

Zukofsky often insisted he was in no hurry to complete “A”, but by the time he began “A”-14 in 1964 he was 60 years old, had been working on the poem for over 35 years, and there were still eight movements to go. Bach supposedly remarked that “unfinished is against the laws of the *spirit*” (“A” 130), and certainly in Zukofsky’s own case he left nothing incomplete.<sup>1</sup> So with the end of *Catullus* in sight, he turned back to “A” determined to see it to the finish. “A”-14 was written rapidly in the course of a month (August-September 1964) and marked the beginning of an intense period of less than three years in which Zukofsky composed all the long movements through “A”-21 (including “A”-15, -18, -19), as well as completing *Catullus*. If we discount “A”-24, which he did not compose, then by page count these three years account for a third of “A”.

A strong argument could be made for “A”-14 as an ideal entrance into the late Zukofsky. It moves rapidly and its 45 pages can easily be read in a sitting. It displays the full range of his inventive techniques, a characteristic eclectic texture full of curiosities and puzzles, yet all moving along at a fair clip and evidencing both variety and humor. The movement might convince readers that the complexities of the textual surface are not, finally, a matter of obscurity but the pleasures of formal inventiveness. Yet, there is no lack of thematic content, as we shall see.

When “A”-14 was first published in 1965 (50 pages complete in *Poetry*), its narrow lines in orderly stanzas became something of a Zukofsky signature, all the more so for appearing in the heyday of various species of sprawling New American verse. Even while he was finally achieving wide-spread recognition and respect among younger poets, as well as ready access to publication, he stood out as something of an ascetic formalist in a time of letting things hang out. Nevertheless, this contrast, while real, should not be exaggerated because Zukofsky was increasing trusting and allowing an aleatoric quality into his compositional practice. By this time Zukofsky had well established ideas about his work, but he was also in contact with many younger poets and artists, including composers through his son’s involvement with the developments in avant-garde music of this period. It is probably not useful to speak of Zukofsky as being influenced by these younger poets and artists so much as finding for the first time in his career a responsive environment for his work.

### **I - Preliminary Considerations**

1) Following his usual practice since “A”-12 (1951), “A”-14 pushes even further Zukofsky’s constructivist compositional procedure. He noted down in a pocket-sized loose leaf notebook anything of interest: news items, conversational quips, reading notes and whatever else caught his attention. Working directly from these notes, Zukofsky would draft

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<sup>1</sup> Although Zukofsky attributed this remark to Bach on more than one occasion, it is unlikely he was not aware that there is no record Bach said any such thing. Indeed, Bach seems to have offered few comments on music other than the blandly pious. However, Zukofsky clearly felt this remark was authentically in the spirit of Bach’s work, which is to say, in the spirit of his own work. For the curious genealogy of this quotation, see the annotation to “A”-12.128.2 on the Z-site. In “A”-12, Zukofsky includes a catalog of unfinished projects, primarily from the 1930s, although there is little evidence that most went beyond the notes stage, and of course this catalog itself ensured that even these did not go to waste. In a few cases, miscellaneous notes for these projects mentioned in “A”-12 ended up being incorporated into a couple of the 1960s movements.

the long movements, working them up from the materials at hand and their possibilities. This is a curious but typically Zukofskian re-thinking of the traditional approach to a long poem in which the predetermined regularity of line and/or stanzaic form shapes materials that already have a narrative or thematic continuity. “A”-14 allows in any content, not just in the usual modernist sense that breaks down the limits on what is appropriately poetic, but more literally feeding into the poem whatever randomly gathered materials the poet has collected and allowing them to shape and be shaped by the form and compositional process. In “A”-14 it is not the intrinsic concerns of this or that material that necessarily determines its inclusion, but once included the compositional-reading process will discover relations which then take on thematic possibilities. At the same time, Zukofsky had little interest in the then pervasive concern to capture the existential moment in its authenticity and open-endedness—whether conceived as projective verse, Beat expressionism, or I-do-this-I-do-that poems—which is most clearly marked by the absence of a consistently identifiable speaking persona. The tendency is toward overload—since any materials can come in, there is a perpetual disturbance and need to readjust, but this is intrinsic to the need to maintain the dialectical dynamic of the compositional-reading process so that it does not settle and reify into static thematics. The intent of the poem is not representational in the sense of expressing the poet or some theme or critique, but rather lies in the formal dynamic of the poem itself. Ultimately for Zukofsky all poems, one could justifiably say all human labor, have the same intent: they are acts of negotiation with the world rather than statements about it, even when they look like such statements.

2) “A”-14 is the first movement of “A” composed in a word-count line, which, with the exception of “A”-15, would now be his habitual form right through *80 Flowers* (1974-1978). In this case, he uses an eye catching short line, beginning with one word per line for the first page and a half, shifting to a two-word line for fifteen and a half pages, and then to a three-word line for last 26 pages except for the concluding half page where he quickly reverses back down to the final single word lines. Furthermore, the poem is shaped into regular three-line stanzas, except for the single word lines of the prelude and tail end (the line count of the prelude’s stanzas are 6-10-10-10, while that of the tail is 6-10). Typically, there are scattered irregularities, both in the word-count and the stanzaic units (see e.g. 334, 342, 347).

Given that the word-count line would become Zukofsky’s preferred formal mode throughout the rest of his life and that in the eyes of many this is really no form at all, it is worth pausing over this odd practice. The idea goes back quite early in Zukofsky’s career, since in a footnote to the original version of “American Poetry 1920-1930” (1931) he had observed that William Carlos Williams “perhaps not too consciously” seems to use such a form in *Spring and All* and that he himself had experimented with it in a pair of poems composed in 1929, “Songs 28 & 29: Two Dedications” (CSP 37-39).<sup>2</sup> This is one of a number of instances where Zukofsky notes the significance of visual stanzas in Williams, shaped poems that do not rely on a strict syllable count yet look as if the stanzas are formally equivalent, and this will be a common practice in Zukofsky’s short poems as well. Both liked to invent a stanzaic appearance without adhering to a strict template, and these forms themselves would become the dominant measure of a given poem, giving it a sense of flexible regularity. As Zukofsky puts it in “American Poetry 1920-1930,” the word-count line restricts the number of syllables per line while at the same time allowing variation, which makes for an interesting “quantity,” a code word for free verse prosody, a sense of a flexible

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<sup>2</sup> “American Poetry 1920-1930,” *The Symposium* 2.1 (Jan. 1931): 64. It is now commonly remarked that “The Red Wheelbarrow” from *Spring and All* is the progenitor of the word-count poem, at least in American poetry.

rhythm beyond the habitual metrical metronome. The word-count maintains the line as a recognizable unit, yet this is often played against the syntax over the course of any number of lines. As Zukofsky pointed out, this was quite distinct from Pound's approach to free verse in which each line tends to be heavily marked as a distinct, complete unit, both semantically and rhythmically (WCW/LZ 250-251; see Z-Notes commentary on Zukofsky, Williams and Pound).

Zukofsky never proposed any quintessential distinction between poetry and prose, and always preferred to insist that his nominally critical and other prose writings were on a continuum with his poetic works (*Prep.* "Prefatory Note" n.p., 167). Indeed, there was no essential definition of the poetic, as all writing exists on a continuum with all other human labor, all of which manifests the active effort to realize oneself with others, that is, measure, the sense of how one orients with and interacts with the world. The word-count line, often together with stanzaic units, maintains the various advantages of the typographical legacy of poetry offered by the cuts of the lines without the restraints of meter and rhyme, even while suggesting, at least visually, a degree of rhythmic regularity. Within the English poetic tradition, blank verse was already a decisive move in this direction. A favorite Zukofsky line from Shakespeare is: "the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for 't"—the effectiveness of blank verse lies as much in the play of its irregularity against expectations of regularity.<sup>3</sup> So it is not altogether surprising that we encounter in "A"-14 a snippet from the most famous defense of blank verse, Milton's preface to *Paradise Lost*.

Zukofsky would deliberately experiment with the possibilities or feel of the word-count form, the most obvious contrast is the use of a short line broken up into regular stanzas in both "A"-14 and -19, resulting in fast moving, lighter and playful movements, as opposed to the long 8-count line broken up into large irregular blocks of "A"-18 resulting in a movement that is clotted and heavy. It is of course not the word-count form alone or even primarily that determines the feel and tone of these individual movements, which might be attributed more strongly to the nature of the dominant materials Zukofsky feeds into them and to syntax, however elliptical, which in "A"-14 and -19 is allowed to run whereas in "A"-18 it tends to be very agglutinative, blocking any sense of free flow. Nevertheless, the visual form of these movements immediately signals to the reader, as well as working the reading eye differently, so that in "A"-14 and -19 one reads more vertically, connecting between lines and words, whereas in "A"-18 one is stuck in the horizontal. At least in Zukofsky's handling, the former movements clearly urge toward the lyrical whereas "A"-18 tends toward the prosaic, if we take this latter term to designate the relatively counter-lyrical impulse. With "A"-21 Zukofsky will settle on a five-count line that he will use almost exclusively in the last decade of his life, and this line has been aptly characterized as his version of the pentameter.<sup>4</sup> One might say that compared with the preceding deployments of the word-count line, the five-count line, which for the most part Zukofsky does not break up into stanzas, is relatively characterless and neutral, but like blank verse this enables its strength in terms of flexibility and range. Generally one can observe that with the five-count line the line itself as a distinct and complete unit asserts itself as never previously in Zukofsky's poetry. In "A"-21 this is

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<sup>3</sup> The quotation is from *Hamlet* II.ii.338-339; quoted in *Bottom* 19, 145, 327, 333, "A"-12.163.4-5 and *Prep.* 224. A similar point from the opposite perspective is made in response to William Blake's defense of his irregular verse form as opposed to the "monotonous cadence" of blank verse as used by Milton and Shakespeare, to which Zukofsky points out that an expected cadence is not always monotonous, but the point is that this is not a simple either/or issue (*Bottom* 203-204).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Zukofsky, "Why 4 Other Countries or Dear Charles, This Is All Your Fault," <[http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Zukofsky-Paul\\_4OC.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Zukofsky-Paul_4OC.html)>.

programmatic in that the rule of thumb for his “translation” of Plautus is that each long line of the Latin text (15 syllables) will be matched by a single five-count line, so he is literally working line by line. In “A”-22 & -23 the deployment of the lines becomes much more flexible and variable—while overall the discrete lines assert their integrity, they are frequently broken up into smaller units and/or are enjambed, which seems to me very much the flexibility of blank verse. *80 Flowers* nominally also uses a five-count line although in actual practice the lines are more variegated and on average longer, primarily due to the frequent choice of compound words and a very liberal use of hyphenization. So the word-count line was a useful *modus operandi* for Zukofsky with which he could constantly tinker.

All of this grows out of Zukofsky’s life-long thinking about the implications of free verse, which in his formative years was an unavoidable question—not so much the need to justify free verse against conventional conceptions of poetic form and no longer feeling embarrassed about Whitman, but as thinking about how free verse redefines the possibilities of poetry itself. In short, the issue is not simply one of liberation from the traditional strictures of rhyme and meter but a complete rethinking of the place and possibilities of poetry at a moment when the traditional role and prestige of poetry no longer seemed viable. The word-count line, at least as Zukofsky rethinks it each time he uses it, is a liminal form that offers a semblance of regularity or of rhythmical recurrence over the course of a long poem, yet syntactically and tonally the language is highly variable, flexible and unpredictable. As such, one might detect analogies with Williams’ variable foot, not so much formally (although “4 Other Countries” could be seen as Zukofsky’s variation on the variable foot), but in the felt need to discover and work in a regular-irregular form—although Zukofsky never propagandized word-count as the future of American poetry.

It is worth quickly mentioning that in the years immediately preceding “A”-14, Zukofsky had been working assiduously with Celia on *Catullus*, and they still had a quarter or so of the canon to go, which they would finally finish in February 1966. The extensive and intensive nature of the *Catullus* project would have a far-reaching impact on Zukofsky’s subsequent work beyond his abiding interest in homophonic transcription, which appears to a greater or lesser degree in all the later long movements of “A”. The syllable by syllable attention *Catullus* demanded, as well as the syntactical and grammatical tensions between the rival Latin and English languages, functioned as a programmatic training regime in liberating Zukofsky’s English from its habitual disciplines. Although already evident in “A”-13, with “A”-14 Zukofsky increasingly creates his own poetic idiolect relatively free from the usual grammatical and syntactical expectations in order to throw more emphasis on the verbal texture itself, imagistically and semantically constantly suggestive but rarely allowing for a paraphrasable sense or focused image to settle or dominate. At one point the poem quotes, with apparent approval, Gerald Manley Hopkins’ remark that poetry is “speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning”—with a characteristic punning tweak of the end to “(de-) / ‘meaning’” (331).

