

Louis Zukofsky

**The First Seasons
& Other Early Poems
1918-1924**



Edited by

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Introduction

This volume gathers all the surviving poetry Zukofsky wrote during his student years between 1918-1924, when the poet was 14 to 20 years old. No one is likely to make great claims for the intrinsic merit of most of these poems. Nevertheless, they represent an ambitious young poet seriously going about learning his craft and trying out an impressive range of forms and styles. Furthermore, this poetry is a good exemplar and reminder of a type of poetry that still dominated at the time, despite what we tend to think of as the swift and decisive victory of Imagistic modernism, and therefore represents precisely what Zukofsky needed to shake off to modernize himself.

This volume's presentation is determined by the three sources for these poems. First, there are the poems Zukofsky published as a student, beginning with a few poems in *The Caliper*, the student magazine of Stuyvesant High School, and carrying through those he published in the literary journals at Columbia University, *The Varsity* and particularly *The Morningside*, as well as in a few outside poetry journals of the day. Secondly, there is a typescript of early poems entitled *The First Seasons* by Dunn Wyth, which has a hand-written note by Zukofsky dated Jan. 23, 1941: "*The First Seasons* (including *The First Book*) was written by me ca. 1920-1924 and is not to be published, as the pseudonym intended then; (pronounce 'done with.')." Although this collection has been carefully put together, none of the poems were published in Zukofsky's lifetime, aside from a single, very belated exception. The final group is a miscellaneous handful of poems preserved in a folder marked "discarded poems," which were published posthumously by Carroll Terrell in *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet* (1979).

There are few known details of Zukofsky's early life, other than the usual institutional documentation. As a New Yorker who apparently never ventured outside the greater metropolitan area during his youth, Zukofsky had little reason to write letters, so there is almost no correspondence prior to 1927 when he sent off "Poem beginning 'The'" to Ezra Pound. In *Autobiography* (1970), Zukofsky states that "by eleven I was writing poetry in English, as yet not 'American English.'" From 1916 to January 1920 he attended Stuyvesant High School on 15th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenues – within walking distance of where he grew up on the Lower East Side. Although Stuyvesant was then a relatively new school, founded in 1904, by the time Zukofsky attended admissions were selective and it had already established itself as particularly outstanding in math and science, for which it is renown to this day. Beyond the three poems he published in the student magazine, *The Caliper*, there is little further evidence of his literary activities. However his schoolmate, Henry Zolinsky (1901-2001), was quite active in editing the magazine and would remain a good friend in the following years, eventually showing up with a poem in the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*. Zukofsky matriculated to Columbia University having just turned 16, although this was not particularly unusual at the time when the U.S. public school system allowed a good deal of flexibility in advancing students on merit.

Within the first year Zukofsky entered Columbia in February 1920 he began publishing in the student literary journals, where he would regularly appear throughout his undergraduate years (until summer 1923). There were a good many, often over-lapping, student literary magazines in the early history of Columbia, which had somewhat intermittent runs until 1932 when *The Columbia Review* consolidated the rival periodicals and has been the university's literary magazine ever since.¹ Zukofsky published a few poems in *Varsity*, but primarily in *The Morningside* – so named because the Columbia campus was located in Morningside Heights on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This journal, predominately publishing poetry but also some fiction and drama, initially ran from 1896-1904, during which time John Erskine attended Columbia as a student and was active as an editor. *The Morningside* was reborn in 1920, by which time Erskine was a member of the English faculty. Erskine is best remembered for establishing the General Honor's Program in 1920, which became the model for the later Great Books Programs focusing on a canon of classic works in translation with an emphasis on Socratic discussion rather than lectures, and Zukofsky was one of the early guinea pigs in this course.² He apparently had a somewhat uneasy personal relationship with Erskine, and Erskine and his program are the satirical targets of the fourth movement of "Poem beginning 'The'" (CSP 14-15).³ But both the General Honors course and the Boar's Head Poetry Society also had the participation of a younger professor, Mark Van Doren, with whom Zukofsky would remain on friendly terms throughout his life. The Boar's Head Society was a discussion group initiated by Erskine in 1919 that involved what we would now call workshop activities, the writing and mutual critique of poems. These activities culminated in an annual poetry reading, and *The Morningside* was the group's primary publication venue.

Zukofsky also published in a few literary magazines outside of the university: the New York based *The Pagan* edited by Joseph Kling, *Rhythmus* edited by a young Oscar Williams, and, most notably, an early sonnet in *Poetry*, initiating a half-century-long relationship with this journal. Several poems were reprinted in newspapers, although it is unlikely he submitted these; rather, it was common for such papers to periodically reprint small selections of poems from literary magazines in their Sunday issues.

The First Seasons is a somewhat mysterious text, which Zukofsky apparently circulated among his friends using the pseudonym of Anne Dunn. He gave an unusually personal and highly suggestive explanation in a fragmentary letter to Lorine Niedecker that is worth quoting at length:

1 *The Columbia Review* claims to be "the oldest college literary magazine in the nation" by piggy-backing on these various predecessors going back to 1815.

2 General Honors was a two-year program which Zukofsky took in 1921-1923, receiving all A's. The program had a somewhat troubled early history at Columbia and was temporarily discontinued in 1929, but is credited with spawning subsequent Great Books curricula.

3 See "'O my son Sun': Poem beginning 'The'" in the Z-Notes on the Z-site.

As far as I remember none of the poems were written later than 1926, most of 'em '23-24 – So Anne was never older than 22. Maybe I make a list of dates + what might have influenced, or what she was reading roughly at the time – tomorrow or so. If not, I tell you sometime. Yuss, I used to show 'em to close friends + goils wd. type. I wuz out of school by '23, June [undergraduate graduation] – Columbia printed even earlier stuff – juvenila + gobbled 'em up. Camped <on South Shore of> Long Island – Long Beach – with <Whittaker> Chambers, + Robinson Morton + Jack Rush, + Henry Zolinsky – Chambers there all the time – <we> wd. sleep out in April on beach – + take walks thru towns on way to Long Beach on R.R. – Valley Stream, Lynbrook (where Whitt lived), East Rockaway, Oceanside, etc etc – at midnight + after, or early on off nights, watch 'em get drunk when I wuzn't feeling like it – winter + summer. Usually met Whitt at <Fifth> library where he worked at 10 – + go out on train, or take subway to Jamaica – 1½ hrs + meet Whitt there + go further on train. Glad Anne's days are over, but not sorry they were. – I guess I still read those days (now I only seem to read because I work on things) – freshness of discovering Joyce, Lawrence, etc, the Greeks, Latins, Mediaeval, Adams, French. And Whitt ate incessantly. Friday nights a regular appointment to go over stuff with Henry. Whitt thought the stuff was genius if precipitous. Everybody thought they were difficult but out of ordinary – beautiful in spite of the fact that I was the greatest obscurist who was ever writing – which wd. make me mad – I'd say look this means this + this, say they're rotten, but really if you read carefully you cant's say they're not clear.

Music guided as always – “run over lines” because of a resolution or up-take of cadence etc – wanted to get away from rhyme + write quantitus verse like Horace, Catullus, etc but never scholarly mastery of Latin meters – just what I thought English cd. sound like with Latin + Greek sound as exemplars. – And via Hardy crazy about rhyme all the same, so I never missed a chance at interior (hidden rhyming) within lines, long carry over of one rhyme into other stanzas – knew some of Pound, The Return etc Cathay (Crazy about Exile's Letter in Cathay) since I wuz 15 – but on whole thought he wuz precious + suspected him, til I read some of the Prose + Dials 1925 (?) + then sent him “The” written end of 1926.

[Note at bottom of letter:] To L.N. / ca 1941 / re- ~~finding out~~ <placing> parts of / “Dunn Wyth” (previously “Anne Dunn”) / from Wisconsin, as per p. 7.] (HRC)

While this makes the precise dating of *The First Seasons* poems even fuzzier, it suggests that a large portion of the poems Zukofsky published while at Columbia were written as a high schooler (his “juvenila”), which is generally supported by those published poems for which we have dates. The university context, both the student journals and the Boar's Head Society, encouraged quite predictable and unadventurous verse, largely impervious to the new poetries set in motion in the previous decade. However, among his closest friends – mostly Columbia classmates – he was reading and discussing the modernists and circulating his tentative

compositions trying out new forms and voices. Although it is not clear, Zukofsky seems to indicate that *The First Seasons* was put together in the mid-1920s as an initial presentation of his evolving poetic self and adopted a feminine pseudonym to distinguish and disguise himself from his published Columbia personae. The reason Zukofsky is explaining all this to Niedecker is that in 1941, in a bid to make a bit of money, he apparently asked her to send out various pieces of the typescript to paying journals under the name Anne Dunn – this is the point of the final note added to the above quotation. However, I have found no evidence that any of these poems were published, if in fact they were ever sent out.⁴

For the purposes of the present collection, it is convenient, if somewhat arbitrary, to take June 1924 as the cut-off date, when Zukofsky graduated from Columbia with an M.A. However, it is worth keeping in mind that a few poems composed during the last year of this period ended up in *55 Poems*.⁵ Already at this time, perhaps feeling liberated from his associations with undergraduate forums, he seems to have set about critically reexamining and modernizing his work, which would culminate in “Poem beginning ‘The’” composed in late 1926. One of these poems, “A Parable of Time,” was Zukofsky’s first publication after his graduation from Columbia. It came out in Samuel Roth’s *Two Worlds* and therefore is a convenient marker of the beginning of Zukofsky’s mature career, less because of the merits of the poem itself than because he appears alongside early extracts from James Joyce’s then untitled *Finnegans Wake* as well as Arthur Symons, who directly or indirectly probably influenced the young poet’s aesthete inclinations.⁶

4 In February 1941 Zukofsky mentions to Niedecker that in “trying to keep the wolf from the door” he had resorted to an agent to try to place various work he had on hand. At this time Zukofsky was between WPA jobs without any assurance another would be forthcoming, although in the end he did manage one final contract with the WPA Arts Project from March 1941 to April 1942. It was at this time that he attempted to write some sellable fiction – “A Keystone Comedy” in January 1941 and “Ferdinand” begun the following month – as opposed to the unsellable and apparently unpublishable “fiction” he had dabbled in with “Thanks to the Dictionary” and the never finished “That People the Sunbeams.” The reference to page 7 in the terminal note to Niedecker is to a detailed list of the journals where he instructed her to send the various pieces of *The First Seasons* typescript. Chambers, Henry Morton Robinson and Rush were classmates at Columbia, while as mentioned Zolinsky was a classmate at Stuyvesant High School and attended City College of New York where he published one of Zukofsky’s early poems in their student journal, *The Lavender*. Another curious detail is that on the title page of *The First Seasons* typescript, the author name is left blank and subsequently written in by hand, so whenever it was typed up Zukofsky had not necessarily decided he was done with it.

5 “*tam cari capitis*” (1923), “Not much more than being,” and “Millennium of sun –” (both early 1924).

