A Test of Poetry and Conviction

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If I collect these things to live

It is that I think my eyes, ears and head are still good.

If I quote it is myself I have seen

Coming back to learn conveniently from one book….

            "A"-13, 296

Zukofsky's A Test of Poetry faces two problems with which we are still (always) struggling: first, what are the relations that can be imagined between poetry and the socio-political realm, and between poetry and social critique; and second how to describe

and evaluate the impact of a poem (or, what are the stakes of poetry criticism). What is poetry, what "use" is poetry? how and/or whether to bring together one's desire for a better society and poetry; how to have poetry contribute to a new society. It has seemed as if the second problem—the establishment or pedagogy of critical standards, was the only goal of A Test of Poetry. Indeed, Zukofsky says "to suggest standards is the purpose of this book" (Test, xi). [1]   However, some attention, including bibliographical attention to the text of Test will help me show that its purposes were not limited to the formalist/aesthetic, nor even to the purely pedagogic.

        We have just emerged from an era in which there developed intense, sometimes exaggerated attention to thematics and expressive materials around social location and around the subjectivity of authors. These positions and findings reacted to the bleachings carried out by New Criticism, came out of social ferment, and of course were built on the studies in social location carried out by gender, historical, African-American, gay critics, discussants of masculinity, Jewishness, and so on. We are now in a reactive period in which a key-word for literary criticism is "aesthetic." Indeed, some people have fallen upon this word as onto a plump sofa from which one never has to get up and look out of a window. Yet poetic technique is always contextualized; it cannot be evaluated except by calibrating its rhetorical appeals and impacts, its audiences and ideological surround. If a poet thinks with her poem, if "philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry" (Wittgenstein in English translation), surely it is the critic's task to figure out how inside poetry as poetry this thinking is conducted and what this thinking is concerned with. This was Zukofsky's insistence.

Our task as critics is not to deny the social and ideological fields of poetry but to invent a myriad of investigative strategies to comprehend these locations and to read poems by their various lights. We need to integrate textual study and aesthetics with social study and questions of politics and history in the criticism of poetry. Certainly the textual in poetry is more than a slogan or message, and form is more than a rhetorical enveloping of slogan or message. The real challenge for poetry criticism is not to separate what is said from how it is said, but to try to figure out how to talk about these together, to "integrate these functions," as Zukofsky proposed (see Prep+. 8). [2] This is no small matter; easy solutions are uninteresting, reductive and also conventionally whipping-persons. Perhaps we can encircle the question strategically and acknowledge that ideologies and positions are saturated into textual mechanisms, while understanding that the poetic text is never only its opinions, and proceed to ask how this can be made visible and why and wherefore all this happens.

Louis Zukofsky tried in a variety of ways to construct this helix of attention between the textual and the social. He did so in his own time, tacking between the temptations, rigidities and oversimplifications of the US left including the Communist Party, and his own social interests. One outcome was this strange little anthology and reader called A Test of Poetry which asked one to calibrate manifold effects and affects of poetry. This is an anthology with several agendas, one of which was showing how number of the examples of good poetry offered an economically-aware, critical social vision. Indeed, Zukofsky accomplished this work in 1935-1936 at a moment of cresting left cultural activities, in which he still wanted to participate, and he published it at the post-war moment in the late 40s and early 50s when left populism (not to speak of

Communist cultural lines) had been transformed and hegemonically dismantled to a business-oriented consumerism and an (interestingly related) formalist vision.[3] The two dates of Test, 1935/1948, evoke two different interpretations of the function of art, invested with two different politics. Thus A Test is a book in which one sees one of the prime tensions animating LZ's work, between the formalist and the political (between "demands—… of high modernism and those of the socialist realists of the 1930s" in Tim Woods' words), yet sees these tensions at a moment of functional reconciliation.[4]