3) Elsewhere I have discussed Zukofsky’s conception of “measure” as something more than what merely informs the poem, or, the inner form always implies an active orientation within the world (see Z-Notes commentary on “A”-17). In the latter part of “A”-14 we encounter a reiteration of Zukofsky’s well-known definition of his poetics as an integral of lower limit speech and upper limit music that he had initially stated in “A”-12 (138). It is worth keeping in mind that this is just one of several different definitions of his poetics to be found in “A”-12, another version being: “A poetics is informed and informs— / Just *informs* maybe—the rest a risk” (168). However, the better known formulation reappears in “A”-14 as part of a series of integrals: body : dance, dance : speech, speech : music, music : *mathémata* (349). This entire series is in one sense a single integral made up of a sequence of

sub-integrals, and as such Zukofsky's poetics takes in this expanded version which amounts to a contextualization of his prior statement—folding out what was already implied. Or, to put this differently, the middle integral as a definition specifically of poetics is necessarily related to everything else. The specific form of this definitional series highlights the implied aspiration for orders or measure: the relational form of the integrals culminating in *mathémata*. Discrete terms do not have intrinsic value, and definition is always a matter of relation, therefore any relational definition necessarily implies further relations. Clearly the series could be further expanded or different terms substituted indefinitely. This particular series, from body to *mathémata*, presents itself as a sequence of increased abstraction, and since we know Zukofsky was wary of abstractions, this complicates the common assumption that the speech : music integral is to be understood as a matter of transforming ordinary speech into music—even though that is a perfectly plausible and venerable definition of poetry as language pushed somewhat beyond conventional, routine usage. But Zukofsky would insist on the integral, that the terms define an interval or a dynamic range of possibilities but always necessarily implying and defined by each other, rather than discrete states of language. Obviously enough “A” evidences in practice quite various instances of and alterations between however we choose to define “speech” and “music,” and we could hardly argue that “music” per se is the privileged mode in which the poem is written. One could ask whether “music” is more abstract or more sensuous than “speech”? The fact that Zukofsky chooses the Greek term “*mathémata*” rather than “mathematics” as the final term of his series evokes Pythagorean and numerical cosmologies (which appear prominently in “A”-19), but if this appears to conjure some final metaphysical order then all we need do is remind ourselves that modern physics is carried on in the language of mathematics. These are modes of measure, of orienting ourselves and of making orders, but they are constantly interrelated with and folded into each other without illusion of foundational truth—all definition is relational—other than the incessant activity of making and finding them. When Zukofsky reaches *mathémata*, he then flips or translates this as “*things / learned*,” which is a literal etymological meaning of *mathémata* that puts emphasis both on “things” and as an action, or as he glosses it a few lines later, “*what happens*.” “Swank” is how Zukofsky chooses to characterize “*mathémata*,” a self-deprecating witticism and a reminder that fancy, often pretentious philosophical or academic terms need to be brought down to earth, which is to say contextualized. However, what Zukofsky next gives is a reference to John Cage's “Silence,” a classic example if there ever was one of conceptual, abstract art—art as *mathémata* (the proper title of Cage's work is of course “4' 33'”). Yet Cage's “silence” pulses, it is sensuous, which is precisely how the composer explained the motivation for this work, that there is no absolute silence and at a minimum one hears one's own pulse.<sup>5</sup> Abstractions contextualized are no longer so abstract, although actually this is never an either/or proposition: the terms mutually define each other and always stand in dynamic relation.

Cage cages silence, contextualizes and brings it into orders in order to draw our attention to and fill it. The same point is repeated differently in the phrase I have chosen for my title, “chorál out of random input” (354), where Zukofsky's added accent draws out the pun. As it so happens, this phrase refers to the work of another avant-garde composer, James Tenney, often associated with Cage, although the reader cannot be expected to know that. Here polyvocal song is created out of corralling random noise, although strictly speaking there is no random noise as any sound necessarily has its cause, so it is only when noise is experienced as ungrounded (abstract) that it becomes random but then becomes available for

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<sup>5</sup> There is a further oblique reference to Cage at the top of 348; for the anecdote behind these lines, see *Little* (CF 160-161 and note).

contextualization. As I have already indicated, I am arguing there is an analogy with Zukofsky's own compositional procedure in the later movements of "A", a more or less haphazard gathering of materials and then working them up, finding orders, that is, relations among the materials as an active sense of orientation in the larger world among others. This is "measure" as Zukofsky and Williams understood it.

4) "A"-14 is one of few movements of "A" with a title, "beginning *An.*" Indeed the poem does begin with "An," which would seem to make the title somewhat gratuitous, especially since the first stanza following the one-count prelude announces that this is the first of eleven songs that begin with "*An.*" However, within the body of Zukofsky's poetry, the title does make explicit an allusion to "Poem beginning 'The,'" the poem that can be taken as inaugurating his public career. Apparently Zukofsky planned virtually from the beginning of "A" to shift to "an" in the latter half of the poem, or so he told Pound in 1930 (*EP/LZ* 80). Just what he means by this is difficult to say, but it suggests he is completing the forms of the article, even though he does not bother to consistently begin the early movements of "A" with "a." My guess is that he belatedly revived this earlier idea to mark his determination to finally see "A" to the end, and deciding to arbitrarily begin each movement with "an" simply fit into his increasingly programmatic approach, such as using word-count forms, even while allowing for the contiguous and haphazard. In actual fact, "A"-14 is only numerically the "first" an-song, as there were already three short movements, all beginning (sort of) with "an," composed the year before ("A"-16, -17 and -20) and numbered out of chronological sequence. As I have discussed elsewhere, while "the" implies a particular or specific thing, "a" and "an" imply a thing among others, an egalitarian recognition of always being social (see Z-Notes commentary on "A"-22 & -23). "An" perhaps has the advantage over "a" in that it suggests the non-hierarchical conjunction "and" as well as "another," and in any case puts greater stress on the vowel sound. If we take the title of "A"-14, as seems implied, to refer to "Poem beginning 'The,'" then that poem is in the genre of autobiographical satire and is a declaration of the self freed from various impediments to personal and artistic self-realization. Taking that as a reference point, the later emphasis on "an" songs becomes the recognition by the poet that this self-realization necessarily takes place among and through others and in that sense is a proper fulfillment of the *bildungsroman* pattern implied in the early poem. However, the more consequential point is that the poems themselves must operate with the awareness that they are never stable, whole particulars, but are linguistic objects, that is, products of cultural labor, and as such they are at every moment inherently collaborative, not least with their potential readers. We will have occasion to return to this question.

5) As a preliminary observation, "A"-14, like all the long movements from "A"-12 to "A"-19, consists of roughly two general types of segments: first, what I call set pieces worked from a single source or around an identifiable subject; secondly, more miscellaneous and seemingly random segments that might tentatively be characterized as stream-of-consciousness or montage in structure. Although it may require some familiarity to distinguish these types of segments, their alternation does compound the often disconcerting textual surface. The set pieces offer passages of relative surface consistency, sometimes stylistic and sometimes thematic, which play off of the more miscellaneous segments, which demand a more associative approach in which the figural analogies or relations can be very unpredictable. In gaining a critical handle on the poem, it is natural to highlight the set pieces as offering footholds, indications of thematic arguments, that might stabilize the poem's primary concerns, but we have to keep in mind that this other type of segment deliberately undermines any attempts to conceptually surmount the heterogeneity. This is not to suggest,

however, that these miscellaneous segments ought to be read as purely deconstructive, since they do have their associative logic and pick up many of the themes and concerns of the set pieces. The point is that the poem works from the inside out, building up a crisscross structure rather than starting or ending with overriding conceptions or development.<sup>6</sup> The miscellaneous segments tend to foreground the more personal and everyday materials, including memories, and therefore give the impression of the thoughts of the poet. But if we read these segments as stream-of-consciousness, they are not restricted to or framed by an illusion of a psychological persona, so it is as if the distinction between the self and the outside is highly permeable. Although one might think that a flexible stream-of-consciousness framework could absorb just about anything, Zukofsky in fact throws in segments that are so formally indigestible in terms of psychological verisimilitude that we are forced to fall back on a constructivist conception of a contraption or machine made out of words—yet one in which the personal is often and unabashedly in evidence.

We will consider each of what I have designated as set pieces or segments, worked from a single source or topic, but as a schematic descriptive catalog they begin a few pages in with the line, “Dark heart,” which indeed proves to be worked from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* intertwined with images from the contemporary civil rights struggle. This leads into a six-page segment worked from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, followed by a couple pages centering on a calligraphic scroll by the Japanese Zen poet Ryōkan, which leads back to Milton, but this time mainly from his biography, which then leads to another short segment from the *Heart of Darkness*. Then there are some eight pages of the more miscellaneous and personal, until we reach another long segment worked from Bach’s early biography, closely followed by a shorter segment from Montaigne. The final dozen pages return to the miscellaneous, except for the interpolation of a curious page-long horse segment, until the concluding page and a half focusing on the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Although the end of the movement circles back to the beginning with the image-theme of the sun and seeing, there does not otherwise appear to be any very obvious procedural logic to the presentation of these materials or their alterations, if that is the correct characterization, of textual and more quotidian segments. Nor is there any obvious explanation of why 18 pages into the poem Zukofsky decides to switch from a two-word to a three-word line. Possibly there is a numerological explanation that eludes me, but if so I am not sure what that would explain anyway. Especially given the poem’s scattered irregularities, there seems little reason to strain for explanations beyond Zukofsky’s typical play with seeming formal discipline and contingency. The latter was allowed an increasingly long leash in Zukofsky’s later works, even while he worked in a more and more programmatic fashion, but the latter was simply a means of setting out and completing the job without determining its working out in detail. And, it could be argued, that detail was what matters to Zukofsky more than the whole, which in any case is always beyond the poet and poem. An “an” song must eschew “the.”

## II - *Book of the Dead*

The concluding segment of “A”-14 (357-358) centers on the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* and encapsulates many of the movement’s concerns. The poet exchanges some old books for a copy of E.A. Wallis Budge’s edition of the *Book of the Dead* with the original hieroglyphics, he mentions some details from Budge’s introduction and then concludes with what initially appears an oddly random list of words. However, this list clearly links back to the opening prelude, both in its reversion to single-word lines and imagistically with its final “Sun / eye.” Puzzling as this list may appear, one might guess that it has something to do with

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<sup>6</sup> Crisscrossing as a formal model appears explicitly in “A”-23 (560), where Zukofsky is quoting from the preface to Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*.

hieroglyphics, particularly since the inclusion of “adz” and “cruse” indicate we are in the realm of antiquity and archeology. Zukofsky is in fact “translating” a line of hieroglyphics he finds in the text, where of course Budge provides a proper translation, but here Zukofsky prefers simply to visually read off what he sees, with secondary guesses given in parentheses.<sup>7</sup>

The casual, overtly personal beginning of this segment configures the whole into an elliptical little narrative: the poet acquires a text, looks around in it and then generates a poem of sorts—a paradigmatic instance of Zukofsky’s typical practice of writing with or out of prior texts, writing as always necessarily re-writing/-reading. Since the prior text in this case is the *Book of the Dead*, the poet literally acts out its mythic narrative, as he indicates clearly enough in the stanza immediately preceding his list-poem, where he turns to the “grave” of the text, its “black glyphs” under the aspect of the new moon, out of which he will end up with a rising sun. So the poem is underwritten by hymns to the sun as the life principle, which stand as prototypical of poetry in general. We might also want to make something of the fact that the poet exchanges a small stack of unneeded books to obtain this copy of the *Book of the Dead*, so this segment sees a transformation of the text as a commodity back into use value. If we recall the metaphor taken from Marx evoked in both “A”-8 and the first half of “A”-9, the text is awoken from its “‘death-like’ sleep” (62) by refinding its “maker.”

Zukofsky spent his life studiously keeping mythopoetics at arm’s length and here prefers to simply read off the text for himself, translating a script he does not know—which as we will see is not the only instance of such blind reading in “A”-14. Typically the *Book of the Dead* does not appear as an allusion, as an authority to underwrite the work of the poet, but quite literally as inherited materials that, perhaps somewhat flippantly, is to be reworked. All of which strongly qualifies without finally cancelling out the appeal to myth. The sun as translated into contemporary discourse is a planetary body whose light quite literally makes possible and is embodied in earthly life—thus not fundamentally different from what the Egyptians apparently had in mind. Hymns to the sun are appropriate for Zukofsky’s ultimately affirmative sense of poetry as essentially not expression but an act of existence that always necessarily implies being in the world with others. Or, as he suggests late in “A”-14, if we avoid looking for metaphors, “our worlds do / fly together” (355), that is, we exist together in song.