6 *Two Worlds* is not to be confused with *Two Worlds Monthly* which followed on its heels and in which Roth notoriously printed pirated versions of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Zukofsky would later claim that he had his first job from Roth teaching classes in English as a second language (Mark Scroggins, *Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky*, Shoemaker Hoard (2007): 50).

Taken together, the most notable feature of these early poems is the differences between the two main groups, the published poems and those in *The First Seasons*, although their composition dates overlap. The impression is that the published poems represent what Zukofsky felt he should write, while the unpublished poems are those he wrote for himself, which would be a reason why he bothered to preserve the latter, since they retained a certain sentimental value. Symptomatic of this distinction is that all the published poems have titles, whereas almost all those in *The First Seasons* do not. It is hardly surprising he would resist the propensity for titles to frame and thematize the poem given his concern with the body of the poem as an autonomous object, a dynamic verbal contraption that needs to be engaged with as such. Of course, at the time the mere look of untitled poems gave them a certain modern verve. We might recall that in his discussion of objectification, he remarks on the superfluity of titles, and for the most part *55 Poems* and *Anew* do without. This paratextual detail suggests that the young Zukofsky was writing simultaneously from two distinct stances: one which knew before-hand what a poem should be, both its formal and thematic expectations, while the other was willing to allow the poems more leash to find themselves as they worked themselves out. At this point even the latter stance is cautious, and there is little indication that he was taking note of the more aggressive innovations of modernism, rather he is trying out a wide range of voices and registers, which include lower forms such as children and nonsense songs. Although Zukofsky dutifully, and no doubt with conviction, often echoed Pound's Imagist dicta, he never showed much interest in imagist-style poems as such, but seemingly from the outset was more attracted to the rhetorical and aural intricacies of his verbal constructs, as is indicated in the quoted letter to Niedecker.

The published poems are self-consciously aesthete, as Mark Scroggins has noted.⁷ It is worth recalling Zukofsky's early and enduring attraction to Henry Adams, whose *Education* had just recently been published in 1919 when he entered Columbia, a representative of a refined, if self-critical, class sensibility and close friend of the American version of poetic aestheticism, the so-called Genteel poets. These were academic poets, particularly associated with Harvard, and their influence is much in evidence if one flips through issues of *The Morningside* or, even better, a representative collection such as *The Poets of the Future: A College Anthology for 1920-1921*, which includes a Zukofsky sonnet.⁸ Predominately, the poems of this anthology work with aestheticized romantic materials, nature imagery that is stereotyped and predictably symbolic. The themes are high-minded. Only rarely do the poems adopt an urban setting or any identifiably contemporary circumstance, except for occasional references to college life. There is barely a hint of the recent war, in which students just a few years older than Zukofsky participated. Nor is there much attempt at more realist or colloquial speech. The main concessions to modernizing are limited to the relative avoidance of poetic diction, contractions and artificial syntax, yet the rhetoric usually remains formal and elevated. About a third of the poems are nominally in free verse but evidence no consideration of the

7 Scroggins 33-34.

8 Edited by Henry T. Schnittkind (Boston: The Stratford Co., 1921).

implications of this liberation, merely serving as a license to deploy a somewhat looser form. That there is scarce evidence of Pound's Imagist propagandizing is not really surprising, more so is the disinterest, with only a few exceptions, in what most readers of the time would have considered the "new" American poetry – those heirs of Whitman creating self-consciously populist American poetry represented by Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsey, Robert Frost, Edna St. Vincent Millay, with the Edwin Arlington Robinson standing as an elder transitional figure. These were the Pulitzer Prize winners of the day. These poets attempted to address contemporary themes and voice the diversity of a multi-cultural America during a period of rapid transformation and are the poets Louis Untermeyer primarily had in mind in his survey of contemporary poetry, *The New Era in American Poetry* (1919) and its companion anthology.⁹ Little of this is in evidence in *The Poets of the Future*. Clearly the academic environment was not conducive to encouraging budding modernists, and from today's perspective the anthology's hopeful title can only be seen as comically ironic, with Zukofsky the sole name we are likely to recognize, even if we do not recognize him in the selected sonnet.

Zukofsky's early published poems fit quite comfortably within this context, although his aestheticism is more self-consciously stated than is the norm and is occasionally overtly decadent – "opal dawn" or "a tinkling silver spring running over green quartz" – but lacking erotic titillation. There are suggestions he has been reading Mallarmé, most explicitly in "A Faun Sees." Like most of his fellow student poets, you would never know these poems were written by a life-long urbanite, with only a rare street-light creeping in. The young Zukofsky evidences no interest in writing from and about the circumstances in which he grew up. Poetry is an escape from or alternative to the compromises of the mundane world, and a number of poems adopt Orientalist settings or express pseudo-mystical longings (Tagore was in town during this time). A pervasive melancholy is felt to be the appropriate mood for poetic ruminations, and the recurrent theme is passing time, life's ephemerality. Or, this world-weariness is counter-posed or broken through by flashes of ecstatic affirmation, a sense of possible, even cosmic expansiveness – after all, the poet is young. But overall the world is a fallen place, where only in a subjective poetic sensibility can integrity be maintained. There are no love poems and for the most part barely a hint of (intended) humor. Which is simply to say the young Zukofsky was trying on established poetic poses. One imagines these poems probably went through the process of the Boar's Head Society critique, and there is clearly a focus on craft in a fairly traditional sense. For a young poet they are technically competent, but restrained and self-consciously artificial.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these early published works is the playlet, *Earth Counts a Day: A Fantasy*, which adopts the language and world of children's writing. Both naïf and symbolist, it is reminiscent of Blake's *The Book of Thel*, with

9 *Modern American Poetry* (Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1919), greatly expanded in 1921 and through various editions remained a standard anthology into the 1970s. In a highly critical, if good-humored, response to the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe would assert her preference for precisely these poets; "The Arrogance of Youth," *Poetry* 37.6 (March 1931): 328-333.

its talking plants, clouds, heat and the like on the theme of transience and mortality. The nature characters are not always in perfect harmony but unselfconsciously accept change as a matter of course, while the two children's human conflicts and expectations remain unresolved. In certain respects the play announces Zukofsky's taste for dramatic artifice and quirky humor, which will reappear in his more mature play, *Arise, Arise*, as well as Plautus' *Rudens* incorporated into "A"-21.

Turning to *The First Seasons*, we find a more intriguing group of poems working their way out from the limitations of the published poems and showing some awareness of recent transformations in American verse. Of the 59 poems hardly two are formally identical. There are two sonnets, as opposed to 11 out of the 30 early published poems, but even these play with irregularities, extra syllables and abrupt enjambments, that perhaps hint at the demolition of the sonnet form Zukofsky will perform in "A"-7. We find a good many more attempts to use colloquial language, as well as a range of registers. Many are love poems, even suggesting the erotic, some poems are firmly set in the city, and there are number of comic songs. Indeed, the poet of *The First Seasons* is decidedly less disappointed with the world, and the published poems' pervasive concern with transience is thankfully far less frequent here or else treated ironically. We find a parody of Wordsworth in which he, apparently after his ecstatic vision of the sleeping city from Westminster Bridge, continues into the outskirts of contemporary New York where the vulgar particulars send him into retreat. Above all the poet is quite self-conscious that these are various poses, that he is trying out more liberated possibilities, and, perhaps one might suggest, beginning to develop a nascent objectivist perspective on the language and making of the poem. These are not yet Zukofsky poems, but they are working their way in that direction, and a few are startling in their subordination of the sense to the demands of formal intricacy. For example,

Neither the well is here
Nor you –
All within a year.

They covered the well with tar,
Closing it,
They built with beam and spar. ("The First Book" II)

Although hardly typical of *The First Seasons*, this poem shows characteristics which become familiar in many of Zukofsky's short poems from *Anew* on: an off-hand casualness that holds off denotative sense, each line seeming to shift in cubist manner and open up into ever wider suggestiveness. An off-beat humor interferes with the easy habit of interpreting the poem metaphorically. Also characteristic, but entirely distinct from Zukofsky's early published poems, is the deployment of hypermundane images and vocabulary, as well as concision. Zukofsky's aestheticism is here shorn of its imitative pose, escapism and verbal glamour but instead becomes an attempt to capture subtle nuances of sensibility, particularly within the context of an intimate relation, which motivate many of the peculiarities and even

awkwardnesses of the verbal expression. The situation in which the other is addressed is invariably vague, a mere context for straining the possibilities of verbal expression. Throughout many of these poems there is a visual and aural contest between the type of conventional poetic expectations manifest in the published poems and a conception of the poem as a verbal complex motivated by its own self-definition.

The First Seasons is divided into two roughly equal halves, “The First Book” and “The First Seasons,” with the latter predictably divided into Spring, Summer and Fall sections. The seasonal arrangement of the poems in the latter half is determined by the setting, theme or mood of the individual poems, although there is some intermixing and a couple poems explicitly set in mid-winter appear in the Fall section. The impression is that these poems were not written as a sequence but retrospectively arranged. They possibly trace a romantic relationship, although the other remains a mere deictic reference about whom we learn nothing, not even their gender, which makes it difficult to know whether the person addressed is the same or merely an imaginary projection. In this sense these are more conventional mood lyrics, although formally and emotionally less restrained on the whole than the published poems. On this last point, we can note that a fair number of poems, particularly in the Summer section, are set at the seaside, and there are quite a few more such poems in *55 Poems*.¹⁰ As Zukofsky’s letter to Niedecker about “Anne Dunn” indicates, these poems are related to Whittaker Chambers and his brother Ricky, whose family home was near the south shore of Long Island which for a period Zukofsky often visited and where he camped out in the warm seasons, perhaps his earliest experiences away from his own familial home and the inner city. If the poems are reliable testimony, they register a strong sense, by Zukofsky’s standards, of living within his body, of sensual and erotic sensation.

In the years immediately following his graduation from Columbia, Zukofsky published close to nothing until the appearance of “Poem beginning ‘The’” in Pound’s *The Exile* in the spring of 1928. Nonetheless it was in this period that he set about rethinking and modernizing his poetry, or, it might be more accurate to say he pursued the possibilities latent in *The First Season* poems. There is a considerable distance between the work he published while a student and “Poem beginning ‘The.’” Only a single poem from 1923 survived into *55 Poems*, which includes four poems from 1924, eight from 1925 and six plus “Poem beginning ‘The’” from 1926, and there are an equivalent number of published but uncollected poems from these latter years but just two from 1923. As I have argued elsewhere, “Poem beginning ‘The’”

10 The most obvious cases would include poems 14-16 and 18 (written 1924-1926) from “29 Poems” in *55 Poems*, plus a number of other published but uncollected poems. Poems 14 and 15 were originally published together with another seaside poem, “It is well on this June night,” in *Pagany* (April-June 1930). The latter two poems both address the poet’s companion as “Wickson,” aka Whittaker Chambers. However, a number of the other “29 Poems” almost certainly arise from the long walks Zukofsky describes in his letter to Niedecker; “Poem 17” (“Cars once steel and green, now old”), for example, mentions Cedar Manor, another stop on the rail line to the Chambers’ family home in Lynbrook.

was a one-off, and Zukofsky never returned to the manner of this poem despite the urging of Pound.¹¹ Of course the ironic, satiric stance of this poem is the easiest mode for a young poet to rid himself of more conventional poeticisms, as well as establishing a distance from his immediate modernist mentors, even as he pays homage to them. “Poem beginning “The”” is all about saying goodbye to his youthful self, both personally and poetically, but once stated and anointed with Pound’s imprimatur, Zukofsky could concentrate on how to express the positive embrace of the future with which he closes ““The.””

