

"Come shadow, come": The Louis Zukofsky-Cid Corman Correspondence 1957-1964

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For a period of roughly six and a half years, Zukofsky and Corman were in intense correspondence, almost certainly the most important during this time for each of these inveterate letter writers. This was a pivotal period for both poets, especially Zukofsky as he emerged from two decades of public obscurity, with Corman playing a crucial mediating role as publisher of "*A*" 1-12 (1959) and editor of the second series of *Origin* magazine (1961-1964).

Zukofsky's public re-emergence was directly related to the loose community that became known as the New American poets, which evolved in reaction to the blunting and taming of the more innovative impulses of modernism, first by the politicization of the arts in the 1930s and then by modernism's institutional respectability thereafter. For Zukofsky, who remained committed to formal innovation, publishing outlets and even a reading milieu receptive to his work all but evaporated until the appearance of these younger poets during the 1950s. The remarkable late period of Zukofsky's career, from roughly 1960 until his death in 1978, was directly tied to these poets, who created a readership and context receptive to his work but also were materially involved in the publication of almost all of his writing. This is all the more intriguing in that his poetry, while having obvious local influence here and there, largely stands outside the various species of Beat, Projectivist and other strands of New American poetry and the predominate counter cultural ethos of the time.

The following will examine key features of the correspondence:¹

- I. Bibliographic details and general characterization of the correspondence
- II. Biographical background and context
- III. Zukofsky and Origin Press
- IV. Zukofsky in *Origin* magazine and the East Asian connection
- V. "(Ryokan's scroll)," "A"-14 & "Daruma"
- VI. Oppen & Zukofsky
- VII. The End
- VIII. Obiter dicta – extracts from Zukofsky's letters

¹ References to the letters simply give the written date in-text, and where the writer is not clear the abbreviation LZ or CC has been added. The transcriptions of the letters have not regularized eccentricities and attempt to reproduce the originals as closely as possible, with text added above the main lines or in margins placed in pointed brackets. Uncertain readings of words are placed inside square brackets with a question mark. Corman usually typed his letters while Zukofsky always wrote by hand and tended to make numerous insertions and additions in the margins.

I. Bibliographic details and general characterization of the correspondence

The correspondence held by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin consists of approximately 300 letters and postcards in each direction, from its inception in September 1957 up to early 1964.² For reasons I will explain, their relationship significantly altered at this point, although they continued in regular correspondence through the next couple of years and afterwards more intermittently. The last letter from Zukofsky at the HRC is dated 20 March 1964, and there are letters from Corman up until June 1974, but certainly even Corman's side of the exchange is incomplete for these later years.³ However, for the important period of their relationship, the holdings at the HRC appear all but complete, aside from the odd Zukofsky letter, and it this body of letters which I will examine in the following.

The Zukofsky-Corman letters are equivalent in volume to those of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov but concentrated into less than half the time period.⁴ Each answered the other promptly, typically on the same day of receipt, and tended to respond to each point in the letter just received. In a very real sense it was a close conversation, and even more so than in the case of Duncan and Levertov was a relationship carried out almost entirely through their letters—after their initial meeting, as far as I know the only other occasions they met during this period were when Corman came through New York on his way to Boston in late October 1960 and then back to San Francisco in early April 1961. The correspondence is not among the most intrinsically interesting of literary exchanges. There is not a great deal of discussion of poetics or interpretive remarks on their work, and these were not young poets still feeling their way along (when they met, Corman was 33 and Zukofsky 53). Nor is it intimately personal in the sense of confessional or ruminatively diarist thoughts since neither of these men were given to much personal self-reflective expression, as is evident in their

2 The HRC inventory lists 365 items from Zukofsky from 1957-1964 and 316 items from Corman between 1957-1972, although there are a couple further Corman letters from 1973 and 1974. This includes a fair number of postcards (sometimes 2 or 3 postcards would be sent as one message). On the other hand, the majority of the letters are blue aerograms, for which the usual protocol for both, especially for Zukofsky, was to fill the space to the maximum, including back flaps, along the margins and even extra notes on the back where the return address was written.

3 Zukofsky's later letters to Corman are held at Simon Fraser University, which I have not seen but Mark Scroggins has generously shared his notes with me. Their holdings consist of 140 letters, all but eight post-date the last letter at the HRC and appear to pick up the correspondence immediately where the latter breaks off. The last letter from Zukofsky is dated 21 Dec. 1976. In a 31 Aug. 1965 letter he says that Corman is welcome to sell his (LZ's) letters to the HRC, but that he is no longer saving Corman's letters to him.

4 *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, eds. Robert J. Bertholf & Albert Gelpi (2004).

work—the intimacy is in the sharing more than the content. There is regular reporting on whatever they and their families have been doing (in Corman’s case, he was unattached at the time but closely involved with his friend and editing partner, Will Petersen and his family), complaints about their jobs or, in Corman’s case, often the lack of a job and money problems are a running theme, as are Zukofsky’s hypochondriacal complaints, and so on. But predominately the discussion is about poetry business: updates on their current writing, the problems and opportunities of publishing and editing, the specific publishing projects in which they had a mutual interest, responses to the ongoing series of *Origin*, reporting what other poets they know are doing, chatty exchanges of literary opinions but not extensive analysis. In this sense the correspondence gives a perspective on the intricate network of journals and activities of especially the New American poets, who were largely but not entirely outside the main organs and institutions of the poetry establishment. The Zukofsky-Corman correspondence is a significant example among many others of the crucial role letter writing played in the construction of an alternative poetry community in the mid-century period—when the postal service was cheap, fast and reliable. This of course was manifested most significantly in Olson’s choice to call the poems of *Maximus*, letters, and the ubiquitous propensity among these younger poets to address poems directly to others, most often fellow poets. Furthermore, beyond merely sharing whatever they happened to be working on, the correspondence directly elicited a significant amount of poetry, particularly in the case of Zukofsky, at times the letters themselves serving essentially as draft material.

II. Biographical background and context

Zukofsky and Corman first met by chance in Florence during the Zukofskys’ grand tour of Europe in the summer of 1957. In his long travelogue poem of this trip, “4 Other Countries,” Zukofsky refers to a day spent with Corman, “looking down // From San Miniato / on the flower / structure across / the Arno. . .” (CSP 185). Corman happened to be spending several months in Florence after a year and a half teaching in Matera in southern Italy and was in the process of shifting to Kyoto, Japan, where he would spend most of the rest of his life.⁵ Their mutual friend, the poet Gael Turnbull, who the Zukofskys had visited in the U.K. at the beginning of their tour, notified Corman that they were coming through Florence. The correspondence began immediately on the Zukofskys’ return home in late September and would quickly settle into a routine.

At the time, Zukofsky had been close to a completely obscure poet for most of the past two decades, but from mid-1950s a number of young poets began to seek him out which

5 Cid Corman, “Meeting in Firenze.” *Sagetrieb* 1.1 (Spring 1982): 120-124. Corman recorded this visit in at least one poem, “Firenze Firenze” in *Louis Zukofsky, Or Whoever Someone Else Thought He Was*, ed. Harry Gilonis (North and South, 1988). On the Zukofskys’ European trip, see Mark Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky* (2007): 277-281.

soon evolved into a remarkable comeback. This of course was all part of the resurgent popularity of poetry generally during this time, specifically of the broad alternative current that became loosely known as the New American Poetry. For the latter Zukofsky represented a still active direct link with the more innovative tendencies of 1920s modernism that had been contained and repressed by both the increasing dominance of tendentious politics and the institutional consolidation of its more conservative tendencies, as represented in English above all by T. S. Eliot as poet, critic and publisher. Aside from an unreceptive poetic environment, there were personal reasons for Zukofsky's low profile in the 1940s and 50s. In 1957 he had been teaching at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn for about a decade, a job about which he never had a good word, other than that the students were nice enough. Particularly during the 1950s the Zukofskys' lives were focused on and organized around their only child Paul, in order to support within their means his precocious musical talent. This did not mean Zukofsky ever seriously slowed down in terms of his own writing, although the 1940s were lean by his standards. After major additions to "A" in the late 1940s and early 50s, he became bogged down in *Bottom: on Shakespeare*, which began as an essay and evolved into a seemingly interminable project with little prospect of being published complete.

Robert Duncan was primarily responsible for initiating contacts between Zukofsky and the younger generation of poets. Duncan instigated a correspondence with Zukofsky as early as 1947 and later showed some of his work to Robert Creeley when they were both resident in Mallorca (1955), and the latter soon solicited material from Zukofsky for *Black Mountain Review*.⁶ Jonathan Williams brought out a volume of poems, *Some Time*, under his Jargon imprint in 1957, and Duncan manoeuvred an invitation for Zukofsky to teach a summer course at San Francisco State College in 1958. But the fortuitous meeting with Corman in the summer of 1957 proved particularly crucial over the coming years, as the latter took on the responsibility of publishing anything Zukofsky had to offer. By this time Zukofsky had a considerable backlog of unpublished material or work that had yet to be presented in book form, while at the same time 1960 marks the beginning of Zukofsky's late period, the most productive, confident and inventive of his long career. Not only was the correspondence with Corman the most intensive he had with any of the younger poets and the most productive in terms of helping to make his work public, but it undoubtedly convinced Zukofsky that there was in fact an appreciative readership for his writing and in that sense was vital in his late flowering.

As mentioned, from the mid-1950s until nearly the end of his life in 1978, Zukofsky's publications were, directly or indirectly, almost entirely at the instigation of these younger

⁶ Creeley also heard of Zukofsky from Edward Dahlberg, who was resident on Mallorca at this time. Dahlberg had been a colleague of Zukofsky's at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn in 1948-1950, and they seemed to have sustained an amiable relationship. A chapter of *Bottom*, "Forgotten," is dedicated to Dahlberg, and as the title indicates, it is a wry message of consolation as a fellow forgotten writer.

poets, either in their innumerable, usually ephemeral poetry magazines and presses or as some gained positions of influence with commercial publishers. The only exception, an important one, was *Poetry* magazine, for which Zukofsky always had a soft spot and where he preferred to publish the later movements of “A”, particularly during the period when Henry Rago was editor and an enthusiastic Zukofsky reader.⁷ The topic of Zukofsky’s coming out is evident throughout his last two booklets of short poems, *I’s (pronounced eyes)* and *After I’s* (written 1959-1964), with many direct or indirect references to younger poets, and in quite a few cases the poems directly responded to them (several examples will be discussed below). In many respects these small volumes celebrate his sense of friendship and community, marking a lifting of feelings of long poetic isolation. In the preceding volume, *Barely and widely* (1958), the title poem ironically quotes a description of the poet as “widely / published / throughout / a long / career”—in other words a polite way of saying he was little known (*CSP* 161). Early in *I’s (pronounced eyes)*, the poem “Homage,” written just a couple years later, is a characteristic Zukofskian response to this new-found respect from younger poets that returns the homage back to these poet-friends (*CSP* 203-204).

By all accounts Corman (1924-2004) was fully committed to the promotion of poetry, particularly to un- and under-known poets representing innovative possibilities of poetry against the institutionalized mainstream. Coming from a background of modest means, he campaigned for the poetry he believed in through discussion groups, a radio program, five series of *Origin* magazine (intermittently from 1951-1985), Origin Press, numerous translations from at least half a dozen languages (not all of which he necessarily knew very well), reading tours during which he often read as much from others’ work as his own, regular book reviewing and an astonishing quantity of correspondence and poetry writing. He claimed with probably some reason to have written more poems than any other human ever—tens of thousands of poems—although one is not quite sure why this is something to boast about.⁸ This commitment entailed, as a matter of course, living a precarious economic existence. Any small accumulated surplus was cause for another volume from the Origin Press, by himself or others. In Japan, where Corman more or less settled permanently from 1958, he taught at a women’s college, which was not lucrative but flexible and allowed him

7 All the movements of “A” from “A”-14 through “A”-22 first appeared complete in *Poetry*, with the exception of the short “A”-16 and -20, plus the latter half of “A”-21 (*Rudens*)—close to 200 pages. With Rago’s sudden death in 1969, Zukofsky did not feel the subsequent editors of *Poetry* were as amenable to his work. Although “A”-22 did appear there in 1973-74, the fallout ended Zukofsky’s association with the magazine (Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life* 428). For a full listing of Zukofsky’s publications in *Poetry*, going back to 1924, see the Journals and Publishers page on the Z-site (in Bibliographies & Research).

