sensuous multiplicity. This is one way to define the human condition, and the answer for Spinoza and Zukofsky is not either/or nor neither, but a proportional balance, although like most modernists Zukofsky feels that in current historical circumstances the bigger danger is that of over-abstraction. Zukofsky follows this stanza with Einstein's thumbnail summary of the significance of the theory of relativity: that if everything disappeared, time and space would disappear as well. In other words our perceptual structure is intrinsic to the things perceived, or abstractions cannot exist separate from the specific sensual perceptions from which they arise. There are structures of order in whatever we happen to find or put together because they are all necessarily within the world, albeit since we are always necessarily within and alongside those things, we may not be able to perceive in a comprehensive fashion those orders. Zukofsky pushes the implications of this stance on the assumption that we are always necessarily finding and making such orders out of everything in our living.

Immediately following the sounding of the C note, there are an important few pages that begin by essentially echoing the horse passage discussed previously: writing is always rewriting, the personal is always determined and informed by the outside, and so the poet's poetics retain the "old ochre" of Paleolithic cave painting. We are not surprised, then, when horses do in fact make a brief reappearance at this point. The passage continues with three examples: 1) a crayon drawing by Paul of a robin which he now insists is a ship—the "same" work changes with time or the same viewer changes perception; 2) a piece of patterned cloth which has been cut and recut as curtains to suit different residences or to serve as a bedspread—the same cloth reworked to decorate different abodes (this cloth appears as a couch cover in the story "It Was" (*CF* 184)); 3) a collage that hangs framed on the wall that Zukofsky made and describes in meticulous detail—an obvious image of the collaged poem itself. The "same" materials reworked from what is at hand to suit changing circumstances. In the case of the collage we have the classic modernist form of creating or composing out of mundane detritus, which in this case is now recycled yet again as a verbal artifact in a poetic

collage. But this is not simply aesthetic activity, it is what we are always endeavoring to do in living. It is appropriate that scattered throughout the middle pages of part five are snippets from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as transmutated by Arthur Golding, which we find out a little further on are apparently from notes for an opera composed out of Golding that was one of Zukofsky's earlier unrealized projects (254), now redistributed in a different work.

The most striking segment of this part is the poet's catalog of old notes and projects, as he apparently weeds through old files or notebooks presumably in preparation for "A"-12. It is entirely characteristic and amusing that he turns this cleanup operation into a substantial portion of his new work. These unsprouted seeds thus achieve an unexpected fruition and nothing is entirely lost. Nevertheless, these notes are presented precisely as such, as unrealized, so that their redemption here cannot cancel out the lost possibilities. It is evident that these notes are predominately from the 1930s and in particular his listing of still-born projects feature dramatic works and others dealing with American history, which identify them as from the general milieu of *Arise, Arise* and "A"-8, as well as of his work on the *Index of American Design* and other WPA projects. They offer a glimpse of a quite different Zukofsky than the one that has come down to us—while no less experimental and eccentric, these notes imply a more public address, if, as Zukofsky notes in passing, he had only received some encouragement to pursue them (252). In this sense the notes indicate something more than merely subjective dead-ends, but also a cultural moment when collective possibilities seemed possible that on the other side of World War II and in the context of the Cold War now seem long lost except as these preserved seeds hint at potentials awaiting their future moment.

Before looking at the concluding two pages, something further should be said about the C and H notes. It may seem surprising that Celia's presence seems only to flicker in and out of "A"-12, although she comes into prominence at the conclusion and generally she is more visible throughout the stretto. Since the H note is lacking, it is arguable that the C note extends throughout most of this part. However, at the beginning of the poem Zukofsky had defined the Celia note as speaking simply and seldom (127). At one point she is designated "our tutelary spirit" (241), and it is she who offers an always present, loving and sheltering context for the poet, but as the ending of "A"-12 suggests, a presence that also draws the poet out of himself. She might be taken as the figure for the "tacit" that enables "measure," the always implied counterpoint that enlarges by decentering the subject. In the first two "Songs of Degrees," written within a few years of "A"-12, Celia becomes a mirror for the poet—not narcissistic but doubling and enlarging, the poet present yet other from himself (*CSP* 145-146). Celia means sky or heavens, and Zukofsky is also fond of the pun C-sea-see. Scattered in "A"-12 are variations on the phrase "face of the sky" or "eye of the sky" (135, 138 (twice), 161), and Scroggins is surely correct in identifying these somewhat enigmatic repetitions with Celia (*Bio* 251), even though simply translating her directly into these contexts will not always make obvious sense. The significance of the sea as a connecting image has already been mentioned in the discussion of part four, and there is an interesting repetition of the image of the sea enfolded in the arms of land (183, 187, 213). This is consistent with how Zukofsky depicts the Celia character in the autobiographical novel *Little* (started the year before "A"-12 was composed although dropped until it was again picked up and finished in 1967): while Little and his father tend to dominate the foreground, the mother is always present making certain practical realities are taken care of—she is the gardener of the family. In this sense, Celia's presence is everywhere in the poem and indistinguishable from the poet's sense of himself. We might account for various aspects of "A"-12, particularly its rejection of Poundian heroicism or the epic stance for an insistent siting in the domestic, as significantly due to this feminine presence. One cannot say that Zukofsky ever faltered in his ambition and desire for public recognition; however, particularly at this moment when