Zukofsky looks at the myths of the Egyptians, which reach us as nothing more than a text, as quite literally a dead book, yet readable so not altogether dead and therefore available for revivification. Finally the poet goes directly to the original hieroglyphic text and indeed enacts its resurrection. If nothing else, this act is justified or motivated by the undeniable intentionality the hieroglyphics wear on their faces, or simply as cultural labor, as evidence of humans in the act of living—a script or evidence not to be replicated, as no reading is mere replication, but as generating more reading, labor, living. All of which can be traced back to the sun, which not only offers the prototypical instance of diurnal resurrection necessary to any earthly life but whose light is also required for reading. The first details from the *Book of the Dead* that the poet gives are colors, a quite literal manifestation of light, and it so happens that the final color mentioned in the quotation from Budge is orange, which is the opening image of the poem’s prelude where it is an image of a fruit that is an image of the sun that also literally embodies sunlight.

The concluding “translation” initially appears little more than a word list with nouns particularly prominent, as one would expect in reading off hieroglyphs, whose imagistic force

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<sup>7</sup> For a reproduction of the page in Budge from which Zukofsky worked, see the annotations on the Z-site. Budge’s translation of the line is: “Thou shalt exist for millions of millions of years, a period of millions of years.”



lies on their surface but whose grammar is absent for those without specialized knowledge. Hieroglyphs have of course played a large role in the Western imaginary as an ideal of a language homogenous with the real, and we might want to recall Zukofsky's argument in *Bottom*, published the same year as "A"-14's composition, emphasizing the eyes over the abstracting propensities of the mind. This translation might be seen as a literal acting out of *Bottom*'s thesis. But the *Bottom* thesis is not dualistic, rather it is an integral or proportional model of the relationship between eyes (the body, sensation) and mind (ideas), and insists that the former not automatically evaporate into a mere abstract sense of "sense." In this sense, hieroglyphics retain that bodily sense and delight in the world, even more so in the colored manuscripts that are reproduced in the third volume of Budge's edition.<sup>8</sup> However, Zukofsky does not reproduce the hieroglyphics themselves, as Pound did in *Rock-Drill*, not to mention the ubiquitous appearance of Chinese characters throughout the later *Cantos*. In Pound these stand as the dream of grounding language in the real or natural, so central and problematic to his entire project. As such the hieroglyphics and Chinese characters mark a limit to translatability, as do in fact all the numerous foreign quotations in the *Cantos*, which even if accompanied by translations nonetheless retain a tang or flavor that must be uniquely experienced in the "original." But the platitude that translation is impossible if taken to its logical extreme would mean we cannot communicate with any assurance even within our "own" language, a common enough skepticism in modern Western philosophy and theory—the always elusive uniqueness of singular experience or events. For Zukofsky everything was translatable, but translation is not some carrying over of a unique original, rather an action that necessarily implies one's existence with others. Clearly this rendition of hieroglyphs concluding "A"-14 is directly related to the method of *Catullus*, but instead of a literal mouthing of the original text, here there is a literal eyeing. In "A"-14 it is not the desire for a hieroglyphic script that is being presented but readability.

If initially this translation appears a mere word list, a pure eyeing, this impression is quickly qualified by the mind's presence, manifest not only in the secondary guesses (which are overtly punctuated as tentative), but also in the discovery of syntax and abstract concepts (numbers) in the latter stanza. The asymmetrical division of the two stanzas splits, but in doing so emphasizes, the two "meanings" of a single hieroglyph: "gaze" and "mouth." The visual and the aural are here conflated, as in fact they are in an alphabetic (phonetic) script, which is what we are reading, even if the reference is to hieroglyphics, which are not presented. We might even understand "gaze" as partially suggested by the initial "adz." In any case there is the inevitable reflexivity of what we are doing in reading. The latter stanza begins to stray ever more from the purely visual, in part suggested by the indication of syntax in the repetition of a couple hieroglyphs: "exalt" and "tally," with the latter secondarily translated as numbers. With one and three, which add up to four, we arguably have the numbers most important to Zukofsky, who is well known for his number fascination. Numbers are always related to poetry and measure, which in turn imply cosmic harmonies.<sup>9</sup> For Zukofsky, however, cosmic harmonies are not matters of some order out there, but of our sense of ourselves in the world, which is what he, along with Williams, meant by "measure." Measure is simply our desire for an adequate fit with the totality, which is necessarily a perpetual negotiation with whatever it is we find ourselves confronted. Perhaps this is what is

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<sup>8</sup> However Zukofsky is working from an economical one volume reprint (University Books, 1960) that binds together the first two volumes of Budge's original three volumes, lacking the final volume consisting of a color facsimile—thus the poet's remark that he does not need it.

<sup>9</sup> In "A"-19 where Pythagorean number cosmology comes overtly into the poem (418-420), we should not be surprised that there is a related mention there of Egyptian hymns to the gods (420) via Demetrius *On Style*.

suggested by the juxtaposition of “exult” (the hieroglyph shows a figure with arms upraised), “tally” and “wiggle,” with this last sandwiched between the repetition of the other two terms. Hymns to the gods (poems) are the manifest and performative desire to tally with the totality which always involves plenty of wiggling. The secondary translation for “tally” is “(one: / three),” unity and difference. Threes in the later Zukofsky can always refer to the Zukofsky family unit, but in fact there are all manner of tripartite models in *Bottom* and “A”. Three’s significance, particularly put into relation with one, can be understood as minimal complexity beyond the simplicities of mere unity or dualism—complexity always implies difference but also the possibility of coordination—we might want to think of it as the dialectic. Also aside from the obvious significance of the final two words, “Sun / eye,” that has already been mentioned, these terms can be aligned with one and three: the sun as the principle of singularity, the eye that of multiplicity (with the respective capitalizations visually emphasizing this point), but obviously the latter is only possible or functional because of the former and vice versa.

I suggested that this concluding segment sketches a little narrative, in which the turn to the final list poem or “translation” appears to be prompted by a difference or at least a swerve from Budge. Just what the point of disagreement is is characteristically oblique, unless it is simply the irresistibility of punning on Budge’s name. However, this part of the segment throws up a couple of terms from Budge’s text and evidently the issue is how they are to be interpreted or translated: there is the original title of the *Book of the Dead* (romanized as *Pert-em-hru*) and the word *Kuh*.<sup>10</sup> The poem gives a couple of the versions for the title that Budge cites, which notably emphasize the hymn or praise of the sun rather than the death of the standard English rendition. *Kuh* is usually understood as spirits of the dead, in other words their living presence. Within the narrative of the segment, we could read these versions as simply the effort, under the guidance of Budge, to fix the meaning of the *Book of the Dead*, which however suggestive the poet finally puts aside in order to come up with his own interpretation, which is not hermeneutic but an enactment. It is with reference to *Kuh* that we encounter the mysterious phrase, “voice that / did not scribe / passing.” The collocation of voice, inscription and passing is extremely suggestive, yet it seems perfectly impossible to nail down a paraphrase of this phrase without being arbitrary. Any plausible explanation, which as such would not be difficult to come up with, has a subjective authority that must doubt itself in its assertion. Is *Kuh* the voice that cannot survive inscription? The inexorable uniqueness of experience that can never be translated would seem to be a possibility that suits the general sense of *Kuh* as the soul of the dead. Yet the writing and its reading, which is the only possibility of encountering *Kuh*, denies such an interpretation, which pre-limits meaningfulness to a metaphysical conception, a soul that by definition cannot be known yet somehow asserts its presence. For Zukofsky this was a false problem: the inscription is not always already inadequate unless we assume it should do something—offer definitive meaning lying before or beyond the inscription—that it cannot. Such an assumption turns inscription into a “grave,” which Zukofsky here responds to by demonstrating a different mode of reading that generates the concluding poem through a very literal emphasis on the eye and a bracketing of the “mind,” resulting in very list-like poem made up predominately of images. But of course there is no pure “eye” here or ever, and the “mind” is well in evidence as previously mentioned. This concluding segment of “A”-14 is not simply about the production of the poem—a set-piece poem within the poem—but about reading and the active participation it requires, and as such hails the reader.

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<sup>10</sup> The term in Budge is *Khu*, which Zukofsky has either mistakenly or deliberately mistranscribed. I will maintain Zukofsky’s “mistaken” spelling for the purposes of this discussion.

Before finally moving on to other segments of “A”-14, it is worth remarking on the particular materials Zukofsky takes in hand in this case, even though I have been arguing that the specificity of the materials he uses is of relatively little consequence in determining its significance in his poetry. The *Egyptian Book of the Dead* is not the sort of text that normally interested Zukofsky, which typically can be characterized as very canonical (reinforced by the required reading for the standard literature and humanities courses he taught). On the other hand the *Book of the Dead* was the type of material popular in the mid-1960s and representative of the alternative wisdom literature that attracted so many American poets throughout the century as a species of repressed knowledge that poetry might have a special role in revealing or recovering in an age of pervasive rationalization. Zukofsky’s choice here might be seen as a dig at poets such as Olson or Duncan, or for that matter Pound, in his rather irreverent take on mythopoetics. Actually, however, Zukofsky was by no means uninterested in myth, mysticism or religion, even if his perspective on them was persistently secular—they are all “phases of utterance” (*Prep.* 8) and as such manifest the effort to take measure, to come to a dynamic accommodation within the world. So from this perspective he could at times become quite interested in specific linguistic articulations of Platonic myths, or the scholastic theology of Aquinas and Erigena, or the mystical discourse of Jacob Boehm or the Kabbalah. All of these are poetic in their own way, but none represented the expression of some deep or hidden truth or knowledge any more than any other textual manifestation. In this sense Zukofsky treats mystical texts as if lacking the mystical, or occult texts as without anything hidden—which is to say they are emptied of metaphysics. To a degree these kinds of discourses could serve a critical function against dominant secular-rationalist discourses that threaten to become ossified and hegemonic, and Zukofsky for example uses Plato, specifically the *Timaeus*, in *Bottom* as a counter-point to the abstract tendencies of Aristotle (*Bottom* 74-75). Nonetheless, there is little doubt Zukofsky felt a closer affinity with Aristotle than Plato. As his handling of the *Book of the Dead* indicates, Zukofsky is not interested in revealing some hidden or lost meaning of the text. If I suggested that in an important sense he is reenacting the foundational myth of the text, this is simply what we do anyway regardless of our knowledge of this particularly myth and has little enough to do with recovering some archaic experience or knowledge to authenticate the present. Elsewhere, in a passage worked from Montaigne, the poet remarks that the profit of reading is what fires the mind (echoing the “firing” of the prelude) not what furnishes it (344). A related misapprehension in reading Zukofsky would substitute a hermetic or esoteric reference with an etymological or lexical basis, invariably evoking those occasions when he told earnest enquirers that all possible meanings of a given word are relevant. This has led to the idea that the dictionary functions as something like the semantic authority or limit of Zukofsky’s texts. This too is barking up the wrong tree, and the most obvious evidence is the prevalence of punning in the later Zukofsky, particularly of homophonic transcription or suggestion, which has as much authority in creating relations and possible meanings as anything else in his poetry. As mentioned, the concluding “reading” from the *Book of the Dead* is essentially a species of visual punning. For some this is proof of Zukofsky’s ultimate frivolity and lack of responsibility, but this depends on one’s moral or moralizing criteria. For Zukofsky we can say the point is to prevent “a” song from becoming “the” song. There is not some original or definitive meaning, knowledge, experience that is somehow being carried over into the present, yet we can and do and must re-enact whatever it was those priest and scribes were doing in setting down and performing the *Book of the Dead* as acts of measure in the world with others.

### III - The Prelude (“An / orange...”)

Beginning with “A”-14, most of the late long movements of “A” have clearly identifiable preludes (“A”-15, -18, -19 and -22), that is, opening segments that are distinct poems and in some cases were published as such.<sup>11</sup> All of these preludes serve a heuristic function, directing the reader to carefully eye and sound each word or syllable. The visually striking prelude to “A”-14 begins by suggesting some of the morphological relations of words, as the first and third word-lines can be found embedded in the second, and throughout relations often seem determined by visual and aural punning or kinship as much as any plausible sense. The one word per line of predominately one syllable words presents the challenge of isolating each word/line, while moving the poem forward. There is a movable gap in the relationships between individual words and possible syntax that resists settling into a comfortable isomorphism. However, if we compare the closing “translation” worked from the *Book of the Dead* with the prelude, it is striking how different they are despite their superficial formal similarity. I characterized the latter as list-like and even the punctuation tends to emphasize the discreteness of each word, which is appropriate given its emphasis on the eye, even though the latter half begins to complicate the poem and suggest some syntax. The prelude, on the other hand, clips along in a more overtly playful and unfolding manner, the words dripping down the page with the ear and eye more focused on aural and letteristic relations rather than discrete noun-objects.