From a different angle, however, we might see Zukofsky’s self make-over as an ingenious transmutation of his early aestheticism. His life-long thinking in terms of musical models was obviously indebted to aestheticism, and he never abandoned the sense of aesthetic experience as a matter of highly nuanced sensibility, all of which can be seen as motivated by an early determination to escape his familial circumstances – if one is inclined to such psycho-biographical explanations. The elusiveness of experience, particularly in the ordinary and quotidian, becomes the grounds for ever more adventurous and various verbal experiments. Zukofsky’s is a poetry of phenomenological intimacy, but this closeness with the world and others is mediated or enacted through the nuanced handling of words, their strange ordinariness, their elusive presence, their wit and shared sociability. As the split between the published and unpublished poems highlights, these early poems are very self-consciously trying out different poetic poses, which can be seen as a nascent objectivist perspective – particularly if we bring in Zukofsky’s self-positioning as a Jewish student in “Poem beginning “The,”” on one hand embracing while on the other radically revising his engagement with the dominant Western canon. The dialectic of Zukofsky’s work is an absolute reverence for the Great Books, within which objectivist eyes can always discern all the self-critique one needs of their biases and blindnesses and thus the seeds for generating new work. “A”-1 opens with what one might understand as a pure aesthetic experience at a performance of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, itself an expression of the West’s central myth of transcendence, but then the poet stumbles out into cacophony of the mundane world on the streets of New York, with its insipid chatter mixed with the realities and demands of the socially deprived. This dichotomy sets the stage for a search for a poetic form capacious and dialectical enough to account for these antithetical elements of modernity summarized in the questions that conclude “A”-6 and then given an initial answer with “A”-7, where the imagination, the capacity to see other than what is simply given, recognizes and remains firmly in the mundane, as emblemized and enacted in dancing saw-horses.

11 ““O my son Sun’: ‘Poem beginning “The”” in Z-Notes on the Z-site.

Note on the Texts

Part I, the published poems (1919-1923), are presented in chronological order of their first printed appearance, since we have only spotty information about their dates of composition. No manuscript or typescript versions of these poems exist, except for the last two, "A Parable of Time" and "No sound. But sun" (both composed 1923). The journal and date of initial publication is given lower right. When known, the year of composition appears lower left. This latter information comes from the dates Zukofsky hand-wrote into his own copies of the journals held at the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) at the University of Texas at Austin. When he registered this information and how reliable it is is impossible to determine. Zukofsky also sometimes corrected misprints, which are taken into account in the texts printed here. A number of these poems were reprinted, in some cases several times, and occasionally Zukofsky made minor revisions. Also there are slight variations in punctuation or lineation which may or may not be due to Zukofsky's choice. Although the journals and dates given with the poems always refer to the earliest publication, I have sometimes opted to use the text from a subsequent printing, which I have indicated in the notes and why. A special case is Zukofsky's playlet, "The Earth Counts a Day," which he extensively corrected or revised by hand in his copy of the printed text, including the addition of half a dozen lines. It is impossible to distinguish corrections from revisions, and very probably in this case we have a combination of both. In any case the marked revisions are on the whole more consistent and coherent, without substantially altering the play, so it seems sensible to print this "corrected" version with the additional lines placed in square brackets.

Part II transcribes the typescript of *First Seasons* as closely as possible, since this was carefully put together as a coherent collection. No attempt has been made to regularize turnovers, as this would involve editorial guesses as to what are and are not run-on lines, which with Zukofsky always runs into ambiguities. As mentioned, Zukofsky published none of these poems, nor, by the time the typescript was put together, intended to, as indicated by the mock pseudonym he adopted. Nevertheless, "Vast, tremulous" did appear incorporated into "A"-18 (composed 1966), in a passage where Zukofsky is recalling his early poetic efforts. Apparently this was because Celia liked this poem, so Zukofsky gave it a title, "I Sent Thee Lately," alluding to Ben Jonson's "Song: to Celia," and allowed it to be printed as a minuscule (2½ x 3 inches) two-page booklet in a hand-press edition of 20 copies by "LHS" (Laurence H. Scott) in June 1965 at Harvard Yard.¹²

The half dozen poems in Part III are from a folder of "discarded poems" (HRC 15.2) consisting of miscellaneous poems that Zukofsky apparently considered for inclusion in one or another of his early volumes of short poems, but which in the end did not make the cut. All are manuscripts except for "(To Master Aristippus)" in typescript. These were published by Carroll F. Terrell in *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1979), along with a few later

¹² This poem is included with this title in the *Complete Short Poetry* (1991), but with a small error: the terminal punctuation of line 2 should be a colon rather than a semi-colon. See also "A"-18 (391).

discarded poems, but are included here for the sake of completeness. There are a few incomplete or mis-transcriptions in Terrell's presentation, so this is also an opportunity to offer more reliable texts.

The Notes offer a few annotations to the poems but for the most part note textual variants, which is more information than most reader will want or need.

Acknowledgments

Particular thanks to Dr. Emily Moore (faculty adviser to *The Caliper*) and Mary McGregor (Librarian) of Stuyvesant High School, New York City for confirming that Zukofsky had in fact published poems in *The Caliper* and for warmly welcoming me to the school campus to look over old issues of the magazine (which is still ongoing today). Two identical typescripts of *The First Seasons* are held in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin and in the Beinecke Library at Yale University (the latter a carbon copy). The HRC also holds Zukofsky's file of "discarded poems," as well as his personal copies of many of the early magazines in which he published, particularly *The Morningside* – sometimes with his marginal notes or corrections. The New York Public Library has been very helpful in tracking down a few old journals unavailable at the HRC.

PART I: PUBLISHED POEMS (1919-1923)

Sanity

My soul's in a far away country,
 In a dreamland no more to return,
And my mind it is steeped in vague fancy
 While my heart sings a dreary nocturne.

My friends are the springs and the flowers,
 And the wood with its whispering moan.
I brood in all nooks and all bowers, –
 I am glad when I'm with them alone.

In this world of mad clamor, and bustle,
 I'm a stranger in a far-away land;
'Mid this empty, wild, turbulent tussle,
 I'm a ship cast on a far away strand.

It is thus that I wander in sadness,
 While my heart is all wounded with pain,
And some say that my sadness is madness
 Yet I doubt if 'tis they who are sane.

The Caliper (Oct. 1919)

The Sea

O mighty, ever tossing, whirling sea,
I call you and greet you with a cry of fear
And worship: sea of a thousand different moods
You hold me with your swirling sweeping swish
And I am the captive of your charm. You are
At once a divine mystery and a soul
Significant; you are a voice that speaks
Thru a turbulent stream of blue white rollers

With a cry of resounding resonance.
You are the spirit of all emotion,
And the soul of burning passion; you know
The soul of the dreamer, for your waves are
Eternal wanderers. You never speak
O sea, but with your silence and your moan
Of whirling waves you say more than can be said in words.

Long have I heard your voice and still I hear
It: in the whisper and rustle of leaves,
In the cracking of branches and the spatter of rain,
Mid the noise and din and surging commotion
Of large cities and the whistle of storm winds
I hear the throbbing of your mighty heart.

I know and understand you, Oh sea,
For there is a sea of passion in me

Always echoing your sonorous cry.
You are the most sublime of all poets;
Your song is like the song of the mighty Gods,
And man's voice sounds like a piping flageolet
Against the grand majestic strains you play
Upon the chords of fantastic music.
And the burden of your song sounds like the cry
Of the raging elements.

The Caliper (Nov. 1919)

The Rain

Dripping, dripping, falls the rain
In the night and in the wind,
With an ancient weird refrain
Beating on the window pane.
Dripping, dripping, falls the rain
'Mid the moaning of the wind.

Weeping, weeping, falls the rain
Weeping over someone's fate;
And my heart is rent with pain
By the weeping of the rain.
As it falls with a sad refrain,
Weeping over someone's fate. . . .

The Caliper (Nov. 1919)

Dawn After Storm

All night, the scowling gods have cast huge boulders down the
mountains,
And have hewn the skies with thundering sledges,
Hiding the stars in secret places.
Now there are dank, green silences of forest,
And the gashed cedars and the riven cypresses
Stand motionless before the dawn.

Across the sodden gardens of the skies
Mist of purple trails,
Leaving a flush of blue.

A scurry of winds from beyond the hills
Foretells a crisp, blue morning:
The wanderers will saunter up the white roads,
With hearts a-flutter,
Breathing the morning air and worshipping the sun.

Even now, I thought I heard a flurry as of a shroud.
Was it the last frightened ghost,
Seeking the shelter of a hollow tree,
Rustling through the bark
Of some knotted, rueful cypress?

Varsity (Nov. 1920)

Monody

Like crushed violets
In a faded hand,
So are
My unfulfilled dreams . . .

Over the sparking sands of the desert,
Skyward
I sent a white bird flying,
With a tip of silver on its wings;
And it fell
Fluttering on the moonlit sands
With an arrow
In its breast.

Lonely,
As cold moonlight
On the glistening slabs
Of flint-white mountains
Are my unfulfilled dreams.

1918

The Morningside (Nov. 1920)

Youth

The opal dawn, that bathed the silent mountains
In its light, found a youth, proud, strong and tanned,
Against the blue. With legs fixed firm, he spanned
Two cliffs, dumb space between. The leaping fountains
Of Life and Hope within them sung; his face
Glowed, ruddy from the breeze; he knew no dearth,
But, holding forth his tawny hands, to earth
He poured out sunshine from a marble vase.

1918

The Morningside (Dec. 1920)

Walking Down the White Sand Streets of Kamakura

Walking down the white sand streets of Kamakura,
My mind was filled with many pretty thoughts.
My heart resembled a garden, exquisitely inlaid
With black and silver pansies and delicate purple violets;
A garden breathing the scent of the tea rose,
Bright with the whiteness of the madonna-lily,
And quaint with blue clematis, climbing a marble wall
Which encompassed it.
 And in the garden there was a pleasant shade
 And a tinkling silver spring running over green quartz.
 So was my heart. . .
When I walked through the white-sand streets of the city,
My soul was as high as the snow-blue summit of a sacred mountain,
And light as the pink-breasted clouds that enfold it.

So with a light heart I walked
Till I came to a place where I heard voices
Mourning one just dead. . .
And all at once the garden was clouded,
The flowers drooped, folded and languid.
And all the pretty thoughts of my mind
Fled from me like frail, silken butterflies
When grey gales sweep upward.

Wolf

The lean wolf howls
And moans;
Snow crunches beneath his feet.