nearing 50 (see 241-242) his youthful hopes appear to have amounted to naught, he felt able to launch what might be described as a casual epic with little prospect of an immediate readership beyond Celia and Niedecker.

In the C section (237f), the poet addresses Celia directly and intimately, saying, in part, that he does not need to say anything to her and that when he writes only for her, he is determined by everything around him. This last sentence is in fact wonderfully ambiguous and could be understood in a number of senses, but my reading is that this sentence and the passage generally is enacting as writing the paradox that the private or intimate always implies everything. Therefore this passage leads without any break into what has already been discussed above: that Zukofsky's poetics include the red ochre of the earliest art-writing and then the three examples of Paul's drawing, the reworked printed cloth and the collage. Spinoza defines love as simply pleasure that thinks of its cause (174)—keeping in mind that pleasure means any entity's movement toward enhanced activity, power, reality, perfection. When the poet composes thinking of Celia or writing to Celia he is increasing his pleasure, which involves relating or entwining himself with others in the act of writing, with the dead, the living and those to come. The thickly sedimented materiality of writing guarantees this. In this sense Celia is a figure for far more than a specific biographical person, yet her concrete presence in the poet's life makes real those larger possibilities. The point is simply that Celia is certainly an actual person in the poet Zukofsky's life, but he makes no effort to evoke illusionism to portray her as a rounded character in the poem, as what she is for him for the reader, whether as muse or beloved or mother or whatever. For the reader, Celia is in the poem as necessarily something else that takes on associations suggested by the poem in combination with the specific nature of the reader. If we relate this to Celia's identification with sea and sky, then she is that which is most simple and present, the Heideggerian house of language where the poet necessarily dwells prior to any saying as well as in-forming any specific speech.

An obvious question that has puzzled readers is the missing H section in the stretto that we have been set up to expect but which never appears. Hatlen has taken this as key evidence for his argument that "A"-12 as a whole traces a movement from modernism to postmodernism, that is, from an ideal of grand closure as emblematized in the polyvocal unity of the B-A-C-H theme stated at the beginning to an acceptance of open-endedness and incompletion as marked by the absent final H. While I am persuaded by many of Hatlen's perceptive local readings, I am less so by this overarching argument, which seems too neat an academic narrative (or desire) relying on widely accepted but reductive characterizations of modernism. On the other hand, there is something in Hatlen's argument because although he presents his argument as a narrative within "A"-12, he clearly intends it as sketching the curve of *"A"* generally. But rather than see this in terms of the desire for and abandonment of closure, I would say the change registered in "A"-12 is that from working within the assumption of the possibility and necessity of utopian politics, which has now given way to a situation in which all political choices are complicit in maintaining the status quo. I do not pretend to have a definite answer about the missing H and perhaps it required Hatlen to come along and sound his note. We might think that H as happy (127) is how the poem and poet end up in the final scene, which I will examine in a moment, or that the point is not simply the consecutive sounding of the notes but that the sounding of the final note necessarily subsumes all the others and itself into a larger complex. I have argued that "A"-12 does not so much develop or get somewhere as retread the same ground differently through a process of thickening and layering. If the poem enacts the desire for forms and a sense of completion, it does so always conscious of the density of equally legitimate alternative forms or linguistic articulations that the interaction of bodies has and always will produce. This is the thrust of the adamant rejection of the autonomy of abstractions that would contain this infinite

proliferation. On the one hand Zukofsky's constantly mentions and performs formal possibilities and hopefully the above readings convince that thematic sense can be found in abundance, yet there is also a persistent pull toward radical nominalism, an egalitarian heterogeneity that resists all suggestions of final coherence. Contributing to the latter is the casualness, not of the specific verbal working here or there, but of the overall movement from this to that without apparent climax or signposts as to where we are going, which finally must be felt as a movement rather than conceptually fixed. H, then, stands for horses that forever plod or run.