This prelude is actually exfoliated out of a prior line found in “A”-13: “An orange our sun—the pea, wee wee” (280).<sup>12</sup> Here we have the opening four words plus the final images of “A”-14’s prelude. This line in “A”-13 is in turn embedded between some remarks by Charlie Chaplin, essentially asserting an affirmative perspective against the apocalyptic rhetoric of the times (specifically the threat of nuclear extermination). As we would expect, this merely confirms yet again Zukofsky basic assumptions about what he or poetry is doing. I have argued that Zukofsky’s essay on Chaplin, “*Modern Times*,” written in the mid-1930s is a more useful and articulate statement of his poetics than the “Objectivists” statements that have so preoccupied academics. Chaplin, Zukofsky argues, is the everyman figure improvising an existence out of whatever his world throws up, not simply overcoming the forces that would harm or limit him but creatively making the best out of what is to hand—humor and wit being not the least part of this endeavor (see Z-Notes commentary on Zukofsky in the later 1930s).

As already indicated, the prelude is a hymn to the sun, the most archaic form of poetry, here streamlined into hyper-modernity. The immediate point is simply that Zukofsky draws on the most primordial sense of poetry as praise song, of which the Egyptian hymns to the sun are paradigmatic and to which Zukofsky early in the “A”-14 adds the Psalms, specifically mentioning the Hallel (meaning “praise” in Hebrew) and the so-called Psalms of Degrees or Ascent (316).<sup>13</sup> In any case, we again have the rising theme, which will crop up as space flight, music and in various other forms.

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<sup>11</sup> The openings of “A”-15, -18 and -22 were all published on their own in fine press editions, respectively as *IYYOB* (Turret Books, 1965), *An Unearthing* (Adams House & Lowell House Printers, 1965) and *AN ERA* (Unicorn Press, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> In a long letter on “A” written to Pound in Dec. 1930, Zukofsky similarly pointed out that the design of “A”, specifically its Bachian intentions, grew out of a single line from “Poem beginning ‘The’” (*EP/LZ* 79).

<sup>13</sup> Hallel designates Psalms 120-134, and etymologically the name is believed related to the Egyptian hieroglyph that Zukofsky “translates” as “exalt”—a figure with raised arms—at the end of “A”-14. The Songs of Degrees or Ascent were so named because they are associated

The prelude begins with the striking image of an orange as a stand-in for the sun, but an orange is an embodiment of the sun, quite literally a manifestation of light, which we intake when eaten. Zukofsky constructs a play on “fire”: the fire of the sun makes possible and is embodied in the orange as fire (food) we consume so that we can fire, which then turns into the firing of a rocket that cannot go to the sun but can to the deflected sun that is the moon. The Cold War space race is one of the recurring motifs throughout the movements of the 1960s beginning with “A”-13 (although one could trace this back to the *Stratostat* of “A”-8 (68-69)) and invariably, as here, brings up irresistible associations with the lunatic. If the space race is the manifestation of a certain type of political madness or of the socio-cultural insatiability of knowing as domination, the moon and its madness also has ancient associations with poets, who have been inclined to be space travellers. The introduction of the moon is simply the necessary flip side or “peer” of the sun, the night implied by the sun, as for example in the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. However, here the moonlight is apparently a blessing, albeit seemingly imaged as peeing down on and becoming a pea blossom, which might stand in for the poem. The blending of light and urine, which picks up on the earlier pun on “whets,” gives basic elements for life. As we will see, urinary imagery and golden showers will crop up a number of times in this movement—Zukofsky is not above a bit of low silliness.

The sun/moon, light/dark binaries that we have already encountered in the *Book of the Dead* will play themselves out in numerous forms throughout the rest of the poem. If the impulse of the poem is praise of light and life, this always necessarily implies its dark side which is being countered even as it is acknowledged as integrally bound up with the life principle, which if it is to remain alive must die or negate itself in order to renew itself. If this suggests that the poem does, after all, have a theme and an argument, it is simply what poets or any humans must do if they write poems or engage in cultural labor. One can interpret the prelude thematically as introducing the most archetypal of images: sun and moon, day and night, as signifying life and time, which underwrite the poem—yet another reenactment of the most primordial impetus of poetry. But rather than all this being underwritten by myth, the mythopoetic is underwritten by the structural play of verbal relations, words’ propensity to double or imply others, which generates the poem, as we have already seen in the dawn of the poem out of the night/death of the *Book of the Dead*. Hymns to the sun or moon tend to be tediously predictable if read for their simple sense and properly must be performed in suitable settings (even if only evoked in imagination). They are a means of siting, situating ourselves in the world, what I have already referred to as “measure.” For Zukofsky this meant formal dynamism as re-enacted by readers, poetry as writing/reading to realize a sense of proportion in the world—not just any old sense of static balance, but the maximum one is capable of, and since this is necessarily site specific and sites constantly re-configure, it is an ongoing activity. Any sense of balance or measure achieved is realized within a contentious totality, perpetually under threat and so constantly striving to renew itself. The prelude sites us in cosmos only to bring us down to earth in the end—peed on pea blossoms that are nonetheless the sun’s peer or complement.

#### **IV - Ascents and Descents**

After the somewhat enigmatic announcement of the prelude, the poem immediately picks up the space flight motif, introducing a satellite buffeted by solar winds, which turns out to be Ranger VII, a lunar probe that took the first close-up photos of the surface in July 1964 (just a couple weeks before Zukofsky began “A”-14). We will encounter further and

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with ascending the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem. *Some Time* (1956) includes a series of poems under the title “Songs of Degrees” (CSP 145-152).

even more curious instances of space flight in “A”-14, but I would suggest here that this satellite can stand in for the poet or reader rather uncertainly attempting to situate themselves in the dark expanse of the poem—looking for a place to land and orient. But in typical disorienting manner, the poem drifts off into mention of the counting of hours and then of words, so again numbers or counting as a measuring and here that of poetry in a poem that literally counts words per line. As always there is a play between antithetical valuations of this counting: on one hand this might be taken as the imposition of an abstract and inert order onto a complex process, or on the other it is a necessary means of orienting oneself, of in fact being able to not just live within but attend to and appreciate that complex process. We then return to our satellite, which is identified and lands on the moon.<sup>14</sup> One of its aims was to assess the lunar surface and whether it was smooth and solid enough for future manned landings. All this stands as the outmost extension of ascent as the will to knowledge, with the obvious accent on “dust” perhaps implying that considerable effort and resources were being expended on not very consequential questions—a measuring that attempts or pretends to master space rather than inhabit it. The abrupt mention of Egypt and Sumer, the beginnings of civilization and literacy, is a reminder that their footprint necessarily remains in whatever we accomplish in the present and future, whether space flight or the poem—“*The works*” are the total human endeavor. At this point, the Psalms are mentioned, and I have already suggested they can be understood as variant manifestations of the hymns to the rising sun in the *Book of the Dead* and that “degrees” is another term for number or measure. This seems to suggest a conflation or intertwining of space flight and archetypal hymns as manifestations of human desire or whatever it is that drives us.

This gives an initial taste of the first four pages of the movement following the prelude, which represents one of what I have designated as miscellaneous segments leading up to the *Paradise Lost* passage. Typical are the rapid shifts, not only of images or subject matter but of tone or register as well, and sometimes given topics/images come back but often they do not. The rapidity, combined with the deliberate heterogeneity, seems designed to undercut any assertion of an overriding conceptual schema, which certainly is Zukofsky’s intent and which puts the critic in a difficult spot. However, it is not difficult to loosely relate these images/topics at least proleptically, taking the concluding *Book of the Dead* segment as a base line. However, the challenges to such a thematic reading become progressively steep as we proceed, since as mentioned seemingly anything can crop up at any moment. The fugal play of ascent and descent can be a useful thread to hang things on, but more fundamental is the contextual implications of any verbal act. The textual warp and web is perpetually generative, which means antithetical discourses will insistently assert themselves. If Zukofsky’s assumption is that poetry or song is necessarily affirmative in intent (à la Spinoza), in doing so it necessarily implies its impediments, or, the very act of affirmation will inevitably bump into its limitations, its lack of actualization.

In the middle of these pages leading up to the *Paradise Lost* passage is the first of two segments worked from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and indeed these pages introduce a turn to darker concerns, the other and always implied antithesis of the surface affirmation of hymns to the sun (solar winds as opposed to solar light). This turn is introduced by some enigmatic punning in which we have the expected ear and eye, but also race (anticipating Conrad and the civil rights struggles to come in a moment, as well as the space race) and “erase”—the cancelling of ear and eye. This somehow generates a question of hating those who sing. In one sense this and its companion question are surely rhetorical: one cannot hate those who sing since singing here is what all humans do, they all are going about attempting

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<sup>14</sup> Strictly speaking, Ranger VII was not designed to land on the moon but to take pictures up to the point of impact.

to realized themselves and singing hymns to life as the activity and labor of living. This is an example of Zukofsky's Spinozism: no individual is inherently evil and hate is ultimately a perverted and misconceived form of love. Nevertheless, by posing the question rhetorically, the poet introduces "hate," and in doing so acknowledges the always active presence of binaries that one cannot simply wish away or repress. This general idea or at least the ethical question is again picked up a few stanzas on with the mention of "bane foe" juxtaposed with "hymn," and then followed by an affirmative statement that sounds like a typical praise of god, which is the case (quoting from the Psalms). Mixed in with these rhetorical questions that appear to turn against the poem is an emphasis on "I" whose erasure of the "eye"—sensuous existence in the world with others—is the repression of such contraries, a theme that will we will encounter again. Also in the mix is a reference to Aristippus, a fairly obscure Greek philosopher in whom Zukofsky seems to have had an early interest, juxtaposed with "spittle."<sup>15</sup> While there is an actual anecdote behind this spitting, one could hardly be expected to conjure it from what the poem offers, and one suspects that it is the very pronunciation of philosopher's name as much as anything that induces this expectoration. More to the point, all this appears to be part of a general assertion of negation, a sense of disgust, rejection or skepticism that counters or fugally counterpoints the aspiration to praise.

Threaded into this passage are homophonic snippets from two Psalms, although for all practical purposes they are invisible to the reader unless pointed out. Oddly, neither Psalm is from the two groups mentioned just prior (Hallel and Songs of Ascent). Given our concern with antithetical and fugal forms, it is notable that Zukofsky homophonically draws out senses that appear to oppose or at least resist the semantic sense. The first instance, "may / ear race / and eye / them," is from the Hebrew of Psalm 19 for a phrase meaning "enlightening the eyes" (in the King James version). This psalm is a hymn in praise of God as the creator, including of laws. The second instance, from "bore—he..." to "...have lavished," is from Psalm 104 (combined from verses 1 and 12), another hymn in praise of God the creator. The central phrase, "my / bane foe / hymn yet / new call," suggestively renders the Hebrew for "from among the branches they [birds] sing." Zukofsky's rendition is elusively multi-faceted, and there is much fodder here for an inter-textual reading, which the reader is free to pursue. However, the poem does not signal its source in such a manner as to trigger such a reading, rather the homophonic manner is simply a means of producing pieces of his poem. Nevertheless, if the method and sources worked are hidden, the effect obviously is not. Instances such as these strongly suggest that the homophonic manner was useful to Zukofsky in resisting the semantic lure to flatten the text out and instead composing sinuously fugal passages, which if nothing else add yet another texture to the multi-textured surface of the poem. As far as I am aware, these are the only homophonic renderings in "A"-14, aside from a stanza rather comically rendered from Job (37.10-12). Except for some set passages or discrete lines—most notably the opening of "A"-15 (from Job) and the partially homophonic renderings from the poems of Mallarmé in "A"-19 (409-411)—Zukofsky did not incorporate homophonic transcription as a ubiquitous component of his compositional practice until "A"-22 and especially "A"-23.