The snow has spread its ranges
Hemming the sky with white,
As the moon sheds crystallized gauzes
Of silver light;
The stars have drawn their steel-blue swords
To lay them on the snow,
And the lean wolf moans,
For the stars are pitiless
In their smile of hunger.

Once when the wolf was younger
And the hills were green,
There were many lambs to eat,
White as the snow. . . .
But that was long ago. . . .
Now he can only moan,
Blending his harsh, hopeless whimper
With the white-winds monotone.

The Seer

(To Rabindranath Tagore)

Thruout the winding, torpid day I heard
The onward-slipping undertones of voices
Fall about me, and laughter that rejoices
In the transient glory of a transient word.
Now I have heard the seer – the mystery
Of rarer, starlit regions in his face –
Lay bare in music, in a flitting space
Of time, words reaching to infinity. . . .

I am fulfilled of music, perfect chords
That linger. And I think of studded hordes
Of moonbeams, trickling on dark, shrouded trees,
Like threaded tears; and of a dark stream, twining
Over jet ledges, when the moonbeams freeze
It silver, and it flows on purling shining. . .

Dec. 31, 1920

The Morningside (Feb. 1921)

Sea-Nymph's Prayer to Okeanos

Take me unto your great, warm breast, O sea,
Cover me with your white wreathes of foam,
Waft me over sun-gilded billows.
Let the sun flood
Your path with its rays
And pour its gold through my veins. . .
Waft me over your waves, O sea,
In grey dawns,
In silver-blue twilights,
Toward misty horizons:
So that my love will be deeper,
And the pain of your beauty unending. . .

Take me unto your great, warm breast, O sea,
Cover me in tangles of sea-weed,
Waft me over silver-crested billows
In the night,
When the heavens are your depths,
And the stars the light
Of your abysses.
Let the blue moon haze
Freeze me into alabaster
That I may know no more longing.

Varsity (Feb. 1921)

Dark Room

In the dark room,
Alone, reclining, eyes closed,
I spoke lovely words without meaning:
They fell thru the lingering silence
Like rain on murk-sunken marshes.

And from the self to the self
I sang slow, wandering strains:
The whirl of lost stars,
The plaint of vague ships on vague rivers,
And dark groping forms
Were their theme.

In the dark room,
Alone, reclining, eyes closed,
I strung unseen harps that were dusty.

When I opened my eyes,
Night had already stolen upon me,
And through cold-silvered windows
Beamed the glimmer of street lamps.

Varsity (March 1921)

Silver Moment

Now that the day is ending, and the sun
Has shed its last dull gold on purple hills,
Now that each leaf is mute, and the hushed air fills
With the grey heaviness of silence spun
By hidden hands, and silver winds have fled
Taking the laughter from the sun-flaked grasses,
Now as the footfall of this moment passes, –
Give thanks for sadness, let no word be said.

I shall accept this moment pure, immense,
And in the useless loveliness of things
My thoughts shall find the world's one recompense
For all the sorrows that it brought; and I
Shall dream old dreams, till night has poised its wings
And the first white star blossoms in the sky.

Varsity (March 1921)

The Faun Sees

Quix,
I say!
Blind are the forest plunderers! . . .

They say it has rained . . .

Since morning lithe birches
Have made love to white clouds.
Now they are wedded.
The clouds have showered the trees
With spangles of gold and of silver.
The sky is their blue wedding-canopy.

The earth brandishes
Swords of blue steel,
Studded with pearl
And with opal!

The sun's a merry reveler
At the grand carnival,
And weeps with joy
At the marriage.

Quix,
I say!
I have seen this and more.
Fools are they
Who say,
It has rained!

Mood

For that I have seen a scraggy pine-tree
Stretching two naked arms upward to the sky,
And pine-needles, tangled hair blown wildly in the wind,
I would lie in tall grasses,
My hair tangled and twisted in weeds,
And let my heart out singing
Strange sad songs.

1920

The Pagan (Oct.-Nov. 1921)

The Earth Counts a Day

A Fantasy

Time: Mid-afternoon of a mid-summer day.

Scene: A wood. A cottage stands in the right corner of the stage. The primness of the garden around it, and its curtained windows suggest that there are people dwelling within. An old oak overshadows the roof of the cottage, and draws branches across the dormer window. In the centre of the stage – a lagoon. Its waters are clear blue to the very bottom, whose white bed can be seen. Lilies grow in profusion by the lagoon's edge. If one looks carefully, one notices that a single lily-bulb is late in blossoming. The day has been altogether too perfect. The whole vista is still and clear, as if framed in glass.

The Characters: As human beings are all indoors, most of them day-dreaming, natural things will take the more important part in the dialogue. Each voice will have a different intonation. Our people, beside a boy and girl, will be: Grass, Earth, Insects, A Cloud, Cloud Image, Lilies, The Lagoon, Moon-glades, A Swallow, Trees and the Heat.

Grass

(Looking around)

How still the Trees are!
Not a leaf stirs,
They climb spire on spire
All ablaze. . .
The Heat spins a web of fire
And the sun sprays a haze
Of gold on each branch,
And see, far and far,
High above, the sun is sending beams
Horde on horde. . .

The heat is a sword being tempered,
The heat is molten gold outpoured,
The heat is shining like metal.
It simmers and sings
Like the boy's mother's kettle!
Like the bees . . . like a breeze. . .
how still the trees are.

Though we are all scorched
The Heat will tap

At our roots
Drinking the sap
And the juice of green shoots.
And the lily bulb will not burst
Nor will it give birth to its petals,
For the Heat drinks the sap of the Earth.

Not a cloud to shroud the Heat. . .
Hills are baring their breasts;
The Heat brands them with fire
And reddens their sands.

And above, the sun reigns
Alone in his blue pavilion – the sun!
[And he laughs as the heat quaffs:
There is no cloud to dim or to storm him
He reigns and he laughs!

Earth
(in a deeper voice)

Come down you Heat! Dig your furrows
Burn out ways on my back, you Sun.]
Brand and fire . . . brand and fire. . .
And you, laughing blotches,
Scampering rabbits of gold
Burrow and burrow.

I hold bare my back!
Temper your swords, Heat,
Forge and forge,
Sizzle your coals and spill your red blood!

Insects
(In Chorus)

Zum . . . zum . . . high . . . low . . . spin . . .
Zum . . . zum . . . high . . . zum . . .

(Presently a cloud, with the lithe form of a youth, sails and anchors
in the sky directly over the lagoon.)

Cloud Image
(Silvery from the lagoon)

Brother, with flushed chest
How I have waited to be!

Cloud

O slender and white . . . so cool . . .
O Image of me!

Heat

(Interfering brazenly)

(To the cloud)

Go, you wreath!

(To the Cloud Image)

Do you want me to scald you?!!

There! More molten gold!

I will spill layer on layer,

I will prison you in walls of gold!

You will never see him again!

Lilies

(Cowering as they whisper)

The Heat is cruel. . .

He angers; his beard flames!

His eyes are green;

His lips twitch and curve. . .

The Cloud Image hides!

O, there will be no rain

And our sister will not blossom!

Grass

(Looking up)

There are other clouds passing over the hills!

See! They are forming about the sun. . .

They pray him to be done

With his laughter.

He does not hear them, but they follow after.

Look, he is giving. . .

They fold him,

They shroud him. . .

(It grows dark. The Trees are shadowed and still. Presently a few leaves strike the ground. The Trees bend closer in the shadow. The Grass bows, and the lilies nod. The face of the lagoon is gray and ruffled to silver by a slight breeze. Now and then thunder rumbles)

Grass

Wind, wind from the hills

Come with timbrels

For us and the Trees;

Clash your cymbals!
[Come with rain that will splash]
On the still lagoon.
Come soon . . . soon . . .
Come like fog, wind,
And curl about the trees.

Earth

**(First deeply, then in a voice
subdued with thought)**

Unbridle your steeds, Heaven!
Snort, thunder
Stamp and clatter!
And rain . . . still rain . . .
Rain from the cloud-wrapped hills
Come with the pink-gray feet of a dove;
And when your beauty overflows,
My heart shall be strengthened with love.

A Swallow

**(who has hitherto trilled,
hidden among the trees)**

Birds, birds to your nest;
Hide your heads under wing,
But do not cower or quail.
I shall hide you from shower and hail,
From the rain that cries and sings,
From the rain whose feet to the earth are pressed.

(The rain falls with a sound as of clashing swords. Leaves vibrate
and are lighted now and then by flashes)

Grass

The rain sings
With the unloosed music of springs.
Thunder bounds
And the wind sounds
The blast of a horn.
Below, the rain in a dance,
Above, it rides the trees,
Now speeds them, now holds them in check.
A horseman's lance
Glints in the air. . .

(While the Grass sings, the Cloud appears again,
darker than before, above the Lagoon)

**Cloud Image
(from the Lagoon)**

Lover, how I have waited!

Cloud

Ah, slender. . .
We shall melt into one
And flow through the earth,
New sap for lilies!

(The rain falls swifter. In the cottage – to which we have paid no attention – a boy and a girl have seated themselves on the sill of an open window)

**The Little Girl
(sings in a half monotone)**

Rain, rain, go away,
Come again some other day. . .

**The Boy
(Awkwardly and speaking sternly,
as though imitating his father)**

Keep still, won't you! I can't stand you any more.

(The girl walks off, weeping, while the boy remains at the window. As he gazes, the rain gradually stops, till at last there is only a spray, tinselled by a few sunrays, groping through the clouds)

**Earth
(In a high-pitched voice)**

The sun rends the woof of his tent!
He sits on a throne of blue jasper
And laughs . . . and he laughs . . .
He is showering gifts to the Grass –
Trinkets and diamonds and opals!
He will clothe my Trees in new garments
And gem their green hair with sapphires and rubies.
And I shall clasp a chain of gold rivers round my neck!

The Swallow

Birds, birds,
Scatter rain from off your wings,
Shatter gold songs in trees,
Like the crystal winds their bell-songs. . .
Scatter songs,
The sun is on your wings
Weaving shadow, weaving light!

(Meanwhile the boy, who has waited anxiously for the rain to stop, vaults over the window. Then, outside, he steps up proudly to the oak overshadowing the cottage. He circles the trunk with his arms)

Boy

Brave warrior,
With new-shining armor,
My, how your bark flashes!
Ha! And yet you are an old graybeard!

(He runs off whistling)

The Grass

Faster, faster
My young master!
We will bear you!
Your feet are white as pebbles washed by rain!
We will stir your blood with our sap,
Your veins will tap us for strength.
We will dye your swift feet with our green.

(The sun is seen rolling away toward the hills west of the wood)

The Trees **(singing as one)**

For the twilight let us raise our voices,
And for the twilight let us be quiet.
The purple mist hangs from our boughs
And the under-fronds of our leaves are cool.
A fire lights our topmost spires
But we shall bathe them in the liquid of skies.
Our thick lower branches are drawn across the sun,
While above, the birds find rest in our arms.
Whisper now . . . whisper now. . .
For at the afterglow we must be silent
Till the moon lights and the stars sing.

