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'A Test for Poetry' : An examination of Louis Zukofsky's 'objectivist principles' and poetic practice

R. G. Allen

My aim in this thesis is to examine Louis Zukofsky's poetry in relation to his stated objectivist principles using those principles and Zukofsky's unpublished statements as a test for his theory and practice.

The first chapter introduces Zukofsky's poetic principles and examines the relationship between his work and Ezra Pound's Imagism. My aim here, is to put the origins of Zukofsky's principles into an appropriate context, disputing the idea of the 'objectivist' as a temporarily revived Imagist.

Chapter II examines Zukofsky's earliest verse, both unpublished juvenilia and the few early poems retained for publication. These poems all predate the 'objectivist' statements and a comparison is made between those poems which anticipate the poet's later technique and those which do not. The chapter culminates in a study of 'Poem beginning "The"' as the first identifiably objectivist work.

Chapter III is concerned with Zukofsky as editor and critic since it was in this dual role that he first expressed his poetic theory. The principles of this theory are examined in detail here and the relationship between Zukofsky's poetry and criticism closely defined.

The fourth chapter examines Zukofsky's shorter poems in the light of the critical framework provided by the 'objectivist principles'. Individual poems are closely examined to reveal the 'mechanism' of 'objectivist' poetry and to facilitate a reading of Zukofsky's long poem "A".

Chapters V and VI are concerned with the two halves of "A". Attention is given to the poem's detailed composition and to its overall structure and movement. This analysis is guided by the overriding question of the application of 'objectivist principles' to a long rather than a short poem.

The final chapter reviews Zukofsky's sustained critical idiom in both poetry and prose criticism and concludes that this idiom provides a flexible but principled and consistent framework for his life's work.

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## CHAPTER I

### 'Towards an Objective'

In 'A Statement for Poetry' (1950), Zukofsky said that 'no verse is 'free' ... if its rhythms inevitably carry the words in contexts that do not falsify the functions of words as speech probing the possibilities and attractions of existence'.<sup>1</sup> Leaving aside at this stage the question of freedom, the idea of 'words as speech probing the possibilities ... of existence' offers an invaluable introduction to Zukofsky's work. The clearest example of this idea in practice is his 'life-poem' "A".<sup>2</sup> Written over a period of fifty years and on a vast scale, "A" attacks an astounding index of 'possibilities' and in the process takes on an apparently intimidating complexity. It is partly because of this that I leave an examination of aspects of "A" to the final chapters, paving the way with an exploration of the concerns that inform it, as they appear in more manageable form in the shorter poems and prose 'statements'.

The poetic theory and criteria that dictate the structure and fabric of Zukofsky's poetry were first explored in a number of statements which appeared from 1930 onwards. The most important of these were 'Sincerity and Objectification', 'Recencies in Poetry', 'Program: "Objectivists" 1931' and 'A Statement for Poetry'.<sup>3</sup>

Variations and refinements of the principles set out in these statements continued to appear throughout Zukofsky's

career in interviews and articles, and also in Zukofsky's collected prose work Prepositions.<sup>4</sup> This is not an appropriate point at which to probe too deeply into the principles of 'an objectivist' in practice, as they will be dealt with in a more suitable context later. However it may be of value to state those points which are at the core of the poet's view of his work.

The most important of these are the demand for 'sincerity' - defined as 'the care for detail', and 'objectification', its 'ideation into structure'. The term 'sincerity' used in this manner refers to the way in which the senses - and in the case of the poet, principally the eye and the ear - reliably present the world in a form susceptible to the poetic process. 'Objectification' refers to the way in which the poet acts upon this raw material and through the medium of words turns it into a poetic 'object', into a machine or complex which whilst presenting the 'thing' which occasioned it, has its own validity or integrity. Whilst not wishing to suggest that Zukofsky's work is 'photographic', the analogy of the photographic process suggests itself in that the photographer converts an image of light into a chemical reaction. This modified chemical material is then acted upon to produce a photograph which whilst bearing a relationship to the scene depicted, is a tangible, independent object different from the object photographed.

The second crucial tenet of an 'objectivist's' practice lies in the definition of 'that which is aimed at....inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars'.<sup>5</sup>

The word 'direction' is essential here and is used in two senses. Firstly it implies motion towards a specific point or state and, as such, it encapsulates the idea of 'aim'. In this sense the process of poetic activity is passive in that it attempts to bring objects into poetry without distorting their integrity. The second sense of the word is active and involves the poet in taking objects, thoughts, or actions ('particulars') and directing them through the medium of words - in a persistent musical analogy - along a line of 'melody'. In music, sound is manipulated in terms of its pitch, tone, duration, attack and rhythm, and these considerations are harmonised or set against one another, juxtaposed and blended into an emotionally charged flow. The poet, in directing 'historic and contemporary particulars' uses words in a similar way, manipulating some of those sound qualities - particularly tone, duration, attack and rhythm, so as to combine them with the essence of language - meaning - and thus arrive at his emotionally charged object. An illustration of these two senses of 'the direction of historic and contemporary particulars' was provided by Zukofsky in an interview published in Contemporary Literature in 1969. Discussing the 'saw-horses' in "A"-7 he said

I use words for them; how can I get them across except in 'words'? I saw 'sawhorse'; otherwise they'd better speak for themselves. That's a case of objectification. There are these sawhorses. All right, somebody can look at them and not bother with them. They interested me. But I wanted to get them into movement because I'm interested in the sound of words. So I got them into movement. Of course, in A-7 I have also talked about words, what to do with words.

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The 'direction of historic and contemporary particulars' clearly dovetails tightly with 'sincerity' and 'objectification', and together these considerations make rigorous demands on the poet, requiring an extreme clarity of perception, a meticulous precision in the choice of words, and a ruthless cutting away of all unnecessary words and ideas. Thus the sparse language and sometimes fractured syntax of Zukofsky's poetry is not surprising. This lean appearance and the demand for economy and discipline together with a haiku-derived form (used not so much by Zukofsky as the other poets who accepted the 'objectivist' tag - Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi and George Oppen) has led some to think of 'objectivist' poetry as a momentary rekindling, or dilution, of Ezra Pound's 'Imagisme'.

There are indeed clear links and similarities between Imagism and 'Objectivism'. The desire to find an authentic twentieth century voice for poetry which occupied Ezra Pound in the years before the 1914-18 war, was still current when Zukofsky was establishing his ideas in the late 1920s and early thirties. In addition there was a continuing need to establish a genuine American literature, building on the ground cleared by Walt Whitman. Although the champion of this cause was W.C. Williams rather than Ezra Pound, Pound did say that he felt the need for a 'Risorgimento' or renaissance in American literature, and that Walt Whitman was the 'American keynote' in Patria Mia (written 1913).<sup>7</sup> Coupled with this was a sense of an American tradition and identity which he needed to affirm. A link with Walt Whitman and the American tradition was also felt by

Zukofsky. A dissatisfaction with the state of poetry and the world of publishing, and a desire to do something about it was expressed by Zukofsky in 'Program "Objectivists" 1931'. After a statement of 'an objectivist's' tenets the 'Program' goes on to say, clearly expressing an admiration for Pound, that

Implied structure of names generally cherished as famous, but not mentioned in this editor's American Poetry 1920-30 or included among the contributors to this issue, is prompted by the historical method of the Chinese sage who wrote, "Then for nine reigns there was no literary production".

None at all, because there was neither consciousness of the "objectively perfect" nor an interest in clear or vital "particulars". Nothing - neither new object nor the stripping of an old to the light - was "aimed at". Strabismus may be a topic of interest between two Strabismics; those who see straight look away.

.... The materials of poetry:  
The small magazines of today and the very recent past must be praised for helping to keep up an interest in these matters. Mr. Pound has treated the subject in detail in The English Journal (Chicago) for November, 1930. The small magazines are to be praised for standing on their own against the business of the publishing racket, the "pseudo-kulchuh" of certain national liberal weeklies published in New York, and the guidance of the American university.

Pound, Williams, McAlmon, Cummings, Reznikoff, etc., have had to publish a good deal of their work in privately printed editions. In every case the work was worth publishing, a statement not applicable to 95% or more of the usual publishers' lists. At least one American publisher could save his face, and add honor and intelligence to publishing, by reprinting Ezra Pound's critical works - Spirit of Romance, Pavannes and Divisions, Instigations, How to Read, etc. - all of the utmost importance to my discussion of the materials of poetry.

(pp 269-271)

It must be said here that certain personal axes are being ground in this statement. A deprecatory attitude towards the 'American university' was expressed in 'Poem beginning "The"' (see chapter II on 'early works'), and acrimony



towards the world of publishing was something which Zukofsky was to express repeatedly (see chapter III on 'Editing'). However, the feeling that something was wrong and had to be rectified comes over clearly in the piece.

Both the 'Imagiste' Pound and the 'objectivist' Zukofsky felt, at different stages of the first third of the twentieth century, that the present state of poetry needed putting right and this implies a responsibility to both the future and to the past. Writing about Walt Whitman, Pound said that

I honour him for he prophesied me while I can only recognize him as a forebear of whom I ought to be proud.

... I am (in common with every educated man) an heir of the ages and I demand my birthright. Yet if Walt Whitman represented his time in language acceptable to my standard of intellectual-artistic living he would belie his time and nation. And yet I am but one of his 'ages and ages' 'encrustations' or to be exact an encrustation of the next age. The vital part of my message, taken from the sap and fibre of America, is the same as his.

... It seems to me I should like to drive Whitman into the old world. I sledge, he drill - and to scourge America with all the old beauty. (For Beauty is an accusation) and with a thousand thongs from Homer to Yeats, from Theocritus to Marcel Schwob. This desire is because I am young and impatient, were I old and wise I should content myself in seeing and saying that these things will come. But now, since I am by no means sure it would be true prophecy, I am fain set my own hand to the labour. 8

The characterisation of Whitman as the 'drill' or the breaker of ground, together with the last sentence of the quotation shows Pound's concern to alter the present for the benefit of the future. A telling similarity between Pound and Zukofsky is in their belief in the necessity of

using the past to create this new order, fusing it with the present to energise poetry and provide a basis for the future - what Zukofsky, in the quotation from the 'Program' called 'the stripping of an old (object) to the light'.

In Pound's Imagist work the chief expression of this is his adoption and adaption of classical Chinese poetry, allied with his enthusiasm for Ernest Fenollosa's The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.<sup>9</sup> A key to the importance of the Chinese poems in Pound's formulation of Imagism is suggested by recurrences in the poems in Lustra.<sup>10</sup> Similar objects and usages may be followed through a number of poems. Thus, in 'Liu Ch'e' there are 'the leaves' and 'a wet leaf that clings to the threshold'; in 'Fan Piece, For Her Imperial Lord' there is 'frost on the grass-blade'; in 'Ts'ai Chi'h' 'the petals', 'the rose leaves' and the ochre that 'clings to the stone'; in 'In a Station of the Metro' 'Petals on a wet, black bough'; in 'Heather' with the 'petal-like frames'. Words such as 'petals', 'leaves', 'wet' and 'clings' recur with an uncommon regularity, as if Pound was testing the possibilities of arriving at a variety of results from a very limited bank of words and ideas within a single structural model. This suggests that the poems represent not an observed world but an intellectual landscape which is controlled by strict and narrow limitations of content and scope. Many of the poems in Lustra and the later volume Cathay<sup>11</sup> are translations from the Chinese. Hugh Kenner suggested that

Pound has had both the boldness and resource to make a new form, similar in effect to that of the original, which permanently extends the bounds of

English verse.

... Translating does not, for him, differ in essence from any other poetic job; as the poet begins by seeing, so the translator by reading; but his reading must be a kind of seeing. 12

To extend this line or argument, if the translator is successful in following this scheme, then he becomes a poet himself within the process of translation, for he is interpreting a world himself, in a process closely allied to the 'original' poet's process of creation, he is 'making it new'.

The translations in Cathay allowed Pound to explore an Imagiste form which was at once subjective and expanded or discursive. This process had begun in Lustra in a poem called 'The Garden' which begins by echoing the haiku-like poems referred to above:

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall  
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington  
Gardens,

(p93)

It is only essentially the inclusion of the last three or six words that distinguish it from Pound's contemporary haiku. The poem so far is restrained and spare and could be the result of observation. Immediately, however, the poem takes a subjective direction with the line:

And she is dying piece-meal  
of a sort of emotional anaemia.

(ibid)

Suddenly we are in an area of statement which has to be applied to the observed moment, and the poem is no longer strictly empirically derived. The applied nature of this emotional dimension is emphasised by the poet's introducing





blown against a wall'. If the poem had remained with the haiku form, this discourse would have been unnecessary, it all could have been derived from the condensed form, and yet this does not remove the possibility of its being an Imagist poem - the terms 'haiku' and 'Imagist' are not interchangeable. 'The Garden' does not betray Pound's outline of the essential prerequisites of Imagist practice. In opening up the condensed image Pound takes care to use the precise word, the 'real thing' - the 'object' - giving it in this case a subjective and direct treatment.

The Cathay translations take this extended or moving image and fuse it into the literary world provided by the Chinese poems. Imagism, for Pound, had to mean more than pretty impressions, it had to do more than supply 'effects'. Pound's contact with Chinese poetry percolated through Fenollosa's concept of the ideogram as a system of poetic form, to become the catalyst he was looking for to develop the poetic convictions that he had expressed as genuine Imagism. The Chinese translations pointed a way forward and added a direction to Pound's thinking.

In the same year that Pound wrote 'I am on my head with Fenollosa notes', (1914),<sup>13</sup> he was also writing to Amy Lowell dissociating himself from the Imagist 'machinery' that she was setting up. Pound wrote 'the present machinery was largely or wholly my making. I ordered "the public" (i.e. a few hundred people and a few reviewers) to take note of certain poems' and 'I should like the name "Imagisme" to retain some sort of meaning. It stands, or I should like it to stand for hard light, clear edges. I can not trust any



the poetry that Pound grasps at rather than the poems; in making anew he sees a need for the poetry and gives it life. In lending his voice to the Chinese poet he is lending him the voice of a living twentieth-century poet and the speech that the Chinese poet stirs in him is the very life that could push forward and dynamise the static image.

The poems in Cathay display none of the listlessness of 'The Garden' nor do they show signs of the frozen aspect of 'In a Station of the Metro'.<sup>18</sup> The 'Four Poems of Departure' in particular show Pound's assimilation of Fenollosa's ideas of the ideogram's possibilities for motion. The first two of these poems show this very clearly. In 'Separation on the River Kiang' and 'Taking Leave of a Friend' each line is an extended unit of sense, separate from the lines preceding and following it. Each line contains two objects pivoting around a verb and implies a component of motion or direction—most commonly in the verb, but certainly at some point within the line. The first poem, 'Separation on the River Kiang' reads:

Ko-Jin goes west from Ko-kaku-ro,  
The smoke-flowers are blurred over the river.  
His lone sail blots the far sky  
And now I see only the river,  
The long Kiang, reaching heaven.

(p147)

Each line is separated from the others and is a cohesive unit having a great degree of internal dependence. The first line breaks down into three points of attention — firstly the proper noun 'Ko-Jin', then the component of motion 'goes west from', and finally another proper noun 'Ko-kaku-ro'. The syntax is being used to give the line a shape in total

sympathy with the sense, typographically describing the departure and the beginning, not only of the poem, but of the separation. The second line also breaks down into three sub-units, 'the smoke-flowers' and the 'river' being the two objects which span the poem. Besides being an object, however, the river here has direction or motion which only reads true as the compound 'over the river'. The verb in the line is really part of the first object - 'the smoke-flowers are blurred' and, in this case, ties the objects together into the line's direction. The structural edges of the line are blurred and yet still discernible, again, in sympathy with the sense. The third line again contains a compound, but in this instance it is concentrated at one end of the line, to add emphasis to its direction and movement. This line takes on further significance in the overall scheme of the poem in that it marks a shift in the locus of the poem. Up to this point Ko-Jin's position is in the foreground, he dominates the first line, and the second serves to add depth and dimension to it. At this point however, the poem takes a step backward and the observer's position gains prominence. The lone sail blotting the sky transports Ko-Jin from view, leaving the observer to meditate on the river which, as the agent of separation, achieves dominance in the mind. These lines work structurally in a similar way to that of the first three. The poem ends in a way that is meditative without being listless or despairing. The phrase 'reaching heaven' is dynamic, it has motion and direction, and it implies at once the apparent length and distance of the river, and yet also the proximity of heaven, with all the implications this has for the journey Ko-Jin is making, and

for the one who is left behind.

The second poem, 'Taking Leave of a Friend', has its lines structured in a similar manner. The poem reads:

Blue mountains to the north of the walls,  
White river winding about them;  
Here we must make separation  
And go out through a thousand miles of dead grass.

Mind like a floating white cloud,  
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances  
Who bow over their clasped hands at a distance.  
Our horses neigh to each other  
as we are departing.

(p147)

In this poem the internal structure of each line, and the separation of line from line, work very much like 'Separation on the River Kiang'. The overall structure is different but achieves the same end, that of delineating the progress of the sense. The first stanza emphasises the narrative element of the content, the second emphasises the meditative. Both stanzas begin with pairs of lines which are parallel to each other in sense, and begin with a similar construction. In stanza one this appears as 'Blue Mountains' and 'White River', and the second stanza has 'Mind like' and 'Sunset like'. In each case, the line pair establishes the context for the stanza - in the first this is a spatial environment, and in the second a meditative mental environment. Both stanzas end with the hard fact of the departure, although in the first the final two lines are devoted to this and in the second it is left to the last single line. The meditation is kept in close contact with its subject, it implies movement and departure with words and ideas such as the 'floating white cloud', the 'parting of old acquaintances',



and a 'distance'. The meditation gives way to the physical departure, however, and is quietly torn away by the final line.

It is the structure of the Cathay poems that is their most important feature. For Pound the important fact represented by Fenollosa's work was that it offered the poet 'verbal definition' through ideogrammic method. In lending the Chinese poet his voice, language, and the shape of the musical phrase within that language, he was providing for himself the means by which poetic and syntactical structure could be used to add dynamism to the image, and a cohesive harmony to the poem. The test-bed is the poetry of 'Rihaku', and the result is at once a form of translation which has a valid originality and a developmental aspect that was to push forward his own poetic thinking.

Natan Zach has defined Pound's concept of the image as 'content conceived of as form.'<sup>19</sup> The word 'content' is perhaps a little loose, but it is partially this view that is put forward in Pound's short 1915 essay 'As for Imagisme'. In this piece Pound brings together his contemporary thinking on Imagism in the light of Vorticism, informed by his interest in Fenollosa. It is an error to regard Vorticism as the end of Imagism in Pound's thinking - the 1914 advertisement for BLAST proclaimed that it included 'Discussion of Cubism, Futurism, Imagisme and all Vital Forms of Modern Art'<sup>20</sup> - because the Vorticist period of Pound's work marks a new awareness of what Imagist principle was all about. The relationship is explained by Pound in 'As for Imagisme'. When initially discussing the

meaning of the word 'Imagisme' he writes:

'I cannot guarantee that my thoughts about it will remain absolutely stationary. I spend the greater part of my time meditating the arts, and I should find this very dull if it were not possible for me occasionally to solve some corner of the mystery, or at least to formulate more clearly my own thoughts as to the nature of some mystery or equation'.<sup>21</sup>

The implication here is that Imagism for Pound was not a fixed poetic position which allowed for no deviation but was, rather, a statement of poetic values which, in the light of experience, could be supplemented and modified. The image, he says, may be redefined as 'a vortex or cluster of fused ideas... endowed with energy', but much of the original thinking on Imagism is still relevant and 'too self-evident to need any defence whatsoever'. The new element in Pound's formulation is the emphasis on 'energy', something for which the influence of the work of Fenollosa is at least partially responsible, as Hugh Kenner points out in The Pound Era.<sup>22</sup> Vorticism is wholly dependent on energy, a fact that itself becomes self-evident when the definition of a Vortex is considered, for a Vortex is indeed purely a manifestation of energy. That which is perceived by the senses is not the Vortex itself but other elements drawn into it, depending on it for their motion and shape. Pound states that 'energy or emotion, expresses itself in form'<sup>23</sup> and that this expression in poetry is the presentation of an image. The image is being reinforced in its position in Pound's thinking as the major defining agent of the poetic object; it has become an important manifestation of 'the primary pigment'.

Informed by this awareness, the original Imagist doctrine (with the possible exception of the definition of the image as 'an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time') may remain intact, although its focus is altered by supplementation. Hardness is no longer a prime motive on its own, but must be vitalised with energy expressed as form in the



presentation of its image. This view represents a movement away from the static. It is in this context that the poem 'Medallion',<sup>24</sup> that closes the 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' series, may be seen as a rejection of Imagist values for it is a rejection of static hardness, rather than of the 'hard, clear light' of the energy-endowed image. The poem is a recognition of limitations rather than a divorce, something which is independent of any argument about whether its voice is that of Pound or of Mauberley.

The words chosen in the poem refer constantly to the hard and brittle, the effect is of something which cannot be scratched away but can only be reduced by shattering. The list continues throughout the poem - 'porcelain', the 'clear soprano' of the piano, the 'sleek head', 'gold-yellow', 'braids' which appear to be 'spun from metal', 'intractable amber', 'glaze', 'bounding-line' and 'topaz' - all have the quality of hard-edged brittleness. Even the reference to 'honey-red', rather than 'honey-yellow' or 'rose-red', besides having descriptive precision, implies a deep, shining gem colour.

The static hardness of these references is echoed in other aspects of the poem's construction. The marriage of syntax and rhythm coupled with the restrained use of verbs results in a poem made up of moments of observation, in the sense of statements of momentary reflection. Thus the poem may be seen more as a passive mirror, lacking an active component. 'The good artist ... can, within limits, not only record but create'. The inference in 'Medallion' may be that vers libre and specifically Imagism can, if they are not strictly controlled, tend towards recording rather than creation. The important point for Pound as a Vorticist is that he has formulated 'more clearly [his] own thoughts as to the nature of some mystery or equation'. Imagism, in order to progress, must rely on the 'creative-inventive faculty', rather



words dominates the resultant poem. In 'The Original Language: Some Postwar Translations of Catullus' Richard Emil Braun illustrates the technique by quoting the original Latin directly above Zukofsky's translation:

an, continentor quod sedetis insulsi  
contem an ducenti, non putatis ausuriam  
me und ducentes irrumere sesores?  
atqui putate: namque totius vobis  
frontem tabernae sopionibus soribam.

Incontinent air, wood, seated asses, sulk a  
century, two centuries, and what assurance  
I can't run thru two hundred rumps, my assessors?  
I'd quip at that: name tag to his whopper on the 28  
front of the tavern, scorpion wee boys, inscribed

Towards the end of Braun's article he states that 'Few who have read even so scant a sampling will doubt that the Zukofsky CATULLUS contains splendid "original" poetry, and this is what matters'. This is indeed true, any reader with the slightest knowledge of Zukofsky's work will instantly see the poet's techniques at work in the above lines - pursue, for example, the 'seated asses' in line one and 'my assessors' in line three. However, it takes the resolute confidence displayed in the theoretical statements referred to above, together with a fine sensibility and a delicacy of technique, to walk the thin line drawn between 'splendid "original" poetry' and 'weaving arabesques'. In a review of the University of California Press edition of "A" Bob Lumsden dealt with Zukofsky's Catullus as a 'triumph of the poet's art over his theory', and went on to say that

If each sound is part of a unique and particular meaning, as Zukofsky seems to believe, the mystery of translation needs something more momentous by way of introduction than the conventional prefatory profession of incompetence. What is really wanted is some sort of poetic recognition of the intricacies involved, some "explanation" of the marvellous transubstantiation. (There is a way out of this difficulty by taking up the Ted Hughes/Peter Brook Orghast position that sound and meaning are tied across languages. But this solution is not available to Zukofsky because of his intrinsic insistence in the specific: "it is impossible to communicate anything but particulars - historic and contemporary".) 29

The first thing to be said about this is that Zukofsky's belief in meaning bound up in sound did incline towards the idea that 'sound and meaning are tied across languages', as he stated clearly in the 1969 Contemporary Literature interview (see later chapter).<sup>30</sup> More important, however, is that Lumsden shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the 'particular'. If a 'thing' made of words - i.e., a poem - is the object under consideration, then the sound of the words is surely a 'specific' - a particular worthy of interest. Language, after all, has nothing other than sound by which to convey its meaning, and writing is nothing more than a graphic score of sound patterns. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that out of this relationship, cross-ties of dependency should arise.

That the sound of Catullus' verse should be an object worthy of becoming the main thrust of translation is not surprising when the relationship between an 'objectivist' and the objects or materials of his verse is understood. This was admirably illustrated by Charles Reznikoff in 'First, there is the Need':

With respect to the treatment of subject matter in verse and the use of the term "objectivist" and "objectivism" let me again refer to the rules with respect to testimony in a court of law. Evidence to be admissible in a trial cannot state conclusion of fact: it must state the facts themselves. For example, a witness in an action for negligence cannot say: the man injured was negligent in crossing the street. He must limit himself to a description of how the man crossed: did he stop before crossing? Did he look? Did he listen? The conclusions of fact are for the jury and let us add, in our case, for the reader. 31

For the objectivist, the emotional component of the poem and the conclusions to be made, must arise from the particulars and the structure, rather than being imposed upon them by the poet. A simple and cogent example of this is "A"-17, which marks the death of Zukofsky's friend William Carlos Williams.<sup>32</sup> The movement contains not elegiac poetry, but a series of quotations from Williams' writing concerned with

his relationship with the Zukofskys. Titled 'A Coronal for Floss' it is also a passing-bell which manages to convey, without statement, the grief expressed in Zukofsky's letters of the period.

Although Zukofsky regarded Pound as being amongst the most consistent of poets in achieving 'objectification', the kind of conclusion and commentary found in a poem such as 'The Garden' or even the internalised suggestion of 'In a Station of the Metro' had increasingly less of a place in 'objectivist' practice as its formulation evolved. Some of the earlier 'objectivist' poems such as 'Poem Beginning "The"', allowed a certain amount of comment to be included, but it was gradually cut out wherever possible.

This evolution of 'an objectivist's' principles as much as anything else distinguishes objectivism from Imagism. Once Pound moved on and Imagism failed to respond to his 'need', it lost its directness and straightness or simplicity. Even Pound's disciple Hilda Doolittle - 'H.D. Imagiste' - was fond of the image for its decorative effects - something which caused Louis Zukofsky to hold her in very low esteem. I intend to demonstrate that Zukofsky continued to apply the principles of his poetic theory throughout his career, evolving them and finding new sides to their character, to such an extent that the final movements of "A", written towards the end of his life, push the implications of his ideas into a whole new and varied area of possibilities.

The links between Imagism and 'objectivism' are twofold. Primarily they had a common root in that both Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky felt the need for directness and 'straight-talking' to re-establish the criteria of poetry. The result of this was a number of ideas held in common about the way this ought to be achieved, including 'direct



treatment', precision of language, a regard for the 'musical phrase' and the energising effect of the literary past. This common root is expressed by Charles Reznikoff in the heading to 'First, there is the need' which reads 'First, there is the need; then, the way, the name, the formula.' The script then goes on to outline his debt to Imagism. To use a somewhat hazardous term, this makes the line between Imagism and objectivism something of a tradition. Perhaps more accurately, they are stages of the same revolution, arising from the same intention, but matching their means to a changing set of circumstances. Having said that, mention must be made of William Carlos Williams, who has been called in different places both 'Imagist' and 'objectivist'. In reality he was neither, but rather a third manifestation of the same direction, creating a third and important variation on a common theme.