8 For an overview and assessment of Corman’s career, see Tim Woods, “Cid Corman: Editor, Translator, Poet,” *Paideuma* 41 (2014): 49-78 and for a critical examination of his poetry, Kenneth Cox, “The Poetry of Cid Corman,” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 7.4 (1977): 34-323. For a more personal memoir cum critical discussion, see Gregory Dunne, *Quiet Accomplishment: Remembering Cid Corman* (Ekstasis Editions, 2014).

the disciplined routine he preferred. While Corman sought irregular funding for *Origin* magazine and Press, plus whatever trickled in by means of subscriptions, both were significantly underwritten by Corman himself and a major means of raising funds was to sell correspondence and manuscripts from earlier series of *Origin*—in fact he sold a batch of Zukofsky's letters to Texas, with the latter's approval, in 1963 to support Origin Press projects (CC 21 July & LZ 26 July 1963).

At the time he met Zukofsky in Florence, Corman was at a particularly transient and uncertain period of a life that was never very secure. Having launched the first series of *Origin* in the spring of 1951 and set it on a steady, if economically precarious, footing, Corman left the U.S. on a Fulbright fellowship for Paris in September 1954, where he stayed about a year and a half. In the spring of 1956 he taught in Bari, on the south Adriatic coast of Italy, but soon shifted to nearby Matera where he remained from April 1956 to June 1957. Throughout this time he continued to bring out *Origin*, although he had predetermined it would conclude with issue #20, which came out in the winter of 1956/57. After Matera, Corman spent several months in Florence, where he met Zukofsky in mid-August 1957, by November he was in Provence, France for a few more months before setting off by ship to Japan and a month later arrived in Kyoto in March/April 1958. Although Kyoto became his permanent home, there were several periods in the U.S., including a two-year period during the correspondence with Zukofsky, when he was based in San Francisco (April 1960-April 1962), which coincided with the launching of the second series of *Origin* featuring Zukofsky.

For Corman, the meeting and correspondence with Zukofsky refocused his editorial energies, providing him a cause, an under-appreciated and under-published major poet to channel his efforts, which one imagines was particularly important at a time he found himself in a distant and alien context, albeit one he found stimulating and that would prove suitable for his ascetic working habits. Personally Corman tended to be a loner, which was counterbalanced by his editing and the sense that he was working along side others dedicated to the better good of poetry. Also once settled in Kyoto, Corman worked assiduously on shaping the poems from his time in Matera, typically selected from a very large mass of poems, that would result in possibly his best-known book, *Sun Rock Man* (originally self-published by Origin Press in 1962 and then republished by New Directions in 1970).

For different but overlapping reasons both Zukofsky and Corman saw themselves as on the margins, not only of the establishment but also of the New American poets network. Zukofsky was of course of another generation, but for all the attention and even sometimes adulation he received from certain of the younger poets, his restrained formalism, often situated in a quite bourgeois domestic setting was at odds with both the aesthetics and lifestyles of the New American poets. Corman of course was centrally involved in the New American Poetry, most notably as the editor of the various series of *Origin*. Indeed, the first series (1951-1957) was arguably the formative forum for especially the Black Mountain arm

of the New American poetics.⁹ However he too maintained a sceptical distance. He probably would have been included in the *New American Poetry* (1960), except that he withdrew his participation, and he would also turn down Robert Kelly's invitation to *A Controversy of Poets*.¹⁰ It is almost as if his abilities as an editor engrained themselves into his personality: he held quite clear and principled aesthetic views that allowed him to quickly size up any work he read and to articulate why he thought a given work was or was not up to scratch. He held himself to rigorous working standards: by his own account he would respond promptly to all submissions and correspondence (usually meaning within a day of receipt) and give explanations for any work that was rejected. Such convinced bluntness and the propensity to adopt an avuncular mentoring attitude annoyed many, and Corman seemed content to pay this price in order to maintain his own sense of principled critical distance all for the higher cause of promoting the poetry he believed in. For someone who was, as editor and publisher, necessarily engaged with the poetry business, but who dismissed all compromises of deeply held but largely intuitive aesthetic principles, the inevitable result was a rather isolated life. He was well aware of and accepted this, although often with regret. On the other hand, Corman carried on many long-term, long distance relationships through his voluminous correspondence with individuals he often rarely met.

Some of these character traits would eventually lead to a falling out with Zukofsky. But more important is how closely they fit with Zukofsky's own outlook, although in the latter case much of this was developed as a defensive formation in response to decades of not only personal neglect but also the absence of even a poetic milieu that might be receptive to his work. So if their correspondence is largely taken up with poetry business and the network of alternative American poets at the time, it is from the perspective of two poets who were sceptical of the whole business and who distrusted groups. But then the New American poetry was thoroughly marked by this question, and it is implicit in Olson's distinction between closed and open verse and manifest in the stance posed against an "academic" verse

9 The first series (Spring 1951-Winter 1957) featured Olson and Creeley and to a lesser extent Duncan, Levertov, Eigner and Blackburn, and it is primarily due to *Origin* that these latter poets would be grouped with poets who actually attended Black Mountain in Allen's anthology (Theodore Enslin and William Bronk also figure prominently in the first series). The *Black Mountain Review* (Spring 1954-Autumn 1957), edited by Creeley, somewhat undiplomatically co-opted much of the stable *Origin* initially established, although there remained considerable overlap in the key poets they published. See *Charles Olson & Cid Corman: Complete Correspondence 1950-1964*, 2 volumes, ed. George Evans (1987, 1991): II 103-104 and Creeley, "Black Mountain Review" (1968) in *The Collected Essays of Robert Creeley* (1989): 505-514.

10 See letters from Corman dated 1 April 1959, 15 Sept. 1959 and 24 July 1964; also *Olson/Corman* II, 163. In 1957 Corman told Olson that he planned to bring out his own anthology of poetry in English written since the end of the war by poets under 50, but not only would his own work not be included, not even his name was to appear as editor (*Olson/Corman* II, 150). This project was never realized.

compromised by conformist and market values. For Zukofsky and Corman mainstream contemporary verse barely existed, they simply did not take it very seriously; they were more concerned by perceived compromises within the self-proclaimed alternatives.¹¹

The publication of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) does not receive much attention in the correspondence. As already mentioned, Corman refused to be included. Zukofsky reports that Allen contacted him for some poems, and he sent the recently published *Barely and widely*, adding that Allen would have to pay a fee if he wanted to use any of it (10 Sept. & 22 Sept. 1959)—this collection was self-published by Celia, and Louis was somewhat irked by the lack of sales. The editorial complications and manoeuvrings surrounding *The New American Poetry* are well-known, but it is unlikely that Allen was very serious about including Zukofsky since he was a fervent advocate of Olson, who himself had a significant influence on the editing and who Allen undoubtedly preferred as the leading elder and anchor point for the anthology.¹² Zukofsky himself does not seem to have had any expectations. When the anthology came out his reaction was lukewarm, remarking that the critical prose at the back was better than the poetry and that he was most convinced by Ginsberg, Corso and Eigner (28 June & 5 July 1960). On the other hand, by this time he was already favourably inclined toward a good many of the poets included, especially Creeley and Duncan, but one can surmise that he may have felt, not unreasonably, that taken as a whole the participating poets were more potential than fully realized. If *The New American Poetry* was news to many, it was not to Zukofsky.¹³ Corman, however, knew Allen from early on but

11 It is noticeable that the early issues of the first series of *Origin* include a fair number of what we would now consider academic or mainstream poets—such as Samuel French Morse, Richard Eberhart, Richard Wilbur, Katherine Hoskins, James Merrill—which sit oddly if interestingly beside the likes of Olson. After issue #5 (Spring 1952), which featured Wallace Stevens and consisted entirely of a short poem by Stevens and a long excerpt from Morse's book on the poet, these mainstream poets disappear.

12 On the editing history of the anthology, see especially Alan Golding, "The New American Poetry Revisited, Again," *Contemporary Literature* 39.2 (Summer 1998): 180-211; also *Poet to Publisher: Charles Olson's Correspondence with Donald Allen*, ed. Ralph Maud (Talonbooks, 2003), 35-76.

13 Of the poets included in *The New American Poetry* or who might as well have been, Zukofsky knew personally or through correspondence by the time of its appearance, Duncan, Creeley, Paul Blackburn, Denise Levertov, Larry Eigner, Jonathan Williams, Ebbe Borregaard, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Kelly, Theodore Enslin, Gael Turnbull (disqualified because Scottish) and also perhaps Joel Oppenheimer and Gilbert Sorrentino—there are undoubtedly others. Striking is the apparently complete disconnect between Zukofsky and the New York School of poets, although there does exist a 1963 note from Ted Berrigan sending a couple copies of "C" and expressing interest in Zukofsky's *Catullus* renditions (HRC 21.2). The title of Berrigan's magazine and press seems unavoidably suggested by "A". Zukofsky read and sometimes responded to the publications sent to him by the younger poets, as well as what he saw in the contributor's copies of journals he received.

did not have a high opinion of his editorial abilities; indeed he does not seem to have thought of anyone as up to scratch in that department aside from himself. He also simply did not like the sort of self-promotion such anthologies represented. Corman has the somewhat curious position of seeming to be connected everywhere with the New American poets, yet affiliated with none, and this was certainly a position he cultivated.

III. Zukofsky and Origin Press

Although Corman's commitment to publishing Zukofsky became central to their relationship, this is not how it started out. During the period with which we are concerned, Zukofsky was engaged with three major works. Initially he was still enmeshed in *Bottom* whose origins went back to 1947, and a decade later he was determined to finally bring it to conclusion despite feelings of exhaustion. Much of the third or Alphabet part of *Bottom*, including the long "Definitions" chapter, was composed during the last years of the 1950s, but everything, apart from the index, was finally finished in May 1960. This work's somewhat convoluted but fortunate publication as a deluxe two-volume boxed edition sponsored by the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas is recounted in Mark Scroggins' biography, but the slow gestation of its production is in the background throughout much of the correspondence with Corman.¹⁴ When *Bottom* finally appeared near the end of this time (in late 1963), it unwittingly became entangled in the latent tensions between Zukofsky and Corman, which I will return to later. With the completion of *Bottom*, Zukofsky turned back to "A" for the first time in nine years, in part because he promised Corman a movement for his planned second series of *Origin*. "A"-13 (the only movement of "A" subdivided into subsections) would appear complete in three of the first four issues, along with selections from *Bottom* in the first two. On finishing "A"-13 in September 1960, Zukofsky promptly turned to *Catullus*, on which he had made a tentative start in 1958 but now was his exclusive focus for the next four years, other than the miscellaneous short poems he continued to write intermittently.

As it so happened, at the time Zukofsky met Corman he had been preparing "A" 1-12 for publication, instigated by Emanuel Navaretta, a building contractor, who wanted to sponsor the volume to be brought out by Jonathan Williams' Jargon. This indicates the situation with which Zukofsky was all too familiar, and he had yet to publish a book that he had not substantially underwritten himself. However, Navaretta procrastinated and apparently had second thoughts, so finally after a year and a half Zukofsky ended the relationship in exasperation in September 1958.¹⁵ By this time Corman was settled in Kyoto, and he mentioned the possibility of Origin Press publishing "A" 1-12, pointing out that printing costs in Japan were significantly lower than the various estimates the Zukofskys had come up

14 Scroggins, *A Poem of a Life* 308-311.

15 On the Navaretta episode, see Scroggins, *A Poem of a Life* 286-287. For Zukofsky's letter terminating their understanding, see *Selected Letters* 250-252.

with. Corman and Zukofsky agreed to roughly split the costs of the volume, printing only 200 copies, and both took on responsibilities for distribution.¹⁶ Navaretta had solicited a preface from William Carlos Williams for the proposed volume, although this was done without Zukofsky's prior knowledge and he was annoyed that Williams, in ill health, was pestered by such a request, and perhaps also because it promoted the filial image of Zukofsky vis-a-vis Williams and Pound.¹⁷ Typically, however, Williams' sense of loyalty prompted him to immediately set about fulfilling the request and then sent Zukofsky what were more a set of loose notes than a proper essay or statement and asked Zukofsky to help him shape it. Since Williams had already taken the trouble, Zukofsky did not feel he could now tell him not to bother, and together they worked on the piece. Corman did not want to include the Williams essay because, understandably, he felt it was not terribly coherent or useful. Both Corman and Zukofsky had a general aversion to prefaces by others and similar self-promoting paratexts.¹⁸ But Zukofsky insisted on including the Williams essay, rejecting Corman's edits because he felt obliged given that Williams had made the effort and believed the act itself was meaningful—in his words, “[...] it's not a constructed essay – it's a voice” (3 Sept. 1959).¹⁹

16 The final cost was \$650, with the Zukofskys paying \$365 and the rest made up by Corman plus a \$100 donation by Mary Ellen Solt (LZ 30 April, 20 July, 1 Sept. 1959; CC 16 July, 2 Aug., 29 Aug. 1959). Solt is best known for co-editing the major anthology, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), as well as being a significant concrete poet herself and a scholar of Williams. She was a frequent correspondent with both Zukofsky and Corman throughout the late 1950s and 1960s.