The *Heart of Darkness* passage, the first of two, is introduced starkly enough with the line "Dark heart"—an unusually insistent allusion for Zukofsky. Interpolated into this pastiche of quotations from Conrad are allusions to the civil rights struggle, which then reappear more concretely immediately following the quotations. These snapshots are

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<sup>15</sup> There is an early unpublished poem entitled "(The Master Aristippus)," written in 1923 (see "Discarded Poems," *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*, ed. Carroll F. Terrell (1979): 146-148), and a significant passage in "A"-22 worked from Diogenes Laertius' life of Aristippus, including the spitting anecdote ("A"-22.517.3-10).

specifically of the notorious events that had recently taken place in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963: the brutal attack by police on demonstrators and the murder of four black girls in a church bombing—events still emblematic today of the African-American struggle against racism. While there are various news events mentioned in the poem, it is these incidents associated with the civil rights movement and race riots that are the primary example of national social trauma in “A”-14, just as it is the Kennedy assassination in “A”-15 and the Vietnam War in “A”-18. The linking of American racism with the *Heart of Darkness* is not subtle but reflects the period’s tracing of the problem to the broader history of imperialist depravations. However, the larger passage is typically complex, and we need to carefully consider the specific snippets Zukofsky chooses to present from Conrad, which are not much concerned with imperialism and the history of slavery per se as with a psychological-linguistic state. Despite the allusion to the source text, simply going to *Heart of Darkness* and reading it back into Zukofsky’s poem will almost invariably lead us astray. None of the key characters is named (Marlowe, Kurtz, the Intended), and we merely have pronouns (he, I, her/she, you). The initial quotation emphasizes being “alone / in the / wilderness” (317), indicating a solipsism alienated from a sense of community and common humanity. There is no explicit mention of the barbaric rites from which Marlowe is attempting to draw Kurtz away, simply a state of being or mind that manifests itself in all manner of destructive behavior. We then have the first brief reference to Birmingham quickly followed by another quotation from Marlowe’s visit to the Intended with its ghostly interpenetration of Kurtz’s heart of darkness. This part gives emphatic stress to the “I,” even slipping in a three-count line at the very bottom of page 317 in order to give a double emphasis to the pronoun. As Zukofsky presents it, the solipsism of “he” is not merely a darkness from which the world of “she” is innocent or sealed off but is equally pervasive throughout. The conventionally gendered spheres kept distinct by Marlowe are here collapsed.<sup>16</sup> To further complicate matters, the second quotation from Conrad is run together with another from Henry James to the effect that “she” is sad when she laughs and laughs when she is sad. As a statement this is simply a paradoxical tautology, but of course in James or Zukofsky’s poem it is not a statement but gestures at complexities that cannot be neatly encapsulated in a psychological formula. The overt presentation of antimonies should alert us, and the implication is that the dialectical interplay of the tragic and the comic is by no means beyond the feminine sphere of experience. In the wilderness, “he” collapses into “I” and forgets “she” or others and thus his own humanity. Zukofsky includes Marlowe’s remark that Kurtz was not a lunatic as his intelligence was perfectly clear, but of course clear reason can be its own form of madness when it cuts itself from its immanence in the world and relations with others—this is the burden of *Bottom*’s argument. The counter to this lucidity comes after the images from Birmingham—“Crazy / white man!”—promptly followed by mention of high-altitude (that is, in outer space) nuclear bomb testing.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, however, this exclamation is an apt reflection on the entire Conrad-Birmingham segment.

However, we need to acknowledge another element or layer in this passage, that is the overtly ludic, which might strike us here as mere trite humor—what by any usual standards is entirely inappropriate in a passage purportedly about painful psycho-social matters. Following the Conrad-James quotation and immediately prior to the set of images from

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. the moment in “A”-18 when the poet remarks how his wife (“love”) is “scorched” by the images of self-immolating protestors against the Vietnam War entering into the domestic sphere via TV (399).

<sup>17</sup> Zukofsky apparently found the “Crazy white man” remark in a media report of Hawaiians’ response on seeing the flash of a high altitude test designated Starfish Prime, which was detonated almost 1500 miles away in July 1963.



Birmingham we get what can only be described as a juvenile witticism of one frost advising another to stay warm. There is no problem linking this to the preceding in terms of antinomies, but it is the abrupt shift of register that appears entirely wayward. The larger Conrad passage, as mentioned, announces itself with “Dark heart” but then promptly stoops to a pun on long underwear. These instances are typical and crop up everywhere in the later movements of “A”, which commentators tend to deal with by pretending they do not exist. The most obvious explanation is Zukofsky’s refusal to allow the verbal texture to flatten out, so that the reader is constantly confronted with a highly diverse linguistic structure whose variegations impinge on and interrelate with each other. Any verbal articulation potentially brings in or relates to any other, and no specific articulation is complete without all those others, which may include all those that are possible but yet to be actualized. This entire passage is not a commentary on the civil rights struggle and says nothing about the attitude we should take toward the issue. Zukofsky did not feel it was his or the poem’s task to tell the reader how to feel about the events in Birmingham or the Vietnam War or the assassination of Kennedy, to indulge in or stir up a sense of indignation. These events are verbally registered as instances of hurt in the body politic, what literally prevents the poem from fully realizing itself, but as verbal articulations they are not intended to prompt outrage which so easily settles into moral righteousness. So Zukofsky’s poems constantly and jarringly turn on themselves in order to elicit in readers a compendious and dynamic sense of being in the world with others. There seems little doubt Zukofsky felt that excessive earnestness was a bane to poetry, and such comical nonsense or dubious punning will almost invariably appear whenever there is some danger of tendentiousness. Interpolated between the details from Birmingham and the exclamation, “Crazy white man!,” appears a quoted apothegm that an unbridled horse is more trustworthy than an undigested harangue (the quote is from Theophrastus). However, more important than the pithy nugget of wisdom, which initially seems apropos nothing, is the overtly figural manner of the maxim, a prompt to keep in mind that this is the case with everything else in the poem. This is not to de-realize or diminish the pain of history this segment primarily records, but to insist that the “facts” read in the daily newspaper are also sited within the larger world of language, whose larger concern is measure, our effort to orient ourselves in the world with and through others as language always necessarily implies. As any experienced reader of “A” knows, whenever horses appear there is the probable allegory of the poet or poem itself, so in this sense we can interpret the maxim as stating a preference for heterogeneity and formal risk, such as a poem that allows the unruliness of the materials itself to find their own orders, over a poetry driven and ordered by an argument. More horses will appear later.

Before moving on, we should mention the other Conrad passage that appears ten pages later (328-329) on the other side of the *Paradise Lost* and Ryōkan’s scroll segments we will consider in a moment. Although marked off as a single quotation, Zukofsky splices together, as he often does, two distinct pieces and in this case tampers somewhat with one of them. Having previously made the intersection between Conrad and contemporary racism, he does not explicitly do so here, but instead the first quotation gives a vision of destructive desolation left in the wake of black rebellion. The predominate images are of empty or destroyed structures and, although Conrad’s description is obviously non-urban (huts, cottages, houses), they almost certainly are intended to evoke the first series of 1960s race riots that took place during the summer of 1964, including several in and around New York City (also referred to at 346). But more fundamental is the evocation of black rage. Zukofsky has made two notable alterations in Conrad’s text, substituting “a gang / of *thick-lips*” for Conrad’s “a lot of mysterious niggers” and “white swine” for “yokels,” which I take to be

drawing on the voices of the contemporary American confrontation.<sup>18</sup> The effect is to blend together the rage as expressed by both extremes, racists and enraged blacks, into an apocalyptic vision of desolation. Zukofsky then adds Marlowe's well-known remark that it is not work per se that he likes or values but what is "in the work." The fact that this is syntactically continuous with the vision of destruction is yet another example of Zukofsky's skewering effect, never allowing the poem to flatten out into statement. "Work" here is usefully polysemous, so we might understand this as a critique of a Protestant work ethic so ingrained in American political discourse, that any work (job, employment) is worthwhile. In this sense, perhaps, the emphasis on tackling the black question by making them employable and getting them off the streets is evading deeper and more socially pervasive quality of life issues. Or, this might be an observation that the work or text or poem as such is less important than what happens in it, an insistence on an engagement with the particulars rather than on overarching generalizations, in which case we might hear a chime with the unbridled horse. We also note that the pointed emphasis on "in" leads immediately into some play on the meaning of "innocence," in yet another instance of the dialectical turning typical of the poem.

## V - Milton

"A"-14 includes two significant but quite different passages worked from Milton materials: six uninterrupted pages are carved entirely out of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (319-325), then after a short break another couple of pages are largely drawn from Milton's biography. In the *Paradise Lost* passage, Zukofsky has snipped short pieces from throughout the epic, sometimes only a couple words and rarely more than a complete line, and quilted them together to form his own poetry.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the biographical passage is more conventionally collagist, but with Zukofsky's typically abrupt shifts. This puzzling disparity in the handling and presentation of materials that on first glance one would expect to be related is typical of the late "A" and the challenges it poses. What this might say about Milton, we will address in a moment, but we will begin by considering how the *Paradise Lost* passage ties into the early pages of the movement.

Zukofsky discovers something of a sci-fi story in Milton's poem, which is not so surprising given all the flying across cosmic spaces that narrative entails. The passage begins with a speaker wondering where to fly, with the suggestion of a landing on an unknown planet, although as the place description proceeds it does come into focus as our earth, yet under a somewhat unfamiliar aspect—we might take this as a species of Martian poetry. But

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<sup>18</sup> As Harry Gilnois has pointed out, Zukofsky's substitution of "thick-lips" for Conrad's "niggers" recalls *Othello* I.i where Othello is referred to as "thick-lips" ("Dark Heart: Conrad in Louis Zukofsky's 'A'," *The Conradian* 14.1/2 (Dec. 1989): 96).

<sup>19</sup> The first nine stanzas of this *Paradise Lost* segment arrange various bits from Books II to V, and thereafter—beginning with "space may / produce..." (320)—Zukofsky's selections follow in almost strict order the sequence of Milton's poem with something taken from every book. See the annotations on the Z-site for a complete list of the relevant passages from Milton. Zukofsky's text was *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. James Holly Hanford, 2nd ed. (NY: Ronald Press Co., 1953). In his copy preserved in the HRC both Hanford's extensive life of Milton as well as *Paradise Lost* are heavily marked, the latter including cross-references to other works (Shakespeare, Spinoza, Dante, etc.) and often brief critical remarks. Zukofsky does not seem to have paid attention to any other works. Characteristically, he made a list (seven pages) of brief quotations based on his markings and then composed the passages from these notes. These notes are attached to the loose-leaf "A" notes notebook in HRC 3.16.

then again, not so unfamiliar since this is readily recognizable within the conventions of poetry: predominately pastoral (georgic) and innocent, the Biblical garden where of course a good deal of Milton's poem takes place but here lacking the ominous framing of Satan's mission except to the extent the reader has taken on that role. All this is in one sense an allegory of the alien reader attempting to land in the poem, the "I/eye" orientating itself in the text. Initially, hovering over the text, wondering where to go or to begin, the eye seeing "all" sees little or nothing, remaining on too abstract a level, but then settles in more closely, apparently helped by the de-conceptualizing olfactory sense (a whiff of seasalt), so things come somewhat into focus. This "I/eye" reasserts its presence periodically throughout. There is a marvelous series of stanzas (beginning: "I started / back... (320)) where the "I" is startled by the mirroring or reciprocating text, but then they proceed to thoroughly intertwine so that "I" and "thou" become so confused that we cannot say who is leading who. Indeed the inhabitants of this world appear to habitually walk in pairs. In this utopian relation between reader and text, all the senses are activated with wonder. The verse is sinuous, gliding from one sense and image to another. However, toward the end of the segment there is the inevitable reassertion of the antithetical with the mention of lost paradise and of death on his pale horse (324). Yet even death or his horse manures the ground, allowing for the lushness that predominates in this segment. Therefore, the horse that Zukofsky inevitably finds—which might signify the poet, the poem or any cultural labor—is conflated with the fall, and the fall's always doubled sense as the eternal sentence of labor and the labor of birth, both fortunate and doleful. Still, pale death appears to leave its mark and the concluding handful of stanzas of the *Paradise Lost* segment are notably more abstract, lacking the preceding sensuousness, with the suggestion that the necessities of social order ("law") assert themselves. It is at least plausible that here Zukofsky finds himself in agreement with Milton: that our unfortunate fall is due to an insatiable desire to know; or, the desire to command the text and its readers, the tyranny of the concept, results in the loss of the pleasures of the text.

While many might easily enough fail to notice the source text, readers reasonably familiar with *Paradise Lost* will catch the opening lines as those of Satan wondering where to flee spliced with Belial's caution about the impossibility of escaping the all-seeing eye of God. Zukofsky has characteristically fused these together so that the "I" who wishes to flee is also the "eye" that sees everything, which I have suggested means seeing nothing: all-mind detached from sensuous contact with the world, or the reader as yet separate from the particulars of the poem. One way Zukofsky has de-Miltonized Milton is to scrupulously leave out all proper names, with one exception, "Tsīyōn," where he has Hebrewized Milton's "Sion"—the new Jerusalem which here is all nature. Zukofsky had the usual modernist suspicion about Milton and his legacy, yet at the same time Zukofsky venerated the poetic canon and in that sense Milton was an Alps that could not be skirted. Certainly Milton's rich aural poetry would have had a certain appeal to Zukofsky, and as indicated he draws on the lush descriptions for his own purposes. Most striking is what happens to Milton's epic when translated into the two-word lines and short stanzas—a more complete re-sounding of Milton's blank verse can hardly be imagined. This results in a thorough decomposition of Milton's paradigmatic hypotaxis and with it the entire moral machinery of his epic. As the opening fly-in suggests (in Milton's poem spoken by Satan and leading to the famous self-recognition that "hell is myself" ), Zukofsky presents a relative lack of such framing as readers find themselves down in and among the flora and fauna of the text. Paradise and its loss has more to do with a stance toward the world or words than with moral or political arguments. In *Bottom* the disproportionate dominance of the mind alienates one from the world of which we are necessarily a part, a sensuous existence that is necessarily the basis of the very ideas that threaten to distance us from it. But if this suggests a critique of Milton, this should not obscure the homage implied in making new poetry out of his epic.