The Little Girl

**(walks out of the cottage, and sits on the threshold,
sobbing as she lifts her voice)**

He runs through the twisted forest
Swifter than a deer or hind,
He will fondle a snail
But to me he is unkind.
When we ramble through the woods together
He must dart ahead
[He leaves me far behind
And is lost where the pathways wind.]

(As she sings, the sun sets, and in the early evening
sky the moon appears)

O Moon, you who are as sad as I,
Perhaps you know why he must roam!
Though he is unkind to me;
I know that you will lead him home.

(She goes in)

The Trees

The stars are out, and they sing
As they-brandish their spears.

Lagoon

I will hold the moon on my breast
For the boy to see when he appears
To look for gold fish in the rushes –
Lighting like fireflies in dark bushes.

Moonglades

(As the closed lily-bulb flowers)

She is blossoming!
She flowers. . .
Her shadow will be one with mine,
She drinks of me; she drinks!
The stars fall in showers. . . !
How shall I sing my joy?
How will the lagoon sing?
What notes will the lagoon purl
As her petals uncurl?

(Short period of silence, after which the boy returns, his eyes shining. As he sings, the wind ruffles his hair)

The Boy

I met a queer old fellow in the wood.
He wore a hood, and the moon shone on it;
His beard reached to the grass.

He stopped me when I wanted to pass
And told me he would caper
And ride the trees just like the wind,
[And climb the highest tree
To make the north starlight a taper.

I met an old fellow in the wood
Each of his eyes were green as a pool
And they blinked and they squinted like eyes of a
fool.]

(When he finishes his song, he begins to whistle. But suddenly he stops, as if he were reminded of something. He walks quietly to the cottage – where the lights have been out for some time – clammers over the window, and is gone)

The Earth

So another day is done
Where rain and sun have blended,
And when the last star goes
The night is ended. . .
And another day begun.

(Curtain)

1919-1920?

The Morningside (Nov. 1921)

**Louis XIV Chamber
(Metropolitan Museum)**

There must be shadows in these mirrored spaces,
 Flowing like air, unshadowed as they tread:
 Strange-eyed they seek this room – these silent dead
With brows like clouded suns and rain-grey faces.
Yes, and they sat here once in silks and laces,
 Brave lovers and their loved ones, head to head,
 While nights gave birth to flowers, and fountains sped
Their spray – and music falling left no traces.

I wonder how they feel if they return –
These who sipped life as from a golden urn,
As we look here and there, and idly say,
At this resplendent and yet saddening show –
Lacquer, carved gold, and glass that glares like day –
“It seems they left us but an hour ago.”

July 1921

The Morningside (Dec. 1921)

The Mystic Song

Shall we turn proudly to the final going,
 Embracing the great song before days cease,
 With no desire to know what is Death's peace,
But knowing Death be happy in the knowing?
Or shall we never sing that which has haunted
 Us alone, and in the glitter of great crowds,
 By waters and wide skies of gathered clouds,
And shall this one song ever have us daunted?
Its rhythms are a mystic song's, unravelled;
 Its harmonies, the changeless, lighted ocean's;
It shows new suns and star-lit ways untravelled –
 Our song, bound in dim tangles of emotions
 Are there but little beauties here for capture?
 Will no song delve the secret of our rapture?

July 1921

The Morningside (Dec. 1921)

Autumn Sunrise

Blazoned and round I saw the great sun rise,
Float out above tall maples flaming red;
A wind swayed them, blew steadily ahead
And curved their sun-sprayed tops in green dawn skies.
And at my feet the road with rainbow eyes
Sparkled, and winding onward – a white thread –
Was lost in golden-yellow fields outspread
Under stray clouds rich-tinged with Autumn dyes.

Out in the fields strong men were garnering sheaves,
Singing old songs, clear songs of men deep-chested:
And the sun shone, and sun beams came down-
thronging. . . .
I also sang, walked on and knew no longing,
Swished a thin bough that twanged out unarrested
Amid the rustle of wind-shattered leaves.

Summer 1921

The Morningside (Feb. 1922)

Sun and Rainbow

I.

Life is color, and a shout
Of horns amid gray sleeping hills;
Life is a rainbow melody of sound
And the light the sun spills.

II.

Raise your hand and shade your eyes
Before this wonder of the skies!

The round heaven shouts with color,
A new earth picks up the sound;
The swift winds clash their cymbals,
And trees rise glorious from the ground.

The sun is spilling down its gold,
The earth drinks to its fill;
There is sun and laughter on the waters,
And silence is a sound where hills are still.

The heaven hangs its rain, and flame is on
the mountains,
The sun pours down its gold like spray of
many fountains.
A rainbow has been spun
Of jeweled rain and sun.

III.

Life is color, and a shout
Of horns amid grey sleeping hills;
Life is a rainbow arch
And the fire it spills.

Moments

Our life is but a wreath of moments: these
Bring us great joys, white glory and deep pain,
Beauty's tall form, and love, and song's refrain,
And knowing these we know all verities.
Lucid like leaves in sunlight – memories,
The token of these moments to the brain,
Are the few truths that lastingly remain
To light a torch in our perplexities.

And the most perfect moment is the twilight's
When we see golden strands through mist; the sky lights
Its stars; a radiance shines through all things –
Truth, seraph with bare sword and fire-tipped wings,
We seem to see beyond our turbid strife,
Yet there is no flamed truth but that is life.

Summer 1921

The Morningside (April-May 1922)

Of Dying Beauty

“Spare us of dying beauty,” cries out Youth,
“Of marble gods that moulder into dust –
Wide-eyed and pensive with an ancient truth
That even gods will go as old things must.”
Where fading splendor grays to powdered earth,
And time’s slow movement darkens quiet skies,
Youth weeps the old, yet gives new beauty birth
And molds again, though the old beauty dies.
Time plays an ancient dirge amid old places
Where ruins are a sign of passing strength,
As is the weariness of aged faces
A token of a beauty gone at length.
Yet youth will always come self-willed and gay –
A son-god in a temple of decay.

Summer 1921

The Morningside (April-May 1922)

An Immortality

Though we shall pass with the dawn's new light,
Or in the blinding glare of the sun,
Or in a peace-flooded hour of night,

It matters not, it is all one.
Though we may pass and though none remember,
The thread will ever be as spun.

For what the slowly purpling ember
Has been to lighted tongues of flame,
And the still dead to the sound of a name,

We shall have been to the weaving of things.
We shall have lived to live on, old sources
For the new flow of hastening springs:

Or be sands worn while the river courses,
Rain-peals in the swift fall of showers;
As change within the change of forces –

White sap that climbs the stems of flowers,
Wave forms receding endlessly
In the welter of a lighted sea.

1921/1922

The Morningside (Nov. 1922)

This Earth

This earth, a dust mote in the storm of space,
Blown down a steep way with the centuries
And nebulae that circle years to freeze
Their fires, and eternities to end their race, –
This earth, that one sees naked for the grace
Of days and nights, exulting in its trees
And hills, in kingly beasts and light-drenched seas,
In iron cities and their populace: –

It's said a death will come to it in time;
That cold will blow, implacable to thawing,
And seas will dry, and their full tides withdrawing
Leave a waste land where life will rot in slime;
And that black tiers of mountains strangely grand
Will marshal forth for deserts of white sand.

Rhythmus (March 1923)

Glamour

Japan, and a small boy is in a garden.
Sunlight tinsels the trees where a butterfly
Flutters: "Father, see where the young trees harden,
Is it a spirit dancing down from the sky?"
Japan, and moonlight foams, blue on the hill-crests,
And all the stars are kindling pathways shoreward,
Where hills meet sea: "Who comes with tapers forward,
Father, see over hill-tops where blue silk rests?"

Father speaks gravely, yet goes on with his work:
"What demons or quaint glamorous fancies lurk
In children's minds! They dream, and stars are tapers!
A man is never happy as they are –
For him no spirit comes to earth or capers –
He knows a flame, yet molds an earthen jar."

Rhythmus (March 1923)

Youth's Ballad of Singleness

Youth wrote a song of his heart and head,
White sages thought him old – no less! –
They smiled that one as new to life
As youth should sing of singleness.

To seek out a life in himself and alone,
Wistfully, slowly,
Be as single a thing as a single stone
In a field: solely

To seek a peace of self's making, yet outerly hear,
Wistfully, slowly,
The clock bring its hour; know the days round the year
For the high and the lowly:

And at the twilight to feel that the white hairs waver,
Wistfully, slowly,
On the head of his mother, in the shadows that lave her,
At twilight, all holy

With her: then, suddenly rise and go to his room,
And his dog wondering
Why he stands and offers no hand for his stare in the gloom,
Why this vast sundering:

Somewhere to meet one, all kind and beautiful,
Perhaps make her his own,
And regret when at fault that she is too dutiful
Towards one much alone:

To love a few out of many far more than himself,
Still let them not know,
Have his father, winding the clock on its shelf,
Think, why his son is so:

To live within with those who sung and were fire,
Who were themselves wholly,
And look up as he reads, find others never tire –
Laboring folk and lowly:

To see the sun rise and to watch how it sets
From a hill against the sky,
See rain sink in black earth and rivulets
In curves pass by:

And when stars dawn as at their first birth
To see the blue loom higher,
While the stilled life of earth seeks closer the earth,
And each house lights its fire:

To know all these things have a place in life,
For they are life wholly:
Then, to know it is good to engage in strife,
But wistful and lowly,

To know beyond all colors and aspects, unchanging,
One, nor wistful, lowly,
Is Change, unlike all things in their tireless ranging
To death, wistfully, slowly –

Is to live as though stars had elevation of stars,
And things not of earth their own aim,
As though a spirit moved in the shadow of bars
And still had the strength of a flame.

Youth ended his song of his heart and head,
Sages thought him wise – no less! –
Not old, nor young, nor growing wise –
For he had sung of singleness.

The Morningside (March-April 1923)

The Mystic

And he sped on, alone to the Alone:
The self drank of its well with open lips,
The soul was naked as to wind that whips
Across the nakedness of rugged stone.
Sometimes it seemed itself as the wind blown.
And Time was to the body as to ships
Sunken where silence on green silence slips –
For in one moment aeons had been shown.

For years a vision soared on in his mind:
He knew a sun that burnt on endlessly,
That shed its fire, yet never dimmed its flame,
And all that lived lived only through its aim.
Yet he forgot he left the land behind,
And stars leaped on the bosom of the sea.

The Morningside (March-April 1923)

Reflections

A placid, crystal plate of level glass
Has more than once within its depths reflected
A worthless image, that in time shall pass
With the fantastic fool, who introspected,
Mused on himself; who flew into a rage,
Thinking that mirror's tranquil depths might hold
A trace of him when gone, as a small cage
Confines a bird which seeks the open wold.

Somehow he thought that mirrors understood
The souls of fools reflected in them. It
Even dawned upon him during one mad mood,
That when Narcissus loved his image lit
To radiant beauty by the limpid waters,
The transient, curling winds, the white-armed daughters
Of the clear fields' were moved to smiles, and after
Stirred the pool's surface into crinkled laughter.

The Morningside (March-April 1923)

A Parable of Time

Where time has been
Men see
Things past
Phenomenally: –

Even in my time
A great house stood
With a face
Of painted wood.