17 Another reason was Zukofsky's worry that the Marxist themes, particularly in “A”-8, might cause problems for Williams, who had suffered McCarthyite inspired attacks when he was set to become consultant to the Library of Congress in 1952. Zukofsky drafted a letter to Williams expressing these concerns, but apparently did not send it (*WCW/LZ* 541-542).

18 Unusually Zukofsky included an introductory essay of his own in this volume, reprinting “Poetry / For my son when he can read,” originally published in an obscure journal in 1948. When an American edition of “A” 1-12 was published in 1967 by Doubleday (Paris Review Editions), it included an essay by Creeley, but apparently this was solicited without Zukofsky knowing an American edition was even planned. He went along with this because he did not want Creeley to lose the payment (12 July 1967), and at the same time he added his own brief “Foreword” (*Prep+* 228).

19 After explaining to Corman a few deletions he had made when Williams gave him “carte blanche” to edit the piece, Zukofsky remarks: “I know that some of those commas could be changed to periods, etc, but <what> after all is a ‘sentence’ – it's Bill's sentence as he speaks that he was getting down or rather had got down. Not ‘senility,’ Cid; he can't see as he types, he forgets, his speech is halting because for the moment there may be a stranger near, but when he's with an old friend like myself he is not embarrassed by his physical weakness and becomes fluent again. It surprises me that no one has seen this in this ‘essay’ – and I want the memory of it, because in a few years I know you'll see it too. ‘The few slight changes, simply to clarify grammar,’ worry me, I wonder what they are. Adding ‘as I said’ isn't bad, but is it really necessary? I remember the spot. Sure, a ‘constructed’ essay would have avoided it but

Zukofsky was exceedingly grateful to Corman for the publication of “A” 1-12, which came out at the end of 1959, and he registered his thanks to and friendship with Corman by composing “Julia’s Wild” as a chapter of *Bottom* (393-394). There Zukofsky indicates the circumstances: Corman, also a Shakespeare enthusiast, reported on reading *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* that his favourite line was “Come, shadow, come, and take this shadow up,” adding, “cd. be Zukofsky. Ring a change on that for me, huh? A dark Valentine” (9 Jan. 1960). Zukofsky promptly obliged in the return letter, meticulously rearranging Shakespeare’s line 19 times, sometimes merely shifting commas (14 Jan. 1960). But in copying this out for Corman, he presented this not as a discrete poem but as a finished chapter of *Bottom*, including the appended glosses (the first page of the chapter as printed in *Bottom*). Corman responded in kind with his own poem taking off from the same Shakespeare line (20 Jan. 1960), which Zukofsky then added to his *Bottom* chapter to complete the exchange.²⁰

At this point Corman is fully committed to boosting Zukofsky’s public exposure, as he would demonstrate most importantly in the second series of *Origin*. During the two years Corman returned to the U.S. (1960-1962), an important means of self-support was giving readings across the country and often he mostly or entirely read from “A”, with copies of “A” 1-12 available for sale. He offered to bring out any work Zukofsky wanted through Origin Press, funds permitting. The latter as always were limited. In the end the press would publish just one further volume, *It Was* (1961), collecting Zukofsky’s short fiction—all written quite a few years previous. Actually, other than mediating, Corman did not have much to do with this book, which was produced by his partner, the artist Will Petersen, and paid for by Zukofsky. Initially the idea was to reprint *5 Statements for Poetry*, previously published in a mimeograph edition while Zukofsky was in residence at San Francisco State College in 1958, but Zukofsky changed his mind when he found out that U.S. copyright law would not allow a reprint in Japan to be imported back to the U.S. (7 May 1961). Corman, who was in San Francisco at the time, felt Zukofsky was overly concerned about these legal

it’s not a constructed essay – it is a voice.” For Williams’ piece, see *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets*, ed. James E. B. Breslin (1985): 264-267. For Williams’ and Zukofsky’s exchange about it, including the latter’s detailed suggestions, see *WCW/LZ* 481-485.

²⁰ Although he never included “Julia’s Wild” in any of his collections of short poems, Zukofsky was not adverse to presenting it on its own. He offered it to the New Orleans based journal, *The Outsider*, who apparently thought he was pulling their leg. However in time it appeared on its own in a special issue of concrete poetry along with a Portuguese translation by the editor and leading Brazilian poet Augusto de Campos (1968) and then in the defining anthology in English of concrete poetry, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), edited by Mary Ellen Solt and Willis Barnstone. This is a somewhat odd context for “Julia’s Wild,” whose conception seems more serial and musical than visual, although the slight rearrangements of a single line does tend to highlight the visually thing-like density of the words as well.

niceties and, sensibly enough, felt that these statements on poetics would, on the heels of “A” 1-12, be more useful to the interested reading public—no doubt feeling the stories were not major work. This little episode manifests Zukofsky’s absolute faith in the quality of his own work, as well as his stubborn refusal or inability to countenance practical considerations. Although Corman always left open to the possibility of further Origin Press volumes, Zukofsky was understandably losing interest in this means of publication, considering the burden in terms of both time and money for Corman, Celia and himself, and the seemingly irresolvable problem of distribution (28 Jan. 1963). Despite Corman’s doubts about the viability of *It Was*, he did become enthusiastic about the long story “Ferdinand” and worked on what he described as a virtual sentence by sentence commentary, although apparently this was never completed (29 July-8 Aug. 1962).

Right around this time, as the second series of Origin got underway in the spring of 1961, Zukofsky was fortunate in finding another venue, *Kulchur* magazine, willing to bring out substantial amounts of his work, especially much of his older backlog. This was mainly at the instigation of Gilbert Sorrentino and Joel Oppenheimer. *Kulchur*’s angle was to print primarily commentary and critical prose, a fairly flexible genre in the hands of the young poets of the day and interpreted generously in the case of Zukofsky. *Kulchur* reprinted the 5 *Statements* and an old essay on Pound, plus unpublished work from the 1930s (“*Modern Times*” and the play *Arise, Arise*), the beginning chapters of what eventually became the novel *Little* (written 1950), and even a few poems from *Catullus* were snuck in as samples to accompany the original version of the brief preface. Over the course of the 1960s and early 1970s, Zukofsky would see everything he finished—and he finished everything—published in book form, usually preceded by journal publication.

IV. Zukofsky in *Origin* magazine and the East Asian connection

From the outset Corman established a fairly fixed template for the various series of *Origin*, with four series published intermittently from Spring 1951 to July 1982 (a fifth series 1983-1985 ended after just six issues and did not adhere to the design of the previous series).²¹ The magazine was published four times a year, each series for five years (20 issues) and each issue consisting of 64 pages. True to Corman’s exacting self-expectations, *Origin* was one of those rare little magazines that consistently came out on schedule. For reasons I will explain below, the second series ended prematurely with issue #14. This series had its own subtitle or epigraph “:response,” and, unlike the case with the other series, did not take subscriptions but

21 On *Origin* see Corman, “Introduction” to *The Gist of Origin 1951-1971: An Anthology* (1975): xv-xxxvii and “Origin” in *The Little Magazine in American: A Modern Documentary History*, eds. Elliott Anderson & Mary Kinzie (Pushcart, 1978): 239-247. See also Alan Golding, “Little Magazines and Alternative Canons: The Example of *Origin*” in *From Outlaw to Classic* (1995): 114-143. The complete run of *Origin* is available online at *Independent Voices* website: <https://voices.revealdigital.org/>.

one had to “respond,” to literally ask and renew the request each year. Generally Corman did not accept unsolicited materials, and he included no reviews or editorial commentary beyond occasional essays—as he put it, the editing was his comment (*Olson/Corman I*, 146). He did like to include excerpts from letters he had received as a form of meta-commentary, and he was in the habit of prodding correspondents for explications or opinions. Each issue featured a poet or sometimes clusters of translations—the second series had issues featuring contemporary French, Italian and German poets, mostly translated by Corman and mostly major poets little translated into English at the time. In addition each of the first two series featured a specific poet who Corman tried to include regularly and offered space for anything that the poet cared to submit—the first series featured Olson and Creeley, the second series Zukofsky.

The first issue of the second series included 50 pages of Zukofsky’s most recent writing: the first two sections of “A”-13, the short poem “(Ryokan’s scroll)” that Corman instigated (see below), a couple of versions from *Catullus*, a substantial excerpt from *Bottom*, as well as several excerpted letters. Thereafter every issue of the series would include at least some further work, the remaining three sections of “A”-13, a further excerpt from *Bottom*, but mostly from the ongoing *Catullus*. Initially Corman was not altogether convinced by the *Catullus* versions. Unlike Zukofsky, he knew Latin and had published a few of his own translations of Catullus in the first issue of *Origin* (Spring 1951), so he reacted as did many others against Zukofsky’s apparent disregard for Catullus’ “voice” and offered his own renditions for comparison (15 June & 19 June 1958). Typically, Zukofsky did not budge, assuring Corman he would hear what he was up to in time and, indeed, by the time Zukofsky returned to *Catullus* in earnest two years later, Corman was an enthusiast and had given up offering advice (8 Nov. 1960). Most issues of the second series included at least some of the renditions—in all about a third of the complete work appeared in *Origin*—despite Corman receiving a fair amount of negative feedback from readers (17 Sept. 1963).

Compared to Olson, Zukofsky did not advise or admonish Corman as to how he should edit his journal, although he did routinely offer his response to individual issues, which was not intended nor received as editorial advice. However, Zukofsky did recommend or suggest various poets that he knew. On the one hand he mentioned students, those poets he had during his summer semester at San Francisco College and a few at Brooklyn Polytechnic, but none of these ended up in *Origin*, if Corman ever bothered to solicit work from them (16 June 1960).²² More consequentially Zukofsky encouraged Oppen, Niedecker and Frank Samperi to send work to Corman, letting the latter know he had done so, but then stepping

22 These younger poets included at San Francisco, Ebbe Borregaard and George Stanley, and at Brooklyn Polytechnic, Hugh Seidman. Despite the fact that Corman was based in San Francisco for the first two years of the second series, he seems to have kept his distance from the local poets—of the San Francisco poets, only Duncan and Michael McClure were in the second series, although Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder (featured in #2) also appeared. Corman knew Snyder earlier and the latter had a hand in bringing him to Japan.

back and allowing Corman to determine whether or what he should publish. Zukofsky had quite fastidious ideas of proper literary relations, and this would be at the root of the difficulties with Oppen. Oppen did not appear in *Origin*, for reasons I will touch on below. However, both Niedecker and Samperi did and would feature even more prominently in the third and fourth series, representing their most extensive journal appearances.²³ Corman's significance for Niedecker is on public record, and he would become her literary executor and bring out a posthumous selection of her poetry.²⁴ In the case of Samperi, Corman took on the role of mentor and then invited him to come to Kyoto, with Petersen as usual arranging a teaching position. Unfortunately, Samperi, newly married, arrived in Japan just as the friendship between Corman and Petersen completely broke down and the relation with Zukofsky became strained. Nevertheless, the personal relationship with Corman would remain vital to Samperi's poetic life, and *Origin*, both journal and press, his primary publishing outlet well into the 1970s.²⁵

The fortuitousness fact that Corman was living in Japan throughout most of the period of their correspondence quickly became a topic of mutual interest and drew out Zukofsky's affinity with East Asian aesthetics, or at least his understanding of it. Remarking on the composition of "Hi, Kuh," Zukofsky wrote: "I looked out the window, thinking of you writing or translating haikus after your last letter + done you dirt" (24 Jan. 1959).²⁶ Whether or not this was literally true, unquestionably Corman's location in Japan, frequent references to it and instructive elaborations on Noh, calligraphy and other cultural arts brought to the surface Zukofsky's own interest and offered opportunities for him to respond with Asian inflected poems.²⁷ Indeed, in these early days in Kyoto, Corman worked on haikus,

23 Niedecker featured in an issue in both the third and fourth series: 3rd series, #2 (July 1966) and 4th series, #16 (July 1981); Samperi featured in each of the second through fourth series: 2nd series, #12 (Jan. 1964), 3rd series, #19 (Oct. 1970) and 4th series, #16 (July 1981).