Such a connection of textual/formal materials, emotion and statement occurs precisely because of the nature of poetry. Poetry is a language practice conducted in line segments and hyper-saturated with its own evocativeness. That is, saturated segmentivities. Poetry is hyper-saturated because of the multiplicity of filiated, but (paradoxically) not completely speakable, impacts. Something is extra, a remainder, a concatination from the mix of elements that cannot be pinned down. [5] Among its other effects, A Test shows how poetry pushes dimensions of language to a maximum evocativeness, and this involves assessing what is barely comprehensible about the effects of a poem or passage of poetry. Zukofsky is thus trying to assemble, but not to codify, the plethora of diverse and semi-calibratible effects. He joins this sense of richness with a concern with poetic form as a way of presenting, representing social materials, even of proposing social ideas and debates. This is what Zukofsky indicated in "A Statement for Poetry" when he said of poetry that "a scientist may envy [a poem's] bottomless perception of relations which, for all its intricacies, keeps a world of things tangible and whole" (Prep+ 19). The "bottomless perception of relations" is a claim that the evocations of this real world in poetry are profound, that they cannot fully be tracked.

In poetry, Zukofsky argued, method is always part of meaning, perhaps close to the whole of meaning. It is difficult to separate how something is constructed from what it means. Zukofsky wanted to raise the stakes of poetry, by attending to its very jot and tittle—the word, the phoneme. An exposed illustration to this comes in the "coda" or last three lines of the sestina "Mantis" (1934), in which Zukofsky deliberately drops one of the six chiming-words he has used throughout. This word is "lost"; the words that remain are leaves, stone, you [in the form your], it, and the word poor, twice. His off-hand explanation in "'Mantis,' An Interpretation" is that "The word sestina has been/ Taken out of the original title. It is no use (killing oneself?)//--Our world will not stand it,/ the implications of a too regular form" (ALL 77). Those implications are, let's say, order and stasis, not movement. As for "killing oneself" to get the form right, this is totally disingenuous; Zukofsky has already considerably over-exerted himself in this brilliant poem, which features tour de force repetitions, not only of the end-line keywords, but of others that mark this dialectical argument (here/here; love/loving, saved/safe/ save; preys/prays, as well as interior-line repetitions of all the keywords at least once, that is, all occurring at least once more than required by the sestina form, and in the case of you, at least 12 times more). Zukofsky could very, very easily have placed the word "lost" in his poem, for there is a perfect mid-line place for it, but these lines would then have read "arise like leaves/The armies of the lost" not "The armies of the poor." Is it too much to suggest that this ideological judgment of lostness was, on the surface, unacceptable to him, a judgment about the poor that he overtly resisted making? But in the very excision, he called attention to the choice. For it is clear that the shadow of this judgment appears as a trace in the poem, at least via the sestina form. Driven by the sestina, the reader looks

for all six words in the "coda" and wonders at the absence of one; the word is as least as palpable in its being excised as it would have been as an automatic, form-driven presence. Not only was Zukofsky using the form ideologically, but he was, in his further choices, exposing his own conflicted politics and emotions.[6]

In A Test of Poetry, in his order, Zukofsky's rubric-like "considerations" for evaluating the impact of poetry are: Translation, Speech, Definition, Sight, Measure, Sound, Worldliness, Meaning, Song, Composition, Content, Emotion, Inevitability, Intellection, Conviction, Grace, Discourse, Perception, Energy, Duration, Impact, Movement, Recurrence, Opulence, Anonymity (Test, 154-165). This list of items fascinates me because it is decidedly unsystematic (a-pedagogic, one might say), circulating among effects that are conceptually so different. By any measure, this list offers categories both stylistic and ethical, rhetorical and generic. The magpie variety of this list is Zukofsky's argument about the complexity of effects and affects in the poetic text. "In other words," to cite Roman Jakobson, "poeticalness is not a supplementation of discourse with rhetorical adornment but a total re-evaluation of the discourse and of all its components whatsoever." [7] Indeed, in his essays written in that long decade (1935-48), Zukofsky insisted on the complexity of the poetic text, its ability to produce relationships far beyond overt statement. This seems to have been why he harried the reductiveness of the suggestions for English as a world language produced in BASIC. (In an essay on that topic in 1943 in Prepositions +). It is why he repeatedly used the mathematical term "Function" to suggest a range of effects joined dynamically.