The other obvious link between 'Imagism' and 'objectivism' is Ezra Pound himself. Having long since moved on from 'Imagisme' in the late 1920s, it was he who noticed and encouraged Zukofsky on the appearance of 'Poem Beginning "The"' and the early movements of "A", and it was through his influence that Zukofsky was invited to edit the February 1931 edition of Poetry (Chicago). Pound brought Zukofsky to Europe, appeared nominally on the advisory board of the Objectivist Press and continued to offer advice and criticism throughout the thirties and, to a decreasing extent, after the war. He seemed to regard Zukofsky as a successor, indeed something of a son and heir, which was reflected in the tone of some of their letters in which they referred to one another as 'Sonny' and 'Poppa'. 'Sonny', however, began to realise that on some issues he was rather in advance of 'Poppa', although it must be said that Zukofsky was always one of Pound's most committed defenders. Though a Russian Jew, Zukofsky never would accept, for example, that Pound was at all anti-semitic. Indeed, in the later

years of Pound's incarceration the relationship changed, almost as if the roles had reversed, with the Zukofskys feeling an almost parental concern for Pound's welfare.

The actual degree of influence of Imagism on 'an objectivist's' practice is difficult to quantify, particularly since the issue is blurred by their response to the broadly similar poetic need suggested above. Some points are clear, however. One is that Pound continued to comment upon and criticize Zukofsky's work throughout the 1930's and more importantly, Zukofsky continued to send it to him for that purpose. This implies that Zukofsky continued to respect Pound but also that Pound had a certain respect for Zukofsky. Both saw their criteria fulfilled in the other. After getting the editorship of the February 1931 edition of Poetry through the intervention of Pound, Zukofsky saw the benefits of using the more established influential poet as a publicist by bringing him in to the advisory board of the Objectivist Press, and Pound saw fit to accept it. The important point to be made is that there are two Imagisms and two objectivisms, or rather, two meanings suggested by each word. Both poets distanced themselves from the notion of a movement and yet in each case a movement can be suggested and, perhaps, even identified. The Imagist movement is a justifiable shorthand for the work of poets such as Richard Aldington, H.D. and F.S. Flint, and a case can be made for an objectivist movement embracing the work of George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff and Carl Rakosi. The other Imagism and the other objectivism are the independent criteria and principles set out by Pound and Zukofsky, and the poetry by which they put them into practice. It is here that the most telling and interesting relationship is to be found, and here that one can find both the strongest link between the two (the similarly felt 'need', and an overlapping of principles), and the most obvious difference.

For Pound, once he had defined 'the need' and set out his principles for supplying it, his own theory and practice developed to a point at which the term 'Imagist' was no longer an adequate description. Zukofsky, however, continued to work within the framework of 'objectivist' practice, developing it and finding new directions in which to pursue it. Clearly, this says something about the nature of the theoretical framework of the 'objectivist' poetics, and at the same time throws up a number of questions - what are 'an objectivist's' principles, what is an objectivist poem and is it possible that the principles and techniques which inform the short poems of ALL, equally sustain a work on the scale of "A"? It is to these questions that I address the following chapters, looking specifically at Zukofsky's poems and editorship in the light of his theoretical statements. I suggest that an 'objectivist' approach, i.e., an adherence to 'the objective' as defined in 'Program "Objectivists" 1931', is the basis for the structural innovation that is, to quote William Carlos Williams, Zukofsky's 'new measure', his 'singing anew'. 33



## CHAPTER II

### 'Early days and student excellences' - Zukofsky's early poetry

In 1941 in a letter to William Carlos Williams,<sup>1</sup> Zukofsky wrote that he was sometimes mature and sometimes not, depending on the success of the poem not youth or old age - like all poets'. In his review of

55 Poems Williams had suggested that

The poems are uneven. They try a different approach to the reader's attention, a very different approach so that there are many factors involved in their failure - even tho' their successes are of a superlative quality when achieved. Both the writer and the reader cannot vary a hairline from the purpose. But we are all variable in mood, in ability - mornings and evenings make us different men, very seldom are we at a peak of interest in anything let alone poetry and difficult poetry at that.

The poems are arranged chronologically beginning with early days and student excellences, an ear for excellencies and for supreme excellences only. There's a hard start. Zukofsky picked up the felicities of all he had displayed to him by his teachers, the essences of Chaucer caught in a phrase - a sort of poetic chemistry, an almost too fine perception, but not without an overall strength that proved itself qualified to make the selection. This was brought together in his poem beginning "The". This is about all he saved from that period. It stays together and is still effective. 2

Zukofsky's reply had clarified Williams' words by stating that 'none of the poems written after June 1924 come literally under "student days and student excellencies" (a damn good phrase to use in discussing "The" by the way) - That is almost all but 2 or 3 were written after I got my M.A. - and curiously enough those that displease me most now are not among the 2 or 3 "early" ones.' Whilst taking Zukofsky's point about maturity, it is true that from a large body of early work, only four pre-1924 poems had been made available by 1941. Besides 'Poem beginning "The"', they are three of the series '29 Poems' - numbers 2 ('Not much more than being' - January 1924), 12 ('Millenium of sun -' February 1924), and 24 ('tam cari capitis -' November 1923).<sup>3</sup> The three

are short, single image poems that reflect the most readily recognisable form of the objective principle, which is the attempt to form the single moment into a self sufficient object through the use of tightly controlled language or, in Zukofsky's terms, the desire to achieve 'objectification' through 'sincerity'. The first poem numerically, brings to mind George Oppen's Discrete Series<sup>4</sup>, and the resemblance is not due merely to a similarity of subject matter. Oppen's approach is firmly empirical so that an instant of experience is formed directly into a complex of language on the page. Oppen describes the process in the following terms:

I'm really concerned with the substantive, with the subject of the sentence, with what we are talking about, and not rushing over the subject - matter in order to make a comment about it. It is still a principle with me, of more than poetry, to notice, to state, to lay down the substantive for its own sake .... The important thing is that if we are talking about the nature of reality, then we are not really talking about our comment about it, we are talking about the apprehension of some thing, whether it is or not, whether one can make a thing of it or not.... All the little nouns are the ones I like the most: the deer, the sun and so on. You say these perfectly little words and you're asserting that the sun is ninety-three million miles away, and that there is shade because of shadows, and more, who knows? It's a tremendous structure to have built out of a few small nouns. I do think they exist and it doesn't particularly embarrass me, it's certainly an act of faith [which means] that the nouns do refer to something; that it's there, that it's true, the whole implication of these nouns: that appearances represent reality, whether or not they misrepresent it: that this in which the thing takes place, this thing is here, and<sup>5</sup> that these things do take place.

Oppen's 'act of faith', or 'commitment to an ethic', is what differentiates the poet from a mere observer. In practical terms it is the concern to manipulate, or direct, the raw materials of the observed moment into a perfectly crafted poetic 'object'. Thus, 'the meaning of a poem is in the cadences and the shape of the lines and the pulse of the thought which is given by these lines'. This is essentially an affirmation of Zukofsky's phrase 'the direction of historic and contemporary particulars', in that the faithfully noted particulars are



is between the flat tableau presentation of the shaft with its turning wheel and the working men, and the spatial relationships employed in the description of the sky and river. The constellation, the Leopard, appears physically above the 'summer river'. The word 'under' is on the line below but linked to 'the summer river', partially by the dash after 'river', partially by its position reflecting its meaning, and partially by the space that divides it from 'The Dragon'. It does have a link with 'The Dragon' however, by virtue of appearing on the same line, implying that the dragon is a reflection in the water rather than an observation of the sky itself. In that dimensions in space are defined by time, the poem achieves a kind of objectification. As the poem concentrates on a stopped moment the time elapsed through its measure is used almost entirely to determine physical space. Thus the laws that condition perception of the solid object are used to make an object of the poem, and the particulars are furnished with direction.

The approach is different in '24' ('Tam cari capitis'), of November 1923. Although the language is spare, it does not show the clipped starkness of '2'. Written as an address, the poem follows the time sequence of speech, with no rounded ending:

Tam cari capitis

I

Unlovely you called yourself  
And at once I felt I was never lovely:  
I who had few truths to go to  
Found you doubting what I loved.

Now I make you lovely my own way.  
Unmentioned were we certain  
Of a greater, in small assurances  
Others may find trivial:

II

The same in all weathers.

And not till there is an end to singing  
Will you go,  
As you have always gone, quiet:

But like your birds that wake in the night  
To sleep again:

The line endings in this poem divide separate units of verbal meaning, so that each line is a discrete statement, with the minimum of sense dependency between one line and another. This is most completely achieved in the first stanza, in which the complete statement is built up from a series of cumulative steps. The time sequence of speech is used to ally the pace of the poem's motion to that of the process of emotionally charged thought, reflecting the poem's subject. The first part of the poem is a progress from doubt to self reassurance, and the second part an examination of the basis of that reassurance. The result is that the poem is composed entirely of the 'intellective' 'gaseous' state without a second 'solid' component. 'Sincerity' is achieved in that 'intellective' particulars result in an 'intellective' poem through modification or control of technique. In that 'the abstract idea is particular, too', the poem achieves its 'maturity', yet it becomes an example of 'sincerity' without 'objectification'. This is largely due to a failure of the relationship between structure and meaning in the second part of the poem. Although the meaning is carried in the clipped phrases of this section, the structure fails to support and add to it, and 'perfect rest' is not achieved. Recognition that sincerity was rarely achieved meant that objectification could not be an essential criterion in deciding whether or not to retain a poem, and 'tam cari capitis' remains Zukofsky's earliest collected poem.

The bulk of the poems of the period were rejected and never published. Many of these were put together between cardboard covers under the title The First Seasons by Dunn Wyth,<sup>9</sup> a collection in two sections, 'The First Book' and 'The First Seasons', with a note on the title page which reads:

'The First Seasons' (including The First Book) was written by me ca. 1920-1924 and is not to be published as the pseudonym intended them; (pronounce "done with".)  
Louis Zukofsky January 23rd, 1941.



The volume contains fifty-eight poems, many of which are derivative and largely conventional, relying heavily on rigid rhyme schemes and clichéd rhythm patterns. There is a sense of experimentation in the work, of the Yiddish speaking adolescent tuning his ear to adopted speech and literary patterns, as for example, the first poem of The First Book:

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.

Evidence of the development of Zukofsky's thinking lies in the contrast between this and the second poem of the volume:

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.

There is quite a step forward from 'To the Publisher' to this poem in the direction of the later work. Assuming it to be contemporary with the rest of The First Book and before The First Seasons, it illustrates Zukofsky's comment on maturity. Although it does not display the control of the later work there is evidence of the cutting away of inessentials, and of the building of a solid base from the proliferation

of small nouns. The raw materials of the objective lens have been established but without the control needed to bring the rays to focus. There is sufficient control, however, to lift it above most of the poems that surround it in The First Book and The First Seasons. One example of this is the conscious use of line endings to echo breaks in sense and rhythm. The line then becomes a contained unit of sound and sense, serving to build the overall rhythmical structure, involving the five implied pauses that the line endings, used in this way, create.

An unpublished poem of the period which does not appear in The First Seasons serves to illustrate the defining defect of these early rejected works, the unsuccessful direction of the particulars:

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 a transient being by the chance collisions  
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 3rd, 1923<sup>10</sup>

This poem would appear to display neither the care for detail (sincerity), nor an objectifying structure. Unlike the previous poem, which displayed an early and simple manifestation of Zukofsky's idea of the physiological nature of poetry in its breathing pauses, the line endings here are all carried over by the sense, with the exception of the first line of each stanza, although there is a degree of rhythmical independence in each line. In order for these linear concerns to become a unified structure they must be integrated with a precise control of words and expression. It is on this point that the poem fails to meet the poet's own criteria. After the interesting setting of 'infinitude' against 'precision', the poem is immediately let down by

the weak phrase 'things that last/Awhile', which in turn has no support from 'and go as wind'. 'Music passed/Into transient being' has an awkwardness which is only emphasised by the weak observation that follows. The inaccurate observation represented by 'the chance collisions/ of winds among poised leaves', in conjunction with the lack of direction of the unqualified word 'poised', means that the poem breaks away from the regime implied by the 'objective lens' - 'the direction of historic and contemporary particulars'. Instead, the idea is allowed to take precedence over the particulars and the words that are there to represent them. As Zukofsky later stated 'the single word is the absolute symbol for thing and texture and unnecessary verbal arpeggios do not add to meaning'.<sup>11</sup> This relationship between 'thing and texture' and the words, puts a bond of responsibility on the poet - in Oppen's words it makes the craft of poetry into 'an act of faith', so that any inadequacy of perception or response results in a poem without validity. The problem is a breakdown of what Zukofsky described as 'sincerity', in which

'Shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of (if there is continuance) completed sound or structure, melody or form. Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody. Shapes suggest<sup>12</sup> themselves; and the mind senses and receives awareness.'

This represents the 'act of faith' at its most demanding, for not only is the poet 'thinking with the things as they exist', but also 'directing them along a line of melody'. The relationships may be expressed in terms of the objective lens, in that 'thinking with the things as they exist' is the clarity of sharp focus, and 'directing them along a line of melody' is the act of focussing or resolving the 'rays' into a poem. Thus, the role of poet as objective lens, or lens-operator is not a passive one involving recording or fixing of received images, but represents the basis for a creative poetics. It is the



development and modification of the poet's response to this role, and his continued exploration of its implications, that shapes the development from these early explorations to the later publications. In his dissertation The Finer Mathematician: An Introduction to the Work of Louis Zukofsky Stephen R. Mandell suggests that

Much of the critical confusion that exists about Zukofsky arises from the fact that many of the critics who have dealt with him make the mistake of judging him solely as a doctrinaire "objectivist", even though he has repeatedly denied the existence of an actual "movement". In [a] recent article, L.S. Dembo says, "Zukofsky is impatient with labels; he accepts the term "objectivist", but (William Carlos Williams notwithstanding) he denies that there is or ever was anything called Objectivism. Despite this observation Dembo goes on to say, "still, his poetic values do spring from a coherent philosophic context," and proceeds to discuss Zukofsky as if there were a coherent objectivist philosophy.

Not only has Zukofsky denied the existence of "Objectivism", he has said that he never even used the word; according to him, it was Harriet Monroe's term. In Zukofsky's estimation, the entire Objectivist phase was the naive action of an immature artist who, if he had it to do over again, would have avoided the entire situation ....Although the so-called "objectivist" doctrine, as stated in Poetry, did as Zukofsky said, bring things "down to the bare bone", it was a product of his early career. As regards the major body of his work, then, objectivism was an interesting but rather unimportant diversion. <sup>13</sup>

If 'objectivism' never existed, then the poet could never be a 'doctrinaire objectivist' and neither could something which never existed be 'an interesting but rather unimportant diversion'. An 'objectivist' movement as such never did exist, and Zukofsky's playing with the idea of a political and welfare union of writers under the umbrella of The Objectivist Press was arguably a short-lived 'product of his early career'. However, to dismiss 'objectivism' as a phase which the poet grew out of is unconvincing in the light of Zukofsky's later work. The definition of an objective that appeared in 'Program "Objectivists" 1931', which was modified from "A"-6 (1930), was a definition of poetic perception and response rather than a prescription of dogmatic principle. As such it finds its echoes in the definition of Zukofsky's poetics in "A"-12, 33.

An integral  
Lower limit speech  
Upper limit music

(1950)

(p138)

and, later still, in his statement that

...the word is so much of a physiological thing that its articulation, as against other words, will make an 'object'. Now you can make an object that is in a sense purely image and, unless you're a great poet, it can get too heavy. You will become one of those painter-poets who are, really, too frivolous; they exist in every generation. You know, they look at something and they immediately want to write a poem. That's not the way to make an image; it ought to be involved with the cadence - something very few people realize. What I mean is the kind of thing you get in Chapman's "the unspeakable good liquor there". Obviously, the man who wrote that knew what it was to gargle something down his throat. So body, voice, in handling words - that concerns the poet.

... I'd say the business of writing is to see as much as you can, to hear as much as you can, and if you think at all to think without clutter; then as you put the things together,<sup>14</sup> try to be concise. (1968)

The principle of 'the direction of historic and contemporary particulars' is one which finds its echoes throughout Zukofsky's career. As the central principle of the 'objectivist' statements - indeed as the 'objective' itself - it provides a valid meaning and justification for the word 'objectivist' as applied to the poet's work. In order to avoid unnecessary verbal contortions the word 'objectivism' also has its uses in this sense.

'An Objective' and the terms 'sincerity' and 'objectification' appeared in print in 1930-31 as the result of an already established poetic principle. The concepts did not spring from nowhere, but represented five years of directed work. It is for this reason that the poems of 1923-24 are of interest, in that it is these poems rather than the 1925-30 work that represent the only true 'pre-objectivist' period, a feeling of the way. When the 'objective' is not being 'aimed at', the

the result is a poem such as 'Devotions' (December 23rd, 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.

15

No attempt is made in this poem to direct particulars, the subject is a tool to achieve the form rather than the other way round. The expression is awkward as in 'A sunbeam comes to survey' or 'Lifting its host who is kind', or it is incongruously 'poetic' as in 'Would what oppresses', 'vexes till day' or 'lowly earth'. The resulting poem lacks 'sincerity' and, whilst using a conventional form, does not 'sing anew'. Later in his career, Zukofsky was able to use conventional or discarded forms and make of them a new poem. Of his use of the sestina for 'Mantis', he said

I suppose there are two types of natures. One is aware of the two-hundred-year-old oak, and it's still alive and it's going to have some use to him; the other one is going to say cut it down and build a supermarket. I'm not inclined to be the latter nor do I want to imitate a traditional form, but if that thing has lasted two hundred years and has some merit in it, it is possible I can use it and somehow in transferring it into words - as I said in "Aleatorical indeterminate" - make something new of it. And the same for the form of the sestina.

... Williams said it was impossible to write sonnets. I don't know whether anybody has been careful about it. I wrote five hundred when I was young and threw them away. Then I wrote A-7 and a canzone, which is quite different from the sonnet, as Pound pointed out. A very intricate form. 16

The essential phrase is 'nor do I want to imitate a traditional form' and the contrast to be made is between imitation, in which the subject

is forced into a ready-made structure and hence subordinated, and the use of a form as a particular, equal and complementary to the subject. "A"-7 is indeed a fine example of this latter principle at work, taking the sonnet form and blending its tightly confined structure with the 'focussing lens' of word choice to 'create anew'. There is a similarity between this objectivist use of traditional forms and Pound's adoption of the haiku form for his Imagism, although the two poets were to differ considerably in their approach to a modern use of the canzone. 'Devotions', however, does not display the sureness of purpose that fuses perception with technique necessary to 'sing anew'.

The poem from this era that marks the consolidation of purpose is Williams' 'student excellence', 'Poem Beginning "The"'.<sup>17</sup> This poem is more a prototype of the techniques employed in "A" than of the shorter poems. It is also the poem which was primarily instrumental in bringing Zukofsky to the notice of Ezra Pound, being published in Pound's Exile 3. But it was with some satisfaction that Zukofsky was later able to report that 'Pound, fortunately, thinks "A" is better than "The"'. I think so and hope so. If not - well -'.<sup>18</sup> The reception Pound afforded the poem was warm, if critical. In his letter accepting it for Exile he suggested that there was 'a drag at the beginning of the second movement ... I found a tendency to skip somewhere about there, and look forward to what might or mightn't be coming. She picks up again later'.<sup>19</sup> Seven months later, on receipt of a further manuscript from Zukofsky, he wrote 'Cadence of this stuff is its weakest component. Not by any means up to the level of Poem beginning THE'.<sup>20</sup>

The poem represents an enormous step *beyond* the techniques employed in the majority of his contemporary work. The first noticeable change is its unconventional appearance, being composed of 330 numbered lines divided into six 'movements'. The uncompromising title reflects



Zukofsky's belief that 'the first word or words is always the right title and every poem ... needs the particular dignity of identification'<sup>21</sup> - a belief that was to be exposed even more starkly in the naming of "A".

The technique of building the poem is very similar to that involved in "A", as is the thematic intention. It is autobiographical in that the poet is the centre on which is hung the various elements of his world. Each movement represents a separate element, or the 'focussing of the rays from a [separate] object'. The first movement '"And out of olde bokes, in good faith"' provides a private awareness of the immediate past through the poet's literary context. The second movement 'International Episode' broadens the poem's horizon into a reflection on the political 'aftermath' of the war, which had been the main concern of the first movement. The effect of the third and fourth movements is to break up the flow and create a pause that consolidates the picture so far created. The object of focus in the first movement had been the literary past, in the second it had been the politics of the present, and in these movements it is the nature of the poet's response. 'In Cat Minor', the third movement, is a crystallisation of the mood that informed the earlier passages, and the fourth movement 'More "Renaissance"' is concerned with the effects of education. The fifth movement 'Autobiography' again alters the viewpoint, this time to examine the local, personal world of the Russian Jew in Manhattan. Finally, the 'Half-Dozenth Movement: Finale and After' is a unification of all that has gone before, expressed specifically in line 280:

'By the cat and the well, I swear, my  
Shulamite!'

(p21)

This line in itself is an affirmation ('I swear') of the second and third movements ('the cat'), the first movement ('the well'), and the fifth ('my Shulamite'). The rest of the section expands and builds



upon this and in doing so reaches forward as the first movement reached back. This is so completely a prescription for "A", and particularly "A" 1-12, that the poem, if not a maquette for the larger work, certainly betrays itself as the working out of the structural devices that were to shape it.

The first movement "'And out of olde bokes, in good faith'" examines a response to the war through quotations from and references to available literature, most of which was not too 'old' in 1926. An awareness of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (first published in the U.S.A. in 1916) and Ulysses (1922) is apparent, and the whole movement (particularly lines 1-13) seems to reflect Eliot's The Waste Land in feeling, with such references as 'Rush singing in the wilderness', 'Residue of Oedipus - faced wrecks/Creating out of the dead, -' and

- '10 Books from the stony heart, flames rapping  
the stone
- 11 Residue of self-exiled men
- 12 By the 'Tyrrhenian'

(p12)

This is picked up again in lines 24-27:

- '24 Kerith is long dry, and the ravens that  
brought the prophet bread
- 25 Are dust in the waste land of a raven-  
winged evening.
- 26 And why if the waste land has been explored,  
traveled over, circumscribed,
- 27 Are there only wrathless skeletons exhumed  
new planted in its sacred wood,'

(pp12-13)

The most specific reference is to Ezra Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley  
(Life and Contacts) (1920).<sup>22</sup> The section reads:

- '15 The broken Earth-face, the age demands an  
image of its life and contacts,
- 16 Lord, lord, not that we pray, are sure of  
the question,
- 17 But why are our finest always dead?
- 18 And why, Lord, this time, is it Mauberly's  
Luini in porcelain,'

The section consists, in the first instance, of a series of quotations from Pound's Mauberley, beginning with

the age demands an  
image of its life and contacts, (p12)

Apart from the alteration of the tense of 'demands' from 'demanded', this is a fusion of the beginning of the second poem of Mauberley, which reads:

The age demanded an image  
Of its accelerated grimace

with Pound's sub-title 'Life and Contacts', 'Luini in porcelain' is the first line of the last poem in Mauberley, 'Medallion'. Line 17, 'But why are our finest always dead', echoes particularly the fifth poem of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley:

There died a myriad,  
And of the best, among them,  
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,  
For a botched civilization,

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,  
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

For two gross of broken statues,  
For a few thousand battered books.

The Mauberley lines of the first movement provide an early example of the technique of taking 'found objects' and making them 'sing anew'. Zukofsky's use of the Pound material is neither plagiarism, nor is it, in Pound's words, 'the classics in paraphrase'.<sup>23</sup> Initially, the quotations are not used for their subject but as subject in themselves, as particulars which the eye has perceived and the poet directed. The directing process throws the quotations into a different perspective from that which they held in their original context. By changing 'demanded' to 'demands', Zukofsky is announcing his response to a different set of circumstances. This is compounded by the substitution



called 'a drag ... I found a tendency to skip somewhere about there, and look forward to what might or mightn't be coming'. There is certainly a break from the finely-tuned cadence of the first movement in which the rapid rhythmical pace is fused to the highly controlled structuring of vowel/consonant relationships. This breaks down between lines 61 and 75 and does not really pick up again until line 81. The effect is more of a resettling of the measure than a 'drag' however and it represents a change or transition in the direction. Pound's objection could have more to do with the subject than the structure however, as the passage represents the poem's most specific statement against the rise of Fascism, particularly between lines 68 and 75:

68 Somehow, in Germany, the Jew goat-song  
    is unconvincing -  
69 How the brain forms its visions think-  
    ing incessantly of the things,  
70 Not the old Greeks anymore, -  
71 the things themselves a shadow world  
    scarce shifting the incessant  
    thought -  
72 Time, time the goat were an offering,  
73 Eh, what show do we see tonight, Peter?  
74 "Il Duce: I feel God deeply."  
75 Black shirts - black shirts - some power  
    is so funereal.

(p14)

Zukofsky's treatment of the Jewish condition here, as throughout his work, whilst being angry and outraged is distanced by always being part of a political or economic context. His approach to the subject contrasts strongly with that of Charles Reznikoff, who concentrates on the specific horrors that make up Fascist anti-semitism. The starkest example of this is his long series Holocaust.

The direct narrative form of Reznikoff's poem highlights the horrors in a cumulative list of atrocities. For example:

The driver of the truck they were in  
asked the commander who was going along  
where to put the Jews off  
and was told, "A bit further".

There they were told to lie down  
and did and, as the lad was lying there,  
he heard the noise of bullets whizzing past -  
and he too was shot.  
The bullet came into the nape of his neck  
and out through his mouth.

26

The difference between the two is not explained by the fact that the one was written in 1926 and the other after World War II, for in "A"-10 (1940) Zukofsky's approach was similar:

Anti-semites in Italy once  
people scarcely civilized hostile to Jews  
In Berlin "clear street" is the signal to loot  
The tailor's dummy hat on  
Hangs with a rope around its neck

(p119)

The difference begins with an obvious difference of purpose, Reznikoff's aim being to chronicle the Nazi oppression of the Jewish people, and Zukofsky's being to offer a wider view of an era through a complex of its disparate parts. This is occasioned and reinforced by a subtly different interpretation of the role of the 'objectivist' poet.

Reznikoff stated that:

By the term 'objectivist' I suppose a writer may be meant who does not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears; who is restricted almost to the testimony of a witness in a court of law; and who expresses his feelings indirectly by the selection of his subject-matter and, if he writes in verse, by its music. Now suppose in a court of law, you are testifying in a negligence case. You cannot get up on the stand and say, "The man was negligent". That's a conclusion of fact. What you'd be compelled to say is how the man acted. Did he stop before he crossed the street? Did he look? The judges of whether he is negligent or not are the jury in that case and the judges of what you say as a poet are the readers. That is, there is an analogy between testimony in the court and the testimony of a poet.

The world is very large, I think, and I certainly can't testify to the whole of it. I can only say what I saw and heard, and I try to say it as well as I can. And if your conclusion is that what I saw and heard makes you feel the way I did, then the poem is successful.

27

Both poets build up the larger picture from a number of smaller



incidents and believe that the poet should 'not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears'. The rigidity of Reznikoff's concept of the witness alters the shape of his work, however. The incidents which he selects as his objects are essentially local and specific, the close relationship between witness and testimony tightening the scope of his perception, so that anything to be included must be viewed from close range. The result is a series of powerful and clear statements of the immediate particulars, which allows the inclusion of the agony and horror of the executed Jew and the S.S. man who 'laughed/ and tore the baby apart as one would tear a rag', but does not allow the broader awareness of an entire system. Zukofsky's focussing lens permits the poet to change his viewpoint, to step back, and so increase the scope of the objects that fall within his boundaries. Although the obliqueness that this engenders sometimes robs Zukofsky's work of the intensity of personal locality that Reznikoff creates, it allows 'Poem Beginning "The"', whilst being made up of a series of 'found objects', to appear as more of a unified whole than would otherwise be possible. This discovery of a flexibility of scope, much more than the autobiographical subject, helps qualify the poem as a preface or prototype for "A".