24 *Between Your House and Mine: The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960-1970*, ed. Lisa Pater Faranda (1986), and *The Granite Pail: The Selected Poems of Lorine Niedecker*, ed. Cid Corman (North Point, 1996). Corman also edited a volume of posthumous poems, *Blue Chicory* (Elizabeth Press, 1976). See Corman, "With Lorine, a memorial: 1903-1970" in *At their Word: Essays on the Arts of Language*, vol. II (Black Sparrow Press, 1978): 183-218.

25 Petersen was also deeply involved in Samperi's early publications, personally producing several of his earliest collections. Petersen's stone-prints feature on the covers of the lovely Mushinsha/Grossman publication of Samperi's first trilogy, *The Prefiguration*, *Quadri-fariam* and *Lumen Gloriam* (1971-1973). Mushinsha was founded in Tokyo by Corman's friend Eric Sackheim, and its publications include a number of Corman and Petersen's translations.

26 Zukofsky gives a later but better-known version of the genesis of this poem in his interview with L.S. Dembo, *Prepositions* + 242-243.

27 A similar use of Oriental material came via Basil Bunting. In the long "Continents" chapter of *Bottom*, where Zukofsky surveys the literary and sometime philosophical presence of "eyes" across Western history and beyond, the section on Whitman includes a single phrase quotation from "Salut au Monde!": "I see Teheran..." plucked out from several

adaptations from Basho and others, published in two small books by Origin Press as *Cool Melon* and *Cool Gong* (both 1959). Anticipating the imminent arrival of these latter publications, Zukofsky drew an association between haiku's minimalism and a cluster of mini-poems he would incorporate into "I's (pronounced *eyes*)" (CSP 214-217). Copying out two of these poems — "HARBOR" and "FOR"— he referred to them as "silences" (15 June 1959).²⁸ When we recognize that the four-word "A"-16 was written during the period of this correspondence and in a real sense for Corman, its haiku flavor is obvious enough.

In the wake of the publication of "A" 1-12, Zukofsky brought to Corman's attention another old work with an eye to possible publication, his play *Arise, Arise* from the mid-1930s. He introduced it as follows:

You'll probably be interested in my one play *Arise, Arise* (1936, I had others in mind then, as I "sum up" in A-12); it was almost (?) printed in Japan in 1950, when someone Isaku Hirai who'd heard of me thru Kitasono (whom I have not corresponded with) wrote me asking for a contribution to *Shigaku* "the best + only poetry" magazine in the East. Anyway, it's a play "purely" Western in thought meant for Jap or Chinese dancers to act: "an action . . . at the same time a poem . . . $\int^{\text{music}/\text{word}}$. . . realizable only in a dance of human bodies that having weighed in their minds some valid ideas of the West can form them as movement on several parallel levels of theatre + Noh." (29 May 1959)²⁹

As Zukofsky indicates he had made the connection between his play and Noh, or Oriental performance more generally, in a cover letter sent in 1950, presumably in an attempt to appeal to his Japanese editor. But this interest goes back a good deal earlier than that, as he points out in the continuation of his letter to Corman where he refers to Reznikoff's *Nine Plays* (1927), short and lacking action, which he also compares with Noh, in this case quoting from the original version of "Sincerity and Objectification." The latter was written in early 1930 as a comprehensive introduction to Reznikoff's work before there was any dream of inventing the "Objectivists." When the essay was rejected by the *Menorah Journal*, Zukofsky, never one to waste anything, pruned it down for the purposes of the "Objectivists"

pages cataloguing "seen" lands and cities. The seeming arbitrariness of this choice is personal and due to the fact that he was in frequent correspondence with Bunting when he was based in Teheran during much of the late 1940s and early 1950s. This example might disabuse the common notion that *Bottom*'s argument simply asserts the priority of literal empirical seeing. Bunting is the direct cause of the various appearances of Persian poetry in Zukofsky's work, going back at least to *Arise, Arise*, and later in "A"-12 and *Bottom*. The Persian epigraph to the *55 Poems* was suggested by Bunting and is a quatrain from Omar Khayyám in Bunting's hand.

²⁸ Zukofsky mentions two others written at the same time, although actually there are three further poems from this date, 13 June 1959: "Angelo," "SEVEN DAYS A WEEK" and "TREE—SEE?"—the latter a collaborative poem with Niedecker.

²⁹ Zukofsky gives here a slightly abbreviated version of a suggested "forward" to *Arise, Arise* in his letter to Isaku Hirai dated 18 May 1950 (HRC 5.15).

issue of *Poetry* (Feb. 1931). The original essay includes sections on Reznikoff's fiction and drama—in the latter, we get an “Objectivist” take on Noh:

[...] as in the Noh performance, consideration would deal with a stage in which the significance of sensitized minds amid things, not merely amid scenes, is emphasized. . . . a stage across and around + within which anything can happen – the world, to quote R's Black Death, from which one dream may have gone, “not what caused the dream.”

The stress here on a phenomenological and anti-dramatic aesthetic remains fundamental throughout Zukofsky's writing, and his thinking in terms of dramatic works—from “*Modern Times*” to *Arise, Arise* to *Bottom: on Shakespeare* to “A”-21 (Rudens)—is worth noting. Zukofsky is reminding Corman that he has long held some notion of Noh, however mediated and distorted, and that such ideas had been in circulation for quite a while. Corman characteristically wasted no time in speaking authoritatively on Noh and other East Asian arts, dismissing the Pound/Fenollosa and Waley translations and promising to bring out more authentic renditions with the help of Petersen (23 May 1959). Zukofsky stuck by Pound, from whom he presumably picked up his conception of Noh, not for his translations' authority or accuracy but for his “poetic insight” (29 May 1959). On the other hand, Corman not only encouraged his interest in Noh and East Asian aesthetics, but often claimed Zukofsky had an intuitively Oriental sensibility. When Corman suggested that parts of “A”-12 were like Basho (who he had been working on for some time), Zukofsky replied:

This I have felt <sometimes>: while my contemporaries have translated Chink + Jap, I have more or less lived something like it — hard to explain, but something that shows in the “conciseness” of my lines as I see them — sometimes. I haven't in any case ever looked for ornament or made East an out of the way jade etc. (13 Jan. 1964)

Aside from the expected influence of the Fenollosa/Pound versions of Noh, another significant model was the performance of the great Peking Opera star, Mei Lanfang, who made a sensational North American tour in early 1930—the first of several visits to the West which a few years later had a direct impact on Bertold Brecht's conception of the “alienation effect” and also on Sergei Eisenstein. Both Zukofsky and Williams saw and were deeply impressed by Mei Lanfang during his extended run in New York, and the former often mentioned this performance as he did to Corman (29 May 1959; see *WCW/LZ* 60-62).³⁰ In this connection, it is worth recalling Zukofsky's admiration for Charlie Chaplin, and the emphasis in his important essay on *Modern Times*, which draws comparisons with Noh, on the gestural and visceral as opposed to a mimetic and realist aesthetic (*Prep*+ 57-64).

30 Mary Oppen in her memoir, *Meaning a Life: An Autobiography* (1978), mentions Zukofsky mimicking Mei Lanfang's gestures (94). On Mei Lanfang's international tours and their impact on the West, see Min Tian, *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced* (2012); and for a briefer account of his reception in NYC, see Mark Cosdon, “‘Introducing Occidentals to an Exotic Art’: Mei Lanfang in New York,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 12.1 (1995): 175-189.

Corman, however, was not impressed by *Arise, Arise*, and although he agreed to publish it in a later issue of *Origin*, he probably was relieved when *Kulchur* agreed to do so instead. Nevertheless, the exchanges between Corman and Zukofsky on Noh and East Asian drama would bear fruit particularly in the third section or partita of “A”-13, in which a legendary anecdote about a Korean king and his lute appears in the opening passage, which is complimented near the end by a long descriptive passage on the K’in, the Chinese equivalent of the same instrument, which is in turn followed by some intricate working with Japanese dances Zukofsky had seen and discussed with Corman (LZ 29 May & 15 June 1959, CC 11 June 1959). Indeed, Zukofsky copied out excerpts from Corman’s and even his own letters into his notebooks, and this Japanese dance passage is not the only instance where the correspondence gets worked directly into parts of both “A”-13 and -14.³¹ I have examined these passages from “A”-13 in some detail elsewhere and here will simply point out that Zukofsky’s identification with East Asian aesthetics was with its gestural creation of a sense of space or “measure,” an enhanced sense of being situated in the world (see Z-notes commentary on “A”-13). Zukofsky’s interest in East Asia, particularly China, is a running leitmotiv throughout his life, which as such is hardly surprising, but in “A”-22 & -23 where he seems to draw on as much of his reading as possible, there is an unexpected amount of Chinese material, with Herbert A. Giles’ *A History of Chinese Literature* the single most frequently and extensively used source of all. A final note on the third partita of “A”-13: it first appeared in *Origin* #3 (Oct. 1961) with just one other work, an elaborately annotated and illustrated translation of Zeami’s Noh play *Yashima* by Corman and Petersen. Zukofsky was delighted with the juxtaposition (13 Sept. 1961), and Corman felt it was the “pivot of all the issues” (15 Sept. 1961).

V. “(Ryokan’s scroll),” “A”-14 & “Daruma”

Corman has given an account of the circumstances that elicited the poem “(Ryokan’s scroll)” (*CSP* 203), which became the opening poem of *I’s (pronounced eyes)* (1963).³² He had acquired a reproduction of a calligraphy scroll by the Japanese Zen poet Ryōkan (1758-1831) and wanted to share it with friends, so the idea was to loan it for a year and then have it passed on to another friend (9 Feb. 1960). As is typical with such works in Japan and China, the text is a classical poem, not by Ryōkan himself—in this case from the *Man’yōshū*, the foundational anthology of Japanese poetry. The calligraphy is in a cursive style—also

31 Unfortunately there appears to be a missing Zukofsky letter from early June 1959, in which he presumably reports on the Gagaku performance he saw (the notebooks indicate probably seen 3 June, HRC 3.13) and probably sketched what became a long passage in “A”-13.301.25-302.28. All the elements of this passage are in the notebook, but whether Zukofsky then used some of these notes in his letter to Corman or vice versa is impossible to determine, but Corman clearly responds to some of the points that ended up in the passage (11 June 1959).

32 Corman, “Ryokan’s Scroll,” *Sagetrieb* 1.2 (Fall 1982): 285-289.

referred to as grass style—which maximizes the gestural and spontaneously improvisational quality, although the result may be unreadable, as Corman pointed out. This accounts for the “dripping” effect Zukofsky notes, although this word was actually suggested by Corman:

Each character is used as a syllabic note rather than, as it might seem, a word: in fact, the literal meanings of the words are only “incidental” (but used as dripping is by our contemporary painters, for “incidental effect,” to let it occur) [...] For me the dance of the hand as it moves the eyes down the paper is absolute delight. (13 Dec. 1960)

The deliberate blurring of visual art and writing naturally appealed to Zukofsky, who aspired to a writing that achieved the effect of a “solid,” as he liked to put it, or more to the point, a visceral, performative effect. Such gestural forms particularly attracted Zukofsky, the affect of a dynamic and resonant space that resists rarefying into paraphrasable sense or conceptualization. On receiving the scroll Zukofsky asked Corman for a translation of the poem, which was duly supplied and immediately incorporated into “(Ryokan’s scroll)” (LZ 11 Dec. 1960, CC 13 Dec. 1960). Zukofsky noted that the “eyes” in his poem is a verb, obviously following directly out of the poetics of *Bottom*, the action of the eyes as an embodiment in the world. Visually the poem attempts to evoke both the dripping style and a hanging scroll.³³

Sometime later, on receiving a copy of *I’s* (*pronounced eyes*) Corman noted that the reproduction of Ryōkan’s scroll on the cover was upside down and jokingly suggested Zukofsky might write a follow-up poem entitled “ERRATUM” (5 June 1963). Zukofsky answered that his next booklet of poems, *After I’s*, was already more or less in shape (although strictly speaking he composed two further poems), and he would no longer write short poems, so that “Erratum” had better go into “A” (12 June 1963). Whatever the reasons for this decision, Zukofsky had for some time expressed his strong desire for a collected short poems, and although he did not yet have a publishing prospect for such a volume, he had already decided on the final poem, “Finally a Valentine.” In any case, Zukofsky was as usual as good as his word, and incorporates a substantial passage into “A”-14 that does some further improvisations on Ryōkan’s scroll, includes some of the anecdotal information on Ryōkan that Corman sent him and touches on the printing error (“A” 325-326). Zukofsky copied out the relevant passages from Corman’s letter into his working notebook and then immediately wrote out a long response in prose, beginning with the mention of the “erratum” (HRC 3.16). In “A”-14 the latter ends up as the close of the passage, which Zukofsky shaped by severely pruning his original prose. One cannot say this is typical of how Zukofsky composed, but it was one way he at times went about it³⁴

33 For Corman’s translation, see annotations for the poem on the Z-site. See also Richard Parker, “Louis Zukofsky’s American Zen” in *Modernism and the Orient*, ed. Zhaoming Qian (2012): 232-248. Parker argues for a significant, if highly mediated engagement with Zen Buddhism in the later Zukofsky, and he discusses both “(Ryokan’s scroll)” and “Daruma.”