In his notes in the second part of Test, Zukofsky addresses these debates about the textual and the social directly. "Recent critics of literature have expressed the opinion that

the beliefs implied or held in a poem influence the reader's appreciation. The opposite opinion would be that a poem is an emotional object defined not by the beliefs it deals with, but by its technique and the poetic conviction or mastery with which these beliefs are expressed" (Text 77-78). In this crucial, and wily passage (incidentally, in context, referring directly to religious conviction), the importance of beliefs or ideas in poetry is not denied, nor totally displaced into formalism, but into "poetic conviction" (an Objectivist "sincerity"), a tertium quid, linking through the same conceptual term each formation: poetry and politics. This combination of two tendencies makes a helix of form and content (form as: technique/ poetic conviction/ mastery; content as tactics with which "beliefs are expressed" and the sense that these beliefs are the sincere convictions of the author). In passages such as these from Prepositions and from Test, Zukofsky laid groundwork for social readings of poetic texts that do not ignore form, readings that suffuse these concerns together and do not, in our current terminology, aestheticize the poem. One agenda of his anthology is to defend at one and the same time social progressive work and excellent poetry as being not mutually exclusive, indeed, as being coxtensive with each other.

    With similar purposes, Zukofsky enters into the left debate around folk poetry and the idealizing of such poetry, concluding that "the essential technique of folk art (not the technique of rhyme scheme, four line stanzas, etc.)—its simplicity, its wholeness of emotional presentation—can serve as a guide to any detail of technique growing out of the living processes of any age" (Test 70). The handbook ballad prosodies do not interest him; "emotional presentation" and the representation of "the living processes of any age" do. He relates emotion to historical and social forces, observations, and arousals. Again,

"Poetry does not arise and exist in a vacuum. It is one of the arts—sometimes individual, sometimes collective in origin—and reflects economic and social status of peoples" –this is suddenly pure reflection theory, in a Marxist sense (Test 99). In the next two clauses, Zukofsky shows that the language of poetry "arises" from the "everyday matter of fact" but that poetry makes, by intelligence and emotions, constructions out of those experiences, a further reflection or lens refraction.

When Zukofsky says "Poetry convinces not by argument but by the form it creates to carry its content" (Test 52), this looks, at first glance, like a denial of the meanings or content that poetry creates, but at second glance is an attempt to articulate how content, emotion and form coincide and suffuse in statement, a way of trying to account for the bottomless impact of a poem to produce a response from argument via form. Conviction/convinces are key undercarriage terms. Zukofsky is producing a helix of social and formalist criteria. However, he did not offer a reading method for this relationship, but, amid other judgments, left these clues to its existence, wanting a kind of understanding of poetry that did not, in the manner of the contemporaneous American left, over-simplify things. What he did for the social meanings and convictions of poetry in A Test was to insist on a particular cluster of conviction, what I will call a "sub-plot of gold."

When I opened A Test of Poetry after many years, I was struck by the degree to which wealth, riches, and economic injustice were at issue in a good deal (about one-quarter) of the poetry Zukofsky selected for inclusion. Perhaps the ur-text for Zukofsky's sub-plot of gold is the three stanzas from Thomas Hood's astonishing seventy-seven page novel in verse (1840) called Miss Killmansegg and her Precious Leg. I will cite a

stanza-plus that Zukofsky does not, but before I do, I want to note a peculiar fact about <u>A</u> <u>Test of Poetry</u> as a document.