After a brief break for a segment on Ryōkan's scroll, which I will examine in a moment, the poem returns to Milton, but this time primarily drawing on details of Milton's biography, plus a few snippets from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* (327-328). This is the first of two biographical passages, the other more extensive example being concerned with the young Bach. The details seem initially a mere string of miscellaneous details that caught Zukofsky's attention so that it is not easy to know what to make of them. But they sketch a fragmentary portrait of qualities that I believe Zukofsky identified with, and this connection is marked by a personal interpolation into the middle of this passage: after quoting remarks by Milton that moving house made him ill and about taking a supply of books when he travelled, there is an abrupt intrusion by someone insistently quizzing the poet as to whether he is a foreigner (specifically an Italian), to which the poet responds he is a Jew from New York City.<sup>20</sup> Inexplicable shifts in Zukofsky's poems are common enough, and I have already argued he clearly gravitated toward variegated and unpredictable poetic textures or tonal modulations. But it seems to me that this unusually direct autobiographical intrusion is meant to signal his links with the biographical Milton. Zukofsky had in fact just made a major house move before he began composing "A"-14, which was the second move in a bit more than two years, and as we know, books are always a major challenge in such moves.<sup>21</sup> It is not that readers are expected to pick up these precise links, which are entirely beyond reasonable view, except for a mutual sense of displacement—half humorous, half serious. The passage begins, quoting Milton, with remarks that the poet does not feel a compulsion to write and that he does not care to drink with the boys, which segues directly into another claim that his political writings were not meant to insult but written under the banner of truth. These are all sentiments with which Zukofsky would generally be in agreement, although their interest here is equally due to their high rhetorical, somewhat comical manner. The latter half of the passage, following the personal interruption, alludes to Milton's retreat after the fall of the Commonwealth and then ends with a pastiche of quotations that begin and end with Zukofsky's signature concern with "eyes." Included is a snippet from the Preface to *Paradise Lost*, the famous defense of his use of unrhyming blank verse, which undoubtedly Zukofsky recognized as a crucial forerunner in the poetic legacy that leads to free verse and the conception of an immanent rather than superimposed form. The missing subject of the particular phrase Zukofsky quotes is "musical delight," which consists of "the sense variously drawn from one verse to another not in the jingling [of rhyme]" (328). This is an apt description of "A"-14, which somewhat wildly seems to draw from one verse to another without the controlling oversight of argument or concept, much less of the metronome of cadence. The degree to which readers can be expected to pick up identities between Milton and Zukofsky will depend on their familiarity with both poets, but in any case is not

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<sup>20</sup> In actual biographical fact, it was Celia rather than Louis himself who responded to the persistent inquirer during a trip to Europe in the summer of 1957. In noting down various details from Milton's life, Zukofsky included an incident during his grand tour involving the dangers of expressing his religious views in Catholic Italy, which evokes this memory from the Zukofskys' own trip, an analogous instance of not asserting one's own beliefs yet not equivocating when asked (HRC 3.16). Particularly in "A"-22 & -23, Zukofsky will fairly often use this odd procedure of substituting an analogous textual incident into a passage otherwise drawing on a single source and in the process rendering entirely oblique its semantic or analogical relationship, but then the point is that that sense is not the sense or connection that matters.

<sup>21</sup> The prior move and its disruptions in Feb. 1962 was the occasion of the sequence "The Old Poet Moves to a New Apartment 14 Times" (CSP 222-231), one poem of which mentions carrying up cartons of books into their new apartment (227).

demanded. If nothing else, the passage offers a thumbnail portrait of a poet in his diverse concerns and circumstances, and here the emphasis is certainly on a poet in the world rather than as a sermonizer. Although the passage has a coherent identity in the sense of being from or about Milton, actually it is typical of the other miscellaneous segments throughout “A”-14 and indeed the later movements of “A”. There is the disconcerting indiscriminateness of the materials, in tone as much as content, which is worked into a sequence. Seamless is not the right characterization, but nonetheless the effect is elusively sinuous—constantly suggestive and variable, without ever feeling as if we can quite manage to fix the sense. This would be Zukofsky’s music.

## VI - Ryōkan’s scroll

The *Paradise Lost* passage immediately leads into a segment focusing on a hanging scroll in which the poet discovers his own initials (325-326). This scroll is a reproduction of the Japanese Zen poet Ryōkan’s calligraphy in a running cursive style, in which case it is quite likely anyone might discern the suggestion of their initials in a script they cannot “read.” This Ryōkan scroll segment has obvious similarities with the *Book of Dead* segment in that it is another blind reading of an unknown script. As with the *Book of the Dead* passage, we do not get so much a description or image of the scroll as a possible “translation” or transmutation of it. In this case, contrasting with the hieratic inertness of the hieroglyphs, we have a source text that foregrounds gesture and movement.

This segment falls into three distinct parts which progress in a simple dialectical fashion: first a subjective reading of the scroll, then the introduction of another voice, followed by a return to the subjective voice but now informed by or intertwined with the second. The subjectivity of the initial phase is most obviously marked by the poet finding his own initials in the calligraphy and then feeling as if he is breathing in or with the scroll, which then opens up into a fairly predictable Orientalist scene of falling snow and blossoms. This is experienced as if sound has been “forgot.” “Sound” is here left suggestively ambiguous so that it might refer to the silence of a painted snow scene, or the script this reader cannot sound, or the voice of the poet now dead, or the cacophonous noise and cares of the world that such Oriental poems or art supposedly transcend. However, with this mention of sound, the other voice intrudes, neatly counterpointing this said soundlessness by asserting that s/he only sees what is sounded. This second voice is presented in three clearly marked pieces: after the assertion about seeing what is heard, there is some background information on the occasion of Ryōkan writing the scroll and then the observation that the public version is upside down.<sup>22</sup> This fracturing of the second voice obviously indicates the presence of the

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<sup>22</sup> Although it would be difficult to figure out from the poem, the background to this puzzling upside downness is that the image of the scroll was used on the cover of Zukofsky’s just published little book of poems *I’s (pronounced eyes)* (Trobar Press, 1964) but was mistakenly printed upside down (see the Z-site annotations on “A”-14 for an image of the cover and further details on the publication). Zukofsky’s remark that it is hard to see but he will check when he gets home, probably means he is looking at the image on the cover of *I’s (pronounced eyes)*, which aside from being upside down is small and of poor quality, so he needs to check the scroll at home to confirm the printing mistake. The other voice of this passage is extracted from a letter from Cid Corman, who loaned this reproduction of Ryōkan’s scroll to a number of his friends for a year each, clearly hoping to generate poetic responses, which Zukofsky duly obliged. See Corman, “Ryokan’s Scroll,” *Sagetrieb* 1.2 (Fall 1982): 285-189. There is a companion short poem, “(Ryokan’s scroll)” (*CSP* 203), that leads off *I’s (pronounced eyes)* (1963), which attempts to visual suggest the look of a scroll and mimics its dripping manner using a one-count line. That poem works with a literal translation

larger world and its contingencies; although the scroll remains steadily as the object under discussion or observation, we now get a small gamut of varying discursive modes addressed to or around it. The return of the poet's voice then picks up on this upside downness, encouraging him to read up or to imagine those blossoms falling up, which might be related to my suggestion that the form of "A"-14 tends toward vertical reading. In any case this enhances the sense of a reading or writing that is relatively liberated from the disciplines not only of semantics but of syntax and grammar as well. This last part of the segment is particularly hard to parse but we can recognize that it amalgamates various elements of the preceding readings. Its predominant trajectory seems to be the acceptance of the "erratum" as an element of the poem, a mark of the inevitable complex of immanent existence or the pressure of limitations, whether thought of as the foibles and compromises of any production or as a reminder of the necessarily mixed social existence of any art work. So there is the disruption of the purely subjective aesthetic experience and the recognition that the subjective is bounded up with the outside and others—thus there is little surprise that the "world" is mentioned explicitly at the end of the passage.

Of course, if this plays itself out as the suggestion of a mini-narrative, all the elements are implied from the outset, as there is no innocent subjective reading. Whatever the poet initially reads in the scroll—his name, snow and blossoms— is strongly socially marked. His reading is also plainly erroneous, as he does not even "know" the language. But this merely highlights what is the case with any reading, that it necessarily takes place within a complex totality largely well beyond our ken. Yet for all this, Ryōkan's scroll is legible, it speaks to us and manifests a commonality however thickly mediated.

The appearance of this segment on Ryōkan's scroll immediately after that worked from *Paradise Lost* is quite suggestive. Zukofsky makes a fairly explicit link between the two segments since the *Paradise Lost* passage concludes with a certain admonition about the will to knowledge and then Milton's image of "all the stars thou knew'st by name," which is promptly followed by the poet finding his name (initials) in the Japanese scroll. So this link already indicates that the subjective discovery of his name folds out into the larger cosmos or into other texts; it is no different from and inextricably related to the making or finding of orders that is the activity of living. Versions of East Asian poetry of course have played a crucial role in modern Anglo-American poetry, precisely as a poetic model to counter an inheritance that can be attributed above all to Milton—small, gestural, anti-hypotactic, which in many respects define essential values of modernist poetry. The Ryōkan scroll is a quite literal image of such aspirations, and as we have seen allows the reader to move in any direction relatively free of the conventions of grammar, syntax and semantics, as if an image of pure intentionality without intention. But again, if the very foreignness of the source materials enables this sense of permissiveness, Zukofsky overtly stages this as a scene of re-writing/-reading, fundamentally no different from any other act of social labor and its inevitable indebtedness.

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of Ryōkan's poem supplied by Corman, which also lies behind the snow and blossoms of this "A"-14 passage. "(Ryokan's scroll)" itself has a companion poem, "Daruma" (*CSP* 221-222), that leads off *After I's* (1964) and was inspired by the gift of a mounted stone from Will Petersen, who worked with Corman on the second series of *Origin* journal (see annotations to "Daruma" on the Z-site and Richard Parker, "Louis Zukofsky's American Zen" in *Modernism and the Orient*, ed. Zhaoming Qian (2012): 232-248). Both Corman and Petersen were living in Japan at the time.

## VII - Young Bach

Beginning with “A”-14, Zukofsky introduced significant segments worked from Bach’s biography in chronological order into three successive long movements (“A”-14, -15, and -18). Each of these segments covers the standard periods of Bach’s life determined primarily by where he resided: “A”-14 covers his youth and first jobs at Arnstadt and Mühlhausen (1685-1708; “A” 338-343), “A”-15 at the court of Weimar (1708-1717; “A” 366-367) and “A”-18 in Cöthen (1717-1723; “A” 405). The last and most significant period in Leipzig (1723-1750) is less extensively touched on in “A”-21,<sup>23</sup> but was already represented by the prominent appearance of *St. Matthew Passion* in “A”-1 and -8, plus the *Art of Fugue* in “A”-12. These biographical segments appear to be programmatically laid into their respective movements, simply pre-determined materials that Zukofsky decided to include, and do not have obvious thematic relationship to the rest of the movements’ concerns. As I have argued, by this point in “A”, subject matter was largely arbitrary and the poem assumes that anything will find its connections and relevance. Of course, the central importance of Bach in “A” is established from its very first lines, and Zukofsky never failed to highlight Bach’s presence whenever he publically introduced or summarized “A”.

However, if Bach appears as a major unifying leitmotiv, how he appears is various and unpredictable. Generally in the earlier movements of “A”, through “A”-13, the emphasis is on Bach as a formal model—either in terms of a polyvocal or fugal concept of organization or in terms of specific works suggesting something of a formal template for given movements, such as the *Mass in B Minor* for “A”-10, *Art of Fugue* in “A”-12 or a partita (suite) in “A”-13. In some of his explanations of “A”, Zukofsky would extend these Bachian formal models to such works as “A”-7 and “A”-9—insisting that the poetic forms he is adopting (sonnet and canzone) are musical in origin and formed part of the tradition within which Bach necessarily worked. While suggestive, such explanations tend to imply a neater and more determined order than plausibly seems the case, but Zukofsky, like any number of other poets, was inclined toward such claims when speaking to potential readers whose initial encounter with the poem was bafflement. Nevertheless it is certainly the case that Bach stands in for an aesthetic ideal that he wished to honor and emulate but also for an entire tradition and idea of music that Zukofsky so frequently evoked as a conceptual model that gravitated against a poetry of personal expression or as a mode of rumination. But this comes into Zukofsky’s work in a number of different forms, or one might say from a number of different angles, and this is reflected in the various ways Bach appears in the poem. One can say that presentation of *St. Matthew Passion* in the opening passage of “A”-1 combines a polyvocal form, the biographical Bach and the subjectivity of the poet who experiences the performance of the work in the present which awakens a sense of his own artistic aspirations. The intersection of Bach’s life as an artistic model with the aspirations of the poet is clearly implied in “A”-4 where there appears a quotation from Bach about how music first came into his family with his great-great-grandfather, a miller, playing his lute while grinding grain (15), which is embedded in a movement preoccupied with Zukofsky’s own Jewish heritage. Early in “A”-8 appears the most extensive biographical passage in the early movements, in this case giving details of Bach’s practical struggles to put on an adequate performance of *St. Matthew Passion* (45-46), which fits with that movement’s emphasis on the topic of labor.