The flexibility of viewpoint is illustrated by the transition from the second through the third and fourth to the fifth movement. The third and fourth movements represent an interlude between the long movements that surround them, crystallizing and commenting on the concerns expressed in them, and creating a break in the pace. The viewpoint closes in and narrows, the shift in focus reinforcing the pause in the flow. The third movement is introduced in a minor key, by association it is a nocturne. It becomes apparent, however, that the movement is an exercise in control and balance. The melancholy introduced by the minor key and the 'hard, hard' night world subject are strictly balanced by the use of

a controlled humour. The irony that this creates is carried over into the fourth movement in which the effectiveness of an education in the American/English tradition is questioned as a means of finding the 'sun' to relieve the 'cat-world'. Whereas the third movement had been stating a case, however, the fourth is questioning values and its approach is different with a much sharper and more obviously stated humorous edge. The concerns that these two movements crystallize from the substance of the first two, provide the argument for the fifth.

The fifth movement is the crux of the entire poem. Its title 'Autobiography' assumes a specialized meaning in a generally autobiographical poem. The movement expresses a personal solution to the problems stated in the poem, and a personal position in relation to the context so far established. The poet's mother is used as an example of the immigrant who is unwilling to break away from the traditions and culture of her birth. In a letter to Carl Rakosi in 1931 Zukofsky had written:

What's there to say about me? Of a very close Yiddish family, married brother (nephew and niece) married sister (nephew) - another nephew by a sister who died almost eighteen years ago - my mother died on my birthday about four years ago (Jan. 29) - We hardly ever say six words to each other at a time, but we think for each other all the time. Not that it helps any - my father, for instance, the only pious example of Spinozistic philosophy I've ever met - who has nothing but is resigned. I talk Yiddish to him, to my sister, I talked Yiddish to my mother - they don't know what I'm about and all that a quantity which doesn't enter into what they think, they think I'm their L - or what they call me.

My brother is the only one who speaks English - the kids, too, 28  
of course.

The extract illustrates the process taking place in this part of the poem. The ideas of searching for the sun and the 'assimilation' of education are picked up from the previous movements. The main drive of the movement is the poet's wish to break away from the restrictions

created by the immigrant's fear of letting go of his traditions and culture. Zukofsky's family remained Russian Jews living in America, to the extent of not even learning the language of their adoptive country. The attitude of mind that breeds this kind of isolation leads to two results which the poet was anxious to avoid, firstly the vulnerability of resignation, and secondly the inability to think outside a very narrow sphere - 'they don't know what I'm about and all that a quantity which doesn't enter into what they think'. The implication is that the poet knows what he is about but also is able to understand them, and hence his scope is widened.

For Zukofsky, the vulnerability created by a self-perpetuated difference and the resignation to circumstances, forms the prescription for the ghetto or the second society. The struggle represented by the assimilation of the finer parts of the host culture leads, in contrast, to a position of strength:

254 I'll read their Donne as mine,  
255 And leopard in their spots  
256 I'll do what says their Coleridge,  
257 Twist red hot pokers into knots.  
258 The villainy they teach me I will execute  
259 And it shall go hard with them,  
260 For I'll better the instruction,  
261 Having learned, so to speak, in their  
colleges.

(p20)

Zukofsky already had two of the tools needed in his hand when the process of 'assimilation' began. Firstly, and of obvious importance, he had learned and accepted the English language. Secondly, he had broken the constricting ties of a socially-defining religion and 'once the Faith's askew/I might as well look Shagetz just as much as Jew' (line 253). The break with religion came early in the poet's life. In 1931 he wrote that 'I have never loved the synagoguery & I was an apostate at twelve',<sup>29</sup> and earlier in the same year had been able to

state that 'a Jewish ethos - I ain't got it myself - its purely a family affair'.<sup>30</sup> The completeness of the transition, and the success of the assimilation, was realised by Zukofsky over forty years after 'Poem Beginning "The"', when he suggested that 'my son is deeply involved in furthering American music as I have been furthering American poetry over forty years, I now begin to sense gratefully something of the cycle that identifies me with the American tradition.'<sup>31</sup>

The defiance of the 1926 poem has been replaced in 1966 by a more positive appraisal of the achievement of finding a position in an 'assimilated' tradition. The fact of assimilating a culture may have provided a distance from its immediate conditions that helped rather than hindered Zukofsky's progress. As he suggested in 1959:

Having just "finished" Whitman with my classes, this historical judgement follows reading "A" 1-12 as book: Ez underrated Whitman; I feel - I never felt that before - that I follow out of Walt more than I realized - especially in the sense that I am more of my time, as he was of his, than are my immediate elders born c.a. 1875-1894. I assume less attitude I think than any of them and come out more person - whatever that's worth - even in the regular meter I'm of this time (covering the first half of the century) (and anticipating, like Walt) - my elders rather end off something European.<sup>32</sup>

The process of becoming of his time and 'anticipating' is something that accumulates through the poet's career, particularly through the development of "A". The main anticipation of 'Poem Beginning "The"' is towards "A". A specific example of this in the fifth movement, is the use of words to express a wild 'natural' freedom in a confined urban context. Lines 238 and 239,

238 If horses could but sing Bach, mother, -  
239 Remember how I wished it once -

(p19)

anticipate "A"-7 in which saw horses, inanimate and therefore even less likely to 'sing', are brought into the context of the Bach theme of "A"



and form the poem's most perfect example of the poetics of:

An integral  
Lower limit speech  
Upper limit music.

("A"-12 p138)

That Zukofsky was forming his ideas of the need for precision and clarity in an era that saw Le Corbusier demanding the same qualities is one instance of the poet being of his time. That this unity with the present could, in poetic terms, be transformed into a Whitman-like anticipation was expressed by Robert Creeley when he wrote:

Zukofsky says, one writes one poem all one's life. All that he has written may be felt as indivisible, and all one - which word occurs frequently in the text in this sense.

Another word found often is leaf, echoing, specifically at times as in the latter part of "A"-12, Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Despite what seem dissimilarities, they are like men in that both would favor... with Shakespeare as Zukofsky has proposed... the "clear physical eye" as against "the erring brain". The experience of one's life as one is given to have it, and as relationships of its nature are found, unfold, then, as learns, finding home in time far past or in the instant now.

..."His voice in me ...". That men do so move, one to one, here grandfather, to father, to son .. but that also, as Zukofsky thinks possible, it may be that Shakespeare had read Catullus, and that men who may so read the same text may so in time relate. 33

The internal 'anticipation', the relationship between 'Poem Beginning "The"' and "A", is an example of the poet's work being 'felt as indivisible, and all one'. The external 'anticipation' is a consequence of the process that began with 'Having learned, so to speak, in their colleges', the 'cycle that identifies me with the American tradition'. By the very nature of a tradition, to be identified with it or to be a part of it is to be part of a process that is made up of consequences reaching forward as much as back.

This process is the main concern of the summing-up that forms the final ('Half-Dozenth') movement, 'Finale, and After'. The movement is both retrospective, in that it brings together the strands of the poem, and



progressive in that it looks forward or 'anticipates', hence the subtitle. It is no accident that the last words of the poem are 'shall be'. The proposal of the fifth movement - 'The villainy they teach me I'll execute' - is acted upon, with Whitman's leaves in attendance:

285 I must try to fare forth from here.  
286 I do not forget you,  
287 I am just gone out for to-night,  
288 The Royal Stag is abroad,  
289 I am gone out hunting,  
290 The leaves have lit by the moon.

(p21)

The process of 'Finale and After', or the simultaneous retrospective and progressive consequences is established in lines 285 and 286. That 'assimilation' is an addition to, rather than a replacement for, all that has been learned before is stated by the suggestion that it is the light of the moon, and later the 'firefly, little errant star', that illuminates the hunt for the sun. The twinned ideas of life from decay, in the manner of Eliot's 'breeding/lilacs out of the dead land', and of the strength that comes from a progress which acknowledges its past, are expressed in the primeval image between lines 318 and 326:

318 By the wrack we shall sing our sun-song  
319 Under our feet will crawl  
320 The shadows of dead worlds,  
321 We shall open our arms wide,  
322 Call out of pure might -  
323 Sun - you great Sun, our comrade,  
324 From eternity to eternity we remain true to you,  
325 A myriad years we have been,  
326 Myriad upon myriad shall be.

(p22)

The poem relies for its success on the disparate elements from which it is composed being forged together by its rhythmical and syntactic structure. If the early, pre-1924 poems are seen as the search for an authentic voice, then 'Poem Beginning "The"', in forging this link may be making the first steps towards establishing a voice or 'new measure'. In doing so it provides the basis for "A" which from 1927 was to be 'the

core of Zukofsky's work. In 1946, William Carlos Williams wrote that 'poems are the effects of engineering skills in poets'. In many ways, 'Poem Beginning "The"' marks the end of one learning phase in the poet's career in that it is the first clear example of these acquired skills being put to use in the establishment of a technique that Williams described as 'a return (enlarged) to the physical basis of the song, the writing of a new (kind) of musical sentence (an invention) in a new way. A new measure'.<sup>34</sup> Although Williams himself was to place more emphasis on this, Zukofsky's 'new measure' is essentially an American measure - after all, he saw himself as 'following out of Whitman'. It is partially because of this that Zukofsky was totally unwilling to follow Pound's example and seek exile outside the United States - indeed Pound found great difficulty in persuading him even to cross the Atlantic for a visit. In this one sense at least Zukofsky's views tended ever more towards Williams than Pound, although this is not to diminish the priority of Pound in Zukofsky's analysis of American poetry. A product of this acknowledgement of an integration into an American tradition is his being adopted as a mentor or forerunner by poets such as Robert Creeley and Cid Corman, to the extent that Creeley could write, in tribute to Zukofsky, that

He taught me so much, in so many ways. Without the least trying, so to speak, the measures of person, of conduct, of art, which he constituted, are all of a factual piece. Again I think of that frail man's walking me late at night to the subway entrance, so I wouldn't have difficulty finding it, despite the effort it must have been for him to confront those streets at that hour, and his walk back alone. I remember "raise grief to music" - "the joy that comes from knowing things" - "the more so all have it" - "upper limit music, lower limit speech" - "love lights light in like eyes" - "he got around ...." And if I misquote, then I do - because this is the practical, daily company of Louis Zukofsky for me, the measure of his father, "everybody loved Reb Pincos because he loved everybody. Simple ...." 35

The continuing American tradition that is signified here is a line of respect and indebtedness between poets. Zukofsky found in Pound what

he called a high degree of 'objectification', and it is this same quality which Creeley and Corman found in his own work. Zukofsky's route to the poetry of 'rested totality', which the term "objectification" implies, is expressed in his objectivist principles. The medium for working out and publicizing these principles was criticism and editorship.

### CHAPTER III

#### 'Program Objectivists' - Zukofsky as editor and critic

If 'Poem Beginning "The"' and the early sections of "A" were primarily responsible for bringing Zukofsky to the attention of Ezra Pound, then they may also be said to have begun his editorship, as it was through the prompting of Pound that Zukofsky was given the February 1931 issue of Poetry, the first outlet for Zukofsky's 'objectivist' principles. Although they formed a major part of his career as a poet, editing and the writing of criticism were not activities that Zukofsky claimed to enjoy. In October 1930, Pound wrote to Zukofsky that

Am cheered to know you don't like writing cri'zism. That's as it shd. be.

However its up to blokes like us to do it. The inspired lunatics can't. There are very few inspired lunatics.

It is also up to us to kill off the sonzabitchzss that LIKE to write it (crizism). How much pleasanter it wd. be on the bright<sup>1</sup> Oct. p.m. to be writing 3 pages of Canto.

The rewards of editing for Zukofsky were not financial, his own money often being swallowed up in meeting the overheads, but it did become an important part of his work. Many of the techniques and motivations that informed his poetry were also present in his editorship. It provided him with the opportunity to encourage those writers whom he saw as deserving a voice, coupled with the political need to unify writers into a form of self-help co-operation. Editorial control also gave him a platform for his own criticism and poetic theory, allowing it to appear in a self-determined context.

Editing was something Zukofsky found himself unable to avoid, as witnessed by the 'collaborations' or re-writings in An "Objectivists" Anthology. From 1930 until the beginning of his thirty year 'silence', Carl Rakosi sent many of his poems to Zukofsky, sometimes for consideration for

publication but often purely as examples of his current work. Zukofsky's response was always that of the committed editor, and his letters to Rakosi were often filled with suggestions of line and word alterations or omissions, the advice constantly being that 'you can do better by merely naming objects. The what is happening, being, etc.'<sup>2</sup> On one occasion Zukofsky was moved to offer an alternative structure for one of Rakosi's poems, although as an adjunct to, rather than a replacement for the original. Rakosi's poem appeared in the following form:

The Gnat.

Winter and wind  
The whole age  
is an afternoon  
around the house  
a little snow  
a sea blizzard  
a yard clover  
a lucky horse  
anabasis  
for edelweiss  
six rivers and six  
wenches, the twelve  
victories.

Carl Rakosi

Greetings.

On the reverse, Zukofsky had written:

Yeah bo'  
it's a good gnat. Permit me, I will do a mirror  
fugue upon it:

The Gnat  
12 victories  
6 rivers and  
wenches six  
edelweiss  
for anabasis  
a yard clover  
a horse lucky  
a little blizzard  
a sea snow



around the house  
is an afternoon

wind and winter  
the whole age.

Sink the pinna now and bring the tune out from the tympanum and<sup>3</sup>  
you will have your original the best in a long time. Greetings.

Although this is a parody of his regular editorial response to Rakosi's work and a joke at his own expense, it serves to illustrate by caricature the nature of his editorial faculty.

Ezra Pound took a close interest in the "objectivist's" issue of Poetry, frequently writing to Zukofsky and Harriet Monroe with suggestions and advice. There is the feeling given in many of these letters that it is Pound's project and his responsibility, as witnessed, for example, by a letter of 25th October 1930:

You should have at least 30 or 32 pages for verse. I don't think you can show more than a dozen authors, three or four unassailable chunks, and others held down to a single page or poem. Get what is at least attackable or arguable. Mere surface or trying to be clever can't carry the thing. Cummingsites cd. enliven the shorter manifestations.

BUT the chaps that mean what they say have got to give the weight. there's got to be enough difference in contributors to indicate a circumference; but NOT to dispense and scatter the energy

///

It is a better chance to launch Reznikoff than you cd. have expected.

with which remarks: go to it. I don't think poss to have it ready for Press Dec. 20. Harriet to me says "Feb. march or May". March is certainly the earliest poss. and no great harm done if May is later found to be more commodious.

at any rate GET IT RIGHT.

E

You'll have to suspend Jefferson for the moment and pass a few<sup>4</sup> weeks STUDYIN the writes of yr. contmps.

Pound's parental pushing of Zukofsky was not confined to general advice and encouragement, for in a separate letter of the same date he is eager to suggest the shape and content of the issue, and Zukofsky's aims in editing it:

DONT' spoil sheep for ha'porth of tar. You can't get number done RIGHT in time for Feb. issue. take one of the later dates H. has offered.

///

The number ought to be NEW line up. You can mention me and old Bill Walrus in the historic section.

If you don't know nawthin about your contemporaries you'll have to lean on McKenzie who hath faith.

I don't think you need the English. I don't want to queer their pitch, but as the aim is not limited by the immediate objective i;e; not to STOP with your special number but to regenerate and redemivirginate Poetry; the Eng. wd. natcherly git a show after you have blossomed.

Rakosi may be dead, I wish I cd. trace him.  
His last address was

61 N. Main St. Kenosha Wisconsin

///

Loomis is too tired and sophisticated. You can get some other one of yr. dozen without lapping over Exile.

The Imagiste movement was made with four or five poems of Hilda's, three or four of Richard's and one ole Bill Water Closet Wm's. plus y.v.t. or if you like manipulated by y.v.t. whereto were added about the same amt. of stuff that wdnt damage (i.e. one hoped it wont damage the effek).

Problem ain't now the same. I go on burbling merely to indicate that mere extent of verbal manifestation has nawthin ter dew 5 wiff it.

The paternal tone of the letters was not missed by either Zukofsky or Pound, and in a later series of acid political exchanges they were to refer to each other as 'Sonny' and 'Poppa'. The eagerness to advise and direct that prompted this tone added to the pressure being applied on Zukofsky by Harriet Monroe to form a movement which would act as a base from which to 'regenerate and redemivirginate Poetry'. Zukofsky's mistrust of the effectiveness and consequences of artistic movements precluded his founding one and it was with reluctance that he coined the word 'objectivist'. In 1969, Zukofsky explained his attitude as follows:

In the first place, objectivism ... I never used the word; I used the word "objectivist", and the only reason for using it was Harriet Monroe's insistence when I edited the "objectivist" number of Poetry. Pound was after her; he thought the old rag, as he called it, was senile, and so on. He had his fights with her; couldn't get across the people he wanted, and in one of his vituperative letters he told old Harriet the magazine would come to nothing, that there was this youngster who was one of the best

critics in America ... well, I'm reminiscing: In any case, Harriet was fond of Pound and after all she was enterprising. Well, she told me, "You must have a movement." I said, "No, some of us are writing to say things simply so that they will affect us as new again". "Well, give it a name". Well, there were pre-Raphaelitism, and dadaism, and expressionism and futurism - I don't like any of those isms. I mean, as soon as you do that, you start becoming a balloon instead of a person. And it swells and a lot of mad people go chasing it.... Anyway, I told Harriet, "All right, let's call it 'objectivists'", and I wrote the essay on sincerity and objectification. I wouldn't do it today.

... The objectivist then, is one person, not a group, and as I define him, he is interested in living with things as they exist, and as a "wordsman", he is a craftsman who puts words together<sub>6</sub> into an object.

In a letter acknowledging the receipt of Rakosi's work for consideration for the issue, in which Zukofsky said 'Permit me to say that your poems are the best in America - these U.S.A. - that I have seen since, well, 1926', there is an indication of the uncertainties which were present in the formation of this new project:

My issue of "Poetry" is as much of a surprise to me as I suppose my invitation to you is to you. Harriet perhaps influenced by E.P.'s opinion of me, perhaps impressed by an essay on Hen. Adams I wrote 6 years ago and now appearing serially in Hound and Horn, perhaps encouraged by my recent rise in academic standing to a  $\frac{2}{3}$  asst. ship - anyway, asked me. My intention is to print 32 p. of the best unpublished material written in the last 10 years. Naturally I should like to show off at least 8 poets - if I don't find 12. Or at least six. But I do want to print as much of you as I can - say 5-7 pages, depending on other available genius. ... What I don't keep I'll try to pass off in Hound and Horn, Pagany, or future issues of "Poetry" (if I still can after my issue - Harriet has offered me complete control and maybe she doesn't know what she's in for - she has never seen me nor I her, so I can't answer your question as to whether her palms are hirsute) - with your permission. 7

The process of editing had begun, however, with suggestions for changing words and phrases in Rakosi's work, including the omission of a line from 'Orphean Lost' which obviously spoils a straight thing'.

When the issue finally appeared in February 1931, it contained thirty pages of poetry by twenty poets, most of whom were represented only by a single short poem. The bulk of the space was taken up by Carl Rakosi

with four poems over five pages, Zukofsky's own "A"-7 of four and a half pages, and Robert McAlmon's five page poem 'Fortuna Carraciola A Satire'. The remainder of the issue is occupied by the editorial 'Program: "Objectivists" 1931', two essays by the editor - 'Sincerity and Objectification With Special Reference to the work of Charles Reznikoff', and 'Three Poems by André Salmon' - and 'A Symposium' which consists of a poem each by Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford, followed by a note on poetics by the poets, a disagreement by Zukofsky and a 'rebuttal' by Tyler and Ford.

The fact that 'Program: "Objectivists" 1931 is the editorial or 'comment' explains its title, it is a 'program' for the "objectivists" issue and not a movement manifesto as the word 'program' may suggest. For the editor's 'interests in American poetry of the last decade' the reader is referred to his article 'American Poetry 1920-1930' in The Symposium, and is presented with a list of 'works absolutely necessary to students of poetry' reprinted from that article. If Zukofsky was unwilling to restate his appraisal of the contemporary state of the poetic art he was not reticent in his view of the literary establishment:

The materials of poetry:

The small magazines of today and the very recent past must be praised for helping to keep up an interest in these matters. Mr. Pound has treated this subject in detail in an article in The English Journal (Chicago) for November 1930. The small magazines are to be praised for standing on their own against the business of the publishing racket, the "pseudo-kulchuh" of certain national liberal weeklies published in New York, and the guidance of the American university.

Pound, Williams, McAlmon, Cummings, Reznikoff, etc., have had to publish a good deal of their work in privately printed editions. In every case the work was worth publishing, a statement not applicable to 95% or more of the usual publisher's lists. At least one American publisher could save his face, and add honor and intelligence to publishing, by reprinting Ezra Pound's critical works - *Spirit of Romance*, *Pavannes and Divisions*, *Instigations*, *How to Read*, etc. - all of the utmost importance to any discussion of the materials of poetry.

(p271)



This extract reveals the motivation behind all of Zukofsky's editing and publishing ventures. 'What is aimed at' is the establishment of conditions under which poetic advancement is controlled by poets, without the constraints of cost and sales-conscious publishers, and the out of date academic criticism referred to as 'the American university'. It is exactly this motivation that was to provide the impetus for 'The Objectivist Press', and it bears some similarity to Pound's reasons for establishing Imagism.. The cause of 'redemivirginating' poetry was still able to arouse Pound's sympathy and this, together with the choice of work that backed it up, caused him to write, on receipt of the issue, 'Feb. just here. Only thing I have time to crit. I mean to see as needin amendment is in the Taupin. The rest is a good job.'<sup>8</sup>

Zukofsky's major written contributions to the issue are "A"-7, which will be referred to elsewhere, and the essay 'Sincerity and Objectification With Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff', which is one of his most significant expositions of poetic values. Using Reznikoff's work as an example, Zukofsky presents the poetic criteria that had first appeared as a successful whole in 'Poem Beginning "The"'. In stating that Reznikoff's shorter poems suggest 'entire aspects of thought: economics, beliefs, literary analytics etc.', he is presenting the idea of the poem as object, the conditions for which are supplied by the concepts of 'sincerity' and 'objectification'. Sincerity, the 'preoccupation with the accuracy of detail in writing', is the initial requirement from which objectification may be realized. The process is explained in full as follows:

In sincerity shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of (if there is continuance) completed sound or structure, melody or form. Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody. Shapes suggest themselves, and the mind senses and receives awareness. Parallels sought for in the other arts call up the perfect line



of occasional drawing, the clear beginnings of sculpture not proceeded with.

Presented with sincerity, the mind ever tends to supply, in further suggestion which does not attain rested totality, the totality not always found in sincerity and necessary only for perfect rest, complete appreciation. This rested totality may be called objectification - the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object.

(pp 273-274)

The achievement of sincerity, of 'thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody', or 'the direction of historic and contemporary particulars', is arrived at through a combination of the sincerity of perception and the sincerity of technique. To arrive at 'objectification' the 'minor units of sincerity' must be forged into an indivisible structural whole, described by Zukofsky as 'the resolving of words and their ideation into structure'. The implications of this go some way towards explaining the apparent complexity of Zukofsky's work. The word is manifested and apprehended in two ways. First there is the sound (and in writing, the appearance) which gives the word a physical presence. Secondly there is the 'ideation' which is a complex of the substructure of thought which gives rise to the word's usage and, hence, the meaning, or meanings, which can be derived from it. Within any given language the physical aspects of the word and its ideation are indivisible, to the extent that 'each word possesses objectification to a powerful degree'. In fact Zukofsky was so convinced of this physiological integrity of the word that he put forward the view that it could, on occasion, continue across language boundaries - 'something must have led the Greeks to say hudor and for us to say water'.<sup>9</sup> Words, for Zukofsky, 'are absolute symbols for objects, states, acts, interrelations, thoughts about them'. The 'absolute symbol' accepts the absolute nature of the object it symbolises, in the manner of Oppen's conviction that 'you say these perfectly little words and you're asserting that the sun is ninety-three million miles away,

and that there is shade because of shadows, and more, who knows?'<sup>10</sup>

The word is an 'absolute symbol' because these assertions are not alternatives, but facets of the compound thought that provides the meaning for the single word. The consequence of the acceptance of the absolute nature of the word, or its internal 'objectification' for the poet, is that it imposes on him the need for strict control of word choice. The facts and associations that make up the ideation of the word form the links and the flow in any syntactic or line sequence. This influence that one word exerts over another in the close relationship of a poem, coupled with the word's rhythm and sound, ultimately decides the poetic effect. There is no room in this regime for the paraphrase or synonym as a different word will create a different effect, the word-choice being intimately bound up with the poetic structure. This is the technique that brings about 'objectification'; 'the detail of seeing' being linked to the structure through the precisely controlled choice of words. In Zukofsky's terms, it is a 'physiological' poetry, in which the eye directly affects the measure. Here is the central core of an 'objectivists' poetics, it is the territory between the 'lower limit speech' and the 'upper limit music' and is restated repeatedly, whether it be in Oppen's 'act of faith' or Zukofsky's assertion that 'the business of writing is to see as much as you can, to hear as much as you can, and if you think at all to think without clutter; then as you put the things together, try to be concise'.

In this context it may be suggested that it is appropriate that "A"-7 accompanies 'Sincerity and Objectification' in the issue. If "A" is the centre of Zukofsky's output, then the seventh movement comes close to being the centre of "A". As will be stated in a later chapter, the status of the word as the 'absolute symbol' is most closely explored in "A"-7, helping it to become perhaps the most finely wrought example of

the objectivist principle at work. If Zukofsky was to 'redemivirginate' American poetry by example then here was one of his most finely devised attempts. 'Sincerity and Objectification' can with hindsight be seen as a gloss for this poetic example. Herein also lies the importance to Zukofsky of editorships.

Besides being a vehicle for Zukofsky's poetics, 'Sincerity and Objectification' gave an oblique opportunity to exercise the editor's privilege, which he had renounced in the 'program', of making some comment on the work of contemporary poets:

At any time, objectification in writing is rare. The poems or the prose structures of a generation are few. Properly no verse should be called a poem if it does not convey the totality of perfect rest. In contemporary writing, the poems of Ezra Pound alone possess objectification to a most constant degree; his objects are musical shapes. Objectification is to be found in Poems VIII, X, XVIII, XXVI in William Carlos Williams' Spring and All. With the exception of Marianne Moore's poems An Octopus and Like a Bulrush, and T.S. Eliot's Mr. Appolinax, progressions of sincerity and not objectification are to be found in these poets. It is interesting that the work of Marianne Moore is largely a portrait of the author's character intent upon the presentation which is sincerity, rather than the revealed rest of objectification which is, for example, An Octopus. In the work of T.S. Eliot it is often the single quatrain (or whatever the unit of composition may be) which possesses objectification; together, his quatrains are a series rather than the entirety of a poem. Whatever objectification the writings of e.e. cummings possess (i.e. Him, Song III, Amores VII, Unrealities V in Tulips and Chimneys; at least a half-dozen poems in Is5) is an equilibrium between the extremely connotative speech of an energy of five senses which are vitally young, and an aptness of purposeful print, and musical rhetoric weaving this energy into an interlacing (sometimes, unfortunately, astray).