It is often the case in Zukofsky's excerpts that stanzas of the poem are cut, often without giving notice. With longer poems (as his citation of Thomas Hood in I, 5b) whole pages are cut between the stanzas to make what Zukofsky offers us on the page. That is, one astonishing issue that I could not take up here is Zukofsky's absolute construction by excision of the particular shape of his excerpts—including the touchstone poem by Herrick, containing the line "Trust to good verses, then"; here, of the original thirteen stanzas of Herrick, Zukofsky presents five (I, 7a). Is he claiming this is the gist of the poem, the best of the poem, the most illustrative part for his purposes—or even, acting as if this were the whole poem? Without more discussion, his excisions can't be "read" but they emphatically do exist. Those "good verses" we must "trust" have has been carefully, silently, and cunningly micro-managed by Zukofsky's editorial excisions.

Here, at any rate, is my selection of a few stanzas from Thomas Hood to give you a sense of this poem's unfolding :

Moreover, he has a Golden Ass,

Sometimes at stall, and sometimes at grass,

    That was worth his own weight in money—

And a golden hive, on a Golden Bank,

Where golden bees, by alchemical prank,

    Gather'd gold instead of honey.

Gold! and gold! and gold without end!

H had gold to lay by, and gold to spend,

Gold to give, and gold to lend….[8]

 In mordant, and devastating comic verse—both predecessor and the equal of the verse of

Lewis Carroll, W. S. Gilbert, Edward Lear, and the light verse part of T. S. Eliot—Hood

tells the story of a Midas-like wealthy family in which everything is "gold," including the

peg-leg of a monstrous, narcissistic daughter whose nasty Bildung and downfall, from

birth, education, courtship, marriage to allegorical death, Hood lavishly traces. Hood's

work is an effervescent, poetically skilled social satire of upper class pretension and

corruption. I call this the ur-poem for Zukofsky's sub-plot of gold because in A Test of

Poetry, in at least one-quarter of the poems, in every tone, from Shakespeare to Burns,

from Samuel Butler and George Crabbe to anonymous ballads, Zukofsky is notably

concerned with possession, greed, wealth, riches, corruption, ownership, class, social

injustice, poverty, and rectification. Not only do these concerns form a distinctive stratum

of the themes in A Test of Poetry but there is, throughout, a glancing critique of certain

emphases in Christianity as complicit with economic injustice, and, even a comic analysis

of the theologically "fortunate" fall (see Test 34-35. I, 19b, from Robert Burns).

Zukofsky illustrates, with the examples he selected for inclusion in Test, that

critical social thought and excellent poetry are as co-extensive with one another as love

longing and excellent poetry. His anthology argues, inferentially and with a muted

polemical purpose, that to offer critical ideas in poetry, to make poetry that depicts the

"living processes of any age," you did not have to conform to agit-prop criteria, demands

that Zukofsky reviled (Test 70). King Lear has pride of place in A Test of Poetry with:

"So distribution should undo excess/ And each man have enough" (Test 21; see also

"A"-8, 50), and citations from this play recur. Throughout Test, Zukofsky has chosen

many pithy selections which are socially critical: "Here our reformers come not; none

object/ To paths polluted, or upbraid neglect" (18 a, Test, p 32) is from George Crabbe's

The Borough, another work from which repeated selections are taken, as also poems by

both Burns and Blake. The illustrations of good verses are often at the same time

expressions of importantly critical and analytical sentiments from an ethically-conscious

sense of social and economic justice.

　　　　This subtext of A Test of Poetry is even more visible with a bibliographic study of

the text's origins. A Test of Poetry is involved and interlocked with (and may be an

extended revision of) a shorter (54 page typescript unpublished anthology of poetry that

Zukofsky also edited, called A Workers Anthology, whose editor's preface is dated

March 8, 1935.[9] That is, the Workers Anthology project may, as Scroggins said, have

been "aborted" but it was not in fact "abandoned"; rather it was, almost in toto, silently

subsumed into A Test of Poetry (Scroggins 998, 29).