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<sup>23</sup> “A”-21 includes quotations from two Bach letters from his time in Leipzig (491-492). There is also a segment worked from a description of Leipzig and Bach’s accommodations there; however, in this case Zukofsky suppresses any overt reference to Bach and amalgamates the descriptive details with his own living circumstances so that the relation to Bach is effectively hidden (see 495.27-496.3 and the annotations on the Z-site).

In the case of the later segments from Bach's biography, although the raw materials are the same and all pretty much come from a single standard biography, the feel and handling in "A"-14 is quite different from that in "A"-15 and -18.<sup>24</sup> Both the latter can be characterized as typical documentary collage, scissoring together select details from the source text. However, "A"-15 is syntactically coherent and usually each line marks a clear semantic or phrasal unit, very much in the manner of the *Cantos*, whereas "A"-18 is aggressively broken up with short pieces joined together by ellipses, which matches the very agglutinative manner of that movement overall. The difference is even more marked with the "A"-14 segment, where the more lyrical form and the generally lighter touch results in a markedly more playful treatment of the Bach materials, which intersects with the poet's own biography and thoughts, as we already saw anticipated in the Milton biographical segment.

In contrast to the large body of his compositions, the historical documentation of Bach's life is comparatively sparse and includes very little of a personal nature. Zukofsky mentions various Bach compositions, but they merely appear among miscellaneous more mundane concerns without any special emphasis. Bach's life was quite ordinary, that of a hard-working professional, something of a fussy perfectionist, dealing with the ordinary problems of a heavy work load and a large family—the evidence of the importance of his family life is generally the most personal information we have. Obviously this all suits Zukofsky's own unheroic sense of the artist-poet, a career of steady labor with limited expectations of public recognition—in "A"-15 Zukofsky notes that there is still no street named after Bach in Weimar (that has since been rectified) and Bach's public recognition in his lifetime was modest, particularly compared with his apotheosis in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Before pursuing the specifics of the Bach segment in "A"-14, we might backtrack for a moment and consider the shift to a three-word line, which in the current edition of "A" begins at the head of a verso page and consequently is easily missed as one turns the page. Precisely why Zukofsky shifts the poem to a three-count line at this point remains a mystery, but it is noticeable that the three count section is more personal, or perhaps we should say the personal asserts itself more overtly, as it is full of both subjective observation, memories and overt references to the autobiographical "I." However, I would argue that this assertion of the self functions to draw out its necessary entanglement with the world, that the self is also necessarily related to everything. One indication of this is the difficulty one always encounters trying to hang onto the fiction of a stable speaker—even though there is a perpetual return to the self, it constantly gets lost such that it is hard to sustain even a compendious version of stream-of-consciousness.

At the beginning of the three-count section (top of 332), we get a passage of imagistic description that comes into quasi-focus as a harbor scene, somewhere along the docks of the New York harbor (probably Brooklyn side), with all the motley sights and objects one might expect to find there. In "A"-12 I suggested that observations of the passing traffic in New York harbor become an image-memory of the speaker-viewer's connection with the rest of the world, of the observer's interrelation with the totality.<sup>25</sup> With the spatial folding out inevitably comes the temporal expansion of past and future. "A"-14's seemingly random details staged within a harbor setting indicate precisely such extrapolation, so that the

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<sup>24</sup> Both early and late, Zukofsky's main source for biographical information on Bach was Charles Sanford Terry's *Bach: A Biography* (1928), a standard authoritative work. However, in later years, Zukofsky sometimes uses material from *The Bach Reader*, eds. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel (1945, rev. ed. 1966), a biography in the form of letters and contemporaneous documents.

<sup>25</sup> See Z-Notes commentary on "A"-12 and also on "A"-13, where I argue for a similar reading in the fifth part of that movement.



juxtaposition of an eagle knocker with a footlocker and a Chinese wind chime (333) can suggest all manner of relations and implications—especially since what we are seeing is a verbal rather than object world. It is not surprising, then, that in the next moment the poem mentions correspondence with friends. We have already encountered reading as a self-conscious activity, and more instances are to come. But if this early passage (in the three-count section) with its ships, shipping and nations on the other side of the world, emphasizes the spatial expansiveness as the field of the poem, it is arguably the temporal expansiveness, particularly memory that looms large through most of the rest of the movement, which is replete with memories of the poet's childhood and youth as well as those of his son.

Much of this prepares for or helps situate the segment on the young Bach in the sense that the harbor scene implies the interconnectivity of everything, both spatially and temporally, and so the poet will intersect Bach's biography with moments from his own. The lead into the Bach segment involves a mention of the poet's recently deceased friend (William Carlos Williams) buried over on the Jersey side of the Hudson River, which then meanders into some Latin phrases that he promptly translates to the effect that they are singing their city. These Latin phrases are epigrams referring to Bach's natal city, Eisenach, so this is merely a variant reiteration of Zukofsky's praise song motif, what any artist necessarily does, singing the human city—and in this sense the aptness of the preceding reference to Williams is evident. Admittedly this remains all a bit obscure at this point, but a few stanzas further the poem explicitly evokes Bach's biography which will dominate the next five plus pages. Yet hardly has the poem launched Bach than Zukofsky intrudes memories of his own. Specifically he mentions going at age five to see *Prometheus Bound* staged in Yiddish (he practically grew up in the Yiddish theater district), which chimes with the fact that Bach as a student learned to read a moralizing Greek text by pseudo-Phocylides. This may seem a rather tenuous analogy, a mutual early exposure to Greek literature, even though Zukofsky adds that pseudo-Phocylides was "half-Jewish" since his text evidences knowledge of the Pentateuch. Actually there is not much of an analogy here between their lives, more like a few random associations. But Zukofsky valued precisely such seeming randomness, like the strewn objects along the harbor piers. In his late lecture on Wallace Stevens he begins by making a list of all the biographical connections he can think of between himself and the older poet, at the end of which a skeptical listener/reader would likely conclude that these conjunctures add up to zip. But for Zukofsky, however ephemeral such connections may be, they matter and feed into how he reads Stevens' work, so they prepare for the climax of his talk which is the reading of a parallel series of poems by Stevens and himself. We all recognize that personal associations, direct or indirect, matter considerably in how we orient ourselves toward a given text, even if such connections are usually critically bracketed out. In any case, the interpolation of Zukofsky's memory of the Yiddish theater signals a subjective reading of Bach's life, not that Bach's life serves as an allegory for his own, but that here and there there will be various intersections so that this becomes one means of weaving the Bach materials into his poem.

In fact Zukofsky indicates that he is not only reading but rereading Bach's life after a Biblical period of 40 years (he will also mention several pages later that he is rereading Montaigne as well after 40 years with different eyes). So aside from whatever parallels there may be between the lives of Bach and the poet, there is also the difference between a younger and older poet and how this alters his perspective on Bach. Rereading Bach's life thus curiously becomes a reflection on his own, and he notes explicitly that there is much in Bach's life that he now sees that he could not when he read it as a young man. A banal enough observation, except that it registers the instability of reading, which is to say of the text. However, what lies behind Zukofsky's observation is primarily the older poet's awareness of the tension between the innocent pursuit of art and the profession or career of

art. So there is mention of a few professional conflicts in the young Bach's life in contrast to his personal compulsion to pursue his music and his insistence on the highest standards. These incidents are presented at least half-comically, and one suspects that, for example, the incident of the *zippelfagottist* (342) gets mention primarily due to the droll irresistibility of that quasi-untranslatable word, although a more earnest reading would claim it as an instance of Bach's high artistic standards. More ominously, there is mention of quarrelling over a musical center (341) and also of Bach late in life joining the *Societät der Musicalischen Wissenschaften* (Society of Musical Sciences), founded by one of his admirers for theoretical discussions of music. Both of these details are from well outside the chronological framework of Bach's early life that determines the inclusion of the other biographical materials in "A"-14. The segue into the *Societät* is "Waiting his lifetime / for patience to join..." (342)—in other words, is this what a lifetime of musical creativity is doomed to amount to? Academic canonization as the seal of success? And by implication is some such fate awaiting Zukofsky himself after decades of neglect? "A"-14 was written at the time when Zukofsky was finally coming into something like public success as a poet, and with it the benefits (publication and readers), as well as the disadvantages (the poetry business and careerism). The latter particularly made him queasy as he observed the musical career of his son, and in a few years he would return to finish *Little*, which from the point he picked it up again is largely a satire on the dangers of the business and the desire to maintain some sense of aesthetic values free of such careerist concerns.<sup>26</sup>

Before leaving Bach, we should quickly turn back to the moment when Zukofsky mentions the young Bach's study of the pseudo-Phocylides (339), which prompts him to "thumb" the genuine Phocylides, a 6<sup>th</sup> century BC gnomic Greek poet. On the basis of this tenuous connection, we get a passage worked from Phocylides' verses, but by this time we should not be surprised to find Zukofsky's poem following its own nose. Besides, this offers the opportunity to improvise a dozen lines from Phocylides' colorful, bitter maxims, whose vehemence often remains close to satire's origin in the curse. Then Zukofsky abruptly breaks this off and returns to the still young but now mature Bach, saying that Bach felt no need to sneer with Maria Barbara in the choir. This obliquely alludes to an incident in which Bach got into a bit of trouble when caught alone with his fiancée in the choir loft, but within the context of the poem's presentation the point is to contrast Phocylides' bitterness with Bach's presumably more affirmative perspective, particularly as expressed in their respective works. The segment worked from Phocylides begins with the image of a cliff-top town standing orderly above "mad Nineveh," the latter presumably representing the mad world of empire, politics and history generally. In some respects, one might expect Zukofsky to be sympathetic with this sentiment of orderly smallness over the predatory propensities of ambition, particularly as the following few lines offer a couple of agreeable political maxims, especially the sentiment that virtue is defined by justice. But as the passage proceeds its humor becomes more cutting at the expense of its targets, particularly *Lerians* and women. Phocylides, then, is the cliff-top dweller sardonically looking down on the world below, which is paralleled with a difference by Bach up in the choir where he would be playing his organ, but not alone. We have already touched on the problem of the isolate intellect. No doubt there was much that amused and attracted Zukofsky in Phocylides' few remains, but it is a predominately bitter and negative perspective, which indicates an alienated mind, whereas he saw Bach as

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<sup>26</sup> This is also a significant motif in "A"-19 which includes a major segment on Paul Zukofsky's participation in the Paganini violin competition, complicated by Cold War entanglements. See Z-Notes commentary on "A"-19 and also the commentary on the end of "A"-18. In "A"-14 there is a further crack at the expense of academics at 346 and some sardonic punning around the Nobel Prize at 345.

an eminently affirmative, which is to say, sociable artist. I have argued that after “Poem beginning ‘The,’” Zukofsky largely avoided satire, which is so characteristic of modernism and its ironies, despite the fact that he clearly was attracted to satirists such as Jonathan Swift and Martial and the late movements of “A” are peppered with biting quips picked up from conversation. However, these satiric sound bites are never allowed sufficient purchase, a consistency of moral or judgmental perspective to effectively function as more than passing bits of stinging wit. The attraction of sarcasm is not to be denied, but it is not allowed to set the larger tone of the poem (although at times, in the shadow of the Vietnam War, “A”-18 comes close).

### VIII - Horses and Cats

Late in “A”-14 the poet’s wife quips on his “horse complex,” which is all the excuse he needs to indulge in it once again. The following 36 lines (“A” 351-352) are constructed from various horse sources visually set off by their irregular alternation of italicized and non-italicized lines, with the latter set in parentheses and the diction of the former clearly historical (in fact they are all from Shakespeare). This formally doubled presentation teases the reader as to how to approach it. It represents one possible fugal form, so that we might read the passage as an interexchange or as polyphonically intertwined. However, we cannot in any plausible sense identify two distinct voices beyond the already mentioned non-contemporaneity of the italicized lines, which gives the passage a historical self-consciousness. Generally we might discern that the italicized lines tend to emphasize emphatic joining, with key words such as: forgiveness, kindness, dancing, music, modest gaze, delight; whereas the parenthetical lines are more ominous, suggesting hierarchies and violence, especially in the later instances—but one cannot say this is consistently symmetrical enough to draw confident conclusions.