34 See annotations for these lines, “A”-14.325.7-326.31, on the Z-site, where there is also an image of the cover with the scroll, and for critical discussion, see the Z-notes commentary on

Corman also expressed his surprise that *I's* (*pronounced eyes*) did not include the poem “Daruma” (CSP 221-222), the poem that opens *After I's* (1964). The tale of “Daruma” parallels that of “(Ryokan’s scroll),” but this time in dialogue with Will Petersen rather than Corman. Petersen (1928-1994) became best known as a lithographer, but in the early 1950s he had been stationed in Japan while in the military, was active with the West Coast Beat poets on his return to the U.S. and then returned to Kyoto in 1957 where he would remain for eight years, studying printmaking, calligraphy, Noh and Zen Buddhism. In Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*, Petersen appears briefly as the character Rol Sturlason, already an aficionado of the Zen rock garden of Ryōanji, about which he published an influential essay in the *Evergreen Review*.³⁵ For all practical purposes, Petersen was co-editor with Corman for both Origin Press and the second series of the journal, mainly responsible for design and production, with his Japanese wife, Ami, taking care of administrative matters and mailings. Since Corman and Petersen worked so closely together, he appears constantly in the correspondence with Zukofsky, so that it was routine to report news of the Petersen family and exchange greetings. In the immediate afterglow of bringing out Origin #3—which consisted of the Oriental music and dance partita of “A”-13 along with the Corman-Petersen translation from the Noh—Peterson repeated Corman’s gesture with Ryokan’s scroll by sending Zukofsky a small rock on a stand he called “Daruma,” writing Zukofsky about the background of the “figure.” As he hoped, Zukofsky promptly wrote a poem addressed to Petersen and largely written out of the latter’s letters.³⁶ Again this was Zukofsky’s way of thanking Petersen and Ami for their efforts on his behalf.

Something should be said about Corman’s own poetry in relation to Zukofsky. The period of the correspondence appears to coincide with the establishment of Corman’s identifiable style: short poems with short lines and often gnomic in manner. In his poems of the early 1950s, during the first series of *Origin*, his poems are formally more conventional, usually adopting a relaxed colloquial style deriving from a certain influential version of Williams, although there are also a whole category of poems more self-consciously literary

“A”-14. There are also a few lines on the Japanese word “*kokoro*” at “A”-14.335.4-6, which come directly out of the correspondence. When Zukofsky asked about Corman’s use of this word, he explained it means “[...] heart-mind. When a Japanese person uses the word ‘mind’ he touches his heart, NEVER his head” (3 July 1963).

35 “Stone Garden,” *Evergreen Review* 4 (1957): 127-137.

36 See the annotations to “Daruma” on the Z-site, which quote the relevant passages from Petersen’s letters. These were first pointed out to me by Richard Parker, who has discussed this poem in “Louis Zukofsky’s American Zen” (2012). Usually Zukofsky and Petersen communicated to each other through Corman, but there are 34 letter from Petersen held at Texas (HRC 26.2). Also in connection with this poem, there is a 15 Feb. 1962 postcard to Lorine Niedecker in which Zukofsky refers her to Lafcadio Hearn’s “Otokicki’s Daruma” in *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901).

that draw on classical myth.³⁷ *Sun Rock Man*, written in Matera shortly before meeting Zukofsky, was pivotal, and Corman spent an unusual amount of time and effort selecting and arranging the volume before Origin Press finally published it in 1962. Formally the collection is quite diverse in terms of the length of both lines and individual poems, and is broadly descriptive in manner since the conception of the book was to give a comprehensive picture of this rather remote and backward area of southern Italy or at least of Corman's experience of it. Again the example of Williams is clear in its direct colloquial language and the telling detail to convey a sense of ordinary experience. In Japan Corman moved toward increased minimalism, which does not mark a dramatic shift in manner so much as a focusing of the formal eclecticism he had practised up to this time. Unquestionably Japanese aesthetics, informed by Petersen, and his work with haiku were decisive influences on maximizing the effect of a few words, but no doubt the regular and close engagement with Zukofsky at the least reinforced this propensity, a weighing of each word and their silences. Also both poets tended to think of their poems as intrinsically occasional rather than as ruminations on experience. However, it has to be said that Corman was never quite able to resist the gnomic temptation, so that the occasionality of the poem was evidence for and made necessary by the ever-present theme of mortality and ephemeral existence—an omnipresent motif in East Asian literature.

Inevitably Corman wrote poems out of his relationship with Zukofsky, and there are a number written directly out of the correspondence.³⁸ On receiving the printer's copy of *Bottom*, Corman wrote the following poem, which appeared, with Zukofsky's encouragement, in the next issue of *Origin*:

On Opening BOTTOM

There is that that should
perhaps be noted:
how the poet keeps
lingering over

37 It is telling that in *The Gist of Origin* (1975), which offers a compendious selection from the first three series of *Origin*, Corman included none of his own poems from the first series (1951-1957) but substantial selections from the latter two series (1961-1971).

38 Three such poems appear in *& Without End* (Elizabeth Press, 1967): “‘The harbor burns,’ you / write,” “So ‘many things’ or” and “Your brother now”—the quotations in the first two are directly from Zukofsky's letters, while the third refers to the death of his brother in 1966 (CC 2 Sept. 1966). On “The harbor burns,” see “A”-14.333.16 and annotations on the Z-site—this particular comes just after a page and a half passage mostly cataloguing details of the Brooklyn harbor front near where the Zukofskys' lived and includes a couple of Japanese references.

each word—no, each sound
and every silence
gives a little cry,
as if it might end

all end, there, amidst
thought's chance, love's care, love's
character. Master
Shakespeare, whom he plumbs

for Bottom, did no
less. Does, in our mind,
this conjoint author
that love makes of me,

does, I say, do more
by drawing out eyes
to their own praise to
see to hymn this ground.³⁹

Much of this mimics the mannered formal style Zukofsky sometimes adopted, a deliberate slowing down so as to linger over each word and silence, and also characteristically Zukofskyian is the word play, the tendency to dissolve thematic argument into overdetermined punning complexities. The critical observation expressed in the first half is predictable and a quality Corman aspired to emulate. Nevertheless, it has to be said that as a critical comment on *Bottom*—that the work is most essentially about the act of reading—is more perceptive than most of what has been said about that work.

VI. Oppen & Zukofsky

There are two episodes in the relationship between Oppen and Zukofsky that come up in the correspondence with Corman: the 1959 road trip to Mexico and a never realized selected poems. Although a fair number have remarked on the nature and travails of this relationship, the imbalance in the public evidence should be noted. With Mary Oppen's memoir, George's many interviews during his years of success, plus letters and notebooks and even a few poems there are quite a number of scattered remarks, very often negative, expressing Oppen's personal views on Zukofsky. From the other side there is approximately zero on public record, although a certain amount of vague testimony of Zukofsky's splenic grumblings

³⁹ *Origin* 12 (Jan. 1964): 59. The poem appears with the date 25 August 1963, which was not Corman's usual practice.

about Oppen in private. This imbalance itself might be worth consideration, and one wonders why Oppen felt the need to publicly, as well as privately stick in the knife. Ultimately this is all pretty trivial, but perhaps it is worth presenting a little of what little Zukofsky had to say.

Apparently Zukofsky initiated contact with Oppen in August 1958, having obtained the latter's Mexico address while in residence at San Francisco State College that summer.⁴⁰ The Oppens were in the process of returning to the U.S. as well as to poetry, and made a couple of visits to NYC in late 1958 and 1959, ostensibly to visit their daughter who was attending Sarah Lawrence College. In their May 1959 visit, the Oppens impulsively invited the Zukofskys to drive back down to Mexico with them and within a couple of weeks they were on the road (22 June 1959). Zukofsky had previously expressed interest in visiting Mexico, and this was a chance for the family to get out of the city, have a short summer vacation and then return by airplane—Zukofsky's first flight.⁴¹ In her account of this trip, Mary Oppen ends melancholically with the observation that they (George and herself) realized that there was no chance for a meaningful renewal of an old friendship and that the Zukofskys were too much of a closed family (*Meaning a Life* 206-209). This conclusion is no doubt colored by subsequent events and the purposes of Mary's memoir do not necessarily demand scrupulous recording of factual details, but it may very well accurately express how the Oppens felt about the experience at the time. This is hardly surprising given the very different trajectories and situations of the families and poets. The Zukofskys undoubtedly were a claustrophobically inward looking family unit, while the Oppens at that point were quite out of sorts and looking to reconnect with the U.S. and with poetry. While there are obvious reasons, beyond the purely personal, why Oppen would want to look up Zukofsky at this time, it would be naive to expect to simply rekindle a friendship after 25 years that had been suspended on a somewhat sour note. The Oppens after all did not simply put poetry writing aside in 1934 but fairly abruptly dropped their literary relations for their commitments to the Communist Party. Apparently based on Mary's account, other commentators have characterised the Mexico trip in more dramatic terms, as "disastrous" and the like, as if it marked a decisive moment in the relationship. This is surely not the case. In Zukofsky's account to Corman there is no hint of problems, although he would have had no reason to hide this from Corman for whom at that point Oppen was nobody. He complains about the discomfort of the long drive, despite the fact that Oppen was an excellent driver—Zukofsky was a true New Yorker who never learned to drive and rarely took road trips. He further explains that although the living arrangements at the Oppens' Mexico City home were quite comfortable, they moved to a hotel at some cost for the last couple of nights because the shadowy figure of David Raphael Wang insisted on visiting Zukofsky while he was in

40 On the renewal of contact with Oppen and the Mexico trip, see Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life* 295-296. For Oppen's initial letters to Zukofsky in 1958, see *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1990): 7-9.

41 Zukofsky's poetic record of this trip is "Jaunt," included in *I's (pronounced eyes)* (CSP 210-213).

Mexico City, and Zukofsky did not feel he should risk inconveniencing his hosts. In the event Wang did not show up to Zukofsky's annoyance (20 July 1959).⁴²

A year later, Zukofsky suggested that Oppen submit some of his new poems to Corman for *Origin*, which he did (20 July 1960). Initially Corman was not impressed, but had some exchange with Oppen with critical suggestions (1 Aug. 1960, 20 Aug. 1960).⁴³ In the end, Oppen never appeared in *Origin*, although this is not quite the end of this thread. More than three decades later in the final issue of the fourth series of *Origin* (July 1982), Corman included a couple of pages of excerpts from Oppen's 1960 letters as a form of apology or admission of his editorial blindness at the time, concluding with a more recent snippet from 1977 in which Oppen thanked Corman for a positive review of his *Collected Poems* (1975).⁴⁴

The business of a selected poems is a more complicated matter and certainly did contribute substantially, perhaps decisively, to the final breakdown of Zukofsky's relationship with Oppen. Again the background to this is the very different situations and expectations that the poets had during this time. In 1958 when Oppen decided to return to poetry and the U.S. he was 50 years old, by all accounts he and Mary had had a fairly miserable period of self-exile in Mexico, and he could not have felt that he had accomplished much with his life to this point.⁴⁵ Fortunately for him, he could essentially "retire" to full-time concentration on poetry, since however modest the income from his mother's inheritance, it was sufficient, and as chance would have it his half-sister, June Oppen Degnan, was in the publishing business so that as soon as he had a book ready it came out with a commercial publisher. For Oppen and his publisher sister, there was a clear marketing value in reviving the "Objectivists," and they brought out a selected volume of Reznikoff simultaneously with Oppen's first post-return book, *The Materials* (1962).⁴⁶ Logically, they wanted to follow this up with a volume of selected Zukofsky poems, and Oppen expressed

42 Corman himself had had some uncomfortable encounters with the Wang. Wang was working on a Li Po issue of *The Galley Sail Review*, for which he asked both Zukofsky and Corman to contribute. Zukofsky selected three short "oriental" passages from "A"-4, -8 and -12. See *The Galley Sail Review* 5 (Winter 1959/60): 8-10. On David Raphael Wang or David Hsin-fu Wand, see Hugh Witemeyer, "The Strange Progress of David Hsin-fu Wand," *Paideuma* 15.2/3 (Fall/Winter 1986): 191-210.