　　　　In the preface to A Workers Anthology, Zukofsky cites Lenin, whom he takes to

be pointing him toward a double purpose: to encourage the artistic goals in and of the

working class by showing how themes and materials that engage the proletariat already

exist as great art, and second, to suggest to the serious, radical artist that speaking to the

masses in poetry can be accomplished without compromising poetic excellence. [10] This is

basically one theme of A Test of Poetry but without addressing specific cadres. Elite

writers and the masses can make common cause in the encirclement of the bourgeoisie;

excellence in poetry and articulate left-wing thinking can braid together in mutually

generative ways. In this preface, then, Zukofsky is precisely, deliberately, and elegantly

side-stepping the juggernaut of agitprop art yet making a parallel kind of claim for poetry in struggle.[11]

Thus his preface to the <u>Workers</u> anthology clearly enunciates the helix of aesthetic and social concerns that animates <u>A Test of Poetry</u> but less overtly so in <u>Test</u>: that great poetry has been made from socially conscious, decided critiques of existing power and economic arrangements. Hence while it is possible to read <u>A Test</u> from its 1948 date forward, as making a formalist or New Critical gesture, it is more generative to read it from the mid-30's forward as trying to provide an alternative within the cultural politics of the American left. While <u>A Test of Poetry</u> makes a strategic retreat from the overt Leninism Zukofsky tried to espouse in the <u>Workers Anthology</u> preface, still <u>A Test</u> is not a purely formalist work, but a work that dialectically moves between the convictions of poetry as artistic text and poetry as statement. <u>A Test</u> is a tertium quid, a reconceptualization of the history of poetry and of the purposes of poetry told from, and for, both political-ethical and formalist convictions.

How does the earlier anthology figure in this work? Despite never publishing <u>A Workers Anthology,</u> Zukofsky has recuperated virtually all of the poems of <u>A Workers Anthology</u> into <u>A Test of Poetry</u>. That is, of the 38 poems or excerpts in <u>A Workers Anthology</u>, thirty-five appear, thirty-three in exactly the same selection and format, redistributed into <u>Test</u>. [12] The discrepency between the numbers 35 and 33 occurs because Zukofsky chose different poems by Blake for the different anthologies, but in both cases two of the <u>Songs of Innocence and Experience</u> are included.[13] The impact of the poems in <u>Test</u> is different, of course; <u>Test</u> has more total excerpts (about 184 by my count) putting political rage, economic griefs amid lyric-plus topics like love longing,

sexual desire, female beauty, death sadness, and elegiac sentiments. Thus the critiques of wealth and privilege, the class-conscious, critical opinions, come up at a different rate. I further counted about thirteen more socially interesting selections (in A Test, but not from A Workers Anthology) bringing the total number for this motif to 48: as a proportion 48/184 or 26%. Test also has three sections, a variety of categories and criteria, Zukofsky's critical suggestions, and the involvement of, or invitations to the reader to evaluate the selections, but still the folding of one anthology into the other remains a striking fact about A Test of Poetry. So why did Zukofsky take virtually every single poem from one anthology into the other?

Given that A Workers Anthology was not published, let's say that Zukofsky did not want to waste his work. Thus, he simply reused its elements. But this account—that the first anthology was used simply as a source book by happenstance--does not credit serious motivation, just tidiness.[14] It's also possible—there is some ambiguity in dating them as to which came first-- that the full array in A Test preceded the other anthology, which he subsequently made as a politically motivated experiment. In either case, I think instead that A Workers Anthology is present in A Test of Poetry because the thematic issues raised in A Workers Anthology—rage at the rich, defense of the poor, attentiveness to the conditions of poverty, squalor, abuse and oppression, and calls for economic justice—are meant to emerge in Test as one of several vital strands. Zukofsky is naturalizing political conviction within the history of poetry. Any reader of the poems in Test is subtly returned to and confronted by these ideas, but in a literary historical and formalist context in which the political and social materials come up sub rosa and sub-liminally, relatively unmarked, but nonetheless present. As a text, A Workers Anthology

could surely have been seen as overtly propagandizing; with Test, in contrast, the tactic Zukofsky uses is continuous suggestion that economic justice and social rage are both major themes of Anglo-American poetry, and—his central point--that these themes, like any others are coextensive with poetic excellence. Poetic excellence and political conviction are mutually enfolded in each other.