The reader can readily recognize that this segment pieces together horse quotations, even if in some cases explicit mention of the horse has disappeared. What Zukofsky has done is go to the index of *Bottom* (published the same year as “A”-14’s composition) under “horse(s)” and chosen quotations referred to there out of which he pieced together the passage much in the manner of the *Paradise Lost* segment. The italicized lines are all from Shakespeare, while the others are from various texts (The Book of Enoch, George Bernard Shaw, Homer and Spinoza), and while Zukofsky certainly did not use all the quotations referred to in the index, all those that he did appear in the order that they appear in *Bottom*. Particularly in the case of the Shakespeare lines, they are often stitched together from very small snippets out of various plays and “Venus and Adonis”—the extreme example is the six lines from “*heels between . . .*” to “*as t’were,*” culled from five different Shakespeare texts.

It has often enough been pointed out that the ubiquitous horses of “A” can stand allegorically for the poet or for the poem itself, as is the case with their first major appearance in “A”-7 as sawhorses which are set dancing by the poet. It is perfectly possible to read all the horses in this passage as allegories for the poem, in which case we have a playful catalog of different views of what a poem might be or the relation between poet (rider) and poem (horse), which then in this passage come into a dance-like dialogue with each other. If this is taken as a possible reflection on the larger poem itself, then it replicates its general miscellaneousness while focusing its aspiration to form into a song or fugal work, in other words realizing its utopian intent. In this sense, this passage might be compared to what I have called the 9-9 passage tipped into “A”-8 (49-52), which I have discussed in these terms elsewhere (see Z-Notes commentary on Zukofsky and Henry Adams).

However, it may be more useful to think of horses as simply an index to materials for use, something that Zukofsky took note of whenever he ran across the word “horse,” its image or associated terms. The more conventional approach in which the “horse” represents a

theme that underwrites the choice and arrangement of the words is here turned inside out, so that the appearance of the word or image of “horses” becomes the arbitrary means of choosing textual matter that is then shaped into its own construction. Obviously the specific word-image chosen here takes on various potential significances within the larger context of “A”, yet at the same time the particular handling puts in question any attempt at too handy an allegorical meaning. On the one hand what comes into the poem is arbitrary, like going to an index to find the materials for a poem or passage, yet on the other it is not in the least arbitrary but is determined by the poet’s “complex,” which I take to be something more than a subjective psychological tick but the full weight of the totality on any given subject or occasion. This doubled inside-outside perspective goes back at least to the original definitions of “an objective” in “A”-6—“My one voice. My other: is / An objective...” (24)—which is underwritten by Spinoza and anticipates that movement’s concluding question as to adapting the fugal form to poetry.

This horse passage, then, summarizes or embodies or enacts the larger intent of the movement or of “A” generally. But the fact that this is a segment embedded within a much larger work indicates its limitations: that no instance can encapsulate or express the whole except in a gestural manner. It raises without resolving the question of whether any such passage can serve as a key to the whole. This is characteristic of “A” generally, which, to the frustration of many readers, refuses to offer clearly marked climaxes around which one might organize the rest. Therefore, it may be more useful to emphasize this passage’s formal significance as a pointer to reading the movement in general. If horses are the thread that nominally ties these disparate textual pieces together, that ultimately proves to be an elusive or dissolving link—throwing out diverse suggestions yet finally undermining any such confidence that there is a thread that holds. And yet if we can suspend our demand for fixing a single central thread, then we will discover relations all over, although the thread that connects this bit with that may be a different one from the one relating that with this.<sup>27</sup>

If this horse passage is overtly constructed, almost decoratively formal with the semblance of a centralizing image, then the following five or so pages dissolve into a miscellaneous manner, including some further horses, before concluding with the *Book of the Dead*. This segment is strongly marked by everyday ephemera and personal memories—such as finding Pound as a clue in a *New York Times* crossword puzzle (one possible fate of the poet) or a boyhood anecdote about a runaway cat—quite readable as stream-of-consciousness. Read against the horse passage, however, reminds the reader not to allow such miscellany to flatten out into representation of the poet’s supposed inner cinema. Even the anecdote concerning a cat turns on a malapropism, which is immediately followed by what appears to be the suggestion or implication that they wash the streets of Poitiers with cat urine (possibly this is a witticism about seeing numerous street cats on a European trip, or the smell of disinfectant used in Poitiers, or possibility “it” does not refer to cat piss at all). The Poitiers reference leads to a passage on Zukofsky’s *Catullus*, which he habitually referred to as his “Cats,” but which here is introduced by the phrase, “Out of that / jakes my ‘Cats’...” (355). I mentioned the moon peeing on pea blossom in the prelude as announcing a certain urinary leitmotif in the poem, and on the page preceding our cats there is a related pun at the expense of Barry Goldwater (other peeing instances appear at 336, 348, 350). This mention of jakes (an outside latrine) goes back to a quick quote from Daniel Defoe speaking of England as the jakes of Europe (334-335), that is, where everyone else dumps their unwanted population, although in Zukofsky’s presentation the implied receptor of Europe’s offal is more likely the New World, such as the case with his own family. Regardless of whether we pull these

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<sup>27</sup> If one has not had enough, further discussion on horses in “A” can be found in Z-Notes commentaries on “A”-12 and on The Forms of “A”.

threads together—and “jakes” is a striking enough word to remain lodged in the mind until picked up 20 pages later—the suggestion that Zukofsky’s *Catullus* is the by-product of Europe seems implied, which the poet immediately claims he has purified or at least made “chaste.” There follows a page primarily offering lyrical arabesques on the Zukofskys’ homophonic method of recasting Catullus, along with the expected miscellaneous intrusions and distractions, but we already have enough of a tangle with which to work.

Much of this evidences Zukofsky’s brand of humor, often missed, but amongst these jakes and pissing Zukofsky is simply suggesting that the poet or for that matter any social being works with what has been passed down. In one sense, Zukofsky is puckishly taking on board the outraged accusation that the “new” is mere crap—anticipating the reactions to *Catullus*.<sup>28</sup> But such accusations assume protocols of the “proper” that would duly discipline one’s relation to one’s inheritance, protocols of propriety that undoubtedly would have sabotaged the possibilities of those very works—the poems of Catullus—in the first place. The poet thus asserts his chasteness in this respect, passionately eyeing the text to reenact a voice, but not the replication of the original except as it comes through the contemporary poet and into his rendering. There is an abrupt and initially puzzling appearance of the eyes of Egyptian gods, which anticipates the *Book of the Dead* segment a page later, but this also recalls the Sumerian/Egyptian footprint on the moon we encountered at the beginning of the movement, the whole vast human inheritance visible in or looking back at us from any text or artifact. There is no pure original Catullus that can be violated by subsequent readers or writers. The poet is innocent and there is no question of traducing some “original” Catullus. When Zukofsky claims the chasteness of his rendition of Catullus, he also has in mind defocusing the “prurience” of Catullus, the scandalous sexuality that plays such a major role in Catullus’ appeal as a popular and racy poet.<sup>29</sup> The Zukofskys’ homophonic approach to the text called “Catullus” directly attacks this illusionist verisimilitude, and as already mentioned, this anticipates the manner of the concluding poem rendered out of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Returning to the childhood anecdote of the escaped cat that initiates this cat sequence, I suggested this concludes on a malapropism, although perhaps this is not strictly accurate. Having recaptured the wayward cat and returned it to the apartment, the boy (presumably Zukofsky himself) apparently observed that he is “preventing an animal / errand” (355), which became one of those in-family jokes. This “errand” might be understood as preventing the cat from peeing where it shouldn’t (an error) or rescuing it from getting lost (errant), but in either case this “errand” foreshadows by many decades Zukofsky’s work on *Catullus*—a cat generated by errant pronunciations of the text. For Zukofsky at least such errancy from the routine is the seed of poetry, but as such it is not the exclusive province of poets.

Also threaded into this segment is an appearance of the moon, notable given our previous encounters with the lunar, which here appears to derive or be associated with the Egyptian deity or its eyes. Its appearance is reinforced by the line, “*Lunaria annua honesty*,” which is a botanical name with its more humble English version for a plant that produces translucent white, circular (moon-shaped) seedpods. This particular plant name in both

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<sup>28</sup> In the same general passage under discussion (following the horse segment), the poem refers to “broken-glass painting” and “chorál out / of random input” (354), which specifically refer respectively to the artist Carolee Schneemann (best known as a performance artist but a painter as well) and, as already mentioned, to the experimental composer James Tenney—the two were a couple and living in New York City at the time.

<sup>29</sup> Zukofsky insisted on this point about avoiding the allure of the pornographic to a number of his correspondents (see e.g. David Gordon, “Zuk on His Toes,” *Sagetrieb* 1.1 (1982): 135). The 1960s saw numerous renditions of Catullus into English, selected or complete, and the liberated climate of the times inevitably encouraged suggestive vernacular versions.

versions recurs a number of times in “A”, which I mention but will not pursue here.<sup>30</sup> However, I take it the Latin name in proximity to Catullus is not haphazard, nor that the following quote from Shakespeare is from *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, a play that takes place largely under the aspect of the moon. There is a botanical connection between these two bits, since the “Mustardseed” mentioned by Bottom is a plant that belongs to the same family as *Lunaria annua*, but even without this somewhat specialized knowledge, the reader can readily make the connections. (One of Mustardseed’s cohorts is Pea Blossom, offering another tangent to the prelude). Zukofsky specifically mentions “this side” of the moon and in the context of *Catullus* this is a suggestive image of the text, a reading or working with what is seen rather than a projective interpretation of the dark side. One of the paradoxes of *Catullus*’ method is that it can be taken as more “literal,” a reading off of the phonetic script, than a lexical translation with its conjuring propensities. Again, this anticipates the literal eying of the hieroglyphs. However, one advantage of the image of the moon, or better yet its face, is that we do not simply see it but the reflected light of the sun, much as the objective lens focuses refracted light. The “truth” of the moon is not its dark side but is what happens in the dynamic of the complex in which it is situated. Bottom declares his desire for “more acquaintance” with Mustardseed—“more acquaintance” is an apt phrase for a knowledge that is a being together with another, an open relation. The powers of reason and social order—Theseus and his entourage—would correct and finally dismiss Bottom and his friend’s literalism, all the sub-lunar world that would accept what is seen rather than merely what the mind has been taught to see or not see.

After concluding his improvisations on *Catullus* (which might also be read as a non-statement of poetics) with a final assertion of his “piety,” Zukofsky drops in a snippet from Mr. Dooley, a Chicago saloon keeper who speaks with an Irish brogue.<sup>31</sup> Mr. Dooley declares that he never reads literature, although he uses the Bible and Shakespeare as a defense between himself and “all modhren / lithrachoor” (357), since the former must be read before the latter. Mr. Dooley stands here as the wisdom of a contemporary Shakespearean clown, such as Bottom. We might take this as a sample of lower limit speech in Zukofsky’s well-known definition of his poetic, which in this case is not only everyday talk but strongly class-marked to remind us of the very real limits of the literary sphere and its readers. In one sense, this is a final example of what we have had occasion to note a number of times, the intrusion of (in)appropriate humor puncturing the poem’s or most poetry’s propensity toward excessive self-importance. You will not find Zukofsky making such claims, as did his good friend Williams, that people “die miserably every day for lack of what is found there,” however much he may empathize with the sentiment. One might relate this to Zukofsky’s own background growing up in a hard-working immigrant family with little interest in the rarified cultural concerns of their youngest child.<sup>32</sup> However, in the larger context of Zukofsky’s poem, I would suggest that such intrusions are consistent with his skepticism about overriding concepts or abstractions and his assumption that the work of poetry is co-extensive

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Michele Leggott, *Reading Zukofsky’s 80 Flowers* (1989): 136-140.

<sup>31</sup> Mr. Dooley was a vehicle for satiric commentary invented by Finley Peter Dunne (1867-1936) originally appearing in newspapers and then collected into very popular books in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mr. Dooley is also quoted in *Anew* 14 (“One oak fool box’;—the pun” *CSP* 84-85).

<sup>32</sup> The exception was Zukofsky’s elder brother, Morris Ephraim. As for his parents and sisters, who lived predominately in a Yiddish speaking sphere, Zukofsky once wrote to Carl Rakosi that they had no idea of or interest in his literary and intellectual preoccupations (dated 6 Jan 1931, HRC 20.12). See Z-Notes commentary on “Poem beginning ‘The.’”

with the larger work of social reproduction—existing within a totality that is massively beyond the ken of any given site. Zukofsky would certainly accept the truth of Mr. Dooley’s claim that one must read the Bible and Shakespeare before modern literature, or more to the point, if one reads modern literature one is necessarily reading the Bible and Shakespeare, they are what makes possible and are always already in the latter. This is one way to express Zukofsky’s common working assumptions and mode of practice. In any case, poetry as music is never a transcendence or mere transmutation of speech, it always necessarily exists within and in active relation with speech and the Dooleys of the world.

28 Jan. 2017 (Year of the Rooster)