(pp276-277)

This extract is yet another indication of the relationship between Zukofsky's editorship and an 'objectivist' aesthetic. From the standpoint of an objectivist being 'one person, not a group', this is an 'objectivist' view of a wide field of poetic responses, rather than a binding prescription to differentiate a small section of it. The objectivist identifies certain criteria that define poetry and applies them almost as a test of poetic value. Thus 'no verse should be called

a poem if it does not convey the totality of perfect rest'. Simply, this is a plea for excellence, in which excellence is defined in terms of harmony and cohesion. The constituent elements of this are neither predatory nor subordinated, and so give the resultant poem the solidity and integrity of an object. The poets mentioned in the essay and those in the issue illustrate the scope with which Zukofsky was willing to apply his criteria, and the fact that those criteria were not a prescription for a movement. As in An "Objectivists" Anthology, the objectivist issue of Poetry was intended to be more of an anthology of excellence than a textbook of esoteric practice. Of the poets included, only Oppen, Rakosi and Reznikoff were later able to accept the objectivist tag, largely because their own poetic criteria were expressed in broadly similar terms to those of Zukofsky. William Carlos Williams, in many ways the closest poet to Zukofsky in terms of intention and often his strongest supporter and most sympathetic reader, did not share this commitment to 'objectivist' terms. His ideas are compatible with those of Zukofsky and often overlap and mesh with them, but the relationship between the two poetics is more of a variable parallel than a superimposition.

However much confusion Zukofsky may have stirred up by coining the term "objectivist", he found it useful for two further publishing/editing ventures - An "Objectivists" Anthology and The Objectivist Press. The link between the two is George Oppen's To Publishers. Oppen described the relationship between Zukofsky and To as follows:

To Publishers was established with my wife and I as publishers - the status of Publisher somewhat modified by our age, which was 21 - and Louis Zukofsky as editor. Our first publication was the Objectivist Anthology, edited by Zukofsky; it was not the product of any formal decision or affiliation among the contributors. Attitudes toward the Introduction undoubtedly varied, but not, I think, in any case to the degree of basic opposition to the position put forward. 11



George and Mary Oppen established To in France, a circumstance which created problems which eventually became too large for such a small operation. Mary Oppen described some of the aims and the problems in her autobiography, stating that

We published AN OBJECTIVIST ANTHOLOGY, William Carlos Williams' NOVELETTE, Ezra Pound's ABC OF READING. Books to be sold at low cost in the U.S. The idea was to make books of poetry, and other books that could not find a publisher, available at least, to poets and their own circle, for we had searched with great difficulty to find the writing of our times.

We made frequent trips to Toulon to get the books printed by a French printer, books in English. We read proof again and again, each time to find more mistakes. <sup>12</sup>

The repetition of printing mistakes meant that eventually An Objectivist's Anthology had to be issued with a typed errata sheet and this, together with problems with the U.S. Customs, and the difficulties of long range publishing caused Oppen, in effect, to bring To to New York. During their stay in Europe they had contacted Ezra Pound, and Mary Oppen describes the meeting as follows:

We went, before going to Paris, to Rapallo to visit Ezra Pound. We walked with him, talking on the waterfront in Rapallo. We stood, looking out at the Mediterranean, where with a sweep of his cape and his cane, he pointed (the wrong way) said, "From there came Greek ships".

He was telling us, "Read, study the languages read the poets in their own languages". Our message to him would have been just as clear, "You are too far away from what is your own". But we were twenty, Pound was forty, and our respect for his position in literature forbade us telling him that we lacked respect for his insane politics, and that he should go home. He asked us, "What does 'girl friend, boy friend' mean", new slang new words entering the language and he didn't hear them from the tongues of those who invented them. We'd have said to him, "Go home".

We did not intend to be expatriates. Pound was generous, there <sup>13</sup> was nothing he could do for us that he did not do.

Pound was later to write the preface for Oppen's Discrete Series, published by The Objectivist Press in 1934, and had been involved through Zukofsky in the production of An Objectivist's Anthology.



Taking into account that 'the objectivist was one person, not a group', the title makes it clear that the anthology was very much Zukofsky's project. It was a continuation of what he had been doing in his issue of Poetry and it contains a reprint of his editorial 'Program:

"Objectivists" 1931'. The volume is divided into five sections, the first a preface by Zukofsky, which is the first published version of his '"Recencies" in Poetry', the second and third are the anthology proper and consist of the work of fifteen poets. The fourth section called 'Collaborations' consists of poems by four poets either collaborated upon or rewritten by Zukofsky. The final section is the 'Program', presented as an Appendix.

The editorial policy and content of the volume is largely a continuation of the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry, both in terms of the poems chosen and the critical statements of the preface which follows the trend of argument which had informed 'American Poetry 1920-1930', 'Program: "Objectivists" 1931' and 'Sincerity and Objectification'. Zukofsky uses the Anthology to express an indebtedness to Ezra Pound, to whom the volume is dedicated, with the statement that he 'is still for the poets of our time/the/most important'.

Pound's poetical statements form the core of the preface. Among the most important are the principles of 'Imagisme', originally stated as;

1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

14

These principles, together with Pound's 'an "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time', and his concept of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanapoeia are supported by a peppering



poet as critic. He states that

as a critic the editor of Feb. Poetry began as a poet, and that as a poet he had implicitly to be a critic. Wm. Carlos Williams had said before him, in Spring and All, - "I believe it possible, even essential, that when poetry fails it does not become prose but bad poetry".

A poet finds the continuously present analysis of his work preferable to criticism so-called. Yet what other criticism exclusive of his poem seems permissible? In preference to the brands of circumlocution requisite to ponderous journals and designated by Mr. Pound as backsidebeforeness, a "prose" criticism, whose analysis follows without undue length of misinterpretation the more concise analysis of a considered poem seems permissible, if the general good demands such a prose. The direction of this prose, tho' it will be definition, will also be poetry, arising from the same source or what to a third reader may seem to be the same source as the poetry - a poetically charged mentality.

(p10)

If a "poetically charged mentality" is a pre-requisite for a 'permissible' criticism, then, so the argument goes, the responsibility for critical advance lies with the poet, as he is the best equipped to provide this lead. With a criticism of this kind leading the way, poetry would be less likely to fall into an academically approved stagnation. Zukofsky, obviously, does not limit the scope of his criticism to his own work. His published criticism largely treats poetry generally, and his correspondence with poets such as Carl Rakosi and Cid Corman has, as a prominent feature, a careful and detailed analysis of their work. Some thirty years later Zukofsky was to see a similar analytical approach applied to his own work by Robert Creeley.

Zukofsky goes on to say that

Tho perhaps gratifying to the poet whose poem is under observation - this prose, with all its poetic direction and right impetus, should, to the critic himself with his merely poetically charged mentality, seem secondary even tertiary and less i.e. compared with that act which is a poem, not, of course, compared with "critical" backsidebeforeness .

(pp10-11)

This defines even more closely Zukofsky's feeling towards criticism. Like his teaching, criticism was a necessary evil, always 'secondary

even tertiary' to his writing of poetry. Unlike teaching, however, criticism and analysis are allied to the poetry, in that they represent part of the same 'job':

But a critic-poet-analyst is interested in growing degrees of intelligence. He has an economic bias. He has been doing a job. It will perhaps as soon not as be his salvation. He does not pretend it to be more than a job.... At any rate - poetry defined as a job, a piece of work.

(p14)

At this stage of the 'revolution' criticism had to be part of the 'job'. Although Zukofsky's contention was always that the poetry must and will speak for itself, the perceived inadequacy in academic criticism was felt to be such that a sympathetic or 'permissible' criticism was required to back it up and so redress the balance. Later in his career, the urgency of this need had dissipated sufficiently for him to relegate criticism to a very minor position in the hierarchy of his priorities. In an interview in 1969 he said that

I wrote the essay on sincerity and objectification. I wouldn't do it today. (I've sworn off criticism after Bottom, after nineteen years of going through all that.) In any case I wouldn't use the same terminology anymore. But looking back at that essay, and as it was revised in Propositions.... What I did in this volume of criticism was to get it down to the bare bone. Granted that there are certain infelicities of style in the original. Actually, I don't think I changed ten words in editing the collected criticism. I omitted a great deal though, and that made all the difference.

... Well, I'd prefer a poem that embodied all I have said here,<sup>15</sup> a poem which said them for me, rather than the criticism.

"Recencies", in one sense, may be said to 'get it down to the bare bone' - the style is spare and the syntax is lean so that all that is left on the page is a flurry of ideas. It is a shorthand rather than a conventional prose style. In another sense, however, it is far from 'the bare bone' due to the number of ideas that are crammed in to make the point. Of these ideas many will be returned to later, such as the idea of the poem as an object in process and the nature and role of the epic. One further

subject that is raised in "Recencies" however, is that of a 'literature of the proletariat'. The relevant paragraphs read:

The protagonist of Pound's poem -

He made no immediate application  
Of this to relation of the state  
To the individual -

No predatory manifestation - Yet a manifestation making the mind more temperate because the poem exists and has perhaps recorded both state and individual -

By all means a literature of the proletariat - which will be only literature after all - if there are writers. They will never get across to the proletariat if they are not. As writers, most proletarians are too idle to permit themselves the necessary communication of analysis. "A poet" said Keats, "is the least poetical of anything in existence: it is for ever, in, for, and fulfilling some other object".

(p19)

For Zukofsky the word 'literature' does not allow qualification, the 'thing that is literature' is simply that and cannot be 'proletarian literature' or any other such categorisation. This is in line with his view, expressed elsewhere in the essay, that poetry cannot be 'good poetry' or 'bad poetry' - if a piece of work is poetry then it is 'good', if not then it is not poetry. The distinction is being made between a literature produced by or appealing to the proletariat, and something dogmatically produced - or assumed - to be a proletarian literature.

The word 'proletariat' has its obvious political overtones. As Zukofsky suggests, every poet has 'an economic bias'. There is a difference, however, between the writer who, in writing with sincerity - in 'thinking with the things as they exist' - allows his political and economic bias to be a particular in his span of vision, shaping the poetic object without 'predatory intent', and the writer who subordinates his writing to a political object. Allowing his poetry to remain a 'non-predatory manifestation', Zukofsky, temporarily at least, used his editing as an outlet for his specific political aims through the formulation of the 'Objectivist Press'.



Zukofsky's original concept of the Press was radical to say the least. The motivation behind it was complex. Firstly he was stung by the refusal of the 'committed left' -- as represented by the New Masses' -- to accept that he was a left wing sympathiser, they were even to refer to him as a Fascist due to his association with Ezra Pound, a charge from which his being a Jew did not save him. Additionally there was the idea that if poetry was to be saved from sinking under the demands of academic criticism and publishers' hesitancy, then it was only writers themselves who could effect the change. This was linked to collectivist principles in which those writers who had the security of an established name and a regular income could subsidise those who had neither, so ensuring a continuing progress. Finally there was Zukofsky's rancour at the commercial publishing world, something that was to continue to occupy him throughout his career. In October 1932 he wrote the following in a letter to Carl Rakosi:

What chance I have of breaking thru the shit controls of our publishing racket -- read the maniac Yvor Winters in current H & H on "Objectivist" Anth. Please get a copy & answer his review ... no use my doing it. If the contributors to the anth. stand<sup>16</sup> for his viciousness they deserve it.

This was backed up in a later letter to Rakosi of the same year when he said that 'these suggestions are for you -- not for the magazine snot editors. I mean they shd. accept humbly'.<sup>17</sup>

All these feelings and ideas came together in December 1932, again in a letter to Rakosi, in the form of a plan to create a writers union with the following aims:

1. Embrace only the writers (say of at least one good poem, or one good piece of prose, + a humility to shut up otherwise.)
2. That wd. publish one or two mimeographed sheets a year, preferably one side of a sheet of paper -- saying what they are doing, what they disapprove, damn, shit upon etc. (cd. be sold to non-members for \$1 the year subscription basis).

3. That wd. handle marketing, contractory, copyright from a centralized agency - (itself?)
4. That wd. maybe support at least one good writer a year, a different one each year, if only at \$5 a week (the good, big cheese members & the successful cd. do that by contributions - & by them I don't mean Edna St. or Van Loon, but Joyce, Eliot, Hemingway, Yeats etc. who have money and know what writing is) - For my good friend, the rich as such will never support the poor & if the rich as successful "writers" (i.e. shitters) are sometimes donors, they go back on the good in a very short time, witness Harriet's guarantees etc. etc. - and Every craftsman has his honor & his union, vy not ve writers? ... O yes point 5 to add to the above 4 - maybe a good way to start To again - otherwise Gorde knows when, maybe never - the promise of continuing in B. Humphri's catalog just a promise - perhaps to help sell what there is in hand now. 18

The plan was radical, idealistic, and above all ambitious if it was to include Joyce, Eliot, Hemingway and Yeats. In this form the venture could not possibly work, as Ezra Pound was to point out emphatically:

The first BUSINESS proposition has got to be a list of books that's got at least a snowball's chance of selling.

... I am NOT willing to hold assessable shares in anything. If I throw it out of the window that's that, but I aint going to tie my foot to it. There is no reason why writers who have been on lean pay for 20 years and have efficient pubrs/shd/ take up with an undercapitalized new pubr//=

better they shd. earn money

and spend it. simpler all round.

You can ask 'em but I can't. Joyce, Lewis, Yeats, Ford wd certainly ALL tell me to go to hell on any such proposition. Hem. wd. give me the money on condition I ate it mself and refrained from encouraging authors.

Aldington makes money, I don't spose the others have any, except Nancy who is working on Scotsborough.

On the whole wd/be simpler to earn some money and spend it printing an occasional book.

You might earn some, by writing ads/for pinchthearse corsets or something. You wd/git some practice in direct simple statement.

You CANT limit a guild to the best//meaning highbrows AND still get Edgar Wallace to sell AT THE SAME TIME.

THE first essential step/IF a company is to be started is to get a list of books (at least SIX) that could conceivably sell. How many "How to Reads" have Bruce Humphries sold???

... At present I am ready to donate my share (25) bucks to the show in form of two weeks salary to the hon. sec/covering the two weeks spent by him on shipboard, comin an goin and contained, included or circumvolved in the maximum \$112 of his transport (as

mentioned in previous korryspundence).

UNLESS there is a LIST of books known to the etc// the time is inopportune//Books known to E.P. are the Cocteau and Bill's Poems which last the american pubshiting world do not regard as a good bet (Financially).

BEFORE I have anything to do with the show you must see Desmond HOWELL and see if he thinks its a business proposition/// GOTT to get out of highbrow licherary circle of viciousness//Howell has had some bizniz xperience ... etc ... at any rate only by getting out of small inside ring can the thing be practical ...

You'll find him ignorant of comparative literature/// all right//<sup>19</sup>  
so iz the pubk//

Pound's criticism of the plan was indicative of the direction Zukofsky's thinking was to take. In knocking the proposals into a workable shape, much of the radicalism was to be lost, although most of the motivating ideals remained in a modified form. The scheme that Zukofsky had arrived at by October 1933 followed many of Pound's ideas. The core of the scheme was that the writers involved should in effect publish their own work and, as far as possible, pay for the overheads. A professional printer was to be used - Little and Ives of New York - who would, it was hoped, guarantee a high standard of presentation of the books which, unlike the 'To' volumes, were to be bound. The professional appearance of the volumes was to be further enhanced by the use of 'important people' such as Wallace Stevens to write the introductions. In order to keep the costs down and maintain control, most of the work was to be done by Reznikoff and Zukofsky who took on the job of secretary, publicist and distributor.

The most important feature of the plan was that it was to be the writers themselves publishing their own work. Any writer prepared to do this would be eligible, providing their work met with the approval of Zukofsky. The finance was to come from voluntary contributions from those involved, from any remaining receipts of 'To' and from the sale of the books. Following Pound's advice, the first book was to be the one with the best

chance of selling. For this William Carlos Williams was chosen because of his comparatively well established reputation.

In October 1933 Zukofsky wrote to Rakosi to inform him of these developments and to send him the prototype of the publicity announcement that was to appear in magazines, newspapers and as circulars:

The Objectivist Press  
10W36 St. New York

Announces

the publication of the Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams (\$2.00).

Also Jerusalem the Golden (poems, \$1.00) and Testimony (prose \$1.00) by Charles Reznikoff.

Advance orders are now being accepted. The first year's program will include:

if (55 Poems by Louis Zukofsky  
we get (probably Bunting  
that far ( " you

The Objectivists Press is an organisation of writers who are publishing their own work & that of other writers who they think ought to be read.

Advisory Board

E.P.

W.C.W.

L.Z.s'ecy.

(we don't know yet,  
but are almost sure)

And that's all the announcing or prospecting we'll do.

20

Pound's response to the announcement was swift and positive:

GOOD! that is the kind ova nouncement that can be READ and comprehended. Do I onnerstan that the 55 poems means a new YANTHOLOGY. If so I approve. I suggest that it include NO poems by authors OLDER than L/Z B/B and Rakosi I suggest it be in bulk say 60% from these three authors plus Oppen and that you represent as many new authors as possible. By one poem each (or at least try to get in 20 different YOUNGER poets/treating yrselves as the 1925 ers, the men now 30 years ov age an dover// try to get twenty guys UNDER 30.

Even if you have to include promising minds, who aren't povably good poets. to make up the 20 or 15 or whatever.

Title Objectivist Press / is excellent. Let me amend yr/sentence/ it shd/read "We have not asked W. Stevens because HE wd. be no use."

Yes/az implied in opening word of this epustle. I hereby consent to the use of my name on yr/vidsory board or plank/and will leave it thaaar till you git too ornry.



Also I will take a vote on the board when you and Bill can agree.  
Also the advisory board is not to be watered by the addition of<sup>21</sup>  
catpissary members.

For all of Pound's enthusiasm, the achievements of the Objectivist Press were few, although some volumes were produced, notably the Williams, Reznikoff's Jerusalem the Golden and Testament and George Oppen's Discrete Series. Rakosi, although contributing money and corresponding with Zukofsky on the subject was never published by the Press. The Press was killed primarily by financial constraints, contributions were slow to come in and books were slow to sell. Also, Zukofsky found it increasingly difficult to run the operation virtually single handed, whilst at the same time producing his own poetry and having to teach to make a living, particularly when part of that income was swallowed up by keeping the Press alive. The 'big cheese members' Zukofsky had hoped to attract never materialized. William Carlos Williams contributed his work, money and support, although he maintained his conventional publishing contacts, and Ezra Pound allowed the use of his name and continued to provide his own brand of advice, but in general the established writers ignored the Objectivist Press. Even if financial problems had not put a stop to the Press it probably would not have survived the war or the right wing hysteria of McCarthyism that followed it. The idea of self-publication was one which Zukofsky was to return to throughout his career, however. The reason for this was not always as a result of idealism, but of Zukofsky's continuing disaffection with established publishers, and theirs with him. His distrust of publishers and their machinations was to be partially responsible in the 1960s for rifts between Zukofsky and Oppen, and to a lesser extent with Reznikoff. A good example of the way in which such a rift could arise from a confrontation between tactless uninformed publishers and Zukofsky's pessimistic stubbornness, is contained in two letters he wrote to Cid Corman in 1962:



There was such a great rush to publish L.Z. you know that it turns out that the Laughlin-San Francisco Review combo publishing Rezy is also bringing out George Oppen at the same time, and some others as well - that's in Sept. And I guess or C's guessed the intention is to win you over in case you do a review. Which - the Oppen publication is allright with me - except that ever since Jim held out hope for the Cat. & Oppen was consulting me as to what to include in the Rezy it was always with regret that L.Z.'s poems couldn't be done at the same time, but that Laughlin had said that something must be etc. & would - & of course as I told them I have nothing but good will towards Rezy coming out first, but why Oppen after all these years should be so cagey about his own good fortune with me, I don't know. They played that kind of game with me almost 30 years ago - there's nothing to resent but I get tired of all this deviousness. They've been trying to get me to do a review ostensibly of Rezy, after failing to get a preface (I told them I wasn't doing that for anyone anymore - that they could reprint my 1930 essay on Rezy if they wished & well I suppose that's how they sought out C.P. Snow.) - but the aim obviously was to exhume the Objectivists with G.O. as one of the originals, since Koehler approached me first as he put it because G.O. had told him I could best handle that episode of Bill's story. I suppose since the piece I sent Mass. Rev. doesn't handle that at all - but Bill himself - explains that imposes Koehler's silence. To hell with it all - why should I bother you, except you know how wholeheartedly I had urged G.O. for Origin - I wouldn't have minded at all if he'd said what he wanted in the first place. 22

These feelings were still evident in the September when the Reznikoff volume was issued. Zukofsky again wrote to Corman:

Rezy phoned to say he'd send his book inscribed to all of us, and he did - but that was after June called to ask if we'd go to the cocktail party for the authors - I said I wouldn't. The "formal" invitation followed anyway - a kind of order blank from Gotham Book Mart, with a mimeographed circular all about G.O. and C.R. & the Objectivists - but L.Z. is never mentioned! (Marianne Moore is, but she had nothing to do with it & G.O. never has a good word for her.) G.O. hasn't sent his - and after all this aristocratic behavior they expect me (not C.R., he's just being used for business) to abet them with homage? My excuse was I don't go to parties - as you know - but had I known I might have asked what good would I do 'em. 23

Although Zukofsky was to continue self-publishing and spending time and money on printing, binding and distribution, the job of editing was one of which he undertook little after the nineteen thirties. Similarly, the amount of public criticism which he produced declined as his career progressed, although private criticism in correspondence was

something he seemed to do naturally. Editing and publishing were carried out when Zukofsky felt that there was a need for them, and when that need was pressing enough to become a priority. His approach to editing was consistent with his approach to his poetry, and for a while it was part of 'the job'. When it got in the way of poetry, however, priorities had to be re-established.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Short Poems

Zukofsky was consistently a believer in the idea that the poet writes one poem in his life and that the individual pieces are moments from that work. "A" itself is an example of this philosophy at work, in that it is composed of a series of complete poetic 'objects', at once capable of being removed and considered separately, and yet forming the fabric of a cohesive work in their co-existence. Throughout the time Zukofsky was writing "A" he produced a steady output of short poems, discrete from the long work, and yet shot through with the same concerns.

It is perhaps easy to assume that the "Objectivist" was a latter day imagist whose characteristic poem was the short condensed impression - a continual re-enactment of Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'. From this assumption rises the question of how "A", with its vast physical size, can ever be considered an "Objectivist" poem. Given Zukofsky's position in any reasonable definition of the "Objectivist", and the major importance of "A" in relation to his complete poetic output, then the long poem becomes the archetypal "Objectivist" work. The real question, therefore, is how far the short poems can be considered to be "Objectivist" works.

Most of Zukofsky's earlier short poems of publishable quality are contained in 55 Poems. These are divided into three sections, 'Poem Beginning "The"', '29 Poems' and '29 Songs'. Contained in '29 Poems' are the few very early poems (referred to in a previous chapter) which Zukofsky retained for publication. An example of this is 'tam cari capitis'. Otherwise the span of '29 Poems' reaches from the Oppen-like poem beginning 'Not much more than being' to the organic layering of 'D.R.'

- a poem surprisingly similar in both theme and structure to William Carlos Williams' contemporary work 'It is a Living Coral'.

To suggest the precedence of "A" over the shorter poems is not to suggest that, with the possible exception of 'Poem beginning "The"', they are merely maquettes for sections of "A" or that they cannot properly be viewed as "Objectivist" work. In Zukofsky's terms, the poems must stand or fall by the same criteria - sincerity, objectification and the principles of the objective lens. To apply this regimen of precision to the shorter poems is perhaps easier than to make the same critical demands on "A", and there is always the comparison with the short "Objectivist" works of Oppen, Reznikoff and Rakosi to illustrate a definitive "Objectivist" demand for brevity. In fact a study of the short poems does provide the critic with a relatively painless method of recognising and isolating the defining principles, but it is through the unlocking of "A" that the true nature of these principles and their effect on the poet's voice may be seen.

The fifth of '29 Poems' is a good example of what could be assumed to be the 'typical' "Objectivist" poem, a purely empirical statement of a visual impression:

Ferry

Gleams, a green lamp  
In the fog:  
Murmur, in almost  
A dialogue

Siren and signal  
Siren to signal.

Parts the shore from the fog,  
Rise there, tower on tower,  
Signs of stray light  
And of power.

Siren to signal  
Siren to signal.

Hour-gongs and the green  
Of the lamp.

Plash. Night. Plash. Sky.

This poem has all the ingredients - it is a short, precisely stated description creating a satisfyingly fresh picture through a combination of close observation and carefully arranged sound patterns. The observational care is an example of 'sincerity' - the 'care for detail'. The poem also displays a high degree of 'objectification' - 'the ideation into structure'. The key to this is the line structure, which, if broken down, destroys the poem and leaves, at best, a very trivial statement. 'Line structure' in this context refers, of course, not only to the linear groupings of words with their resultant line-endings, but also to the intralinear rhythm and sound relationships. Writing in 1946, in a draft preface for Zukofsky's Anew, William Carlos Williams explains the nature of the line:

When the 'music' of a line takes primary place in the line there is no poem. It is the words that have primary place in a line and in a poem - which is an arrangement, an invention of lines, if possible, anew. ... The line, the line. It is the making of the line. The line is the meat - and not, not what it says. ... First the spareness of the language - the language in general is related to speech, to the sounds of speech - remember that in a poem the sound is primary to the word - the line is made up of sounds which by that add another meaning to the word, an additional meaning, which in the aggregate is the poem. That's why in some modern poems a word is split in half at the end of a line, to emphasise the primacy of the sound. (NOTE: I did not say the sound is more important than the meaning). ... All verse is measure. We may not be able to measure it, we may not know how but, finally, it is measure.

Then a new line is a new measure.

2

That the line is important to any poem is undeniable, but in Zukofsky's work it takes on an extra value. Williams' statement again bears relevance to "A"-7 in which a traditional form, the sonnet, is transformed into 'a new measure', partially by an awareness of the 'primacy of the sound' helped by a meticulously precise choice of words. The demand for precision, with its consequent pruning of the language down to the spare essentials, means that the language is unable to carry the poem should the line structure hesitate. Further, the economy of language



requires what Williams calls the 'additional meaning' imparted by the relationships within the line, in order to achieve the round solidarity, or completeness, that the objectified poem must have. The line structure, therefore, is the key to Zukofsky's work and it must be read, or at least recognized, if the poem is not to collapse.

This is not to say, however, that without precision of the vocabulary, the line structure will survive. If the word fails, then the line goes with it, for when dealing with a poem rather than a theory the two are inextricably bound together. Zukofsky was later embarrassed by 'that damn word "gyre"' in poem 3 of '29 Poems' and indeed the word stands out and puts the integrity of the entire poem in question.

'29 Poems' is a collection of experiments, a working-out of ideas which does not always result in a successful poem. The collection has its successes but many of the poems are examples of successful moments in a context which never fully coalesces - in Zukofsky's terms, 'sincerity' without 'objectification'. An example of how critical the control must be is found in the fourteenth poem of the series:

14

Only water -

We seek of the water  
The water's love!

Shall we go again  
Breast to water-breast,

Gather the fish-substance,  
The shining fire,  
The phosphor-subtlety?

We sing who were many in the South,  
At each live river mouth  
Sparse-lighted, carried along!

(p32)

At first glance this would seem to be an acceptably successful 'objectivist' poem, displaying tight control of rhythm and sound combinations, although the mechanism by which this control is exercised is at times a

little too clearly visible - for example the use of 'the' in lines two and three. Something goes very wrong however, in lines seven to nine. This section is signalled by a rhythmical break between lines six and seven and is further isolated by a break in the rhythm between lines nine and ten. There is an awkwardness in the expression 'fish-substance' which diverts attention away from the flow of the poem. The meaning of the words is not precise enough to carry the poem and the hyphenation adds to the disarray. This is highlighted by the recurrence of the hyphen in the expression 'phosphor-subtlety'. Intended to tie together more closely the association between 'phosphor' and 'subtlety', in practice it breaks down the image and destroys its solidity.