A Test of Poetry is odd because of its pedagogic arc. Taking one view, this arc is perfect. Part I offers examples of poetic texts in whole or part, without author, period, or any marker. After the reader bumbles around there, evaluating the selections (as instructed, with simple or even simplistic grades like "great, good, fair, poor"—certainly a lackadaisical pedagogy, or, is he kidding? p. 3), the reader passes to Part II, in which Zukofsky sets out notational criteria with more selections. After (presumably) assimilating these and some of the criteria for judgment and appreciation, the reader goes to Part III, in which again, the selections are given anonymously. The implication is that the reader has learned from her ignorance (in Part I) and from her teacher's perceptions (Part II) to become a better reader of poetry (Part III). This is a reading of the second word of the title, Test, as university oriented. Test, however, is "a means of examination, trial, or proof" as well as "a criterion, standard" and to use the chemistry meaning as one of those scientific metaphors, it is "a physical reaction by which a substance may be detected or its properties ascertained." Thus the book is not so much a test of a student as a test of poetry as a set of words in language. Do the selections have "poetry" in them? This idea is also at play with the preposition in his title. Of, a perfectly astonishing little word, probably indicating a test "concerning or with reference to poetry." But if Zukofsky meant OF as "produced by or issuing from" or "caused by; resulting from"

poetry—he would be talking about the medium itself. That is, the nature of poetry itself,

the plethora of language effects calls forth questions. So finally poetry itself is tested, not,

as in the other model, the student-reader. It is a Test OF Poetry as a medium. Are its

language practices adequate—but to what? I would answer—to the double arc of

"conviction"—poetic and social in resonance and mutually suffusing.

This point can be further elaborated when we return to the categories that

Zukofsky proposed, as these are charted at the back of the book with the keys to the

authors and dates. Many of the "considerations" with which he organized the selections

of the Test are formalist: concerned with modes of writing or diction/genre (translation,

speech, definition, song, discourse) or prosodic/formalist matters (measure, sound,

recurrence, duration, movement). There are also generally "poetic" stylistic evaluations,

such as grace or perception or opulence. But a considerable number of the categories

have to be called ideological and semantic. Zukofsky is concerned with worldliness,

meaning, content, inevitability, intellection, conviction, energy, impact. This is hardly a

purely formalist list and the mixture within these categories of consideration again

suggests the helix of formal excellence and social critique in poetry that Zukofsky

proposed.

This tacking between social materials and formalist ones is characteristic of

Zukofsky from at least one date of Test to the other (from 1935 to about 1948). It is clear

in his reading (1935) of Lewis Carroll, in which he insists that the nonsense writing might

not have "overt meaning" but nonetheless "the nonsense recorded its own testimony" in a

"guileless" fashion; by 'testimony" Zukofsky meant social critique. In one quick

sentence, Zukofsky points to the critique of court, of institutions of justice, and to the

poignancy of poverty presented in <u>Alice in Wonderland</u>, juxtaposing the incidents with

Dodson's <u>Journal of a Tour in Russia</u> and his view of the corruption and wealth there pre-

Revolution (Prep+ 65-66). Just because Carroll was himself publicly agnostic about

whether "The Hunting of the Snark" was "a political satire" does not mean he was not

subtly attacking "predatory interests" that were "too callous or too stupid" to notice the

"tangent" upon which this apparent nonsense was embarked (Prep+ 65). One might say

the same about Zukofsky's strategy in <u>A Test</u>. The anthology was offering the same kind

of subtle attack: both resistance to "predatory interests" and a "guileless" strategy that

nonetheless, <u>sub rosa</u>, "recorded its own testimony."