An old man came, and went,
And a lady of position;
Both spoke low, and bowed,
Befitting their condition.

People of high feeling –
They dwelt reserved;
Yet when they moved away
Some tattlers were perturbed.

The great house lost its roof
And is now a timber yard;
The man who owns the walls
Presents a shabby card. –

Yet why worry who he is
As time goes on men see
Most things
Phenomenally.

Summer 1923

Two Worlds (Sept. 1925)

No sound. But sun.
Lie under. Overhead
the last peace is perfected.
In a kind of steady weather
graves marl the fallow dead.

Aug 16/23

Blues (Feb. 1929)

THE FIRST SEASONS

by

DUNN WYTH

THE FIRST BOOK

[The First Seasons (including The First Book) was written by me ca. 1920-1924 and is not to be published, as the pseudonym intended then; (pronounced “done with.”)]

Louis Zukofsky Jan. 23, 1941]

Un, deux, trois
Lui, moi, toi

Old French Song

I

To The Publisher

Lie sunned and hear as living I heard,
As from a page I heard –

But I shall be more safely dead

If my writings go forlorn
And I go deaf to the unborn,

If a stranger comes, throws
My book out to the snows,

And the wind turns round a page
In the sunlight with a rage,

And a book lying scattered
From out the snows shows tattered

To be stepped on in the snows
As any newspaper that blows.

II

Neither the well is here
Nor you –
All within a year.

They covered the well with tar,
Closing it,
They built with beam and spar.

III

So many shadows have I loved: not merely
As presences that loom to stir the eye,
As of inverted ships on a desert sky
To the tired eyes of a Bedouin, but clearly
For what they have given of form and thought. Though yearly
Remembrances recede, shadows with a sigh
Half choked in the throat come back in mind: I
Live once again with forms I have loved dearly.

As an old friend returned home from afar
They come to me. I scarcely think they are
Now changed from what they were. Love still perceives
Old good, as of a still embrace of arms.
Recollection grows like a wood which charms
One lost to the shudder of its many leaves.

IV

Lie closer, dark heart,
For your sake,
For your sake.

I do not want it:
Your hair-scent
Drapes my night away
Melts the trees, out
To the river and beyond-it-all.

I do not want it:
Saturn, dark heart, you must not love,
Nor body of Saturn
Reflected on the wave,
And I am cast upon the wave, my love.

I rouse to breathe the air
By darling?
I know,
But how else, how else?
Lie closer, dark heart,
For your sake,
For your sake,
Dark heart.

V

Ode

Sense of wet moss:
I enter your body
only as hard
Queer being might –

a tree in a current of sea –

with outer bark, with flow,
you cover me.

VI

My love, my fool in false-face, tall fool, lily-
Like, or yet marionette, appearing graceful
As a lily when it bends its head in a vase full
Of water – grieved, and not a little silly –
Is it like wilting of your petals now,
My being with you, your tongue striving for an answer,
Or like the soaking of a marionette, little dancer,
Wooden, in water, and it drowns, floats till its brow.
Say it happened: once you were mine in sleep,
Wilting the way of lily, marionette
Soaking, you sleep no longer; pale green semblance
Of a flower hurt you bend your head, gaze, fret,
And your eyes stare black. Stare, stare, burning deep –
I marvel at the ancient tall resemblance.

VII

How beautiful upstanding, you,
Leaping to meet the fog,
The leaping waters,
All your being surrounded
In my heart surrounded, –

Commanding
As we meet the fog,
The sirens ringing, the buoy, –
Your being plunging, sounding,
In my heart sounded.

VIII

Stars
And their avatars,
These now loom
Near to us,
Pivotal.

The equivocal
Was long ended
When our shapely heads
met.

When kissing,
Like the earliest races,
Forehead with forehead
We over and above
The stars
Saw,
Their manifestations in ourselves,
and the Star, Earth,
saw.

IX

O the glory of the moon lifts the glory of me to the heavens,
The stars are borne on across the lucent,
Floe breaking clouds of the heavens,
And the little glory of me is taken with sleeping.

It is gone out, it is blown, the little glory of me, like a husk,
Like the crescent that dawned to this moon in the full,
It is gone out, it is blown,
 the little glory of me taken with sleeping.

X

Who can say now,
Speaking after,
Merely a vain path
Wasted your years?

Me,
greeting you,
Your eyes move to laughter,
Your lips to tears.

Drawn skin to bone
Your hollow cheeks
Control a smile,
Level;

Distract in tone
Your voice flows harsh,
As flow on stone
Waters level.

As you speak
I feel unblinking
Dust that gathered,
Left you utter;

Feel how bleak
The sun was, chinking
Human frame
Like shutter.

XI

It doesn't matter, does it, what we may have
We who must from shyness border
Upon love till love at least can break its tether.

Till talking freely over our coffee
We both defy the vague intruder
And conquer all at once with gleam
Of eye our Shyness than whom we know none ruder.

XII

Your voice comes across a space
And I know the light is emerald,

Know, by the white oak
Spray of white oak
Even before to-night you knew me.

The great circle lay around the moon,
The immense upper darkness grew emerald –
Moon on its sea.

The tree over the roadway stood growing,
All its height toward the moonlight,
And you were with me

Though you did not see, could not,
Being away – and one with me
Lost utterly

The way is timed
And the day comes –
The way is not hard.

We shall part:
The way is not hard.

XIII

Shine! shine! the light of a face
Thrown over this shoulder!
The faces of these foreign shrink
From the moans, flare, of our fire-brink!

Welcome! one face
Falls onto the face of the other – one face –
Drink, drink, the night is of stars,
The house falls into us, the strangers ringed!

The strangers ringed, –
They are lost, they are lost, they are lost,
They speed down from us – earth-faces
In their graves! lost!

XIV

Tears? I have grown still. – Born of a race thriving alone,
Corrosive while it thrives, we could not tone
Two different bodies to be one,
Each, darkening, self-consuming, as the sun.

Why couldn't we
We who were perhaps deserving?
 The glory of the sun upon the welter
We might have moved together.

Have I known anyone better than you,
Have I found a worthier task to pursue –
Myself? You have been so much myself.
How can I ever lose you, how can I pretend
To.

XV

As sun
Recovers things from dark –
Only his thought in quiet weather
Moves us to one song:
It has made our days as one.

XVI

The Voice

I take you home
On the train

And when we at last
Get up to walk

Stars will be over us –

And they will whirl
Amain, amain,

And ever me alone
When I hasten home,

Alone, as the night-noises
Night lamps, factories

Make the night deeper
And I hasten home sleepy.

XVII

Now the sun is too heavy for gossip
All good mothers have left for the shade;
On the coolest of white pillows
Their youngest are laid.

While over the level ocean
The landsmen are cruising, –
Guarding the quietest breathing
Their wives sit musing,

As one, who apart from the others
All week she was there,
Weeps, as a new-arrived stranger
Bends to the child and her hair.

XVIII

Here yuh-married-for-life, tune
Up, if you're singing to the moon!

Let us all married and unmarried
Walking past the pond
Sing how fond
Of it the moon is, sing upon the path
Beneath us to the glory of a Moon-Bath!

That the couples may wake to a laugh!
That the unmarried may forget their
upbringing!

XIX

“An interval no rarer
Than a cricket’s.
The season thins.

The train:
Reverberating on our summer loves;
It sings . . . Then
Might we at the window
Here not light the lamp?

So that whatever foliage
Remains will in the dawn blue
Whispering

Be green this fall
As in the spring!”

XX

Composition

Sleep is so deep upon him here,
As quiet on his forehead; clear,

While each breath naked and intense
Lulls with his body's somnolence.

Sleep is so deep; nothing is old
Where breath is sweet and nose is cold.

Where his still horse blanketed warm below
Stands as if it could never go:

Stands waiting the day.

The dawn comes soon; the horse will move
And snow will thaw in either groove

Showing the wheels of a wagon have passed –

Newspapers, spokes, and head all shining.

XXI

“Wall! corpse! You dead fish upon
Your marshes! Stellar
Regions shine over your house: we see
 you stored
A new woodpile in your cellar . . .

Old friends ye-es! and we’re walking
Here, speaking to each other, stalking –
‘Maybe if he’d used his wood more often . . .’
‘This snowed lintel, God! ’s cold! shows
 his door.’”

XXII

I cannot bear it
This place you chose to rest in,
I think like a storm-bird you have happened here
Because all your life you will not rest anymore.

And because what I am now
To you, I cannot be again
As in your peregrinations
Alone you shall listen to the rain on
 drifted snow as around this door.

See, see, staring far from me,
Storm-bird I become
Myself watching you, terrified as to what
 searching, falling from
Me now, you plunge in, lost through rain over
 snow – steady downpour.

XXIII

Whistled a song
To find peace in it:
And both their griefs
Like meeting fires, in one
Flame were lit!

He brought a tune
With him to bed –
Windows frameless,
Night's borders spread.

XXIV

Wake while yet the other sleeps,
Peer from out the tent,
Lie while all the little cheeps
Sing that birds are permanent.

Do but step upon the sand –
And you learn how narrow
Is the reach of air and land
For the song-sparrow.

Step within the tent again,
Lie down not to wake
The other; wonder when
(Cheeps) sleep will break.

XXV

“Come, let’s leave this grocery
Of people who inherit their earth,
And let us drive your car,
Uphill and downhill, from eggs and hens
And birth!”

“Heavens, the riding lights are out!”
“Fine, this *will* be driving!”
“Sure will, but Lord knows
When we’re arriving, if we are arriving.”

“Why should we be arriving
When what we’ve seen and we are brothers
Supposedly? Together, human, we ought
To go plumb to Hell with all others!”

XXVI

Evening:
 the increscent moon
Accompanies his walk, rests, when he rests;
Crossing his doorway he bears certitude
Of a moon shining, a body tired.

In his room night greets him – a friendly
 warder.

(Springtide nights
Young folk are amorous on the bridges, cables
Tremble for moments with the jar of traffic;
Ships in the harbor whistle the old portent,
Fog over the waves and time across the deep!
Ships have a world of their own – their whistles
 tell.)

In his dark room, alone, reclining, eyes closed,
He has heard, strung harps once dusty and unseen;
He has opened his eyes for the night anew to come
To where the windows are wide and the lamp is green, –
Close; when voices in the streets are sibilants.

XXVII

Since you are gone
The street lives hushed: black.
What can atone lack?

Streets that heard
Feet on stone
With you alone
Pause dead, stone blurred.

XXVIII

Do not touch what has been here.
It is very clear
Lying dead.

Our love is fast asleep.
O very much asleep
The certain thighs, the gracious head.

(Exhumed young prince of Egypt
Brought out under the sun)
Proud, nose tilted, let one lie on unchanged,
Being gone.

XXIX

Nothing, only a short circuit:
If you want the light
The lamp must be tightened
In the socket, I think I know
How to work it.

Remember we're one together,
But mix it with dying of shock,
I won't have it:
I should be allowed to die fixing
This lamp if I want to,

If you must
Go out of this room, if you wish,
While I fix it.