Rhythmically, the poem is left in mid-air at this point, as the line 'The phosphor-subtlety?' fails to round it off before the instigation of the different measure of the last three lines. Again in these lines the intrusive hyphen makes an appearance, but the main fault here is one of rhythm. Having begun after a slightly mis-handled rhythmical break, the section loses its own rhythmical integrity in the last line. The jagged staccato of this line fails to round off the poem and leaves it disturbingly unfinished. Zukofsky's least successful poems are often marred by the throwing away of rhythmical control in the last line. As this suggests, the difference between the poem that fully succeeds and the one that falls below this standard is one of degree of control or resolution of all the elements into one solid whole. It is, in Zukofsky's own terms, the difference between a poem which displays 'sincerity' and one which achieves a combination of both 'sincerity' and 'objectification'. Once again, 'that which is aimed at' is the 'direction of historic and contemporary particulars', in which all the component elements, or particulars - subject, words, their structural co-existence, line structure and measure - are forged into an unbreak-

able object. The important consequence of this technique is the interdependence of all the elements, such that should one element be weak then the entire structure will collapse. Thus the 'objectivist' criterion demands the highest level of precision in all of the poem's interleaved concerns and gives the poet no leeway for deviation or inattention.

An example of the complexity which often marks a strict adherence to this criterion is the third of 29 Songs:

3

Prop. LXI

(The Strength of The Emotions O Ethica ordine  
geometrico demonstrata: IV)

Confute leaf -  
Point's water with slight dropped sounds, -  
Turn coat, cheat facts, say for the spring's bloom's fall  
The tree's trunk has set the circling horn-branch  
To cipher each drop - the eye - shot in the rain around.

So cheated well  
Let the fallen bloom-wet clutter down, and into ...  
And the heart (fact ..) holds nothing, desire is  
No excess, the eye points each leaf  
The brain desire, the rain (cheat) recites their brief.

(p47)

The poem sets out to 'confute' a simplistic symbolism by confronting it with a precision which is so complete that it is, to borrow Hugh Kenner's phrase, 'hermetically sealed'.<sup>3</sup> Each word is chosen to be irreplaceable and placed in an unalterable position. Thus a word with a number of definitions or usages has those definitions or usages recognised as all contributing to its meaning and they are all utilised within the poem's framework of relationships, so that the word cannot be substituted without part of the structure collapsing. Similarly, line endings are used to strengthen or weaken relationships between words and ideas, as well as to measure out the poem.

The first line serves a double function, introducing the direction the poem is to take by giving prominence to the word 'Confute', and then linking it with 'leaf-' to provide a strong association. The line ending

deliberately reinforces this association by strengthening both it and the connection between 'Point's' and 'water', whilst breaking 'leaf-' away from 'Points's'. The second line is a collection of pattering consonants which mirror the sense of the words, the 'slight dropped sounds'. The word 'dropped' has further significance in its sense or meaning. In the first instance it draws attention to the dropping of the image from line one to line two, effected by the splitting of 'leaf-/Point's'. Secondly, together with 'fall' at the end of line three and 'drop' in line five, it establishes a direction of movement within the poem which is provided with a base line by the words 'fallen' and 'clutter-down' in the second half. Thus the poem is provided with a directional momentum, and the image of the falling water drops is reflected in the sense of the words. The single word is, therefore, so knotted into the web of the poem - affecting its sound, its rhythm, its meaning and its structure - that it is irreplaceable. It is an example of what 'the objectivist' means by 'precision'.

Line three begins with another charged word, 'Turn'. This is a verb/noun play in which both senses are there to be read and have their place in the poem. As a verb, it introduces the idea of turning up the coat collar against the rain, thus becoming part of the central image and taking its place in the symbolist side of the poem's argument. As a noun with 'coat' it furthers the idea of duplicity and falsehood that is supported by the words 'Confute' and 'cheat'. Thus a single two word phrase contains within it both sides of the argument. 'Turn' is also neatly placed as it provides a pivot or turning centre, in that its verbal meaning is dependent upon and supportive of the meaning of the words directly preceding it, whereas its noun meaning is dependent on, and supported by, the words immediately following it.

The line pivots around the phrase 'cheat facts' which forms a chorus for the rest of the poem, firmly restoring the protagonist elements of its constitution. In this instance, the words themselves have clear, unequivocal meanings, but the apparent simplicity of the phrase belies its central importance. The first point to be noted is that it is the statement for which the opening phrase of the poem is an illustration, both in meaning and in word order. Thus, 'Confute' (cheat), leaf-/Point's water (facts). That the word choice and order is a conscious consequence of this structural concern is established when, with an eye to symmetry, the second stanza provides a mirror image of the first in presenting first 'heart (fact ..)' and then 'the rain (cheat)'. The idea of cheating facts is an important one to a poet who bases his work on 'thinking with things as they exist'. Facts within such a philosophy are incorruptible and, when used, must be allowed to retain their 'discretion'. There are two ways in which to 'cheat facts' - one is to promote a false statement as a fact and the other is to use facts to arrive at a conclusion which they cannot support. A spurious symbolism cheats facts in both of these ways. It creates the falsehood that  $a=b$  when  $a$  and  $b$  are in fact totally separate particulars. In doing so, it removes the discretion of the individual fact, by stripping it of its qualities and replacing them with the qualities of a second fact or particular. This is directly opposite to the nature of the image which demands that each fact or particular retains its individual qualities and displays them to the highest possible degree. 'Prop LXI' is an archetype of the poem created by 'thinking with things as they exist', in that it both argues the case for such an approach and, at the same time, illustrates the effects of such precision.

The second half of the third line is symmetrical with the opening phrase of the poem, where the phrase 'say for the' mirrors 'confute', and 'spring's



bloom's fall' mirrors 'leaf-/Point's water'. There is also an internal symmetry in the line in that as it began on a play of verb/noun meanings, so it also ends on one; in this case, the word 'fall' which, in its verb sense, echoes 'dropped', 'drop' and 'fallen' and, in its noun sense, vibrates with the word 'spring's' to reinforce the idea of seasonal change, of one fact (spring) containing within it the necessity of another (fall).

The fourth line introduces another image which is woven into the pattern. This is a physiological image in which the word 'trunk', as well as referring to the tree, becomes anatomical when viewed together with 'horn' in the same line, 'the eye', 'the heart', 'the eye' again, and finally 'the brain'. To Zukofsky the 'physiological' nature of the word was of prime importance. In 1969 he said that

the eye concerns the poet: the ear concerns the poet because he hears noises, and like the kid he's affected. And you can do all sorts of things with the noises. You can imitate natural things, and so forth. I like to keep the noises as close to the body as possible, so that (I don't know how you'd express it mathematically) the eye is a function of the ear and the ear of the eye; maybe with that you might feel a sense of smell, of taste even.<sup>4</sup> So much of the word is a physiological thing.

Zukofsky went on to say that 'the word is such a physiological thing that its articulation, as against that of other words will make an "object"'. The key phrase in relation to 'Prop LXI' and any poem based on 'thinking with things as they exist' is 'that its articulation as against that of other words will make an "object"'. Thus, different words create a different "object", and precision in the choice of words is essential.

The fourth line, moreover, is once again symmetrical, beginning with 'The tree's trunk' and ending with 'horn-branch', the tree references surrounding the active centre of the line. Of this centre, the most important component is the word 'circling'. This is set firmly in the fabric of the line through its perpetuation of the chain of alliteration

which began with 'The tree's trunk' and continues with 'has set the circling'. Its primary function, however, is to lead forward into the fifth line which is almost entirely an exercise in 'circling'.

This line begins with 'To', a small enough word but one which both leads the idea of 'circling' into the line and also introduces the letter 'o', a visual and aural aid which is repeated a further three times through the line. The second word 'cipher' is the most significant element of the line, illustrating again the technique of utilising a word's entire potential in order to tie together all of a poem's concerns in one place at one time. Its first task is to link back alliteratively to 'circling', thus strengthening the bond of ideas. Secondly, it restates the ideas, introduced by 'confute' and 'cheat facts', of a worthless symbolism, both through its meaning of 'worthlessness' and its reference to a code or secret language. The word aids the picture of the progression of rain drops through its suggestion of the branch counting, or arithmetically analysing, the drops as they fall. Finally, it furthers the 'circling' aspect of the line due to its being the arithmetical symbol '0'. This is further represented in the first half of the line by the word 'drop' which, in addition to its verb meaning which aids the descent aspect of the poem, also presents its dominant noun meaning with its suggestion of roundness.

Yet again the line is symmetrical with two sections balancing each other around the pivot provided by '-the eye-'. This arrangement draws attention to the central word and emphasises its importance. The circular theme of the line intensifies its impact and strengthens the solidity of its presence as an image. The dashes that surround the word not only help the symmetry of the line and isolate 'the eye' for emphasis, but also echo the dash at the end of line two which draws the stanza

together and provides part of the inter-stanza symmetry.

The last section of the line successfully closes the first stanza. The 'circular' theme is present through the 'o's in 'shot' and 'around' and the meaning of 'around'. The phrase rounds off the stanza rhythmically and closes the sense and, in doing so, justifies the break between the two halves of the poem.

The second stanza is, in many ways, a mirror image of the first, continuing the symmetry upon which the poem depends. The first line reflects the opening line of the first stanza and completes its action by acknowledging that the instruction has been carried out. The second line behaves in a similar way in that the water with its 'dropped sounds' becomes 'bloom-wet' which has 'fallen' and 'clutters down'. The movement is taken one stage further, however, by the addition at the end of the line of the words 'and into ...'. This effectively forms a base for the directional motion introduced in the first stanza, and thus provides the circumstances in which it can build on the moment that the motion has created.

The first tool used in this process is the series of three dots at the end of the line which, broken down into two and one, appear again further down the stanza. These have the effect of providing a pause into which the ideas settle without breaking the flow. They also provide a symmetry with the dash at the end of the corresponding line in the opening stanza, and in the same way they reappear, two of them after 'fact' in the third line and one after 'cheat' in the last line. The stanza goes 'into' the propositions set up in the first half of the poem. In the third line there is a return to the physiological theme with the word 'heart'. Thus the physiological aspect is stated clearly rather than being suggested through an image. This is reinforced by its being followed by '(fact...)' which emphasises the concrete nature of the

physiological presence. Coming at the centre of the line '(fact..)', isolated by its brackets, also provides a pivot between ideas which are finely balanced in opposition to one another. As the two stops that follow the word would suggest, this represents a point of going 'into' the proposition. 'The heart' - 'holds nothing' and so the physiological 'fact' is just that, a fact in its own right, and so holds no key to a symbolic interpretation of other facts around it.

Because of their position in relation to a line ending, 'desire is' and 'No excess' become charged with meaning which, without this structural device, they could not sustain. The connection between the two halves of the phrase is emphasised by its being bracketed at either end with a comma, but the split between them is much stronger, suggesting that they require separate attention. 'Desire is' becomes a statement of existence, connected to the heart, whereas 'no excess', by dropping to the next line, is connected more closely to 'the eye'. Thus, 'the heart', a physiological fact, 'holds nothing' but desire does exist. Further, 'desire is no excess' but a fact, as is that which the eye perceives.

The remainder of the fourth line is a direct response to the first two lines of the stanza and the fourth line of the first. 'Confute leaf-/ Point's water' becomes 'the eye points each leaf'. The manner in which the poet perceives the world dictates his treatment of it. Essentially it is his eye which shapes his response rather than his 'heart'.

Although the 'tree's trunk has set the circling horn-branch' it is the eye which 'points each leaf'. Therefore, to use Charles Reznikoff's word, it is the 'testament' of the eye which shapes the poetic object and upon which an emotional response depends, rather than the poet applying a ready made emotional structure onto the world he perceives. Intellect, brain, and emotions, with what may be their relatively corrupt substructures are allowed to infiltrate the process as little as



possible so that it is the eye - unfettered and isolate - and perhaps also the ear, which builds the poem, however astigmatic. This was emphasised in the last line of the first stanza when 'the eye' appears isolated from its surroundings by the dash on either side of it.

The phrase 'the eye points' has a further contribution to make to the theme of a physiological poetry. It looks forward some six years to the poem and group of poems called 'I's (pronounced Eyes)'. This idea ties together the eye, the word and the object into a solid unit. 'The eye points' suggests the lower case letter 'i' with its 'point', and this suggestion is underlined by the letter's appearance in the seven major words of the last twelve - 'points', 'brain', 'desire', 'rain', 'recites', 'their' and 'brief'. In his essay 'Sincerity and Objectification' (1930), Zukofsky had written of objectification that

its character may be simply described as the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity - in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into structure. Granted that the word combination "minor unit of sincerity" is an ironic index of the degradation of the power of the individual word in a culture which seems hardly to know that each word in itself is an arrangement, it may be said that each word possesses objectification to powerful degree; but that the facts carried by one word are, in view of the preponderance of facts carried by combinations of words, not sufficiently explicit to warrant a realization of rested totality such as might be designated an art form. 5

Given that the last part of the statement is a justification for the art of poetry - or more precisely, a backing off from the implications of the extreme minimalism of the phrase 'each word possesses objectification to a powerful degree' - there remains the conviction that, for Zukofsky, the individual word has a constructional solidity and impact which at once shapes the poem, and stands apart from it, intact and immovable. Thus the word is capable of carrying the extra demands put upon it by extreme condensation of the poetic statement. The most formal expression of this is to be found in the form of the haiku as redefined by Ezra



Pound. The stroke of mastery that Pound accomplished was to take the curious effects of inadequate, or perhaps impossible, translation and turn them into a powerfully expressive contemporary form, without losing the essence of the original. The implications of the weight which Pound discovered that each individual word could carry are to be found in the well known 'In a Station of the Metro' or, in Pound's wake, by George Oppen in 'Bad times' and 'As I saw' (Discrete Series, 1934). Bearing in mind the burden of each word in the elongated 'Prop LXI', it comes as no surprise that Zukofsky's return to the eyes (i's) idea takes the form of a playful vertical haiku, the word itself being played with in the poem:

I's (pronounced eyes)

Hi, Kuh,

those  
gold'n bees  
are I's

eyes,

skyscrapers.

6

All the cross referencing and multi-loading of words that operates in 'Prop LXI' operate equally here, although in an eccentric (in Zukofsky's terms 'astigmatic') way. The poem, in its lightness and simplicity serves to illustrate the technique whereby the physiological approach bonds together with subject, the structure and the words themselves. Thus 'I's' (through sound reference) become 'eyes' and 'Hi', emphasised by the introduction of 'bees' ('b's') and then through reference to shape and (obliquely) through the prompting of 'Hi', becomes 'sky-scrapers'. 'Skyscrapers' has the reinforcement of the sound reference in the first syllable to further its association. The poet's eye is represented both as a subject and, through the act of perception, brings its observation into the poem. This involves considerations of sound, word meaning and structure. The word 'structure' is used here both in

the sense of word relationships - their juxtaposition, the cross referencing technique and their position relative to line endings - and the physical shape that the poem demands. In deference to the 'I - Hi - skyscraper' development, the haiku form is turned on its side to appear vertical, in contrast to the emphatically horizontal form favoured by Pound and Reznikoff.

A unity forged between subject, structure and the individual word is the deciding factor in the success of 'Prop LXI' and is particularly evident in the last two lines. A by-product of this technique, when tightly controlled, as has been mentioned above, is the way in which the poem lends itself to a high degree of symmetry which further binds it together. The last line of the first stanza anticipates the structure of the last line of the second. 'To cipher each drop - the eye' illustrates the 'i - eye' connection in that a ciphered drop - an 'o' shape surmounting a 'drop' - forms a letter 'i' which becomes 'eye', and the phrase 'shot in the rain around' is picked up again by the word 'rain' appearing in the middle of the last line.

The last two lines are a return to the argument between symbolism as a vehicle for emotional content as against 'thinking with things as they exist'. 'The eye points each leaf' is separated from 'The brain desire' by a line-ending in order to tie it back into the body of the stanza, yet together the two phrases establish the rest of the last line - 'the rain (cheat) recites their brief'. In this instance, the rain as symbol is seen to be used for the purposes of eye and brain. Rather than being a component in its own right it is a slave of eye and brain, carrying weight which, as an independent 'object' it cannot support - it 'recites their brief' rather than substantiating its own position.

The phrase 'recites their brief' picks up the language of a legal

testimony that threads its way through the poem with words such as 'confute', 'cheat facts', etc..

The complexity illustrated above is a result of what may be called 'absolute structure', in which every element of the poem's structure is so tightly controlled and unified that no part of it can be altered without throwing out of line its every other part. Reading such a poem presents problems if the reader is to approach anywhere near the driving mechanism. Zukofsky's advice to a puzzled reader would always have been to read what is there, the problem being that there is so much there. As 'Prop LXI' illustrates, it is essential 'to cipher each drop', to 'clutter down, and into' in order to reveal what is on the surface. Heavy demands are made not only on the reader, but on the poet as well, of course. It is the paradox of 'objectivist' poetry that the stripping away of the unnecessary and the use of the bare essentials should introduce, not simple clarity, but a maze of intertwined considerations, all interdependent and mutually supporting, like an electronic printed circuit board. Such an analysis is perhaps not totally necessary to an immediate appreciation of the poem's main direction and form, but it is useful as a definition of the terms needed in order to explore what makes an 'objectivist' poem. It is even more important to an attempt to break into the 'hermetically sealed' nature of "A", since the devices illustrated above constitute the mechanism by which the hermetic seal has been applied. The connections in 'Prop LXI' are comparatively easy to find since they are concentrated together into ten lines, while the scale of an individual movement of "A" is such that a word-by-word analysis would in most cases become too unwieldy. It is essential, therefore, that the elements of these connections are recognised, in order that a technique for reading the poem may be assumed rather than constantly restated.

## CHAPTER V

### 'A round of fiddles' "A"1-12

In an article that appeared in 1973, Peter Quartermain, discussing "A"-7 wrote that

In any conventional sense, then, a poem by Zukofsky has no "direction" at all. What direction it has is the direction our lives have: the direction toward form. The poem is "about" nothing at all, except itself. It is, then, a self-sufficient object, like life (which is another way of saying, I suppose, <sub>1</sub> that it is a poem).

Discussing a poem of 806 pages written over forty-six years, questions arise concerning direction, movement, form, structure, cohesion and unity, the very scale of the work blurring the regular guidelines. The poem certainly has 'movement' - in one sense it has twenty-four of them and Zukofsky did not choose the term lightly. The movements are twenty-four phases in the poem's progress and, in the sense of a musical score, each movement measures motion in time from beginning to end. Having movement implies having direction - the poem moves from "A" with 'A/Round of fiddles playing Bach' to "Z" with the poem closing on the poet's initials, and this in a sense defines its direction. The poem moves through time, both in its measured beats and the chronology imposed by the events of the life which inform it. Quartermain's statement that it has 'the direction our lives have' reveals not merely a consequence of an 'objectivist' poetry, but a conscious device, a motivating influence on the poem.

Answering a question on the sawhorses in "A"-7, Zukofsky said that

I use words for them, how can I get them across except for words? I say "sawhorse"; otherwise they'd better speak for themselves. That's a case of objectification. There are these sawhorses. Alright, somebody can look at them and not bother with them. They interested me. But I wanted to get them into movement because I'm interested in the sound of words. So I got them into movement. Of course, in "A"-7 I have also talked about words, what to do



with words.

"A" is written at various times in my life when the life compels it. That also means that my eye is compelling something or my ear is compelling something: the intellect is always working with words. Being a certain creature with my own bloodstream, etc., I will probably, unless I discover something new to interest me or something worthwhile to write about, probably repeat many things. All art is made, I think, out of recurrence. The point is to have recurrence so that it isn't mere repetition, like Poe's "Bells, bells, bells, bells." The point is to have these recurrences so that they will always turn up as new, "just" different. Something has happened to the movement or you see the thing differently. Now this business of words occurs in the first movement "A"-1, and though I'd like to forget it, I must say this: I think that too much of our literature is about the craft of literature. Two great faults I'd like to avoid, but unfortunately I'm among men - I live in my times--- The other fault is pretension to learning. How can they all know so many things? By the time I'm eighty I hope to be very simple, if I haven't shut up. 2

The quotation reveals a great deal, both about the construction of the poem, and the relationship between the work of art and the life. The first point to be noticed is that the 'sawhorses' are 'got ...into movement' by their inclusion in the poem. The process by which this is achieved may be summed up as follows. 'Movement' in poetry is derived principally from its music and this, in time, is forged from words through the process of the poet arranging them. Words, for Zukofsky, are 'absolute symbols' for objects or values, in which case movement - musical or poetic - pertaining to words in the context of a specific poem must necessarily also pertain to the objects those words 'absolutely' represent within that context. Further, 'movement' by necessity implies 'direction', and thus the suggestion can be made that the direction of the events brought in as objects, and the musical direction of the poem, must be one. Again we return to 'objectification' being 'inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars', since here we have another example of 'sincerity' and 'its ideation into structure'.

The most important reference Zukofsky makes in the quotation is to the 'recurrences' which 'always turn up as new, "just" different'.





That the poem was informed by a plan, and that this involved the baroque fugue, is backed up in a 'Preamble to A', which Zukofsky included in a letter to Cid Corman in 1960.

The structure of "A" involves historic and other present particulars in the contrapuntal design of the fugue as transferred to poetry. The mentor is Bach, whose St. Matthew Passion is the start of my poem. Each material recurs throughout - facts of his life, a mass after his B minor ("A"-10), "A"-11 is pre-Bach - Italian song that he used, "A"-12 is prompted by his Art of Fugue, especially the fugue based on the letters of his own name BACH<sup>4</sup> which I announce on the first page of this movement.

"A" was written in two distinct halves, each half taking twenty-three years to write if years of silence are included. Zukofsky signalled this in two ways, first by allowing Cid Corman to publish "A"1-12 as a complete volume, and by making every movement after "A"-13 (based on Bach's partitas) a 'song beginning An'. The first half contains three movements of critical importance to an understanding of the poem. The first is the opening movement, with its role as an introduction. "A"-7 is a concentrate of the techniques and poetic concerns of Zukofsky's work and serves as a node, or point of affirmation, in the development. "A"-9 serves as a thematic node, since it concentrates the poem's thematic content. Zukofsky saw the form of the Italian canzone as the first manifestation of a poetic exploration of the principles of the fugue and since "A"-9 is based on Cavalcanti's canzone 'Donna mi prega', the movement may also be taken as a pointer to the intended form of the entire work. This is particularly so since the major themes of the early movements of "A" - love, labour and value - are brought into close focus simultaneously with the concentration on the fugue form. The crucial nature of these movements may explain why "A"-7 could, or indeed had, to be written before "A"-5 and 6, and why the second half of "A"-9 was written after "A"-10 and an eight year break for other projects.



conversational, and infelicities were able to creep in more readily.

Most of the revisions merely entail a paring away of unnecessary details and the occasional restructuring of a line. The poet's aim is always to tighten up the measure and cut out any imprecision, arriving eventually at a more condensed and polished verse more closely approaching a mathematical and musical poetic ideal.

This type of revision may be illustrated by a closer examination of some of the reworked sections of the early movements. A good example of this is a comparison between part of the 1932 version of "A"-2 and its appearance in 1978.

The clear music -  
Zoo - zoo - kaw - kaw - of - the - sky.  
Not mentioning names, says Kay,  
Poetry is not made of such things.  
Old music, itch according to its wonts,  
Snapped old cat-guts from Johann Sebastian,  
Society, traduction twice over.

Damn you, Kay,  
What do you, Kay, know about it!  
Wherever always we are  
Crowds the sea in upon us,  
Shivers of slugs from the seaweed,  
Tossed cuttlefish shouldering  
Ball of imperialism,  
Wave-games of its stanchions: nations -  
Navies and armaments drilling -  
Churning of old religions, epos,  
Agamemnon carrying off at least two for his comfort -  
The women, epopt, caryatid, holding, holding, the world -  
cornice,  
"Please now and thank you,"  
(Agamemnon), very much like the sailors,  
Lust and lust ritornelle.

5

After revision this becomes

- Clear music -  
Not calling you names, says Kay,  
Poetry is not made of such things,  
Music, itch according to its wonts,  
Snapped old catguts of Johann Sebastian,  
Society, traduction twice over.

- Kay, in the sea  
There with you,  
Slugs, cuttlefish,  
Ball of imperialism, wave games, nations,  
Navies and armaments, drilling,  
Old religions -  
Epos:  
One Greek carrying off at least two wives for his  
comfort -  
Those egypt caryatids, holding, holding, the  
world-cornice.  
(Agamemnon). Very much like the sailors.  
Lust and lust. Ritornelle.

The most immediate difference between the two is the removal of the clumsy line or word whenever it may be found - the 'Zoo - zoo - kaw - kaw - of - the - sky' for example, or the 'old' before 'music'. This process is backed up by subtle word changes designed to render the meaning more precise, such as the substitution of 'of' for 'from' before 'Johann Sebastian'.

In the section after 'Society, traduction twice over', the effect of the revision is not only the removal of what may be termed musical errors, but also the clarification and sharpening of the image, so that the meaning, as well as the aesthetic impact, is fortified. The conversational element is removed, since it upsets the poem's direction, and the sea image is then tightened up into short percussive statements, so that the tread is firmer and the effects of 'sea' and 'drilling' may be felt more strongly. Beyond this, revision takes the form of restructuring, so the 'old reli-gions' and 'epos' are given new emphasis by becoming isolated as lines in their own right. This results in the first introduction of Agamemnon, the introduction being particularly essential since the revised version drops the first mention of the name. The remainder of the extract is tidied up considerably. By removing 'the women' and substituting 'those', and the inclusion of the word 'wives' in the previous line, the meaning is clarified and the poetry rendered less cluttered. This refinement is



assisted by revised punctuation so that 'The women, epopt, caryatid, holding the world -/ cornice' becomes 'Those epopt caryatids, holding, holding, the/world-cornice'. Finally mid-line breaks are introduced by the use of full stops to provide emphasis, although this is secondary to the line separation used earlier in the extract.

The overall effect of the revised second movement is a sharpening of detail, a more accurate focussing of the 'objective lens'. The revisions to the third and fourth movements are by contrast much more fundamental. In going back over the work Zukofsky shifts the weight of the verse so that its central drive is completely altered. In the earlier published version (The New Review 1931) the two movements appear together as one continuous piece, under the title 'Third and Fourth Movements: "out of the voices"', the quotation being part of the last line of the preceding movement - 'The song out of the voices'. This would suggest a recognition that reworking was going to be necessary and that the movements appear as work in progress, rather than a finished piece in 1931. The break between the movements, when it finally appeared, was at a point of change in perspective, and yet not at a clean break in the original version. To take up the idea of the fugue again, "A"-3 marks the introduction of voices picking up a different song or musical component from those which characterized "A"-2. In "A"-3 this melody appears alone and simple, but in the fourth movement the comparative complexity of the verse signals that it is being woven into previous themes, so multi-layering the score. The 1931 version of the third movement had the tone of a requiem, but in its final form the movement is more of a valediction, or valedictory reflection. This is carried out through a pruning of detail and an alteration of rhythm through word omission and line restructuring. The original opening read

At eventide, cool hour of rest  
It is your dead mouth singing

Ricky,

Automobiles speed past the cemetery,  
No gage measures,

No meter turns.  
Sleep

With an open gas range  
Beneath for a pillow.

The cat? paw brought back  
Over her seat, velvet,

Leg, crooked:  
Shape: elbow.

"Puss - puss - she doesn't know  
Her seat from her elbow."

"Who smelt gas?  
What? What?"

"Where is the Scotch?" "Would I lie!"  
(Spilt in a bush, a way back  
from the running-board).

"No crossin' bridges, Rick',  
No, no bridges, not after midnight"

"God's - gift - to - 'oman'. when  
'S after midnight

6

By 1978 this section had been reduced to

At eventide, cool hour  
Your dead mouth singing,

Ricky,

Automobiles speed  
Past the cemetery.

No meter turns.  
Sleep,

With an open gas range  
Beneath for a pillow.

The cat, paw brought back  
Over her seat, velvet,

Puss -.

"Who smelt gas?"  
" - Would I lie!"

"No crossin' bridges,  
Rick' -  
No bridges, not after midnight!"

" - God's gift to woman!"