The final two pages of "A"-12 modulate from the catalog of Zukofsky's notes to return to the context of his immediate family. The very last lines, the coda, simply repeat the B-A-C-H theme from the second page of the movement emphasizing the utopian intent of the whole, but in itself this is merely stuck on as an arbitrary ending. Of the various different pieces in these last two pages, most striking is Zukofsky's incorporation of details from the *Odyssey*, particularly from the remarkable beginning of Book XX (this passage is anticipated quite a few pages earlier at 212-213). At this point Odysseus has returned to Ithaca in disguise and not yet revealed himself to his wife. Unable to sleep because of his anxiety over how to pursue his revenge against the suitors, Athena appears to Odysseus, reassuring him that he is now in his house with his wife and son, and then puts him to sleep. The scene switches to Penelope who also is sleepless from despair over her situation and the presumed death of her husband, and she prays to escape into sleep (or death). At this moment day dawns and Odysseus hears her words in a seeming half-dream, rises and prays to Zeus for a sign that he will succeed. Zeus response with a thunderclap, which is interpreted by a female servant who has stayed up all night grinding grain for the suitors' breakfast as an omen of their imminent demise. Hearing this Odysseus sets about with renewed confidence. Zukofsky whittles this down to just a very few lines but touching on all three scenes which are enacted as moments in his own life: Athena's reassurance distracts the poet from his preoccupation with sifting through his old notes to remind him of his wife and son, Penelope's words promise the comfort of sleep and the rumbling from a nearby warehouse parallels the sound of Zeus' thunder and the millstones grinding grain. The effect is to draw the poet from the self-involved work on his notes and writing to the presence of his family which is further extended to the outside working world, introducing a note of both dissonance and reassurance. In one sense this echoes the three spheres of interconnected existence with which the entire movement has been preoccupied. There is a wonderful ambiguity in the Homeric image of grinding grain that is "the marrow of men's bodies" (260), which is not invented by Zukofsky but taken directly from his source translation by W.H.D. Rouse: the millstones as grinding work and the destruction of bodies (foreboding the slaughter of the suitors) or ground grain as the staff of life.[25] We should resist the conventional expectation that this use of Homer is intended simply to draw a parallel, in which the poet and his family become identified with Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus, although obviously in a sense this is true. Yet the poet of "A"-12 is no Odysseus, has never left home, has had no adventures and, as we have seen, rejects the Poundian heroic stance. It would be more apt to say that the poet has brought Homer down into his own ordinary mundane life. Although Zukofsky is quoting from a translation, he manages it in such a way that there is no hint of the epic or heightened voice. This is strikingly and amusingly confirmed in the final segment

[25] These millstones may also echo those in "A"-4 where J.S. Bach says music came into his family with an ancestor who was a miller and played his lute while he worked. Bach's witty suggestion that the sounds of the millstones grinding and the lute made music together also implies that uneasy relation between work and art, but here brought by the imagination into momentarily harmony.

before the B-A-C-H coda, in which the poet and his wife directly address each other but still in the words of Homer or his translation. Who speaks exactly which lines is appropriately unclear, although I find it irresistible to think that it is the male poet who speaks the version of the opening invocation to the *Odyssey*, which is here turned into a request for a story—after all these pages the poet's desire to begin again is ventriloquized through one of the archetypal beginnings in Western culture. Again Zukofsky's version of this most ritualized of epic set pieces is brought down to common speech, yet the very choice of the invocation as a request for a story about the fall of cities and wandering men evidences the residual temptation of male heroicism. The response of the wife, as I take it, will have none of this and begins the story not where Homer begins but with Telemachus (Paul) mundanely waking up and getting dressed, which of course in a conventional sense points us to dawn, youth and the future. We should remind ourselves that Zukofsky's use of other materials—and all his works are predominately constructed out of other texts—is rarely as allusion or literary authority. Rather, they are resources to be used and renewed in the composition of his own poem, and here Homeric texts wittily become material for an intimate family moment. This conclusion to the movement returns to the beginning most significantly in this explicit act of storytelling between one body and another, which in the very enactment binds both. In this way we are more than isolate selves and act out our desire to actualize our natures.

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