XXX

“I guess I will follow my shoes,” said Wordsworth,
As he followed some water-power in the dark,
And grazed his shoes on the gravel road
Till he reached an amusement park.

“The merry-go-round is lovely,” he said,
“And the Ferris-wheel; and, indeed, it needs no proving
That the people are fair in the lights,
But perhaps I better be moving.”

So he came to a street where low wooden houses
Were closed at the end of a cobblestone view by a steeple,
And some coal-yards and dust in the air
Showed plainly here lived a different people.

And sure enough near some dusky house-door
A goat champed the grass and shook its beard at its tether;
A boy held its horns and as the stranger approached
The goat moved its ears together.

“How the Lights shine night after night,”
Thought Wordsworth, “and what is it the searchlights study
As they wilder along the clouds to-night
Over this wide River not a little muddy?”

But I better be walking home,” said Wordsworth,
“How sylvan the Drive shows to-night is Sunday.
I have lived with solitude a week
And tomorrow is Monday.”

XXXI

What have you lost
Which we have not found,
Which we might find
With the sea aground?

Height is so vast.
Cloud bank through skylight
Rolls far in the waste
Of the morning twilight.

What is to fear
While I cannot sleep,
When the dawn's mist is white
Fog whistles will steep.

Dear,
Asleep in the dawn mist; white;

Sleep – invisible is sleep.

The End.

THE FIRST SEASONS

Spring

I

You're kind
Not making much demand,
Not even on the need
To understand

Me. You know:
So that we are brought each to each
Nor nonplussed
When we go.

IV

The universe is whale, to-night, steel whale,
leviathan eternal, eternal as the
long, light, night-river-blue.

So we explore the cave, the mammal-fish
dark, the armored sides –
two stars.

Two stars across the dark – blue-water-verge –
flowing to foam-flower, one at times,
two at times, upon these tides.

V

Tired? Sing that the shock of trees
Falls down the face of rock!
Lie within dovetailed hands
and lock

Your eyes in sleep –
Past spaces of hill stream climbed
The buzz of day is drowned
In blue-day-heaven-round.

VI

The windless air trembles interminably as the sea.
Eternal warders of men – change now holding
Them, heat that takes them into the cool tide –
Seeing no sea-waves rise upon the air
Aver we can see lilies growing there!

. . .

In sand I walk: and the blue sky, unbarred,
Far off, might well be India's.

. . .

How the sand-fleas I stir
Swarm, cross, dark as a premonition of night;
The sun falls straight,
Falls over waves to shore.

VII

Slowly on the wind we heard
The pigeons coo,
We knew we heard the homing bird
Above us two,

We turned, saw two on a roof
From which they flew slanting,
Ideal in air, beyond reproof
Though love was for the granting.

“O do not let a sailor lad”
I hummed – you hummed,
“Above your knee.”

Summer

VIII

Though I have doubted
Love, as always, living
On mistrust, it learned the pulse
Of proud and utter giving.

Till I cannot doubt again
Or I must doubt the very power
Of continuing a living
Self, the same from hour to hour:

Till I cannot doubt again
But must pay homage
 To the pulse.

IX

Love, not all this night spread out
Becomes more mine than all your body's length,
Nor is the blond thin shine of the moon
Upon this turf where is your hair
More rooted in this heart than the very light
Which is your hair –
Webbed-life I put my face to.

And your eager, eager eyes, love, are comparable only
To beauty-and-the-beast's-in-one but newly
 seeing from their lair,
Their being the moon's to me inclining:
Your life, love, mysterious being of story,
Soft on my chest, my life, reclining,
Almost unconsciously your snare.

X

Are these the streams
That in the day, among the briars and the tree trunks,
Wound? Half-sleeping we lay!
More like the winds in the dark about us
Are these the streams?

Are these the winds
That all day flew across our meadows – blowing
wires with subtle wings
Manoeuvring sunlit against rarest blue?
More like approach of trains in the waste
around us,
Are these the winds?

Are these the trains
That windowed passed our fence across from
us
All day, now hurried through wood-shadows
massed?
More like strayed falling stars hurled down
among us
Are these the trains?

And are these ours
Stars forever thick above us, and a vast
Of wind and stream whirled all around us? Ever
We fathom them, we like two bathers on this land
Become our sea.

XI

Breaking up of a bonfire
On the beach,
Night,
The earth our lonely circle of two
Aflame in the round pit of shadow –
Fire on the wind!

Changeling,
Who won't wear
Your jersey, –
No need for early dying!

This bonfire: token enough
Of the flaming walls of our world,
Though the walls of the sea are crashing
Scarves of fog in the interstices.

Lighted brow
And bent burning nape of neck,

Muted our fire leaps down,
Sunken the charred masts lie heaped,
The sands spread white to the moon:
Sleep, the skies sweep low, the stars!

XII

Crouched on the sands, by the water,
And you said what was you never really leaves me.
Why then did it go?
In a kind of forgetting I imagine greaves. Me
You have entered for always. Your departing,
armor and glow.

Armor and glow! with what romance I can
invest your return;
In a twilight golden, myself, a bitter isle,
And quiet, your departing steps approach,
The gold goes from along the sands, and the greaves
turn

Blue from the water –
Why then did you go?
All that was you in your departing beside me?
You by me now or over? And if I looked up
Would there be nothing but the one look up, or you
to see?

XIII

“These are fish that were his eyes:
Puss in state with subtle flexure
Curiously approached the ocean
And it hit him in the neck, sure!

“Quod erat demonstrandum,
That his soul, flibbertigibbet,
Has no sepulchre of rest,
Id est – the Potentates prohibit.”

Constrained we hurry tentward,
Crackling shells in our still race.

“Dawn of the moon on plying highways,
Luminous loiter the waves and uprear:
*‘Aut Videt aut videsse putat
per nubile lunam’* – ”

A song-sparrow peals
Little bells; there is wider dawn;
Marshes sleep an interval.

In the tent I hear the voice:
“Mild enough to sleep quite naked,
As the snub-nosed Blake would have it –
So the lamb was makèd.”

XIV

Unworshipped, yet worshipped, you, yet mated,
My jumble of words like chaff I scatter to you
 in the dark,
To you in the dark in a jest, knowing what manner
 you take it,
Your almost unhuman kindness sensing the lark
Of the jest; then, kindling to words of the others, lovers,
Who – when, a tree, you heaved upwards, the air
 charged about you – were tried,
Loved, and passed each to the night's core, you
 are satisfied
To think, each, arch, centered within, and
 perfect of lovers.

XV

If he came
Your lover
What in the name of the high stars
Could he do,

But stand by –
Your lover, wonder at me,
Another
Given as he!

XVI

Broken porch
Of the marsh house;
Shore in the near sea,
And the marsh-mallow
Pink against the wind –
Breaking
 or thinned.

We bend,
Weed,
 feed
The ducks in our yard,
Go fishing, the winds rigorous!
Small craft where the water plashes,
(Autumn sun on your lowered lashes!)

Sun keeps us!

XVII

So much of sunlight this twilight,
Golden the high light
Shoots up from the wave,
We will not sleep till against the golden-snaked
green

Our bodies lave.

On the comb the last I shall see
As we rise will be
Your lips in the last sun black-red,
And lowered in the troughs and limned with the
dark of a vision
That shuts – your head.

And sometimes in the mist, froth, you will drift
Over to me, as we lift
Astral, through the horde
Of the sea's ineffable wave –
Our unavoidable lord.

XVIII

He who must parting take
From shore that followed him the summer long
Is like to one recumbent who will ache
With the last recurrence of receding song.

He wakes the last dawn in his tent
And feels there's been a change of wind:
It wraps him in other element.

And all the shore awaking then
Seem but the working of his quiet sorrow –
A bird he hears before he sleeps again.

Fall

XXII

Out by this frozen harbor the flight of gulls comes
near to us.

They seem merry, merry enough for us,
For they fill our wants.
Yet we are strangers here
And whatever brought these gulls
Might do away with them
Whenever whatever wills.

This religious knowledge
Losses have made too certain
To be done away with.

I have said done away with, meaning
As time has done away
With the shuttering house, locked here,
Above.

Yet I look forward to a time
When I can open it
Or one such, like it,
And be made merry by the flight of gulls
Round a corner of this frozen harbor -
Advancing twilight
known by stubby lights
Peaceful on the corner of a world
in snow.

XXIII

So we walked on to The Great Rock, we two,
In the intermittent sunlight of winter,
And there was much turmoil, forgetfulness withal,
In the wind and the blue
Sky that was over us,
In our coats.

And we overlooked frozen waters; gazing
At their unbearable grief of death,
Death's rest,
Till there was transferred to us
From the frozen level quiet
All that was past yet would be in the future, too.

So that as out of our coats we drew closer,
To absolve all this death in the peace of ourselves,
Once more to be at rest as in the night previous
in our beds,
We realized ourselves for the first time.

For as we looked (it was given us to see further,
we two)
And saw the shining white
Of new upbuilding steel, –
In the steady turmoil of wind
Loomed
Our lives for us.

XXIV

Vast, tremulous;
Grave on grave of water-grave:

Past.

Futurity no more than duration
Of a wave's rise, fall, rebound
Against the shingles, in ever repeated mutation
Of emptied returning sound.

XXV

Astrally the distance shows,
Trembles to the sound
Of taut bridge-cables
Straining, high around.

Hurried my train cries,
Other trains rush,
With groups of lights
Flare curving. Where now are

You, whom I knew to love,
Whom as I held,
While trains passed, we saw
Their lights, your trembling quelled?

XXVI

Remembering how you won by grace
And seeing your garden there,
I shall say the calm love of your face
Had brought the sun to bear.

And for grief in my body
And for reviving tears,
As though you lived, I shall see
When winds move quietly.

XXVII

Higher tides and autumn grieves
What the earth at last retrieves.
Will our days now torn,
With a term, be reborn?

Snow we know upon the tide,
Shanty here and countryside,
Yield will to a milder sea
And the earth greenness.

Will we in that April track
All our pleasure, to bring back
Ways beyond earth's reaches,
All these flooded beaches?

XXVIII

With what infinite grace
Have I to bear
The plunge of this branch
Into the main bark of you, tree

Tree, wiry one, to-night
In the rain's grace
Shed tears, Unsurmountable!

The End.

PART III: EARLY DISCARDED POEMS (1923-1924)

The movements of clouds have not a mind's precision
But the infinitude of things that last
Awhile and go as wind, or music passed
Into transient being by the chance collision
Of winds among poised leaves.

Yet the mind can be mutual with clouds –
Even as it can build on an earth of shifting
Nature, – trace feelings in their still drifting
Of changing light and texture – sad or elate,
And when they sweep out gravely.

May 3, 1923

(To Master Aristippus)

What shall I do for money, my friend,
What shall
I do for money?

The master Aristippus
Owned but one silver mina,
And kept it a curio –
As woman keep their china.

But I, what shall I
Do for money, my friend,
What shall I do for money? –

What did he do for land, my friend,
What did
He do for land?