   Zukofsky's emphasis may have seemed to change in later critical writing, but

social critique is a buried charge that glowers inside his work. Zukofsky cares deeply

about the "information" presented in poetry in its general and formal meanings: "But

what specifically is good poetry? It is precise information on existence out of which it

grows, and information of its own existence, that is, the movement (and tone) of the

words." (Prep+, 20, essay from 1950). Zukofsky spends a good deal of energy in wily

maneuvers around the question of poetry and political belief: he may be said to hold this

topic in fruitful suspension and debate, but he also lets social conviction pulse deep inside

his work where it cannot easily be found by the uninitiated or simplifying reader. "Good

poetry does not argue its attitudes or beliefs" precisely because its beliefs are saturated in

form: "Its conviction is [that is, lies, exists, is manifest] in its mastery or [of?] technique."

(Prep+, 20). The word <u>conviction</u> in LZ was a Janus-concept with one eye on ethical and

social conviction as an "interplay of <u>concepts</u>," and the other eye on poetic technique,

music, syntax, and "<u>interplay</u> of concepts" (Prep+21, my emphasis in both cases). Poems

and poetics speak in the languages of conviction: this word is what Louis Zukofsky used

to bridge between socio-political analysis and aesthetic excellence.

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[1] A Test of Poetry, written and compiled by 1936; pub. 1948; repub. 1964; 2000.

Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan U.P., 2000. Further references to this edition will continue

to be in my text. There is no doubt, however, that Zukofsky structured the book as

textbook by including questions, sometimes more even than in the final version, called it

a "text-book," and used it in his own teaching. Barry Ahearn, ed., The Correspondence

of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan U.P.,

2003), 261, 295. Further references to these letters as Ahearn ed., 2003

[2] Louis Zukofsky, Prepositions +, Wesleyan U.P., 2000, 19. All further references will

continue to be in my text.

[3] In Barry Ahearn's introduction to The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and

Louis Zukofsky, we learn that in 1935, Zukofsky became a member of a committee of the

League of American Writers to found a left magazine (which never appeared). Alan

Gilbert, "Charles Olson and Empire, or Charles Olson Flips the Wartime Script,"

delivered at Orono, June 2004, ts.citing Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The

Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. Verso, London and New York.

1997. The following citation courtesy of Gilbert. Michael Denning argues: "[T]he

Popular Front vision of the anti-fascist war was defeated by the corporate vision of an

American Century in the OWI (and its successor, the USIA [United States Information Agency])" (1997: 82).

[4] As Tim Woods argues, in general, early Zukofsky "is a writer who is caught between two conflicting demands—those of high modernism and those of the socialist realists of the 1930s. The attempt to resolve this dilemma leads Zukofsky to make language the site of his politics." The Poetic of the Limit; Ethics and Politics in Modern and Contemporary American Poetry. NY: Palgrave, 2002, 13.

[5] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, The Violence of Language. London: Routledge, 1990, 47.

[6] In his important article , "Zukofsky's 'Mantis,'" John Taggart has penetrating observations about the "rhyme words," their multiple repetitions and fugal properties, but not about their politics. (Paideuma 7, 3 [Winter 1978]: 507-522).

[7] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics" (1958), in ed. David Lodge, Modern Criticism and Theory, A Reader. London: Longman, 1988, 55.

[8] Selected Poems of Thomas Hood, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by John Clubbe. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1970, 194. I am citing the eighth and part of the ninth stanzas opening the poem.

[9] The typescript of this anthology, formerly in the possession of Basil Bunting, is now at the Bunting Archive at the University of Durham, MS. 54. Mark Scroggins had argued: "Significantly, A Test of Poetry followed directly on the heels of an aborted project, a Workers' [sic] Anthology that Zukofsky abandoned in 1935; the turn from the political to the more broadly aesthetic is indicative of an overall shift in Zukofsky's concerns" (Scroggins1998, 29). The relationship of the social to the aesthetic in Zukofsky seems different than Scroggins here argues; if there is a shift, it is slower, and, in my view, the

continued interlacing of social and aesthetic concerns is significant and rather cunningly achieved. However, Scroggins' main position is important: "It is perhaps useless to speculate about what might have happened had the Marxist literary establishment accepted and encouraged Zukofsky's own gropings toward a thoroughly materialist modernism…" (Scroggins 1998, 161).