43 Oppen's side of the exchange can be found in *Selected Letters*, 40-43.

44 *Origin* 20, fourth series (July 1982): 34-37. For Corman's review, see "Together," *Parnassus* (Spring/Summer 1976): 83-95. Much later Corman would simply sum up the situation in an interview: "Oppen never appeared in *Origin*: there was no need for it—and he had no need for me." See "Thirty-One Poems & An Interview," *The American Poetry Review*, Special APR Supplement, Vol. 29, No. 4 (July-Aug. 2000): 25.

45 Peter Nicholls, *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism* (2007): 20-29.

46 Oppen evidently sent Zukofsky the proposed selection of Reznikoff's poems made by Degnan, and his response as reported to Corman was very negative. He thought Reznikoff should make his own selection (23 Feb. 1961). Although the evidence is unclear, Oppen's *Selected Letters* suggest that Oppen subsequently made his own selection, which probably was more or less the version published (44, 48-49).

considerable frustration over the latter's insistence that he was only interested in a collected, which from Oppen's perspective was unrealistic, even arrogant. We have to keep in mind that although Oppen claimed to be trying to help Zukofsky, there was a self-serving element in all this for him, who was an all but non-existent poet up to this point. In any case, clearly Oppen, Degnan and James Laughlin (who was co-publisher with Degnan of the Oppen and Reznikoff volumes) discussed the possibility of following up with a selected Zukofsky, as well as possibility a reprint of *5 Statements*. It is difficult to know to what extent Oppen, Degnan and Laughlin coordinated their efforts with regard to Zukofsky, but not unreasonably Zukofsky assumed they were in close cahoots. Degnan and Oppen both wrote Corman as a means of applying influence on Zukofsky; she mentioned that they possibly hoped to follow up the Oppen/Reznikoff publications with a reprinting of Zukofsky's *5 Statements* and a selected poems, while George asked whether Corman planned to do a selected poems and hinted at proposing such a volume to San Francisco Review/New Directions (CC 1 Oct. & 23 Oct. 1962).⁴⁷ When Corman promptly reported this to Zukofsky, expressing his discomfort at being put in the middle of this business, the latter was understandably angry. No one had said anything to him about publishing *5 Statements*, and in any case this indirection simply confirmed his suspicions that Oppen was a somewhat devious character (9 Oct. & 27 Oct. 1962).⁴⁸ Zukofsky of course could see perfectly well what was going on in this effort to resurrect the "Objectivists," and he wanted none of it. Not only was it an irrelevant marketing ploy, as he saw it, but he felt no need to revive this old nexus.

As outlined above, slowly but surely Zukofsky had been gaining notice and opportunities for publication from the mid-1950s on—it was a hard slow road, perhaps, but an honest and sufficient one as far as he was concerned. The decades of neglect undoubtedly scarred Zukofsky, but one consequence was that he had to come to terms with why he was a poet in the first place and its intrinsic value, although his inclination was to say it was a habit he could not get rid of. Having persisted and waited this long, Zukofsky was not overly impatient and as events unfolded during this period, he had good reason to feel justified as increasingly there was more demand for his work and he was able to publish it on his own terms. In any case, years before the Oppens proposed the selected, Zukofsky had expressed

47 Oppen's *Selected Letters* include the key passage from Oppen's letter to Corman in an endnote (381n.22). DuPlessis says the letter is undated, although she places it in the correct context. Corman quoted this precise passage to Zukofsky in a letter dated 23 Oct. 1962, and one can safely assume he wrote this within a day or two of receiving Oppen's letter.

48 A good example of the difficulty in reading letters is a 14 Sept. 1962 letter from Oppen to Zukofsky, which begins by expressing his appreciation for the latter's "Objectivists" essays, just reprinted in *Kulchur*, then segues into the matter of a selected poems. If one assumes Oppen's sincerity and best intentions, then his defensive awkwardness indicates his self-consciousness in addressing a suspicious and prickly character, whereas if one takes a more sceptical view then it is symptomatic of his awareness that he has been less than forthright or that he has found himself singing somewhat different tunes to different people (*Selected Letters* 68-70).

his determination to bring out his short poems complete and that this was the proper presentation of his work. While Zukofsky's entrance into or return to the public eye certainly gratified and motivated him, at the same time he found the business alarming and distracting. This was all the more the case in that at the same time Paul was embarking on his musical career, a business even more imbued with one-upmanship and institutional back-scratching than poetry – this is precisely the main theme of *Little*. As it turned out in just a couple of years, Zukofsky's collected short poems were published as he wanted at the behest of Denise Levertov—who was prodded by both Creeley and Duncan (25 July 1964)—his first book after all these years brought out by a commercial publisher, as he thankfully noted in *Autobiography*.⁴⁹ Oppen had it a bit easier, but he also was in a hurry and felt the need to make up for lost time, so a bit of marketing was just good practical sense for him, even if this rubs against the usual perception that he was above such matters. Oppen had a curious attachment to the “Objectivist” label and critical terms, which I presume relates to his having to start over from scratch after a long hiatus, and he constantly refers to Zukofsky's early essays and “Objectivist” definitions in letters, interviews and notebooks.⁵⁰ Zukofsky, especially this late in the day, did not want to be read as springing out of some group from the early 1930s and felt each of the poets should be read on their own terms. It did not help, though, that some of the promotional materials for Oppen's *The Materials* managed to mention him as one of the founders of the “Objectivists” without mentioning Zukofsky. Even with Niedecker Zukofsky was wary of advertising the close poetic relationship between them. In the correspondence with Corman he does not say much about her – he strongly recommends her work and presumably urges Niedecker to send poems to Corman, but otherwise he does not boost her, trusting that Corman will recognize her merit and matters will take care of themselves (9 May 1959, 25 Aug. 1960). Some might interpret this reticence as selfish, but there are other ways to look at it.

Precisely what factors, no doubt complex, that brought about the final bitter break between Oppen and Zukofsky are difficult to determine and much of what went on between them during this period is irrecoverable, since they lived in the same Brooklyn neighborhood (practically backdoor neighbors in 1960-1961). Initially Zukofsky seemed perfectly happy about Oppen's return and recommended his work—as he assured Corman, “a poetic sensitivity” (13 Aug. 1960). But I suspect that from his perspective this sense of conniving poetry business was a major point. Zukofsky, frankly, did not trust Oppen, and probably some of this goes back to the 1930s. The Oppens of course have their own account of what

49 *ALL: The Collected Short Poems*, 2 volumes (Norton, 1965, 1966). *Autobiography* (1970): 43. For background details, see Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life* 353-354.

50 Scroggins points out that in the “Objectivists” interviews conducted by L.S. Dembo with the central four poets in 1968, it is Oppen “who had best understood the objectivist manifestos,” meaning he gives the most lucid explanation in response to Dembo's queries (*The Poem of a Life* 408). I think there is good reason for this in terms of who was and was not invested in the concept at the time.

happened, characteristically neat and dramatic, but surely at a minimum the not altogether plausible story of Zukofsky directly challenging Oppen as to the respective value of their poetry requires some context. This is not to deny Zukofsky's prickliness, even paranoia, and the genuine conflicts he felt between a high-minded ideal of aesthetic endeavour and the vulgar realities of public visibility. Over the course of the 1960s, he became increasingly exasperated at the demands and what he saw as scheming involved in being a recognized poet, to which he responded with crotchety and partial withdrawal—again, this is more clearly expressed, quasi-vicariously and in a wryly comic register, in *Little*.

However, the tale of the selected would have repercussions which compounded the tensions that eventually damaged the relationship between Zukofsky and Corman. In early 1964 Corman reported and quoted a letter he received from James Laughlin in response to Corman's urging *New Directions*, not for the first time, to publish Zukofsky. Laughlin responded that he thought it was high time there was a selected Zukofsky, that he had expected Degnan would do this but she had vaguely put him off on the matter, and, finally, that if *New Directions* were to do it it should not be selected by Zukofsky himself, who he felt was prone to wilful obscurity. He therefore suggested Corman might be a suitable editor for such a selection. Corman adds that this last point made practical sense and he would be willing to take on the job, which would help realize what he knew to be Zukofsky's real desire, to publish the collected short poems (1 Feb. 1964). It is surprising, particularly since he was privy to the previous responses to the Oppen manoeuvrings, that Corman felt this might go down with Zukofsky. The last thing Zukofsky tolerated was people going around him in order to do what they thought was in his best interest, while serving their own purposes at the same time. Corman was also aware that there was some history of Laughlin teasingly holding out the possibility of publishing a volume of Zukofsky but repeatedly finding some reason for putting it off. During the time of their correspondence, this song and dance was played out with the possible reprint of *A Test of Poetry* (in the end Jargon brought it out in 1964), and Laughlin had also inquired about *Catullus* when they met at Williams' funeral (11 March 1963). There was a degree of personal dislike between the two, which probably had a class element, that seems to have gone back to when they first met as young men in Rapallo under the gaze of Pound. Neither man gave a forthright account of the other, so it is impossible to be certain just what the tangle of tensions involved, only that they clearly were never comfortable with each other. But Corman no doubt sincerely hoped Laughlin's expression of interest might lead to making Zukofsky more accessible to a wider readership and saw *New Directions* as the logical commercial publisher to finally take him on. Although Corman offered Origin Press to bring out anything Zukofsky wanted published, he did not feel proprietorial about Zukofsky, particularly given his constant funding and distribution difficulties. Zukofsky's response to Corman on Laughlin's offer (if that is what it really was) was firm: that there would be no selected in his lifetime prior to the publication of the collected, that even if this happened no one but himself and Celia was to determine who would edit such a volume, and finally he asked Corman not to become involved in any

mediation with or solicitation of publishers for his work except to direct them to Zukofsky himself—"The least you can do if you get that itch is to confess it to me first, + it'll pass I'm sure" (7 Feb. 1964). Again, it is difficult to imagine how, other than wishful thinking, Corman could have been surprised by this response, and despite the fact that Zukofsky did not directly criticize him, Corman answered rather defensively that he was only thinking as always of Zukofsky's best interest and so on.

VII. The End

A number of otherwise unrelated events over a period of a few months (Oct. 1963-Feb. 1964) brought to the surface latent tensions between and around both poets, culminating in an abrupt and premature termination of the second series of *Origin*. Although there was no sudden break in the correspondence, and they seem to have routinely sent copies of their works to each other right up to Zukofsky's death, the resultant emotional alienation never recovered. This is hardly surprising given that such intense correspondence, almost entirely unsupported by personal contact, can rarely sustain itself indefinitely, especially when there is such a strong mixture of mutual self-interest. In this sense it is a typical little story in the supposed utopia of the poetic relations.