(p9)

Most of the conversation has been removed and with it a lot of the detail that provides awareness of the original scene. An interpretation of this may be that the poet's scheme of which elements were of value had altered by the time of revision. The description of the cat and the conversation concerning the Scotch are removed, and only vestigial traces remain, so that the incident surrounding the death disappears and all that we are left with is the fact. However, this is not to suggest that an impersonal unemotional result has been created, since there is sufficient precise detail left to create its own emotional response.

The lines

No meter turns.  
Sleep,  
With an open gas range  
Beneath for a pillow.

are sufficient to create an image which ensures a response, whilst leaving the poem uncluttered.

The 1931 version then takes a direction which is removed completely from the revision. It continues

It's all after midnight once  
There's a midnight,  
It's all a matter of  
Determining -  
Stand?! - My boy! Has the  
American tragedy in his lap -  
Tool's tarpaulin in  
A tool chest  
Only not just  
Tarpaulin,  
Slicker, something  
For seamen (semen)  
That's to say, allow me to  
Introduce - "Fishskin!"  
How's the old (naval)  
Encounter, otherwise

clean as  
Sapolio!"

Out of memory, a little boy - Rain alights.  
It's rai-ai-ain, Ricky, Coeur de Lion.

What is in a name?  
"Lion-heart", a horse bridled,

Trappings rise and surround  
Princelet out of history;

And more Trappings, churning.  
Rise and surround.

Dark hair, two dark heads  
On white pillows, tall (dead)

Straight foreheads, the beautiful  
Almost sexual brothers.

7

All we are left with in the final version is a truncated expression of  
part of the section:

Out of memory  
A little boy,  
It's rai- ai-nin',

Ricky,  
Coeur de Lion.

Lion-heart,  
A horse bridled -

Trappings rise,  
Princelet  
Out of history.

Trappings  
Rise and surround

Two dark heads,  
Dead, straight foreheads,

The beautiful  
Almost sexual

Brothers.

(pp9-10)

Eighteen lines have disappeared completely from the poem without leaving even a shorthand reference. There are clear reasons for their removal. First of all they introduce a voice which does not harmonise with those around it - it breaks out of the preceding flow and then leads nowhere, thus breaking up the melodic simplicity necessary to successfully differentiate between movements three and four. The sexual nature of the passage appears overstated, and thus again it detracts from the flow around it. More important still, it puts strain on the phrase 'Almost

sexual brothers', which is important enough to require the emphasis of line separation in the later version. Further, references such as 'seamen (semen)' and 'naval'(navel) jar like a nervous laugh at a funeral, something which the tone of the finished movement cannot support.

The section from 'Out of memory' to 'Brothers' is sharpened by pruning and line restructuring, so that it has the strength to sustain the movement. Repetitions and unnecessary words are removed, and lines shortened, in order to arrive at a more precise and direct result. Another indication of the movement's changing function between the two versions lies in the alteration of 'What is in a name?/"Lion-heart", a horse bridled' to 'Lion-heart/A horse bridled -'. The original, with its connection between a 'name' and a 'horse bridled', refers directly ahead to "A"-7 with its horses manes/names discussion. In this form it may be seen as a thread which the later movement picks up. All that is left after revision is the more slender link of the horse, which offers the potential of a unity between movements, without introducing a compound element into a simple movement.

The lines 'The beautiful/Almost sexual/Brothers' bring to an end the 'Passion' sequence. Zukofsky brings together 'Passion', in the sense of the death of Christ and of Ricky, and passion in the sense of sexual love. Although this is played down in the final version it leaves its echoes to be read. Presiding over this as 'mentor' is Bach's St. Matthew Passion, introduced in the first movement. From the 'Passion' the movement goes on to the burial, signalled by the introduction of Joseph of Arimathaea who, according to St. Matthew, gave up his own new tomb to accommodate the dead Christ. This sense of the Christ figure lying dead in the place of 'Arimathaea' is emphasised more strongly in the final version of the movement than in its 1931 appearance. The earlier version reads:



"Go, my soul  
Beg you His corpse!"

I, Arimathaea  
His mirror! lights either side,  
Lord God!

Wish I  
The Glass had been broken!

8

This was amended to read:

I, Arimathaea,  
His mirror,  
Lights either side -

Go,  
Beg His corpse

- Wish I had been broken!

(p10)

The meaning of the passage is reinforced in the revision by the introduction of 'Arimathaea' at the beginning. Clearly, this moves the quoted exhortation further down the passage which makes it more clearly understood, since the idea of Arimathaea has already been established. The quotation is now able to be cleaned up by the removal of quotation marks and awkward words since its meaning has been established. It is the change from 'Wish I/The Glass had been broken' to 'Wish I had been broken' which, by virtue of its new direction, is most significant in establishing the idea of one being dead in the place of another.

The transition from 'passion' to burial in this movement does not mark the end of the theme for the poem as a whole; it is an encapsulation of the theme within a movement which occurs at a suitable point in the development. After "A"-4 which digs back into Old Testament Judaism, only referring to "A"-3 in the line "'My petted birds are dead'", "A"-5 returns to Matthew and the chorale, whilst picking up the threads of "A"-2 with its references to Kay and the leaf-centre. "A"-6 echoes a great deal from "A"-3, including one of the lines cut out in the revision - 'Spilt from the running-board, Ricky!'. Also included are references to

sailors 'in the carousel/ looking for a place to/bury - Ricky', and the resurrection, through memory of 'Ricky's romance/of twenty-three years, in/ Detail, continues'. The biblical story of the Passion is not an act of religious affirmation on the part of the poet, but it is of great importance in the poem. The story of Christ represents a break from Judaism, which was part of the poet's experience, although his route was rather into agnosticism than Christianity. There is also the connection with Bach and the St. Matthew Passion which runs through the text. On a more basic level, however, the story of the death, burial and perhaps resurrection of Christ has a significance for the main themes of this part of "A", love, labour and value. In the first place, it is of primary importance to the direction of Western culture from the period of the Roman Empire, and as such has its place in the poem alongside other influences from China and Japan, from Karl Marx and Spinoza. Further, the elements that go to make up the story have a direct bearing on the major themes of the poem. Such elements as selfless non-sexual love, the actions of authority, death and rebirth, power and triumph and an engagement in the complex of good and evil, form an important thread in the pattern of the poem, offering one perspective amongst others upon the overall design. The fact that the St. Matthew Passion, and hence the Passion itself, are of consistent importance throughout the poem serves to illustrate the relationship between "A"-3 as an individual movement, and the overall shape of the poem. Because a working out of both the idea of a Passion, through a play on its two meanings, and of the Arimathaea figure in the burial takes place in the movement, "A"-3, may be seen as focussing down, to highlight a specific element in the thematic structure. The lens then draws back to reveal the elements as a thread in the pattern. As already stated, another way to see this is as the introduction of one of the parts of the fugue before it is picked up by other voices in blended harmony, like the lone voice that begins and ends a round. This

process occurs and recurs throughout the poem. "A"-8, for example, focusses on labour and communism, "A"-9 on love, labour and value. Contrasted with these is a movement such as "A"-12, which again draws back the lens, and so brings many thematic threads together into a harmonious compound. Thus it may be seen that there are two viewpoints in the poem, the focussed detailing of individual points of interest, and the wider angle view where the elements are combined. It is important that "A"-12 should take the latter role since it completes the first half of the poem. In so doing it fulfils two linked functions; to sum up the elements of the first half of the poem and, to expand them in the manner of the counter-subject of the fugue. In this way "A"-12 is able to close the first half of the poem, whilst at the same time providing the basis for the beginning of the second.

Clearly, "A"-7 and "A"-9 are essential points of focus in the first half of the poem. So too must be "A"-1 and, to a lesser extent, "A"-12. The twelfth movement closes the first half of the poem and thus has a structural role to play. "A"-1 bears the added responsibility of opening and establishing the character of the entire poem. It honours this responsibility in a thorough and satisfying way, stating concerns and pointing the way forward and in.

The opening section of the movement grasps the reader's attention with a flurry of dramatic music, immediately introducing Bach's 'St. Matthew Passion' through the experience of a performance of the work. This is illustrated poetically and graphically in the section, right from the first line - 'A' - which in standing alone to one side of the block represents the still movement as the conductor lifts his baton to bring the orchestra to readiness. Immediately following this, the lines are offset to alternate sides of the typographic block, thus emulating the to and

from motion of the violin bows. The overlay process which creates the image at this point is composed of two further elements. Clearly, one of these is the choice of words which illustrate the nature of the event, such as the 'Round of fiddles playing Bach', the 'passion of our Lord' and 'Johann Sebastian, twenty-two/children!' Here we have a performance of Bach's 'Passion' suggested in a few words. That it is a public performance, with the poet/narrator in the audience, is similarly suggested, in the lines 'Bare arms, black dresses,' and 'Black full dress of the audience./Dead century, where are your motley'. The other element of the process is the preservation of the 'found objects', which in this case are the quotations from the 'Passion', italicized to retain their integrity and independence.

By the end of the first section, the poet has drawn his reader into the dramatic situation and illustrated some of his concerns and techniques. The suggestion, which has been created to draw the reader in, is then reinforced by six lines of solid fact:

The Passion According to Matthew,  
Composed seventeen twenty-nine,  
Rendered at Carnegie Hall,  
Nineteen twenty-eight,  
Thursday evening, the fifth of April.  
The autos parked, honking. (p1)

This reportage is then quickly rendered more personal:

A German lady there said:  
(Heart turned to Thee)  
"I, too, was born in Arcadia." (p2)

The initial effect of these three lines is to crystallize the suggestions made in the opening section. By including the more personal lines at the end, it leads forward into the next phase of the movement, which consists of a descriptive narrative relating the poet's leaving the concert.

This is then interwoven with thoughts or meditation on topics which will recur as points of interest later in the poem. Thought is brought into the poem as an object or particular referring directly to the events, rather than having a parasitic symbolic relationship with them, and it is this kind of relationship which sets the tenor for the poem.

Ideas, themes and words which are to be returned to later in the poem are all introduced and suggested in the opening movement. These include the horses, the 'patrons of poetry' ('cornerstones of waste paper'), political concerns and the writing of poetry. These materials appear interspersed with contemporary particulars, so that the movement is a period portrait of the poet taking part in the event of a concert, his thoughts moving to and fro between the practical and the meditative. His final thought in the movement is a quotation remembered:

"Ye lightnings, ye thunders  
In clouds are ye vanished?

Open, O fierce flaming pit!"

(p5)

It is the exhortation for the poem to open, the defiant gesture of boldly stepping forward and accepting the responsibility of a task to be undertaken. Thus the first movement opens the way for the poem that is to follow.

The shape of the first half of the poem is dictated to a large degree by its focal movements "A"-7 and 9, so it is necessary at this point to look at those movements in detail.

In a letter to Zukofsky in 1931, Ezra Pound wrote:

I thought I said A.7 was technical O.K.  
Experiment/innovation  
What I am doubtful is the technique  
of the half (that is one dept. of technique)  
being) enough to sustain Throughout  
limitless prolongation.



IF you are discussin A at its present  
size/that is ONE prop

If you are diskussin it as the start of  
a pome of "some" length/

that is a NUTHER

And (if you think you are right, go  
ahead, and dont listen to me or any of  
yr/other damned ancestors.

9

The technique of "A"-7 itself would indeed not 'sustain Throughout limit-  
less prolungation', not because it is not enough, but rather because it  
is too much. In the context of the entire poem, however, the density  
and complexity of this single movement draws attention to its role as a  
point of focus. Since the movement is designed to fulfil this role, it  
follows that a prolonging of its technique is neither demanded nor  
expected.

An illustration of this is the way in which "A"-7 brings to focus the  
horses, which appear throughout the poem in a number of contexts. In  
"A"-3 for example, they are the trappings of a prince, in "A"-8 they  
represent labour and industry in the expression 'horsepower' and 'working  
like a horse'. They represent strength, grace, beauty, nature, power  
and, in "A"-7, words. There are bronze horses, wooden horses, wild  
horses and dead horses, seahorses and sawhorses. Nowhere in the poem are  
they as specifically essential as in "A"-7, however. Zukofsky referred  
to the horses in the Contemporary Literature interview of 1969:

Q. Where does the idea of love fit in? It seems to be the  
chief theme of Bottom.

A. Well, its like my horses. If you're good enough to run or  
feel like running, you run. If you want to live, you love; if  
you don't want to live, you hate, that's all. It's as simple as  
that. It's like being and non-being again - just different words  
for states of existence.

Q. The horses in A-7 don't have any manes.

A. Oh, those particular horses are sawhorses. They don't have  
any manes. Oh I see what you're after. I don't think that way  
though. When I say they don't have any manes, that's all I mean.  
It's like the old song, "Yes, We Have No Bananas".

Q. But you say these sawhorses are also words - so they're not just sawhorses.

A. Then if I say that, they are words. I use words for them; how can I get them across except in words? I say "sawhorse"; otherwise they'd better speak for themselves. That's a case of objectification. There are these sawhorses. All right, somebody can look at them and not bother with them. They interested me. But I wanted to get them into movement because I am interested in the sound of words. So I got them into movement. Of course, in A-7 I have also talked about words, what to do with words. 10

The process would seem to be that the poet sees the sawhorses, they interest him and so he includes them in his poem. Things are not as simple as that however, because, as suggested above, the horses play a recurring role through the poem. It could be that since "A"-7 was one of the first movements to be written, the street closed off by the sawhorses was the incident that first stitched them into the fabric of the poem and that their further inclusion springs from that. It is more likely, however, that one of the reasons why they interested Zukofsky was that they fitted in with an already conceived structural device, and hence were able to carry the effect of a major movement.

Zukofsky says in the interview that 'I wanted to get them into movement because I am interested in the sound of words'. It is the 'sound of words' that is of major significance in this movement, the sound being the dynamic component of a word. There are occasions in Zukofsky's work when the sound of words is of such importance to him that it takes precedence over all other considerations. One example of this is I's (pronounced eyes), particularly in the line 'Hi, Kuh', but a much more specific one is the nonsense verse, 'Belly Locks Shnooks Oakie'. This is a little verse that started out as a limerick scribbled down on the fourth of July 1941, perhaps the result of a little seasonal celebration:

"Belly Lox Shnooks Oaky"

Belly Lox Shnooks Oaky  
Went for a walk with a stokey  
They were so doped  
They could not have hoped  
But to sink down to poke pokey.

11

By the time the poem appeared in Anew<sup>12</sup>, and hence All<sup>13</sup>, it had been transformed to read:

Belly Locks Schnooks Oakie  
When he awoke, he  
Scared all the spooks. He  
Was some oak, he  
Was.

The difference between the two versions is that the first is merely a silly verse designed to be funny at the time of writing, whereas the second, whilst retaining the humour, draws the attention to the sounds of words. The lines are crafted so that the pattern of vowels and consonants within the lines and, particularly, the line endings, make a satisfying sound. By removing the already slight meaning in the first version, this interest in the sound is further emphasised. When the effect illustrated in 'Belly Locks Schnooks Oakie' is transferred to a poem, as in "A"-7, it takes on a greater significance.

The scene outlined in "A"-7 is essentially static - there is a street closed off by sawhorses bearing a 'Street Closed' sign, a hole in the road, a vacant laundry and a sign creaking in the wind. The only movement in the scene is very low key - the sign moving and a passing taxi. Even the observer is still, looking at the street from the front porch (stoop) of a house. It is a similar experience to that in the poem 'Immature Pebbles' in which an observer who appears in the verse watches in isolation a scene that unfolds before him. The poem ends with the lines,

In our day, impatience  
handles such matters of photography  
more pertinently from a train window.

14

Discussing 'Immature Pebbles' in the Contemporary Literature interview, Zukofsky said 'I think you can gather that the man who wrote this poem isn't interested in photographing people bathing on a beach' and 'I didn't want to make a photograph and yet I did'. The scene in "A"-7 appears to be an ideal subject for 'photography', a static representation of a static scene. A photographed image is not what Zukofsky is interested in however, and the difference between the static image, and what the poet does with it, is tied in closely with the difference between the sawhorses and the living horses which the poem brings to mind. The sawhorses being brought 'into movement' is an instance of how the otherwise unmoving photographic image can be brought into poetry. Zukofsky 'wanted to get them into movement' because he was 'interested in the sound of words', and it is the sound of words which breathes life into the entire scene. Sound and its rhythm takes precedence in the movement, making a large contribution to the meaning. The key to the technique is the syllable, the recognition of which was to be formalised through the adoption of the canzone form in "A"-9. Whereas the syllabic control of "A"-9 is strictly mathematical, as demanded by the complex form of the canzone, here it is more spontaneous in appearance, a deft quickening of the pace. The structure used is that of the sonnet, presented in a series in such a way that the rhythm hardly breaks between each component. Indeed, the break between the last two is hardly noticeable due to a sentence running on from one to the other. Three of the sonnets finish with the Shakespearian indented couplet and a truncated form of this - an indented pair of matched lines but without the coupled rhyme - is used to signal the break between the last two. As against the more formal mathematical nature of the canzone, the sonnet allows a lighter,

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more relaxed, step to be introduced, although strict rules are still adhered to. Thus we have ten syllables per line, fourteen lines per sonnet, a strict rhyme scheme and three of the seven sonnets ending on an indented couplet. This scheme allows Zukofsky both to indulge in a mathematical game with his readers and to express his almost obsessive interest in the power of number. In the Seventh Movement there are seven sonnets each of 7 x 2 lines. Given ten syllables per line there are 7 x 20 syllables per sonnet, 7 x 140 syllables in the whole movement. To emphasise the point further, the interest in sevens is carried over into the subject. There are seven sawhorses, seven diggers, seven ringers, seven dancers, seven paces and seven saviours each with seven named parts - tongues, hands, feet, eyes, ears, hearts and faces. It is possible to go on playing the game and finding sevens all over the place.

Another, more important reason for the use of the sonnet, however, is its Elizabethan link with the contrapuntally designed music of the air and the madrigal, thus vibrating closely with the overall aim of creating a poetic equivalent of the fugue, and particularly closely with the canzone/fugue interest of "A"-9. Just as important is the powerful tradition of the dance in Elizabethan music, and "A"-7 may be seen as a series of sonnets arranged in a dance. The pace of the movement is breathless, aided by the syllabic structure of the sonnet and the careful placing of soft 'h' and 'w' sounds, vowels and hard consonants. This is further reinforced by the inclusion in the text of words and images associated with flight, dash and headlong dance. For example, there are 'birds of/ Words', 'streaming', 'trot', 'streams', 'airs', 'jiggers', 'dancing bucks' and 'seven sang, danced the paces/seven'. A dancing rhythm also helps the movement of the horses, as the poem races up and down like a galloping horse across full stops and line and sonnet endings. Thus whilst quickening the whole movement, the rhythm is enabling firm wooden



sawhorses to breathe and run through the music of the line.

The movement of "A"-7 is, in many senses, vital. It is founded on a rhythmical structure based on a tradition of dance and the inspiration of movement into the horses. Caught up in this are both the 'objectivist' ideal and the progress of the poem's thematic direction. The years of writing "A"-7, 1928-30 saw the development of the 'objectivist' principles in the February 1931 number of Poetry. The relationship of words to objects and to poetry becomes part of the subject matter of the movement. The prominence of the sound of words as a particular has already been mentioned, but in the eighth line of the movement the appearance of letters is brought in almost as a reverse of the idea that the word is an absolute symbol, since here the object becomes a symbol of written characters - 'two legs stand A, four together M.' A continuation of this idea of the word actually helping us see an object occurs further down the movement, in the lines 'We'll make/Wood horse and recognize it with our words -

/Not it - nine less two!'. Here in a few words is the calibration of the word as absolute symbol. In order that the horses appear in the poem they must be rendered into words. These words, for the 'objectivist', may be absolute symbols, acts of faith, but this need for the word creates responsibility, for it is through the choice of words that we recognize the object. Simply by manipulating the 'absolute symbols' we recognize wooden sawhorses - or living, running, horses - or wooden horses bringing to mind the living animal. This idea is worked out through the movement in the following process. The horses begin the movement as a 'matter of photography', their 'legs are wood... their stomachs are logs with print on them'. That they are an observation and not yet a poem is expressed in the line 'from me to them no singing gut'. The medium needed to make the transformation is words - 'Words/Will do it'. Even this potential is doubted by the second voice, the second side of the argument, because

You're cut out, and she's cut out, and the jiggers  
 Are cut out. No! we can't have such nor bucks  
 As won't, tho they're not here, pass thru a hoop (p39)

The dialogue between the two voices continues so that in the second sonnet the potential is stated again so that we have 'two manes a pair/ of birds, each bird a word, a streaming gut' in which words are seen as capable of giving the horses' manes, a circumstance in which the 'singing gut' or music referred to in the first sonnet becomes a living physiology. Again the premise is questioned ('No horse is here, no horse is there') and the question countered:

Says you! Then I - fellow me, airs! We'll make  
 wood horse, and recognize it with our words - (ibid)

In the third sonnet the dialogue continues, particularly in the question 'he found them sleeping, don't you see?' The reference serves other functions but it again raises the potential of the sawhorses for life, in the sense that the poet 'found them sleeping' and, through his efforts, wakes them into life. The reference to the risen Christ contained in the line, ties in thematically with the larger unit of the whole poem, whilst retaining a specific 'focussed' relevance to the sawhorses in the movement.

In the second part of the same sonnet the link between giving life through words and the biblical resurrection is continued with the lines

For they had no manes ~~we would give them manes,~~  
 For their wood was dead the wood would move - bare (p40)

and 'light lights in air where the dead reposed'. This association in a single phase of a theme which directs the entire poem, and one which serves to define an individual movement, must not be ignored when considering questions of the work's nature as a 'long poem'. Links are

forged which ensure that the requirements of the immediate encapsulated unit which is the movement, contain within them potential points of dependency into the larger whole. The point at which this link is made, in the third sonnet, marks a turning point in the quickening of the sawhorses. From here on the horses are alive, running rapidly through the verse so that the words whistle past the ear as illustrated in the following extract:

"Closed"? then fellow me airs, We'll open ruts  
For the wood-grain skin laundered to pass thru,  
Switch is a whip which never has been, cuts  
Wind for words - Turf streams words, airs untraced - New  
The night, and orchards were here? Horses passes? -  
There were no diggers, bro', no horses there,  
But the graves were turfed and the horses grassed -  
Two voices:- Airs? No birds. Taxi? No air -

(ibid)

The second half of the sonnet again contracts the two voices pivoting around the word 'switch', used both in the sense of a whip and to work a change or switch between the two points of view. The idea being explored is that of the power of words to create something new, whilst maintaining the 'act of faith'. On this point the idea of the street being closed by sawhorses has relevance, since it is through their being given 'life' that the closed form of the sonnet is opened. Of course, the medium for this inspiration of life is the word.

In the following sonnet the argument is advanced in all its directions. First, the power of the word is expressed (in that it is shown to have descriptive force) purely in its sound. The 'bucks' dance in the rapid consonant sequence:

Bum pump a-dumb, the pump is neither bum  
Nor dumb, dumb pump uh! hum, bum pump o! schucks!  
(Whose clavicembalo? bum? bum? te - hum ...)

The next line expresses this specifically - 'Not in the say but in the

sound's - hey - hey - '. Immediately following this, the technique is used again, so that whilst the bucks continue their dance, the theme of biblical resurrection is restated.

The way to-day, Die, die, die, die, tap, slow,  
Die, wake up, up! up! O Saviour, to-day!  
Choose Jews' shoes or whose: anyway Choose! Go! (ibid)

The closing lines of the sonnet acknowledge that the task has been carried out and the horses have life, through the use of the past tense to describe their wooden construction:

But they had no eyes, and their legs were wood!  
But their stomachs were logs with print on them!  
Blood red, red lamps hung from necks or where could  
Be necks, two legs stood A, four together M -  
They had no manes so there were no airs, but -  
Butt ... butt ... from me to pit no singing gut! (ibid)

Placing 'but' in the lines keeps the questioning nature of the argument at hand, offsetting the acceptance injected by the past tense. On this point of tension, the active part of the movement comes to an end. The final two sonnets run together so that the two indented lines which close the sixth, carry over syntactically into the opening lines of the seventh. The two sonnets serve as an extrapolation on the material that makes up "A"-7, but also gather together threads from previous movements. References to 'the sea', 'leaf on leaf' and 'Taken a pump/ And shaped a flower' draw on the 'Kay' sections of "A"-2, 4 and 6. The reference to 'Ricky' looks back to "A"-3 and to 'Shimaunu-San', and the 'Clavicembalo' to "A"-4. Finally, the quotation 'Open - O fierce flaming pit!' refers back to the performance of the St. Matthew Passion in "A"-1. The core of this conglomerate is an expression of Zukofsky's conception of the nature of poetry. An interesting phase in this argument is 'Taken a pump/And shaped a flower'. This is open to two interpretations, and, given the 'two voices' both have their place.

The first is the capacity of verse to romanticise the mundane - a trap for the unwary. The second is a superficially similar process which has, however, a more legitimate result. An objectivist maintains that by bringing an object into a poem with as high a degree of 'sincerity' as possible, a second object, a 'poetic object' with its own validity, beauty and presence will be made. The first ten lines of the sonnet, with their references to the flower, the sea, 'leaf on leaf' and 'liveforever' restate eleven lines from "A"-2 which read

As in Johann Sebastian,  
 Listen, Kay...  
 The music is in the flower,  
 Leaf around leaf ranged around the center;  
 Profuse but clear outer leaf breaking on space,  
 There is space to step to the central heart:  
 The music is in the flower,  
 It is not the sea but hyaline cushions the flower -  
 Liveforever, everlasting.  
 The leaves never topple from each other,  
 Each leaf a buttress flung for the other.

(p7)

An important aspect of the idea is expressed in the lines 'The music is in the flower,/Leaf around leaf ranged around the center', for the characteristic of the flower chosen to carry its 'music' is its structure, regular and unalterable. This is backed up in the last two lines of the extract, which represent an "objectivist" prescription for a verse based on a precise unalterable word choice, with each word and each line mutually dependent - the structure of 'objectification'. With this in mind, 'Taken a pump/And shaped a flower' takes on the direction of sincerity into objectification, through both the immediate choice of words and the power to develop ideas.

Zukofsky's poetic convictions are further stated in the final sonnet of the movement, particularly in the phrase 'Two ways, my two voices ... Offal and what/The imagination...'. Contrasted here are what the poet explained as the 'physiological' aspect of poetry, and the mental process



which seeks to modify or shape the input of the senses. Behind many of Zukofsky's theoretical statements lies the desire to create a poetry which relied purely on a physiological response; if the poet had to think, then he had to do so 'without clutter'. His practice however, reveals that the physiological result is best achieved as the result of a great deal of the most well-ordered work - the arrival at spontaneity through precisely-crafted artifice. Herein lies one example of the 'two voices', whose tense co-existence forms the basis of a large part of the discussion in the movement. The problem - and perhaps its resolution - is to be found in the last line, 'Spoke: words, words, we are words, horses, manes, words'. Everything in the world is processed into recognition with words. If something does not have a name it is given one, if the horses do not have manes they are given them with words. Words can be 'absolute symbols' of things so that, ultimately, perception is governed by words and 'we are words'. Choose the correct words and, since they are absolute symbols, then their interaction will be strengthened by this fact, so providing the possibility of creating the 'new object'.

This twin purpose is evident throughout "A"-7. Its major manifestation is in the pulling together of concerns relevant to its own internal movement and to the overall poem. Within each aspect the 'two voices' come into play again, as in the 'Offal and what/The imagination...' reference above. This pulling together of two opposing elements is given a more complete treatment in the other focal movement of the first half of "A"-9. Between the two lies the long narrative of "A"-8. In turn the opening lines of "A"-8 reveal another side of the internal theme of "A"-7:

And of labor;  
 Light lights in air,  
                                   on streets, on earth, in earth -  
 Obvious as that horses eat oats -  
                                   Labor as creator,  
   Labor as creature,  
 To right praise.