He left the Cyclades
And settled in Cyrene;
He had enough space all his life
To save him from being spleeny.

But I, what shall I
Do for land, my friend,
What shall I do for land? –

What did he do for housing, my friend,
What did
He do for housing?

He built a hut and sowed
His garden to the river;
When the roof of his hut became too low
He trusted the skies which bent over.

But I, what shall I
Do for housing, my friend,
What shall I do for housing? –

Where could he bring his friends, my friend,
Where could
He bring his friends?

They dined at the foot of his door
And splendidly they talked;
And by the river the sun fell
On the hematite whenever they walked.

But I, where can I
Bring my friends, my friend,
Where can I bring my friends? –

What did he do for love, my friend,
What did
He do for love? –

He said Pleasure is Good, my friend,
And Virtue is the norm;
And sometimes went to Athens
For a particular form.

He did this
For love, my friend?
He did this for love? –

And had he time to read his books, my friend,
And had
He time to read his books?

The master Aristippus
Said, we never have time
To read all we want
And lived with Homer all his prime.

But I, where shall I
Find time to read my books, my friend,
Where shall I find time? –

Aristippus never regretted his work, my friend?
Never
Regretted his work?

Sometimes, you know, I think
I might have written music, my friend,
Sometimes I think I might have written music,
you know. –

Aristippus never regretted his life, my friend?
Never
Regretted his life?

He did for a while, but after
Forgot his regrets in living;
He said, he never has anything
Who lives on misgiving.

Damn! I,
Am an exceptional case, my friend,
I am an exceptional case!

Sept. 19, 1923

“whose life has been a broken arch –” H. A.

How their shapely throats breathe as of song!

Stay where the casement suns unapproachably high,
See where over its aerial arch
Top wisps of trees appear.

Force sleeps in motionless space,
And space, to thought, lights!
Shut the eyes,
It is better now the heart has grace.

No hurt comes here, as blind derision:
Only the sense of children, who once touched hearts
With their living divinity, attaining
Still forms perfected in vision.

Nov. 22, 1923

(Devotions)

Would what oppresses a night
Should go with a night,
And a heart that vexes till day
Accept the day,
As reaches of lowly earth
A sunbeam comes to survey:

And that which plots in the dark
Should hide with the dark, –
As a horse that crops and is blind
It reaches a wall, is blind –
Then step thru the dawn like the steed
Lifting its host who is kind.

Dec. 23/1923

Graced – graced,
Deathward are we dancing,
Graced – graced,
Deathward are we dancing,
Graced – graced,
Deathward are we dancing,
Astral – flame

Night
Ravishes the valleys.
Night
Stalks above the gullies.
Night
Shadows all the waters,
The astral downs.

Seeing, the eyes
Grow black with dancing.
Hearing, the heart
Beats lost upon the ribs,
Graced, the eyes
Grow black with dancing.
The antic ends.

(To Mozart Symphony in G. Minor,
the minuet, the 3rd movement)

1923?

The people change and the birds in the air,
And the air itself. In the town
None stirs till real summer is there;
We pass it, we feel a way down
Broken asphalt to cold floods on the sand.

May 25/1924
Long Beach
(Second Island night).

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- “Autumn Sunrise.” *The Morningside* 10.3 (Feb. 1922): 157; *The Morningside* 10.5-6 (April-May 1922): 157; *The Philadelphia Public Ledger* (7 Oct. 1922).
- “Sun and Rainbow.” *The Morningside* 10.4 (March 1922): 103; *Columbia Verse 1897-1924*, ed. Cargill Sprietsma (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924): 107-108.
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- “Spare Us of Dying Beauty.” *The Morningside* 10.5-6 (April-May 1922): 157-158; as “Of Dying Beauty,” *Poetry* 23.4 (Jan. 1924): 197.
- “An Immortality.” *The Morningside* 11.1 (Nov. 1922): 10; *The Forum* 69.2 (Feb. 1923): 1246.
- “This Earth.” *Rhythmus* 1.3 (March 1923): 46.

- “Glamour.” *Rhythmus* 1.3 (March 1923): 47; as Part I of “Vision” [see below], *The Morningside* 12.3-4 (March-April 1923): 49.
- “Youth’s Ballad of Singleness,” *The Morningside* 12.3-4 (March-April 1923): 47-48.
- “Vision II. The Mystic,” *The Morningside* 12.3-4 (March-April 1923): 49-50.
- “Reflections.” *The Morningside* 12.3-4 (March-April 1923): 50.
- “A Parable of Time.” *Two Worlds* (Sept. 1925): 4.
- “No Sound. But Sun.” *Blues* 1 (Feb. 1929): 19.

Notes

The following notes record significant textual variants in the poems of Part I in those poems printed more than once, but not scattered differences in punctuation. Also noted are some textual ambiguities in the poems in Part III. I have added a few annotations where this might be helpful.

Part I: Published Poems

The Sea (p. 2)

The Caliper uses double-column pages, often cramping the longer lines of poetry, which may explain the irregular and inconsistent layout of this poem as printed. This is compounded by Zukofsky's apparent experimenting with enjambment, which may be attempting to formally evoke the turmoil of the sea. Lines 12, 17, 19, 23, 25 and the last protrude to the right, but this appears motivated by avoiding turn-overs so that the poem can fit into the given space on the lower half of the page. I have regularized these but not second-guessed the stanza breaks or punctuation.

Dawn After Storm (p.4)

l. 16: *New York Tribune* has: *lust for last*.

The Seer (p. 10)

Columbia Verse 1897-1924 (1924): lacks dedication to Tagore.

l. 2: both printed versions have "sipping," but LZ corrected/revised this in his personal copy of *The Morningside*.

l.14: *Columbia Verse* has: *purling, shining*.

Tagore visited the U.S. during one of his world tours from October 1920-March 1921. He initially landing in New York, which he used as his base until late January.

The Faun Sees (p. 14)

I have opted for *The Pagan* presentation of this poem, which is more spacious, whereas *The Morningside* printing appears to have squeezed the poem into the available space on the page. The latter printing has no stanza breaks, lacks exclamation points at the end of l. 3 and l. 14, and does not indent the final line but puts it in quotation marks. The poem is dated 1919 in Zukofsky's copy of *The Morningside* but 1919-1920 in his copy of *The Pagan*.

Earth Counts a Day: A Fantasy (p. 16)

As indicated in the note on the texts, Zukofsky quite extensively corrected and revised this playlet in his own copy of the printed text in *The Morningside* (Nov. 1921), which is somewhat hidden away among Zukofsky's papers (HRC 12.1) rather than cataloged with other journals. This augmented text has been

reproduced here, with additional lines placed in square brackets, but otherwise no attempt has been made to record all minor variants.

Louis XIV Chamber (p. 24)

The original printing of this poem in *The Morningside* (Dec. 1921) lacks *but* in the final line, which all other versions include.

The Morningside (April-May 1922) printing has errors in l. 1 and l. 4, corrected by hand to correspond with the original printing.

The *Columbia Verse 1897-1924* (1924) printing, l. 1: *mirror* for *mirrored*; l. 11 and l. 13 indented.

The Mystic Song (p. 25)

Text as in the second *Morningside* printing (April-May 1922), which has some differences in punctuation from the earlier printing.

Sun and Rainbow (p. 27)

Part II, stanza 4, l. 1: *its* added by hand in Zukofsky's *The Morningside* copy: *The heaven hangs its rain....*

Moments (p. 28)

l. 5: *The Morningside* printing has: *sunlight-memories*, which has been corrected by hand in Zukofsky's copy to a dash, which makes better sense.

Of Dying Beauty (p. 29)

The *Poetry* XXIII.4 (Jan. 1924) version has been preferred here with the following revisions from its original printing in *The Morningside*:

Title: *Spare Us of Dying Beauty*

l. 1: *youth*.

l. 2: ends with comma instead of dash.

l. 4: lacks quotation mark, but corrected by hand in Zukofsky's copy.

l. 5: Reads: *Where fading splendor is joined one with earth*. But revised in Zukofsky's copy.

l. 7: final comma.

An Immortality (p. 30)

l. 9: both printings end with a period, but *The Forum* copy is corrected by hand to a comma, which makes better sense.

In Zukofsky's copy of *The Morningside* printing this poem is dated 1921, whereas his copy of *The Forum* it is dated 1922.

Glamour (p. 32)

In *The Morningside* printed as part I under the general title "The Vision" with part II, "The Mystic."

Youth's Ballad of Singleness (p. 33)

Stanza 11, last line: *The Morningside* printing has *Bust*, but this seems a certain misprint.

A Parable of Time (p. 37)

The MS of this poem lacks a title and has minor differences (HRC 15.1).

Part II: *The First Seasons*

Summer XIII "These are fish that were his eyes" (p. 94)

Quod erat demonstrandum: That which was demonstrated = QED.

flibbertigibbet: a frivolous, flighty or excessively talkative person.

Id est: that is (to say).

Vut Videt aut vidisse putat per nubile lunam: from Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.454: one sees or fancies he has seen the moon rise amid the clouds.

Blake: see William Blake, "The Lamb" from the *Songs of Innocence*.

Part III: Discarded Poems

(To Master Aristippus) (p. 108)

This poem exists in a corrected typescript with numbered pages indicating it was at some stage part of a larger selection.

Aristippus of Cyrene was a 4th-5th century BC Greek philosopher, founder of the Cyrenaic school that professed the only good was physical pleasure, although the numerous anecdotes about him in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* tend to emphasize his practical equanimity in diverse circumstances. Aristippus appears a number of times in Zukofsky's work, see "A"-14 (316) and particularly "A"-22 (517), where eight lines are worked from anecdotes about Aristippus from Diogenes Laertius.

Between the fourth and fifth stanzas from the end ("Regretted his work?" [. . .] "Sometimes, you know, I think") the typescript has a canceled stanza to be replaced by three spaces. The canceled stanza reads:

Well, in his youth he lamented
He found no career for his soul,
But after thirty quietly
Wetted his potter's wheel.

How their shapely throats breathe as of song! (p. 111)

Zukofsky's MS has crossed out parts of five lines, but in three instances (lines 1, 4 and 8) he later noted "stet" in the left margin. In transcribing this poem Carroll Terrell simply ignored these instructions, in part perhaps because it is difficult to read the canceled words.

As Zukofsky indicates, the epigraph is from Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*. He refers to this phrase in his essay on "Henry Adams" (*Prepositions* 108), as well as quoting Adams on the "broken arch" as the

quintessential symbol of the Gothic cathedral: “Of all the elaborate symbolism which has been suggested for the Gothic cathedral, the most vital and most perfect may be that the slender nervure, the springing motion of the broken arch, the leap downwards of the flying buttress – the visible effort to throw off a visible stain – never let us forget that Faith only supports it, and that, if Faith fails, Heaven is lost” (*Prepositions* 116; also quoted in his essay on William Carlos Williams, *Prepositions* 52).

Graced – graced (p. 113)

In “Discarded Poems,” Terrell printed this as two separate poems, failing to recognize the third stanza and terminal reference on a different page of the MS as belonging to this poem, although Zukofsky marks the continuation.