After a long and convoluted production process, a printer's copy of *Bottom* was sent to Corman in later 1963, so he was finally able to read the work complete. His enthusiasm immediately moved him to write an essay or what was really a reading through the entire work. Corman claimed this was written in the first instance for Zukofsky, an appreciation and contribution to their dialogue, without concern for its publication. The essay, "At: *Bottom*," was indeed very long and in Corman's typical critical style of plentiful deployment of quotations, in this case echoing Zukofsky's own method in *Bottom*. At the same time Corman was in communication with Lita Hornick, editor of *Kulchur*, which as mentioned had been (re)publishing many of Zukofsky's older prose works, and he suggested that *Kulchur* should do a Zukofsky issue, to which she was receptive. Particularly since it was a journal of critical prose, *Kulchur* seemed a natural place for his essay, ideally in such a special issue. Corman forwarded the essay to Zukofsky to be passed on to Hornick, with a cover note that he was agreeable to whatever alterations Zukofsky might see fit to make. Zukofsky took this license to make substantial cuts in what he no doubt believed to be impractically long. He also eliminated Corman's polemical asides, including a number of comparisons/contrasts between himself and Olson, insisting he did not want to be associated with any arguments or battles in the poetry community (7 Oct. 1963).⁵¹ Corman and Zukofsky had numerous mutual contacts

51 Corman attempted to build a bridge, however tenuous, between the two stars of his two series of *Origin*, which probably did him no favors with either poet. Corman requested that Zukofsky send Olson a signed copy of "A" 1-12, and when he visited Olson in Gloucester he evidently tried to prod him about Zukofsky, but admitted Olson probably felt a degree of rivalry that preventing him from looking at Zukofsky's work (27 Feb. 1961). Robert Duncan

in the larger poetry world, and naturally there were instances where they disagreed or more to the point had differing relationships. In particular, Corman was often scathing about various editors and publishers with whom Zukofsky got along with alright, even though he too was often sceptical about their motives. In any case, Corman was clearly hurt by Zukofsky's response to his *Bottom* essay, sensing that he did not much care for it (13 Oct. 1963). Zukofsky was non-committal, and from his perspective the fact that he took the effort to carefully edit the essay and give specific reasons why he made each cut implied his appreciation. This was typical Zukofsky and a reason why many perceived him as indirect, wilfully over-subtle or simply arrogant. To his mind, it was not for him to judge the value of the critical perception of his own work, but to accept the interest and care expressed by the attention itself. In the event, Hornick returned Corman's essay, as well as a review of *I's* (*pronounced eyes*), even while confirming she was still interested in a Zukofsky issue and would solicit essays from a number of other poets (LZ 8 Nov. 1963). To add insult to injury, *Kulchur* did publish a long essay on "A" 1-12 by Robert Kelly, a poet *Origin* had recently featured in #5 (April 1962), to which Corman responded with a lengthy dismissive critique to Zukofsky (11 Jan. 1964). The latter defended Kelly based not on the specific argument or points made but pointing out that Kelly and Corman had "different sensitivities" and he appreciated them both for what they were—"Let's keep our friends as best we can" (21 Jan. & 7 Feb. 1964). Both Zukofsky and Corman tried to place the *Bottom* essay elsewhere without success, although a few years later it appeared as a pamphlet under Clayton Eshleman's *Caterpillar* imprint (1966). This version, as well as its subsequent gathering into Corman's collection of essays is the version as edited by Zukofsky.⁵²

In February 1964, immediately on the heels of the incident concerning Laughlin and the selected poems, Corman wrote back to back letters that brought matters to the breaking point. The first announced that Petersen was withdrawing from *Origin* with the current issue and his wife, who handled administrative matters and mailings, with the following issue—essentially Corman lost his entire supporting staff (11 Feb. 1964). Petersen had been Corman's closest friend in Japan and whatever the specific reasons, which he did not detail to Zukofsky, the breakdown in their relationship was a big blow. Corman's second letter written the following day announced the premature termination of *Origin* with #14 (#13 was just coming out). Perhaps misjudging Corman's distress, Zukofsky immediately answered the

frequently spoke of Olson and Zukofsky together as defining "polarities of what poetic consciousness might be" ("In Introduction: John Taggart's *Dodeka*," *Collected Essays and Other Prose* (2014): 355).

⁵² Corman, *Word for Word: Essays on the Arts of Language*, vol. I (Black Sparrow Press, 1977): 128-169. Eshleman lived for a time in Kyoto, so he knew both Corman and Petersen very well. For Eshleman's memories and comments on Corman, see "Cid," *Cipher Journal* <https://www.cipherjournal.com/html/eshleman_cid.html> and also *Companion Spider: Essays* (2001): 65-67. For Robert Kelly's review-essay, see "Song? / After Bread: Notes on Zukofsky's A 1-12," *Kulchur* 12 (Winter 1963): 33-63.

first before receiving the second letter and admonished him for his propensity to be overbearing—as he put it, the urge to punish the child for its own good (14 Feb. 1964). Behind this was Zukofsky’s empathy for Petersen, and previously he had suggested that Corman was insufficiently tactful in regard to his partner’s own problems, included marriage difficulties (20 Sept. 1961).⁵³ Such admonishment, which Zukofsky expressed in typically convoluted and overly nuanced manner, was unusual for him and evidently manifested a brewing tension. Possibly Zukofsky felt there had developed too much of an expectation that he owed Corman loyalty and work during a time when Zukofsky’s public profile was steadily rising so that he did not feel or want to be dependent on any particular individual. After all he had endured a very long period of neglect and sticking to his poetic beliefs, even in the face of criticism or bafflement by the likes of Pound and Williams, to justify a self-confidence in the inherent worth of his work, that it eventually would “sell” itself so to speak. The fact that some, such as Degnan and Laughlin, felt it was appropriate or necessary to go through Corman to communicate with Zukofsky, certainly did not help. Zukofsky was very grateful to Corman, above all for the publication of “A” 1-12, but he pointed out that Corman had gained as much from him as he from the other. Zukofsky represented the neglected major poet that precisely suited Corman’s primary motive behind *Origin*, just as Creeley and especially Olson did for the first series, that is, making available ample space for essential work ignored by others. The other side of Corman’s seemingly implacable editorial self-confidence was a persistent sense that others did not really like or appreciate his own poetry, which was only reinforced by, for example, his refusal to be in anthologies. Typically this would involve a process of reluctant agreement followed by withdrawal on the grounds that he did not really believe in anthologies, did not trust the standards of the editor, and the conviction they did not really like his poetry in any case.

The breakdown of Corman’s relationship with Petersen was clearly the emotional as well as practical crisis compelling him to decided to wind up the second series of *Origin* with #14, but his followup letter to Zukofsky gives a couple further reasons. On the one hand there were the perennial money problems: rising printing costs, the expenditure out of his own funds was unsustainable, the money for letters/papers sold to Indiana University had not been forthcoming and his enquiries elicited no response. On the other hand Corman sensed that Zukofsky himself never expressed much enthusiasm for the magazine (12 Feb. 1964). This was probably both true and untrue. Zukofsky certainly appreciated all the effort and support Corman had put into publishing his work, but he also suggested that Corman was expending too much time and personal sacrifices as an editor, which was justified, as he put it, “only

53 At this time, Zukofsky made the following observations in a postcard clearly informed by his *Bottom* thesis: “Women — those who have intellect <esp.> — suffer more seeing — it’s something to bear in mind — loss of temper is probably always justified. Their good ‘sense’ really senses more justly — (I didn’t used to think so) — All’s Well would corroborate. Guys ought to be more sensitive — gallant, [in fact?]” (26 Sept. 1961); see also remarks on “bragging males” in letter dated 9 Aug. 1960.

because you had to” (15 Feb. 1964). At the same time Zukofsky’s long term lack of publishing outlets was becoming inverted into an excess of requests from younger poets bringing out little journals. Although he sometimes grumbled about these expectations, the evidence indicates he usually did not want to disappoint and even resorted to reprinting old pieces on occasion. Even with regard to book publications, while he had yet to be picked up by a commercial publisher he was getting enough interest to feel a shift in this respect as well. Perhaps the unstated expectation that he have something for each issue of *Origin*, which came out four times a year, was becoming a bit burdensome.

However, we should resist the temptation to over-read the emotional spontaneity and ephemerality of letter writing. In part such an intense correspondence and its demands over what was now more than six years inevitably reached a point of exhaustion, and sooner or later other distractions and commitments on both sides was bound to alter its intimacy. All the more so in that the relationship had become closely bound up with issues of publishing and promotion, which are always potential sources of misunderstanding. One senses that Corman’s loyalty and belief in Zukofsky’s work only intensified in the course of publicly championing it, and this was reinforced by the sometimes hostile feedback he received for doing so. Nonetheless, while both Corman and Zukofsky were determined individualists who at least intellectually accepted isolation as the price to be paid for standing by their values, this can take its toll. Living single in Japan, the deterioration of the relationship with his closest friend, a disappointing response to the second series of *Origin*, the always present money problems and frustration at not having the time and quiet he wanted for his own work, put Corman in an isolated and vulnerable situation. While the correspondence continued on a regular and frequent basis for the next couple of years, the intimacy and trust had irrevocably changed. A few years later Zukofsky declined to contribute to the third series of *Origin* telling Corman he would prefer to see those “who haven’t had their chance yet,” but in any case, with *Catullus* finished and no longer writing short poem, he was preoccupied with finishing “A” and hardly needed the exposure of journal publication any longer.⁵⁴ Corman remained dedicated to promoting Zukofsky’s work and published a considerable number of commentaries on his books of short poems and individual movements of “A” that give the impression that he had in mind a substantial critical book on Zukofsky that never materialized.⁵⁵

For the final issue of the second series of *Origin*, Corman and Zukofsky negotiated a literary rapprochement. As mentioned, Zukofsky had promised “A”-13 for *Origin* at the outset of the second series, and Corman periodically hinted that he hoped for another piece of

54 Scroggins, *A Poem of a Life* 360 (LZ letter dated 25 July 1966).

55 Between 1966 when the *Bottom* piece appeared and the end of his life, Corman published over a dozen essays on Zukofsky, some of them quite long and in one case a small book, *The Practice of Poetry: Reconsiderations of Louis Zukofsky’s A Test of Poetry* (Longhouse & Origin, 1998). See the bibliography on the Z-site, which may not be complete and at the very least does not include several pieces Corman wrote that never saw print.

“A”, even though he knew Zukofsky wanted to concentrate on *Catullus* for the time being. However, in 1963 Zukofsky did write three short movements out of sequence that were more personal and occasional (“A”-16, -17 and -20). Initially he did not mention these to Corman, knowing the latter would be itchy to have them, and when he published “A”-17, his collage homage in response to Williams’ death, in *Poetry* (Oct.-Nov. 1963), he felt obliged to give Corman an explanation and mention that the four-word “A”-16 would be his at some later date (28 June 1963).⁵⁶ The fact that the editor of *Poetry*, Henry Rago, was repeatedly trashed by Corman, whereas Rago would prove an important supporter of Zukofsky’s work was one of those tensions that would tell over time. But the minimalist “A”-16 unquestionably manifests the spare gestural inflections of East Asian aesthetics that Corman and Zukofsky so often talked about. When Corman abruptly announced the termination of *Origin* with just one more issue to come, Zukofsky promptly sent him “A”-16, referring to it as “our covenant” (25 Feb. 1964), which appeared on the back cover of the last issue—quite literally the final words of the series. The poem had been written some nine months previous, but Zukofsky seems to have wanted to surprise Corman at the appropriate moment, a final thank you so to speak. It is also striking that the rest of this final issue is entirely Corman’s work, his complete translation with Kamaike Susumu of Basho’s *Back Roads to Far Towns*, plus a handful of his own poems.⁵⁷ Whatever the practical pressures given Corman’s desire to wrap *Origin* up quickly, the presentation of “A”-16 together with the most famous work of the entire haiku tradition is thoroughly typical of Corman’s editorial aesthetics, his ideal of composing issues by selection and arrangement and also a personal statement on his relationship with Zukofsky. The fact that the first issue of the series included “(Ryokan’s

56 Zukofsky wrote Corman a description of Williams’ funeral (11 March 1963), essentially the same as that written to Mary Ellen Solt included in the *Selected Letters* 290-292, but with some further details that are included in the Z-site annotations to “A”-15.374.24.

57 Richard Parker first pointed out to me “A”-16’s original context in *Origin* #14. Corman had been working on this Basho translation for some time, as it came with extensive notes, glosses and other paratexts. Although there are some minor revisions, this is essentially the same text as the handsome book version published in 1968, *Back Roads to Far Towns: Bashō’s OKU-NO-HOSOMICHI* (Mushinsha/Grossman), without the Japanese text. For a 1986 reprint of this volume, Corman apparently redid all the haikus, making them less elliptical and estranging (White Pine Press). The original versions are “foreignizing” renditions, manifest most obviously in their elliptical syntactical literalness and the retention of a high percentage of transcribed Japanese words, not just of proper names but also of various objects and other terms without literal English equivalents. Predictably, this translation has received mixed reviews; the more academically inclined judging it eccentric and awkward, while poets have been more receptive, but overall it has established itself as a major rendition. See Clayton Eshleman, “A Test of Translation IV: Bashō,” *Caterpillar* 2 (Jan. 1968); rpt. *A Caterpillar Anthology* (1971): 74-79; and Eshleman’s followup, “Bashō’s *Back Road to Far Towns*,” *Cipher Journal* http://www.cipherjournal.com/html/eshleman_basho.html.

scroll),” directly instigated by Corman, made for a personally neat framing of the series and their relationship as a whole.