(p43)

These lines represent a short restatement of "A"-7 in the light of a new concern - that of labour, which vibrates with the love and sacrifice theme of the Passion. The reason for delaying this revelation until the opening of the next movement becomes clear in terms of the overall development of the poem. In the movements leading up to "A"-7, the main thematic drive had been based on love and supportive or threatening influences upon it. Examples include Christ's passion, sexual and family love, life and resurrection. Ranged against these were industrial and racial exploitation and international conflict. Music and 'Nature as creator' are used to highlight his general thematic direction. "A"-7 as a focal movement refers forwards as well as back and so, although when read in sequence it appears to be consolidating ground covered in the first six movements, it is also preparing the way for departures yet to be made. When labour makes its appearance in the early movements it is a subordinate issue tied firmly to the primary themes. It begins to rise to prominence in "A"-7, and for a while thereafter it takes over from love as the thematic base. By pushing forward the revelation of its importance to the beginning of "A"-8, Zukofsky strengthens both the sense direction and structure. The condition of labour, as seen in the spotlight beam of Karl Marx, is the central issue of the eighth movement. To help this change of emphasis, the narrative becomes historical, in contrast to the more personal narrative of the earlier verse. "A"-8 is longer than the first six movements put together and its style dense,

thus giving the discussion of labour at least as much weight as that of love. In the same way that the section on love is bracketed between the opening introductory movement and "A"-7, the section on labour falls between "A"-7 and "A"-9, these two focal movements serving both to contain the section and to provide the means for it to integrate forwards and backwards into the body of the poem.

The ninth movement is in one way at least the most important of the first half. Following as it does a lengthy section on love and another on labour it brings the two themes together around a central pivot composed of the question of value. Its form is that of a double canzone modelled on Cavalcanti's 'Donna mi Pregha'. Its use of a strict, controlled-syllable form indicates its intended link with "A"-7. This is particularly relevant when the connections between the sonnet and the Elizabethan madrigal, and that between the canzone and the baroque fugue, are considered. The formal control of "A"-9 goes beyond the syllable structure, however, its most important feature being the echoing effect of the two canzoni. This is largely visible in the repeated line endings, so that line 1 of the first half ends on the same word as line 1 of the second half ('semblance'), line 2 of both halves end on 'values' and so on, though the scheme is actually more complex than this may suggest, with lines in the sequence échoing more than one word, and others adding or altering prefixes on the base word. Zukofsky described the form of "A"-9 as follows:

"A" consists of two canzoni, the first a definition of value, the second a definition of love. Both are profiled after Guido Cavalcanti's Donna mi preghe. The rhymes of the second canzone of "A"-9 are the same as those of the first in the linear sequence, which are in its discourse attempts to transliterate the sound (or "noise") of the original Italian as English. The intention is to have "A"-9 fluoresce as it were in the light of seven centuries of interrelated thought (the sound a part of it).

E. Pound has explained Guido's Donna mi preghe as follows: "The canzone was to the poets of the period what the fugue was to



description of Dante's rules for the canzone serve to illustrate the complexity of the form without illuminating the verse. Possibly intentionally, Zukofsky's continuation is even less illuminating:

In addition, the first 70 lines of each canzone are also the poetic analog of a conic section: that is the ratio of the accelerations of two sounds (r,n) has been made equal to the ratio of the accelerations of the co-ordinates (x,y) of a particle moving in a circular path with uniform angular velocity values of

$$\frac{\frac{d^2y}{dt^2}}{\frac{d^2x}{dt^2}} = \tan \theta \text{ where } \theta = \arctan \frac{y}{x}$$

are noted for five symmetrically located points. The time unit in the poetry is defined by 7 eleven-syllable lines. Each point is represented by a strophe. A mathematician is responsible for this part of the "form". Each coda (lines 71-75 and 146-150) is free.

The following table explains all this more fully:

| POINT       | $\theta$ | $\tan \theta$ | LINES | n's | + | r's used |
|-------------|----------|---------------|-------|-----|---|----------|
| 1           | 0°       | 0             | 1-7   | 13n |   | 13r      |
|             |          |               | 8-14  | 13n |   | 14r      |
| 2           | 90°      | ∞             | 15-21 | 13n |   | 13r      |
|             |          |               | 22-28 | 14n |   | 13r      |
| 3           | 180°     | 0             | 29-35 | 13n |   | 13r      |
|             |          |               | 36-42 | 13n |   | 14r      |
| 4           | 270°     | ∞             | 43-49 | 13n |   | 13r      |
|             |          |               | 50-56 | 14n |   | 14r      |
| 5           | 360°     | 0             | 57-63 | 13n |   | 13r      |
|             |          |               | 64-70 | 13n |   | 14r      |
| Coda (free) |          |               | 71-75 | 11n |   | 11r      |

Again, Zukofsky's mathematics, like the verse-form prescription, serves to illustrate the complexities of controlling poetry to create this kind of solid poetic object. In amongst the opacity of mathematics as applied to poetry there are points to note, however. The idea that it is possible to create the 'poetic analog' of a conic section is an alternative perspective on the 'objectivist's' belief in a poetic object.



It at once seeks a purely empirical legitimacy for the poetic object, and directs the reader deep into the structure as the starting point for a cognitive reading. Set alongside this is a constant restatement of the driving medium of the 'two voices', or two elements, providing tension and equilibrium. There are the poet and the mathematician, each responsible for a part of the form, the two halves of the equation balanced across an equal sign, and the fact that each element of the equation has two parts - r and n, x and y. Taken back into the subject the trend continues, so that in each canzone there are two elements - labour and value, love and value - the two fusions becoming co-ordinates for the movement - labour/value, love/value.

The insistence on a mathematically legitimate form also reveals Zukofsky's desire to echo the mathematically precise nature of the fugue. Musical and poetic mathematics must be seen to achieve harmony, thus cementing the oppositions of the subject, or creating the dynamics of equilibrium.

In the same way that the first focal movement, "A"-7, included in its pattern an interest in the word, "A"-9 is used to emphasise the power of structure. In order to achieve this, the form chosen has to be rigidly self-defining. The use of the canzone fulfils this to a great extent, but the effect is magnified through the device of using two canzoni which not only share the same rhymes, but also 'transliterate' the same sound. The opening lines of each of the two halves illustrate this correlation.

The first half begins:

An impulse to action sings of a semblance  
Of things related as equal values,  
The measure all use is time congealed labor  
In which abstraction things keep no resemblance  
To goods created; integrated all hues  
Hide their natural use to one or one's neighbor.

The second:

An eye to action sees love bear the semblance  
Of things, related is equated, - values  
The measure all use who conceive love, labor  
Men see, abstraction they feel, the resemblance  
(Part, self-created, integrated) all hues  
Show to natural use, like Benedict's neighbor

(p108)

The most obvious connection between the two is the use of the same terminal words - 'semblance', 'values', 'labor', 'resemblance', 'hues' and 'neighbor'. Within each line there are further correspondences, however. The first line shares three of the first four words - 'An ( ) to action' and there follows a sound similarity between 'sees' and 'sings'. The bulk of the second line is shared between the two - 'Of things (,) related ('as' 'is') equa ('l' 'ted') values'. Again line three shares the first four words 'The measure all use'. Line four begins a divergence and shares only two words, 'abstraction' and 'resemblance'. In the first canzone there is a split - there is 'no resemblance', and there follows a contrast between the perception of pure and juxtaposed colour, in the manner of Josef Albers' 'Homage to the square'. The second canzone makes for love the opposing case, 'the resemblance... all hues/show to natural use'.

By the close linking of the two halves, the thematic contrasts in the differences between a valuation of labour and a valuation of love are more readily shown. The link is such that not only do the two halves share a common rhyme scheme, but the rhyme sounds are common between them. Thus each strophe is tied in to itself and the individual canzone, and each canzone is tied in to the movement. Each line and each rhyming syllable plays an important part in supporting the weight of the movement.

Such a rigid formal structure removes any possibility of a narrative approach such as appears in the eighth movement, and links it more closely

with "A"-7. The sound and rhythm and the relationship of words, take on a greater importance in defining the success of the overall effect. This is emphasised by the syntactic bridging of the 'lobes' of the strophe. In only one of the fourteen line sections does the split coincide with the end of a sentence. In all other cases the division is marked only by the break in the terminal rhyme scheme from A,B,C,A,B,C, to D,E,F,F,D,E,F,F,. Thus it is the sound which is defining the shape or 'proportions' of the strophe, as it is the sound which defines the relationship between the two halves of the movement.

Fitted into this imposing sound structure are 'historic and contemporary particulars'. The principle historic particular in the first canzone is Karl Marx, guiding a historic concern - labour and the value of commodities. Set against this is the experience of love in the second half, which, though personal, nevertheless reaches historically, through Cavalcanti, to the characters of classical literature. This blending of the historic and contemporary into a mutually dependent whole, held together by equal and opposite pressures, is a contributing element in the continuity of "A", although it should not be confused with the contrast between historical and personal narrative used to define the thematic areas in the earlier movements. The recognition of time as a flow of past present and future as locked together through a series of dependencies, partially explains Zukofsky's willingness to adhere so rigidly to the medieval form of the canzone. In June 1946 William Carlos Williams wrote a review of Zukofsky's Anew, parts of which could easily apply to the then incomplete "A"-9:

At least (and that's the place to begin) L.Z. has the intention of singing anew when almost all poets otherwise have forgotten the objective - even E.P. - who should know better.

(I can't help the voice. I'm not at the moment stressing the voice. It is not Poe.)

Singing, Singing anew, in that order.

At least L.Z. attempts to sing anew (abetted by Celia) (musician) and from being bogged in the prevalent metaphysical philosophic and semantic mists - in staleness.

To summarise quickly, it is lyric in a sense we have hardly sensed at all for a century. It is wrong to call it musical, a very dangerous designation for any poem. Even to call it music is improper. It is invention in a sense that music cannot and need not copy. You may lay it beside music and say that they have some common ground but that is all.

When the music of a line takes primary place in the line there is no poem. It is the words that have primary place in a line and in a poem - which is an arrangement, an invention of lines, if possible, anew.

Poems are the result of engineering skills in poets.

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The prospect of 'singing anew' was of constant interest to Zukofsky. If the mundane personal observation can be made into a poem fulfilling all the requirements, then that is 'singing anew'. Similarly if the dramatic news event can be made into a poem, then that is 'singing anew'. However, if a traditional poetic form or model can be made into a fresh new poem, then that is 'singing anew' in a very specific sense, revolutionary rather than conservative. It is this specific which lies behind Zukofsky's sound translations of Catullus, ~~and which here~~ allows him to reflesh the skeleton of Cavalcanti's 'Donna mi Preghe', and turn it to his own purpose.

The purpose at this moment in the poem is to provide a point of crystallization of the main themes, and to pare away all but the essential centre. The movement intellectualizes the themes, it 'fluoresces... in the light of seven centuries of interrelated thought' by using thought as its medium. "A"-9 gains some of its impact through the unexpected appearance of such an approach within the framework of lyric form. Driving the point home is the appearance immediately afterwards of two movements relying entirely on personal emotional contact. The first, "A"-10 may be termed 'historical' in that it provides a contemporary perspective on the war, bringing to bear the new themes of power and destruction upon those of labour and value. "A"-11 is a short love lyric under the dedication



'for Celia and Paul'. Thus "A"-10 and 11 may be seen as the emotional echo of the intellectual process being explored in "A"-9. It is, in effect, polyphony, with the second voice picking up the subject in a contrapuntal design. It is this recognition of the two voices, the intellectual and the emotional, the historical and personal and the possibility that through their interplay a complete whole may be achieved, that effectively completes the drive of the first half of "A". "A"-12 is largely a summing-up, a pause for reflection on the events and concerns of the first half, beginning and ending with 'the theme Bach's name'.

The movement opens with a scene similar to that described in the first movement:

Out of deep need  
 Four trombones and the organ in the nave  
 A torch surged -  
 Timed the theme of Bach's name,  
 Dark, larch and ridge, night:  
 From my body to other bodies  
 Angels and bastards interchangeably  
 Who had better sing and tell stories  
 Before all will be abstracted.

(p126)

The ending attempts to contain the main themes in a tightly constructed crystallization:

Blest  
 Ardent  
 Celia  
         unhurt and  
 Happy.

(p261)

Between the two lies a retrospective view of the first eleven movements, with the modifications and expansions possible in hindsight. This retrospective thought occurs as a 'particular' in the poem. The device by which this is achieved is an internal dialogue, which is interspersed with comments from the poet's companions. All the major themes and concerns reappear and are re-examined. Aspects of history, philosophy, music and





There follows the passage presented complete, and indented as a quotation. Quotations and letters appear throughout the movement as found, surrounded by thought and memory which they bring to mind. Since this 'raft of stuff' belongs to the context of the first eleven movements, as it is being turned up leaf by leaf it becomes a commentary on them. Even the conclusion to the first twelve movements becomes itself a particular:

I've finished 12 "books,"  
So to speak,  
Of 24 -

A kind of childlike  
Play this division  
Into 24,  
Enough perhaps for  
12 books in this one  
All done in a summer  
After a gathering of 12 summers.

(p258)

The lines 'Enough perhaps for/12 books in this one' at once acknowledge the accumulation and restatement of the ideas of the first half in the movement, and suggest that within it are sown the seeds of the second half. The reference to the division into twenty-four movements being a 'kind of childlike/Play' is used here to throw into relief the role of commentary that the twelfth movement plays and yet, in doing so, it drastically understates the importance of that division to the poet. The pattern that emerges from "A"1-12 is of an introduction ("A"-1), followed by the theme of love and emotion ("A"2-6), a focal or crystallizing movement ("A"-7), which turns to allow the other half of the theme of labour and value to emerge ("A"-8), followed by another focal movement ("A"-9), which presents an intellectual appraisal of the two-sided theme, two movements presenting the emotional appraisal of the theme ("A"-10, 11), and finally a concluding commentary ("A"-12). The division into movements reinforces this pattern, and establishes an ascending order of poetic units, from line to stanza to movement and, finally, to the poem. Fitting into this order is the

division into two twelve movement halves which, again, is pre-arranged and essential to the final result. Throughout the poem there are always two elements in conflict or harmony, whether it be 'my two voices', sound and meaning, past and present, new and traditional. These form two sides of a theme in conjunction, or two different themes in opposition. The division into two halves continues this process. The initial element to span the two halves is the music of Bach. "A"-12 involves Bach's theme based on the letters of his own name and finishes, appropriately, with lines beginning with these:

Blest  
Ardent  
Celia  
          unhurt and  
Happy.

(p261)

"A"-13 begins with an introduction to its musical theme, Bach's partita's. Thus a link is established before the verse has been read.

## CHAPTER VI

### The 'Z-sited path' - "A" 13-24

Between the first and second halves of "A" there is clearly a difference in approach, between what might be called the prescriptive ("A" 1-12) and the illustrative ("A" 13-24). Naturally however, the poem is not absolutely divided in this way, in that "A" 13-24 continues the progress of the prescriptive elements and "A" 1-12 contained illustrative passages. In addition, the split between the two central cores of the poem is blurred by the bridging movements, "A" 12 and 13. The twelfth movement, as already stated, reassesses material gathered over the years of writing the first half, and in doing so begins to lay the foundations for the techniques of the next twelve. "A"-13 was not produced until nine years after the completion of "A"-12 and takes on the appearance of a 'starting over' movement. It reworks some of the techniques of "A"-12, as in the lines

- I meant to mention there's a facsimile of  
The First Quarto of Pericles  
With a preface by Mr. P.Z. Round. (p276)

This technique enables Zukofsky to reiterate 'objectivist' principles in a way appropriate to a 'bridging' movement. He can thus make a new beginning while continuing the basics:

The blood's music repeats: "cellar door" (1926),  
(1956) "Neither/nor, nor and/or"  
Attesting an exchange between an intellectual portion  
Of head and that part it calls music  
Meaning something some time to come back to a  
second time,  
As if there were shoes to cobble (pp296-7)

Contained in these lines are the principles central to the work's role as a 'life poem'. Most obviously the dated quotations are a restatement

of the desk clearing in "A"-12, a technique which allows the life a certain amount of freedom to define, or shape, the poem. A second principle at work is the poet's insistence on the physiological nature of poetry. The first example of this in the quotation, is the phrase 'The blood's music', which is in effect a compound idea. There is a double recognition here of the rhythmical and cyclical essence of living, represented specifically by the pumping of the blood, together with the idea that the natural rhythms provide the need for, and the substance of, art. It could be the music of the spheres on a human scale. Reinforcement of the idea that art is a natural or elemental process, comes in the reiteration of the idea of the schism between 'an intellectual portion/ Of head and that part it calls music'.

This idea leads directly into the third principle that informs a 'life poem': reiteration and restatement - 'something some time to come back to/a second time'. Again there is a recognition of the cyclical and rhythmical aspect of life - spheres that do not just tolerate reiteration but demand it.

Later in the section this compound of ideas is brought down to a much more personal level:

Richard Flecknoe on Pericles:

"Ars longa, vita brevis, as they say  
But who inverts that saying made this play."  
Was he saying it was a bore, or rather the opposite  
That the life is longer than the brevity of its art.

(p297)

Again, obviously there is the desk clearing approach in which a note is turned up to illustrate the point being made, which it does in a typically finely-crafted way. The first point to notice is that the 'question' does not finish on a question mark but a full stop. 'I have phrased a question!' says the poet, 'but am in fact making an assertion!' The



assertion follows directly out of what has gone before, and appears then as a personal statement made out of a literary example. 'The life is longer than the brevity of its art' springs from the same feeling that caused Zukofsky's autobiography to be the way it was. The idea implicit in the autobiography is that the elemental 'musical' essence of the poet's life is in his work and everything else is of little value - especially to himself. It is not some airy concept that the poet's life is to be divined from his words, but that they represent that aspect of the life which is of enduring importance to a man who greatly resented the need to teach for money, and seems to have valued only his wife and son, his four close friends and his art; this attitude is inevitable. This is why the second half of "A" increasingly involves Celia and Paul in one way or another, and becomes more illustrative and less prescriptive. Thus, Zukofsky's statement asserts that 'its art' and, thus, the clear contact with the spheres, is an unfortunately small part of a life which contains interminable stretches of the boring and the irrelevant.

Even the poet who is acutely aware of the schism between 'the blood's music' and the 'intellective portion of head' can be guilty of allowing the intellectual process to order the emotional response, however. This is admitted and regretted a little earlier in the movement:

How mean of me ridden by words  
Always to think at first of being disturbed  
by the dissonance  
When the years make their order. (p277)

The last line of the quotation provides both a reason and technique for the poem. 'The years make their order' is a very fine answer to the questions "why write a long 'life' poem?" and "is a long 'objectivist' poem possible?" The 'objectivist's' principles lay down the preplanned structural component and the 'years', or the flow of experience, are ultimately responsible for the shape. By using 'objectivist' principles

in the context of a long poem, the poet is in effect making use of the tendency of the years to 'make their order'. rather than merely being subject to it. The long poem can become a liberating force, since its scale helps impart this level of control.

'The years make their order' further illuminates the phrase 'the blood's music'. The physiological, elemental aspect has been referred to above but there is also a temporal relationship implicit in this idea. An organic system is quite obviously subject to the passing of time. The blood's music - an essentially human function - is seen as the driving force in a poet's life and, in the context of a poem such as "A", could be said to measure out the years' order.

If the two ideas - 'the blood's music' and 'the years make their order' are combined, an 'objectivist's' life-poem becomes almost inevitable. A key element in the composition of such a work is the insistence on the use of the 'found objects', which are integrated by the same principle as 'the years make their order'. The point of contact between the two halves of the poem appears as a moment of realisation and reaffirmation of this principle. The first half, whilst conforming to the principle, emphasised the ordering of the poet's intellectual processes - necessarily so since it was laying down the groundwork. Now, in the second half, the found objects, begin to take on more importance, 'the years' are more free to 'make their order'. Nevertheless, the inclusion of 'found objects' also depends upon the insistent measuring of the 'blood's music', as suggested in a letter to Cid Corman -

My Bach still better than my back - I mean the "formal" music of A-13 is flowing into me (I won't give you any hints because it'll be some time before I get to the actual writing). 1

The 'blood's music' here responds to Bach's Partita - the fourth solo sonata - which is itself a found object or an element of experience

brought in and controlled by the physiological, rather than the intellectual, aspect of the poet's perception. Imagination, therefore, responds to the input of the senses, rather than to a preconceived intellectual process.

This sudden assuredness of design and purpose led Zukofsky to make claims for the verse that could only be substantiated in the light of the process of the 'blood's music' ordering found objects. In another letter to Cid Corman he draws attention to the relationships of the sentence to the musical structure:

In any case, a reliable guide to punctuation in A-13 so far is that it's not likely - probably never - that it'll be a period before lower case: you know my feeling for syntax involving a sentence; tho I have been I believe (unconventionally plotting and plodding) very free in 13 to use what we scheiss-prof. paper correctors call "run-on sentences" separated by commas - for my music: in these cases the sentences are phrases of the musical periods. 2

Thus the relationship between the music, the word and the thought is so tightly bound as to give the effect of their being one. The 'formal' music - in this instance Bach's Partita - is itself a found object, a particular, in the movement. Words define the presence of the particular in tandem with 'the blood's music'. The important observation to be made is that these elements present themselves concurrently, no one element being above or below the others, although, as suggested in a previous chapter, threads of meaning or strands of counterpoint may inhabit the margins. On the face of it, however, sentences as 'phrases of the musical periods' are something that the reader may not be aware of, or may sense without realising it, as a 'rightness' or 'solidity'. This is a valid response when the mind is taken up with the compelling precision of the line structure which diverts attention away from syntactic felicities, however fine.

Having consolidated the prescriptive aspects of the first twelve movements, Zukofsky proceeds into the second half of the poem careful to allow 'the years (to) make their order'. After "A"-13 which is a prologue, the second half really begins with the 14th movement 'beginning An'. This is described as the

First of  
eleven songs  
beginning An

(p315)

This device separates 14-24 from the preceding section and ties them more closely together, whilst at the same time emphasising the partially independent introductory role of "A"-13.

Allowing the years to make their order does not preclude a reshuffling of the chronology of the eleven songs. Thus "A"-14 and 15 were written in 1964 and "A"-16, 17 and 20 in 1963. The differentiating features of 16, 17 and 20 are that they are short and intensely personal moments which, although quite obviously intended for "A", did not immediately fall into place in the poem's developing order.

The order is there to be found, but it is a much less obviously premeditated one than that found in the first half. A flow in emotional intensity matches a flow in musical shape so that a smoother result is achieved. Thus, "A"-14 consists of a largely intellectual response to a series of general events, including news items such as

Ranger VII  
photos landing  
on the

moon  
how deep  
its dust?

(pp315-6)

This is a good example of an event which affects the poet's life through the creation of intellectual response. More personal details are treated

in the same way. An example of this is the Ryokan scroll sent to Zukofsky as a gift from Cid Corman, who was at the time in Kyoto and was responsible for the publication of "A"1-12. This is rendered even more personal since

As at  
the scroll's  
first hanging  
  
found my  
own initials  
looking in

(p325)

and yet the response is still intellectual rather than emotional, it is muted and controlled by the precise - perhaps mathematical - direction of the movement. This tension between the intellectual and the emotional is the driving force that powers the entire second half, in that the events which are brought in are those which have caused a strong personal, emotional response in the poet, and the techniques used to present them are precisely intellectually processed, at times to the point of contrivance. A relationship of this kind was suggested at the end of the thirteenth movement, in the lines:

Or two, three  
Numerous  
Only the image of a voice:  
Love you

(p313)

Here, the mathematical order of measure (or two, three/Numerous), and the personal emotion ('Love you') are cemented together by the twin elements of the practice of poetry, 'image' and 'voice'. Thus the remainder of the poetry becomes an attempt to strike a balance between these two forces, signalled by the lack of stop after 'Love you', which draws the reader forward for illumination of the preceding lines.

There then follows the 'eleven songs beginning An', in itself a reaffirmation of the idea of



all one

Or two, three  
Numerous

(p313)

since the indefinite article suggests 'one of many'. The obvious contrast here is with 'Poem beginning "The"' which, as stated in an earlier chapter, is one of Zukofsky's first attempts at making a self-contained object of a poem. Each of the eleven songs is, as the indefinite article would imply, an individual component of a larger object. Since the eleven songs, by virtue of being thus styled, are linked together, it is perhaps valid to suggest that the heading of "A"-14 ('beginning An') also has within it an element of 'beginning again', appropriate to the true start of the second half.

I have suggested above that this intellectual processing of the technique is taken to great lengths, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the 14th movement. The most visible device being used is signalled towards the start of the movement, in the lines

24 all  
of a  
day the

words you  
count what  
words you

leave out  
that count  
go backwards

(p315)

The first three lines clearly illustrate the technique working successfully since a number of ideas - personal, general and specific come together in very few words and vibrate together through the rhythm of the lines. Thus we have the twenty-four hours in a day linked with the twenty-four proposed movements of "A", twenty-four being 'all' of "A" and 'all' of a day, 'all' being also the title of the collected poems on which he was working, and itself reinforcing the poet's insist-

ence on unity of his output.

The nature of the technique is suggested in the remaining lines quoted. In its simplest form it consists of writing a draft of a poem and finding that by accident or intent the key words of each line occupy a similar position within the line. These key words are retained and the rest chopped away. This is something that Zukofsky returned to again and again. A suggestion of it appears in the fourth poem of Barely and Widely (1945-1958):

4  
A Valentine

This  
is  
not  
more  
snow  
to  
fall

but  
a  
gust  
of  
the  
softest —  
bending

down  
the  
wood  
of  
gardens'  
branches  
into

a  
girls  
and  
boys  
pastoral,  
old

years  
not  
to  
wink  
looks,  
middle

life  
to  
chase,  
it's  
musical

Clearly, this shows evidence of much more manipulation than the crude outline sketched above, and yet the spirit of the technique is at work here. A much more stark example is to be found in the first poem of I's (pronounced eyes) (1937-1960).

(Ryokan's scroll)

dripping  
words

off

a  
long  
while

the  
first  
snow

out  
off  
where  
blue

eyes

the.  
cherry  
tree's  
petals

4

Since this piece is another reference to Corman's Ryokan scroll, the technique has the extra burden to carry of suggesting the physical properties of the scroll. The primary intention of using this device however, is to cut out the unnecessary elements of a more extended form and thus leave the essence to dance over the music of the verse.

Meaning is to be found in the periphery of the reader's perception of the verse, or out of the corner of the intellectual eye. It is, therefore, to be sensed rather than stared at straight on. Of course this is yet another shade of meaning in the 'objectivist's' insistence on his poetic object defining its own consequences, rather than merely existing as a vehicle for an applied intent. The relationship between what Pound called 'the dance of the intellect' and the physically present fabric is what gives the poem its life and allows it to 'sing anew'.

However, when the device is used unsuccessfully, the reader can be lost as a result of uncontrolled or excessive editing and a too vigorous pursuit of the effect. In such a case the reader may be alienated from the direction of the verse, not through the complexity of the ideas or the obscurity of the technique, but by the breakdown of the relationship between the two. This is the inevitable risk in going out on a limb, in pushing ideas to their extreme. It is characteristic of Zukofsky's verse, and a direct consequence of the rigors of 'objectivist' principle, that such risks are taken and confronted, with the result that success and failure are often finely balanced. In a note to Zukofsky accompanying the draft of a review of 55 Poems in 1941, William Carlos Williams had been aware of these risks:

This Louis, this is a dangerous sort of writing for if it doesn't click, if it doesn't do the magic and arouse the reader or doesn't find one who is sensitive enough, trained enough and ready enough to place himself exactly in tune with it - or if, in writing it, the writer isn't instructed by deep enough feeling (as it sometimes happens here) it becomes a mere jargon and a reaching. Explicit (as contrasted with this: emphasis and codification) writing always makes sense. Here unless the sense is instructed the writing makes no sense too often. But explicit writing is so very often as it were a runner fastened to a cart and this, when it succeeds, is a runner free! that is wholly justified. But, as I say, it is difficult for the writer and the reader, and always dangerous, for to bore by an unsolvable obscurity is the worst of all writing. And when sense, even ploddingly, cannot solve a sentence because of lack of its parts - the fault cannot be said to lie with the reader. But to fly, we require a certain lightness and wings. HERE, at their best, we<sub>5</sub> have them.