[10] "Lenin" was a figure at issue in the debate between Zukofsky and Morris Schappes in March-May 1933, as traced by Eric Homberger in "Communists and Objectivists": Zukofsky defends the his use of the term Objectivist by citing Lenin on the necessity of a "strictly objective estimate of all the class forces and their inter-relation in every political action." Eric Homberger, "Communists and Objectivists," The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain. Tuscalosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999, 114.

[11] Indeed, as Peter Quartermain pointed out in a 1992 paper given at the MLA, none of the names current in communist-inspired contemporaneous anthologies are included in Zukofsky's A Workers Anthology. The MLA Panel concerned "Objectivism in the 1930s: The New York Matrix." Quartermain, "Basil Bunting with Zukofsky in New York."

[12] These statistics clarify what is vague in Quartermain, who said "Zukofsky included a little less than half of its [A Workers Anthology] contents in A Test of Poetry" (Quartermain, Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe. New York: Cambridge U.P., 1992, n. 15, 210). Quartermain is arguing that the incorporation of poem bits in "A" "suggests that "A" is, amongst other things, a textbook of poetry" (Quartermain 1992, 75). These statistics also clarify what is vague in

Scroggins, who says that "some" of the poems in <u>Workers Anthology</u> would later appear in <u>A Test</u> (Scroggins 1998, 160). "Virtually all" is more accurate. Scroggins is discussing the passage in "A"-8 which runs together several citations from material as disparate as a freedman song in dialect, <u>King Lear</u>, and a poem by Burns to incorporate and honor the words of the people and economic rectification ("A"-8, 50).

[13] Notable in the cuts are a poem by Emily Dickinson ("Revolution is the pod") that does not appear in <u>Test</u> and two poems from modern French, by Apollinaire and Salmon, both translated by Zukofsky. The Dickinson poem (Johnson, ed. #1082) may have been excluded because it's not clear, upon a thorough reading, that it is as pro-"Revolution" as at first glance, since the "Revolution" involves an ambiguous relation to the term "Liberty." In any event, if the Dickinson poem has a politics, it is not fully clear what that politics is. The modern French poems may have been excluded in favor of a very interesting view of contemporaneous United States poetry. There's no doubt that Zukofsky opened <u>A Test</u> in a Poundean fashion, with multiple citations from Book XI of the Odyssey, the nekuia, citing passages Pound did not, and making his own translated adaptations (Test I,1 and I, 2). Thus he launches the book in Pound's wake, yet the contemporary writer apparently absent from this anthology is Pound. This is, however, because Pound refused permission for Zukofsky to cite from his work (as we see from letters of Zukofsky to Williams in Ahearn ed., 2003, 397); Zukofsky regretted the absence which was clearly not of his doing. The second notable absence, looking from our vantage, is Oppen, since all the other poets in the Objectivist nexus at its most extensive are represented, if briefly. That is, there are excerpts from Stevens, Moore, Yeats, Eliot, Williams, Cummings, Niedecker, Reznikoff, Bunting, Pound <u>in absentia</u> (so

to speak), Zukofsky himself, and, in a little "Hail Columbia"— the poet Mark Van Doren, Zukofsky's teacher.

[14] The bibliography of the works of Zukofsky, drawn up by Celia Zukofsky, excludes <u>A Workers Anthology</u>; that is, she does not mention its existence, perhaps because it was never published. <u>Paideuma</u> 7. 3 (Winter 1978): 603-610. She dates <u>A Test of Poetry</u> as begun in 1935 and completed in1940 (ibid. 605-06). A letter from Zukofsky to Pound suggests that a (perhaps only provisionally) completed version in July 1937 was in circulation to publishers; Zukofsky says <u>A Test</u> "now is finished." <u>Pound/Zukofsky. Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky</u>, ed. Barry Ahearn. New York: New Directions,1987. 193. A lettter of Zukofsky to Williams suggests the book was kicking around from 1934 (Ahearn, ed. 2003, letter of Nov. 2, 1938).