VIII. Obiter dicta/Occasional Observations – a few extracts from Zukofsky's letters

Zukofsky did not often comment on his own work or that of others, especially once he more or less stopped writing critical essays after the 1930s. Corman, however, deliberately attempted to draw him out on his literary opinions and was more successful than most, so it is worth rescuing some of these remarks from the mass of of more day to day chat. I have loosely organized these excerpts into comments on other writers and those on his own work:

Emerson & Whitman

As for “feeling-idea” I give you – poet – infinite possibilities for all my rigor. Skeptical enough as to what language might do? Only I wouldn’t want to, like Emerson whom I have to teach in the Am. Lit. course, be responsible for the beat generation. Right as he was sometimes, he was wrong which Whitman wrong as he was often, was always right, grasping solids + immersed in fluids – rather than gases. [9 Nov. 1958]

Having just “finished” Whitman with my classes, this historical judgment follows reading “A’ 1-12 as book: Ez underrated Whitman; I feel – I never felt that before – that I follow out of Walt more than I realized; especially in the sense that I am more of my time, as he was of his, than <are> my immediate elders born ca 1875-1894. I assume less attitude I think than any of them + come out more person – whatever that’s worth – even in the regular meters I’m of this time (covering the first half of the century) (and anticipating, like Walt) – my elders rather end off something <European> Well, that’s just an opinion to confer with yours (I’m itchin to hear.) [27 Dec. 1959]

Henry James

Yuh, Henry J. knew all his classes (clahses), the most worker of a novelist of ‘em all. Celia thinks The Golden Bowl about his best. I still have to read it — I started Wings of the Dove this summer, but never have the time to go on. The pleasure of reading — for a slow reader — I reserve for the years to come, “retirement” etc. But Lorine sent me Italian Hours — + I’ve dabbled. But the Hawthorne <i.e. H.J.’s> — damn lovely — I read years ago I’m rereading to lighten my school work now. Look into The Real Thing if you haven’t recently. The nearest living thing <in approach> to people I know <(like H.J.)> is Rezy, as Celia just put it: “something must be happening there, now what is it.” [7 Oct. 1959]

Yeats

[...] tho he rarely lets you forget the arrogant lecher — in fact when he doesn’t lech I am moved by his arrogance (as per quote from The Tower in Test) but that’s all too rare. Joyce

was a finer man: all summed up as early as Exiles if you love somebody you don't expect to be loved in return. It's like art when it happens — the "return." Anyway what followed out of Yeats ain't good. [25 Feb. 1960]

Joyce

Joyce — of course, I feel close — even tho the last reading goes back to 1936 — so much since 1922 that's a part of one. Not to imitate — but that he worked with the syllables not-teaching not-preaching which your young time don't always understand the words TELL. [12 July 1963]

Stein

Gertie's ok as you can see from p 174 + 229 of "A": the pachyderm as you know can be benignly funny + moving, even deep à la La Fontaine; tho I never wanted to make an analysis of her, as the fashion now is. <[added in margin:] Heavens nose she was over-analytical herself.> I once spurred Bill <when he was writing> his essay on her to read Sterne (Tristram) + showed him "the emptying herself" as she says of Picasso's stages was not eggactly "new." I don't always have patience to swallow her in large doses, but Melanctha is lovely sound, the book for kids (incl. A rose is etc) ditto, Geog. + Plays often Bach-like as inventions, + her Lectures in America (incl her essay on Eng. Lit) very wise — the best perhaps that has ever been said by a writer in her position who had been given a chance to talk in the academy. In the Obj. no of Poetry I felt it necessary to deal with both Jimmy + her in a footnote – as polar: him with his telescoping + her with her grammar (but growing out of sound + sight). I never met either. She must have been a wise old Jewish lady (sometimes that <people's> component counts) + Ez of course hates her because she thought him a Middle-West or some native barrell philosopher — not a bad caricature. Anyway, I included her in the Continents section of Bottom: wait n' you'll see that beautiful antoology. <P.S. Nearest thing to Gertie's insistance is Paul!> [15 Feb. 1960]

The kids in my poetry club bought some recordings out of their funds — Gertie + Frost. I was right — she has a lovely voice — but he's cruel — Vermont rock + that ain't [order?]. [25 Feb. 1960]

Stevens

Been reading, almost thru with it, [Samuel French] Morse's Wallace Stevens essay — persisting more with the quotations. For all Stevens' accomplishment, "great lines," real poetry he's another I ultimately don't take to — it's that damn epistemology of his that doesn't make it<self> worthwhile even if he "probably" says what Spinoza says in the Dec. Poetry issue. But Sp. says it and I'm moved, while St. says "something" + I wonder why a sensuous being bothered so much to be a philosophy professor. I guess Valery was his mentor in a <loose> way <W.S. thought probably more serious> — there again I'm put off (tho I

don't remember the piece you mention or for that matter any of V's prose that runs thru a sieve like the Cimitière): <I'm> even made angry or haven't you guessed as per page 100 of "A". I agree as to Rilke — whose dinge matter enough to distinguish him say from similar approaches in Wordsworthian ethico-metaphysics. Enough! I mean this discussion — + it isn't that I don't agree one can also respect V. as pseudo-musical architectural sport of a French polytechnite. [16 Dec. 1960]

Italian poets (response to *Origin #9* feature)

You sure took on the post-war burden of most serious Eytalians. Valuable to me for the look at what's happening there. Apart from the Montale, it's all new to me. And tho you may guess (or have guessed) that I'm too old (or too young?) for sympathies with a craft whose brain piles "deep" or the image (whereas in my naive "thought" the image, if not lignedent, has already <youngly> abstracted and still gives the effect of being solid — otherwise one has to start all over again <+ explain> that a letter is solid, a syllable body —Bottom's homespun trousers) — those wops tho their eyes float compel serious consideration, insights etc. Obviously the events they went thru and still suffer were, are there — whatever "unsympathetic" art <to L.Z.>. And since you have framed <them in with the> Cats at the beginning and end of the issue, I wonder if my fellow contributors — who probably read English — feel that I've "framed" them — talking homonyous and homophones again between you + me. Reading Collis [*Catullus* 61] in print I must say what a beautiful job of all kinds of recurring sound — wreaths around wreaths of it — hardly the interest of the modern Italians —(tho with my little reading of them in the original I'm no judge) but I rather suspect if it's in them it's a last vestige of old Cat. himself // I notice that Montale's eel's much longer in Penguin Poets (did you edit their work as well as translate — your job of course is fine — a poet's — not the hack work one's had to judge by) Pasolini, Tadini impressive Older men? I like Risi's wit (a younger man?) Don't know that any of them moved me as much as Scotellaro. But that may be my present "simple" involvement. Anyway, I feel I'm among serious people. [17 March 1963]

Arise, Arise

I wonder if you saw the structure — the climaxes of the dream from which the son never wakes up (i.e. on the stage) the tension between the knowledge in the dream that the mother is dead and the shift to another incident of it in the conscious refusal to admit it. Now that sounds like everything <wrong> in the psyche sciences — but no more than your guess, which is right, of the deeply personal in the play; but on reading it I know I'm right because it is the play that always makes them live for me again [...] [29 July 1959]

Bottom

Sure you're at a disadvantage with Bottom, as much as I am who am not thru with it, and know I'm multiplying disadvantages. If I know myself all I'm saying is you can't help

yourself if you're going to say it in words or in notes at all, the thesis will be worked, "almost beyond point" (as you say, but literally <beyond point>). The "secret" of it — or the method?

1. To multiply instances of the insistence on eyes in W.S. (for the interest, of course)
2. considering 1., the implications of it (notes for a graph of culture etc) out of what's before and into what's after (so Aristotle, Spinoza, + Ludwig are icons, whom I get to love for themselves, tho they have all the faults of W.S. for better or worse (I'm speaking ultimates now, not just words — but you can't afford icons, if you want a "thesis," which after all I don't — I start Part I with Gloucester "I stumbled when I saw": and that's point 3.
3. You're not the only one "mad for music" (as mad a Mr. Smart, but he had to <be> mad, after W.S., who just escaped it): <3.> to unite notes (of a "thesis") as if they were (music) — and only when I hear the damn thing as such — the working of a mind (and I don't mean a philosophy — to outdo the philosophers on their own ground + not do it as they do but as poet + musician is the great vanity of this attempt, but the working of a mind, I was saying, that might have written music — when I hear it that way it has "understanding." And if you ever hear it that way — I'll be the happier guy for having done it — + call it seeing. You want some more skepticism?! No, W. [Wittgenstein] is right he means like Baruch — thought, not image or word (as I abbreviate it) — when he says "language disguises" — why confuse the unlimited with the limited — tho I hope we're happier with the "limited" having a limited ["urge"/"upper"?) on our hands anyway! [21 Jan. 1958]

[...] the damn book [*Bottom*] as I said yesterday is my interim substitute for "A" — it's a fugue, it's a song, it's the sin of philosophy tho it's agin all philosophy <it's a life (mine)> + so on — + sections of it will confuse the effect the whole should give. But how else can you guys get a glimpse of it? [9 Sept. 1959]

Catullus

Your version impresses me like <that line in > Cat's Carmen 1 — "patroness virgin," which as I sense it goes both ways, a deference to her, as little as it is a compliment to Cornelius self-abnegating as he is or seems to be. No, reading it over against the Latin I am [I?] still feel making an American English, and music, as against something that is just "straight" and "idea" by default of language and pulse. [25 July 1958]

As I began again on Cat the other day I felt whether you would agree or not what I'm trying to do simply stated is to "imagine" him breathing each Latin word, and since it must be me breathing for him, well I'll at least have made an effort how little someone else can be another. But flush this too. It means something but is passing. [17 May 1960]

"A"

As for influences on “A” etc — you’re probably perfectly right — tho one always balks at feeling where one sounds like someone else. But on the other hand even the “conventional” interest in the syllable in A (8, 9, especially) was working out towards the syllable as you + I feel it today. And on the whole I’d say you can never read me as sonnet, or trochee, or even as Eliot-Swinburne, or EP flow of the positional phrases (something I pointed out as a short [comment?] in the dedication to him in Objectivists Anthology. No arguments — just <remarks on> poetics. [10 Sept. 1959]

I can’t get excited about any poetics finding special terminologies to cover what is the general case, or should be: it moves and someone is moved (Dante understood that a long time ago in <de> Vulgari). Anyhole, all “measure” whether by syllable, accent, quantity (i.e. “classical”) are special cases of the general quantity – + one ought to have a feeling that the line holds together (whatever the verbal statement) musically, or holds that way, as a multiple of some sense of a line musically, or why still break it up into lines – + I don’t care if you don’t – if the music’s there it’ll show up. And how you can cleave that sense from all the other senses the verbal statement, or if you wish non-statement (if you’re in the music of the spheres), I dunno. So it’s me and it’s you or the next guy if we get together. (E.g. despite the Cavalcanti yoke of “A”-9, plus the mathematics etc – it’s still L.Z. + not a prosody book – you may like me less there, but sometimes you may come up hearing it – despite all specific prosody of iamb and/or “variable foot.” And it works with Stravinsky etc the same way, even if he does “decide” to write a “canon” “after” sumpn 11 hundred years old; and its the reason why I can read Yeats, for eggexample, at all) Enough “formal” prosody on p.144, 179, and (better) 220 (to L. N) of “A” [references to “A”-12] – to stop this spout.

Anyhole to give you a glimpse of the “prosody” of 13 in addition to the opening “tercet” you saw – two widely separated ones from the first and each other

Not Nick in Ike or Ike in Niké
Could Rhyme love dove – tale the
Stall in crew’s chief, earth and

—————
Offer as instrument
Avoid their rules like a disease
Dont bring in the judges;

If the “tercets” are successful (never mind the particular references to “things” etc) they ought to go together as nuggets say, but each line should also hold within itself; and it all ought to flow into the first section of the partita, + the 2nd section where the lines won’t have “stanzas” ought to flow out of that. As to subject matter the hardest thing is to feel obligated to record the world of the last 10 years + yes come out with a world.*

[added along margin:] <*Lucretius — OK, in the world of his music only – ditto L.Z.>

So I don’t know that [Kenneth] Burke apart from suspect distinction between dance and speech rhythms (as you see, though without knowing A-13 is subtitled partita, a guileless

“fool”* reader can always be a prophet? <[*] I mean as “a fool is a prophet”> meant anything else by an honest line than that the plethoric is absent, owlsh, or ghoulsh, or droolsh, or foolish, the hunting for effect and the reminiscent. My God one can even reclaim iambs as I think I’ve done in the Ardent p 242-”A”, or parts of 4 other Countries, if you look, or rather as you have no doubt seen.

[11 July 1960]

“A”’s references – as you say, the context must “explain” em or reveal them. They are usually constructs, the telescoping of several actual references, even if as in this section I say I’m talking on P.’s talking or whoever. It’s “autobiography” I suppose as in any good novel or Weston’s “photograph.” And anyone who goes off on exact “identification” I needn’t tell you is not reading or hearing. The “memos” for me as I read <myself> are something else again — I trust as I once told you that they somehow continue to exist in the “noise” as all life probably does that has lived.

For example, no one need know that whilom means Wylam where Basil [Bunting] lives in the following:

Dear whilom friend champng with the bad teeth of Rudaki [...]

[quotes 11 more lines, see “A” 283-284] [13 Aug. 1960]