Williams continued with this theme in the attached review draft:

How are you going to explain to a man who wants to know what a poem "means", that if you say a thing with two words instead of three it is better writing and if you can say it ALL with one word it is genius?

The poems are uneven. They try a different approach to the reader's attention, a very difficult approach so that there are many factors involved in their failure - even tho' their successes are of a superlative quality when achieved. Both the writer and reader cannot vary a hairline from the purpose. But we are all variable, in mood, in ability - morning and evening

make us different men, very seldom are we at a peak of interest in anything let alone poetry and difficult poetry at that. ... But without cluttering it with words - touch, touch, touch - lightly the keys (things) of the instrument to release the (real) music. ... The skill of brevity requires a deep feeling - or it is jargon. Clearly see (and feel) a hint (pointedly) is enough,<sup>6</sup> more would be too much.

These remarks apply just as well to "A" or any of Zukofsky's post-war work as they do to 55 Poems since the lack of compromise and the willingness to confront the risks are constant. It is difficult to imagine a better example of this refusal to compromise than the extremely sparse presentation of large parts of "A"-14. Even at points where the verse extends a little it is still terse, and composed in lines rather than sentences. There are distinct advantages to be gained from such an approach, however. The fact that the verse becomes a very precise but minimal notation, when coupled with Zukofsky's habit of multilayering an aggregate of ideas, results in the capacity to include an enormous number or range of subjects and ideas in a comparatively small space. Added to this is the advantage gained by breaking down conventional syntactic structures in this way, since it shifts the poet's position in relation to his subject, allowing him to stand aside and gain distance. Thus, personal reminiscences and thoughts on his own poetic practice and status can be given a certain objectivity, or at least rendered without the burden of inappropriate sentimentality.

In this way the problems of writing such a work as "A" can be addressed, as in the lines

songs planned?  
40 years  
gone - may  
  
ear race  
and eye  
them - I  
  
hate who  
sing them?  
while I



have being?

(p316)

So too can the personal effect of aging over these years:

Where are my  
distance glasses, reading  
lenses, focus of

the aging - I  
stumbled into the  
TV - 'you want?

to be on  
television' - C.

(p334)

Time and its passage forms the thematic core of the fourteenth movement.

Some five years before the writing of "A"-14, Zukofsky had recalled a  
childhood memory in a letter to Cid Corman<sup>7</sup> and here, towards the end of  
the movement it again makes an appearance:

My persistence reminds:

an escaped cat  
ran down three  
flights of stairs,

a little boy  
after, he caught  
it and climbed

back up the  
three flights and  
before closing the

door on it,  
stroked it, 'you  
pussy stay upstairs,

now I'll go  
downstairs.' It became  
the family joke -

'preventing an animal  
errand.'

(p335)

After thus going back to the limits of personal time - in the letter he  
had referred to this incident as 'one of my earliest memories' - Zukofsky  
then pushes the image back through historical time:

Out of that  
jokes my "Cats"

chaste - eyeing passionate  
Italian lips two  
thousand years near  
  
to sharp them  
and flat them  
not in prurience -  
  
of their voice -  
eyes of Egyptian  
deity that follow  
  
each half step  
blueing to translucent

(p356)

A complex of temporal awareness is built up in the movement by the interweaving of these historic and contemporary elements. Historical events, contemporary news, the poet's own childhood and his sense of aging are brought together to form a web of relationships which ties past and present together in a way which breaks away from an accepted 'historical', or objective, sense of time and creates a personal or contextual chronology. This is something which informs the whole poem in a general sense, and yet it is here in "A"-14 and 15 that it is accorded its most specific realisation. The origins and consequences of this fact can be readily traced and are of great significance to an understanding of the nature of "A". The chief clue lies in the years in which movements 14 to 17 were written and their importance to the poet's life. "A"-14 and 15, in which this crystallization of the personal chronology occurs, were written in 1964, which happened to be the year of Zukofsky's sixtieth birthday, an event of significance to a man at once bound up with an almost mythical view of the power and importance of number, and preoccupied with his own health and the consequences of age. Concentrating the mind still further on events of the past, and their power to come home to roost in the present, was the most personally significant event of the previous year which was the death of William Carlos Williams. It was during 1963, in response to this that the 16th and 17th movements were written.

Before looking at "A"-16 and 17 and possible reasons for their being published out of sequence, it is necessary to consider "A"-15 which, arguably, is the most successful and finely crafted movement of the second half of the poem.

The movement is a closely-focussed working out of the concerns of "A"-14, presented within a narrative framework. The narrative is hidden and only revealed slowly, each section adding a little more to the picture. The opening section is at first puzzling being a conglomeration of quotations and recurrences of earlier parts of "A" but it subsequently becomes clear that it represents a poetry class which Zukofsky is giving at the Brooklyn Poly. Immediate notice of this is given when the reader's attention is suddenly drawn away from the events within the classroom, and focussed through the window at the outside world:

The traffic below,  
sound of it a wind  
eleven stories  
below: The Parkway  
no parking there ever:

(p360)

Later this is supported by the recollection of a conversation with a student which took place whilst walking

thru the swinging  
red leather doors  
of the Institute

(p362)

Very soon the picture is completed when the reason is given for the inclusion of this particular class in the poem.

that the teacher  
overhearing  
a student  
thought a stupid jest -  
the class  
shocked into a "holiday"

Flown back from Love Field, Dallas  
love - so - divided -  
the kittenish face  
the paragon of fashion  
widowed  
with blood soaked stocking  
beneath the wounded head  
she held in her lap -

(p363)

The class, clearly, was the occasion on which Zukofsky heard of the assassination of Kennedy, and it is this event which provides the core of the movement. The details of the death and burial of Kennedy are given a curious distance by being presented across the barrier of the TV screen - we are told that

the nation  
a world  
mourned  
three days in  
dark and in  
daylight  
glued to  
TV  
grieved as a family  
the Kennedy's were a family -

(p364)

and later, in lines which, although physically removed, follow directly in terms of rhythm and sense:

so the nation grieved  
each as for someone in his or her family  
we want Kennedy -  
and the stock market fell and rose  
on the fourth day  
holy holy tetraktys  
of the Pythagorean eternal flowing creation  
and again without the senses TV  
went back to its commercials  
boots reversed flapping backward  
and in another month  
brought back the Indian's summer

(p368)

By concluding the information that the events were witnessed through the medium of television, Zukofsky is not merely recording a bald fact. Its importance is signalled by placing TV alone in a line, and contrast is

sought between the slick commercial medium of television and the vehicles used to record equivalent events of the past - specifically the writings of Gibbon , Shakespeare and Henry Adams. As in "A"-14, historical events are brought into juxtaposition with the present, but here the poet allows himself to make a somewhat bitter comment on the consciousness of the contemporary world as it 'fluoresces' in the light<sup>8</sup> of the past. The acidity is further enforced by an ironical return to the Passion and Arimathaea themes of earlier movements in the lines

and the stock market fell and rose  
on the fourth day

(p368)

the biblical character of which is put into an oblique perspective by a section eighteen lines later which reads:

almost Xmas —  
and in less than another year  
after 2000 years (a few less)  
the dead's church  
remembered not a moment too soon  
to absolve the Jews of Yēshūa's (ah Jesu's)  
cross - except for salvation

(p369)

So the personal chronology bears a subjective bias - it is not an indiscriminate flow of unmanipulated suggestion, nor indeed was it intended to be. The defining feature here is that emotion manipulates intellect, rather than the reverse, and it is at the point of closest emotional proximity that the clearest indications of subjectivity are to be found. As in "A"-14, the personal preoccupations with age and death balance the more general or objective observations. This is reflected in the conversation at the Institute, referred to above:

Like, after all:  
and as I know  
failing eyes  
imagine,  
as shortly after  
his mother died,



walking  
with me  
to my class  
thru the swinging  
red leather doors  
of the Institute  
he remarked on  
a small square pane  
of glass in each of them,  
there to prevent  
if students looked  
those going out  
and those going in  
from swinging the doors  
into so to speak  
mutual faces,  
When I pleaded blindness  
'I've walked thru  
some years now  
and never till you  
said saw these panes'  
he consoled with  
'mere chance  
that I looked'

(pp<sup>362-3</sup>)

There is more here than just an attempt to portray his consciousness of his own advancing years - itself exaggerated since he was, after all, only sixty. Those 'failing eyes' are a much more potent warning for the 'objectivist', for whom the eyes provide the poetry, and indeed, 'eyes (pronounced I's)' are essential for that part of the self which is the poet. It is perhaps too much to suggest that this part of "A" represents a poetic crisis, but it must at least give evidence of a moment of self-appraisal and doubt. After all, was it not Zukofsky who demanded 'the care for detail', and yet here had walked through a door for years and not noticed its panes of glass until they were pointed out? So obvious was his dismay, we are told, that his companion felt the need to play things down by invoking 'mere chance'.

Contributing in some degree to this self-appraisal was the lingering memory of the death of Williams, a year after the event and indeed, a year after his committing to paper a movement devoted to it. However slight the influence of this may have been - and I don't wish to

overstate it - it finds its way into the poem again towards the end of the movement:

The wives of the poets  
flew higher.  
And to show for it -  
on the hill near town the little cemetery  
that would be seen from the Erie?  
- No eulogies, Louis,  
no.  
Perhaps to see where his friend's song  
not too clear while one led his own  
would button into the  
rest of it  
the life of the fugue of it  
not come to talk  
at the funeral.  
The dog as the old friend lay dead  
would not cross his threshold  
he was not there anymore  
his room not his room  
what was there not  
for the day to go into -  
the estuary up the river -  
later thruout the house he ruled  
while the others were interring him  
the friend left at home in it  
hearing the other voice as then  
'you have never  
asked anyone anything'

(p374)

The image of the deceased still permeating his house with a remembered presence is similar to something Zukofsky wrote in a letter to Cid Corman in 1963, describing Williams' funeral. After the ceremony he found himself 'waiting, it seemed in the same house as when I first entered it in 1928, as it were for him to come back from a "call"'.<sup>9</sup>

Of course there is a further practical reason for the inclusion of this subject towards the end of the fifteenth movement, and that is to pave the way for the next two which concern themselves with Williams.

"A"-16 is the shortest movement of the poem, consisting of four words:

An

inequality

wind flower

(p376)

The actual typographical separation between 'inequality' and 'wind flower' is almost half a page and this forms a pause, or still point, between 15 and 17. There is a reference, however unconscious, to the funeral since, in the letter from which the previous quotation comes (written nine months after the event), the abiding memory is of 'wind' and 'flowers':

The weather he died in, Bill's weather - the March of the "Collaboration" in Objectivist's Anthology over 30 years ago: we went in pouring rain and came back in cold wind (winter instead of the earlier feeling of spring) - a blue sky of the kind you know I once cut with an adz. But there were it seemed all the flowers in the funeral parlor with the closed coffin - he had 10 written about.

What follows in "A"-17 is not a eulogy nor a grieving contemplation of death. All that had been worked out in the numerically previous (although chronologically subsequent) two movements. It is not even a series of personal memories. Instead it is the record of a literary relationship intended, as its heading instructs, as a coronal for Williams' widow Floss. The movement contains nothing new but the arrangement, being made up entirely of quotations from Zukofsky's work dating back to 1928, and extracts from letters and inscriptions by Williams to the Zukofskys. Included is one of the most lucid and sharp acknowledgements of the power and vision of the opening lines of Williams' 'The Red Wheelbarrow' ('so much depends/upon') - 'It may take only four words to shift the level at 150.

which emotion is held from neatness of surface to comprehension'. (p380)

Some of the inclusions are merely references to works not quoted, for example:

1931 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS  
MARCH  
An "Objectivists" Anthology pp 196-200 (p378)

and:

1944 William Carlos Williams  
THE WEDGE  
[to] L.Z. (p381)

The movement closes with a page-wide facsimile of Williams' signature from Zukofsky's copy of Pictures from Brueghel, published in 1962. The signature, although readable, is in the shaky hand of an ill man. Spanning the page from margin to margin it underlines the movement and closes it off. It is a powerful and poignant ending but surprisingly free of sentimentality, the movement ends as life ends, definitely and permanently but leaving a human memory.

The arrangement of 16th and 17th movements out of chronological sequence is evidence that here in the second half the shape of the poem is still being planned and structured. Williams died in March 1963 and so, clearly, Zukofsky was presented with an event over which he had no control and to which he had to respond at the appropriate time. Having written 'An inequality' and 'A Coronet' he was then free to set up themes and directions which would lead the poem apparently naturally towards them, leaving them to stand simply as conceived, without the need to carry the burden of explication or thematic extension. The assassination of Kennedy was again a random element fortuitously timed, since the wave of international mass shock and stunned grief provided an essential centre

upon which to base this scene-setting exercise. Having used the public face of death on one side the Williams movements then became a pivot on the other side of which is found the private fears of one's own death expressed in "A"-18. The 16th and 17th movements successfully adopt this pivotal role since they form a still point, due to the fact that they help structure personal emotion into a considered literary tribute.

Again giving evidence of the planning involved in the arrangement of this part of the poem, the eighteenth movement builds on this structurally integrated emotion. The movement begins with the poet presenting fears of his own death, translated into fears for his wife's bereavement, in one of his favourite devices, the valentine:

An unearthing  
my valentine  
if I say it now will  
it always be said.  
I always know  
it is I who have died  
yet in that state  
  
sorrow for you  
by yourself.  
Thinking of you  
without me  
without years  
of hours  
that time is.  
Selfish of  
me to wish you  
to merely  
live long  
  
to fulfill  
no time  
where your  
thought for  
me has no sense  
for with  
that thought  
it is I have died.  
I mean don't cry  
in that sense  
I cannot now  
get around  
thinking I am dead  
where with you  
now I have no place



as I say  
it now  
and you sense  
it always said.

(pp 389-90)

The valentine is a useful device since it not only allows the poet to bring in a degree of sentimentality, but indeed, actually demands that he does. In approach it is similar to the 'found object' principle and allows the poet to reply to readers' surprise at the sentimental emotion by saying 'but it's a valentine - what do you expect?'. From the almost self-indulgent introspection that had crept into movements 14 and 15 and is still in evidence here at the beginning of 18, the effects of the rationalization of "A"-17 resonate and begin to pull the verse back into a more positive exploration of the themes. The danger of sentimentality for the 'objectivist' is that it is emotion independent of the control which must be implicit in every aspect of the verse. Both the lack of control and its rigid imposition are against all of Zukofsky's poetic principles. At the same time, the freedom and 'discretion' of objectivist verse paradoxically arises from the strictest control of every element of the construct or 'machine' which is the poem. W.C. Williams suggested that a poem is 'the result of engineering skills in poets'<sup>11</sup> and, to pursue the argument, the fine tolerances of the engineer demand as high a degree of control as it is possible to achieve: Zukofsky's arrangement of these central movements of the second half of "A" shows that he was aware of the dangers of the position that he was working himself into. By introducing the problems in movements 14 and 15, rationalizing and calming them in 16 and 17, returning to the brink of emotional self-expression at the beginning of 18 and then developing the ideas along an emotionally charged but intellectually structured course through the remainder of the movement, he builds a dynamic element into the order of the poem at this stage.

The stepping-off point for "A"-18, which may be seen as the rationalization of the crisis mentioned above, is a return to the idea that the poetry is the life, or the most important part of it - that which endures. The idea is tested and laid open to the critical eye through being presented as a series of questions. A further test is applied by linking these questions with considerations of the nature of art and of reality. Thus we have references to the war in Vietnam followed by:

When I am dead in the empty ear  
you might ask what he was like away  
from home: on his job more patient with  
others than himself more patient with strangers that's  
always so: what if the song preserves us?

(p393)

Here this central question is presented baldly - 'what if the song preserves us?' The following lines add a dimension by taking the discussion into the more general field of art:

As you said stone sculpture's still and moves  
and to intrigue us further the mobile moves  
with its sustaining current the space is still:  
which is less abstract solid or more sensed?

(ibid)

Clearly the ideas of movement, stillness, abstraction and solidity have a strict relevance for an objectivist's poetics and thus are definitively specified nine lines further on when the current central movements of the second half are brought into the discussion:

No not an efficient man only an observant  
sits down with an aspirin without a prayer  
eight words a line for love: y-eye, yigh  
pointed the kid, y-eyes intentions blaze light lights:  
an order out of hiatus joining a chain:  
"An": faring no cause to an unowned end:  
story of a fiddler from pogrom to program:

(ibid)

The last line of this quotation reads like an ironic subheading to the poem, an attempt to lighten the sombre aspects of the movement. As has been suggested above, 'an order out of hiatus joining a chain:/"An"' is

a good description of the poem at this point, the 'chain' being the 'eleven songs/beginning An' (and also of course the poem itself). The rest of the line beginning '"An"' is a little more problematic until the first two lines and the last line of the quotation are taken into account. The problems that the line poses are intensified when the reader considers Zukofsky's technique of utilising a whole range of legitimate meanings for each word to build up a complex web of references and suggestions. This is the technique referred to in the discussion of the short poem 'Prop. LXI' undertaken in an earlier chapter. In a similar way, the only method of revealing the framework of this line is to dismantle it piece by piece and explore the possibilities each component suggests.

The first signal of the impending complexity is the previous line, 'an order out of hiatus joining a chain:'. Clearly, the primary reference contained in this line is the series of 'songs beginning "An"', but Zukofsky's insistence on linear fidelity provides the basis for suggesting that it serves the secondary role of pointing forward to the subsequent line. The mechanism by which this works depends on the two colons surrounding '"An"'. By means of the first, the word 'chain' is linked forward to "An", and the second serves to strengthen this bond by isolating "An" from the rest of the line in which it appears. However, simultaneously "An" is linked (even more strongly than the colon link) into its own line by means of typography, rhythm and sound. The outcome of this tension is that if the colon-dependent phrase in line five of the quotation is linked to the word "An", then it must to some degree also be linked to the entire line in which the word appears.

Having signalled his intention, Zukofsky goes on to present the reader with one of his apparently most puzzling lines of verse. In order to

begin to unlock it, each word must be examined in turn.

As suggested above, "An" is used as a link back to the sense and intention of the line above, but it also fulfils a role in the sound by resonating strongly with the other n-vowel constructs in the line, i.e., 'no', 'un', 'own' and 'end'. The next word, 'faring', I think may be taken simply as a synonym for 'travelling'. It is the next phrase, 'no cause' which provides the crux of the line and, with Zukofsky's characteristic sense of geometry, it is placed at the point of balance in the centre of the line.

Clearly, the first impression created is that 'cause' is a substitution for 'course', which would fit with the sense of the line. The hardening of the sound of 'course' to 'cause' however, is enough of an irritation to become a stimulus for further investigation. There is a suggestion of 'cause' in the sense of moral or political purpose, reinforced by the word 'pogrom' in the next line, and a link back to the phrase 'without a prayer'. It is the meaning of 'cause' in the sense of 'reason' or 'instigation of effect' that is the most important clue however. The effect being instigated is the 'unowned end', a phrase which is less puzzling than it first appears, when seen in the context of a 'life poem' in which the 'unowned' - unknown, or unpre-determined (as well, of course, as not possessed and not admitted to) 'end' can be seen to refer to the life and the poem. So the word 'cause' has the sense of the verb form of the word 'direction', and similarly the shadow of the word 'course' takes on the role of the noun form. Thus, when 'end' is defined as 'that which is aimed at' and the reader is presented in the final line of the section with an historic and contemporary particular, the meaning of the line would appear to have become clear - 'inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars' the primary

'objectivist' tenet. However, a problem remains in the negative element of the phrase 'faring no course'. To solve this, the quoted section must be taken as a whole. The effect of 'not an efficient man', 'without a prayer', the diminishing tone of 'eight words a line for love' and 'story of a fiddler from pogrom to program' together with the questioning of the attainment of the 'direction of historic and contemporary particulars' is reminiscent of the 'crisis' or moment of doubt referred to earlier in the chapter. Indeed, the poet would appear to be asking himself the very question which began this present study, namely whether or not it is possible to achieve a long 'objectivist' poem, or perhaps more precisely, if it is possible to have a long 'objectivist' life poem.

This ~~qualification~~ is made necessary by the direction the verse takes at this point. The passage includes an ironical crystallization of the concerns of "A"-18 in the lines 'eight words a line for love: y-eye, yigh' and 'story of a fiddler from pogrom to program'. Leading out of the discussion of mortality and loss which ~~precedes~~ this section, the movement becomes a very dense and introspective layering of news, history, family history, literary quotation and most importantly, literary practice. It becomes clear that wherever the argument condenses out it settles on the subject of language and poetic technique, and this is so in a movement bound up with concerns of mortality and personal relationships. What began as a valentine and then worked round into a contemplation of mortality, eventually concentrates its most powerful effect in an expression of poetic values. This phenomenon is observable throughout "A", in that whenever the poet is most closely involved with personal emotional concerns, the reader is presented with either the most precisely crafted passages in the poem or else an exposition of poetic and artistic excellence (see "A"-7 and 9). An extension of this practice is the quotation from, and reference to, the work, practice and style of artists who embody



for Zukofsky the degree of excellence for which he constantly strives. The most obvious examples of this are Bach, Shakespeare and Johnson. These figures are invoked at this point in the movement as part of an attempt to answer the question posed in the preceding section, along with others arising out of it. Bach's appearance serves to reiterate the guiding involvement of the fugue:

B's Notenbuch compiled by both:  
her copy has her initial no other signature:  
'between order and sensibility in its power at  
once to suggest all complexity and keep every  
form each form taking up the same theme':  
not by "association" it is so things come to  
me. (p395)

This definition of the fugue is then used to counter any suggestion that Zukofsky's verse relies on stream of consciousness or association techniques. The poet's enthusiastic adoption of the mechanism of the fugue form applied to his own work emerges again.

The verse goes on:

Why "free"? They'd sing 'Horses, horses I'm  
crazy about horses' Where Luvah doth renew his  
brings The Horses of Lu, they "A"-7 horses:  
"Lou" (her voice) my name God's my life  
forty years later The Adirondack Trust Company of  
Saratoga (Drive-in Banking and FREE Parking While Banking)  
trust "Health - History - Horses" (ibid)

The connection being made here between the suggestion of freedom and "A"-7 is interesting, in that it points out another apparent paradox, which is that Zukofsky's verse often appears at its most 'free' (both in the sense of 'free-verse' and that of being intellectually unrestrained) at points where it is in fact most tightly controlled and precisely structured, or tied firmly by a rigid model. Yet again, "A"-7 and the Cavalcanti-based "A"-9 are the clearest examples of this phenomenon.

Further down the page, however, Zukofsky's defensive explanation runs into a little trouble. He quotes from the introduction to Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language, editing Johnson's statements into the leaner style of "A". The broad sentence structure of the introduction, its asides and secondary references are cut away and a more direct presentation of one central idea is achieved.

Zukofsky tailors Johnson's statement to fit "A" in two ways.

Firstly, he personalises the passage by omitting anything which refers outside the central argument, and anything which unnecessarily pads out the structure. Secondly, the emphasis is moved from sentence structure into line structure, so that Zukofsky controls sentence breaks and rhythm. The result is that Johnson's ideas are brought in intact in his own words, but the selection of which parts make up the central argument and their presentation rhythm and linear shape are established by Zukofsky. Herein lies the meaning of Zukofsky's introductory remark: 'He ... says for/me all that follows'. He goes on to quote Johnson as follows:

Who shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his  
language, that it is in his power to  
change sublunary nature. Sounds are too volatile for  
legal restraints. To enchain syllables and to lash  
the wind are equally undertakings of pride unwilling  
to measure its desires by its strength. That  
signs might be permanent .. like the things? (ibid)

This expresses a dilemma which is crucial to an 'objectivist's' view of poetry: the ability to recognize the fluidity and transience of language, while forging it into a concrete poetic object. Zukofsky's main way round this depends on his belief in the 'physiological' nature of language. In 1969 he expressed it as follows:

But anyway, the eye concerns the poet; the ear concerns the poet because he hears noises, and like the kid he's affected. And you can do all sorts of things with the noises. You can imitate natural things, and so forth. I like to keep the noises as close to the body as possible so that (I don't know how you'd express it mathematically) the eye is a function of the ear and the ear of the eye; maybe with that you might feel a sense of smell, of taste even. So much of the word is a physiological thing. I know all the linguists will say I'm crazy. In fact I think there's close relationship between families of languages in this physiological sense. Something must have led the Greeks to say *hudor* and for us to say water.

But the word is so much of a physiological thing that its articulation, as against that of other words, will make an "object". Now you can make an object that is in a sense purely image and, unless you've a great poet it can get too heavy. You will become one of those painter-poets who are, really, too frivolous; they exist in every generation. You know, they look at something and they immediately want to write a poem. That's not the way to make an image; it ought to be involved in the cadence - something very few people realise. What I mean is the kind of thing you get in Chapman's "the unspeakable good liquor there". Obviously, the man who wrote that knew what it was to gargle something down his throat. So body, voice, in handling words - that concerns the poet. <sup>12</sup>

This conviction appears at this point in the poem to reinforce the reference to "A"-7 with its emphasis on the precise use of language imbued with physiological dependence. In its processing into poetic structure this can breathe life into wooden sawhorses and make them 'dance'. Johnson's words, reinforced by Zukofsky's linear structure, amplify this in the lines:

shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his  
guage, that it is in his power to  
nge sublunary nature. (ibid)

Here an attention to the sound patterns of vowels and consonants gives the verse - as it has become - an organic, bodily rhythm. This, in its way, is an internal answer to the questions being posed.

Another example of how the answer is found in the formulation of the question, lies in the section which follows:

To explain requires the use of terms less  
abstruse than that which is to be explained  
and such terms cannot always be found. Words  
hourly shifting, names have often many ideas, few  
ideas many names. But every art is obscure  
to those ~~that~~ have not learned (?) it. (ibid)

The essence here is that 'names have often many ideas, few/ideas many names'. This has an impact on the 'objectivist's' demand for precision in the choice and use of words. 'Prop. LXI.' had several meanings of each word worked into its structure, so that each 'name' had 'many ideas'. Exactly the right word must be chosen without possibility of substitutes, since 'few/ideas (have) many names'. By fitting the words together in an exact manner, the 'objectivist' builds up a frame-work of dependencies which supports the resultant poetic 'object'. Thus the fluidity of language may be harnessed to a certain extent (but not enchained), by maintaining a high level of internal integrity in the poem.

In the context of "A", the final sentence of the section ('But every art is obscure/to those ~~that~~ have not learned (?) it') it introduces a sense of unease into the argument. The crux of this lies in Zukofsky's question mark, inserted after 'learned'.

Clearly Zukofsky finds in Johnson's words a ready-made answer to the uncomprehending, axe-honing criticism, of the kind he received in 1932 from 'the maniac Yvor Winters in current H + H on 'Obj. Anth.'',<sup>13</sup> and then thirty years later from Julian Symons:

They don't, however, give additional depth to his writing, but on the contrary reveal that what Objectivism covers is in his case an almost total lack of talent ... The great bulk of Zukofsky's writing is so devoid of rhythmical interest and intelligence, and its content is such a dreary would-be informal and matey droning about life and the infinite that it is practically unreadable.

... To pull through one of Zukofsky's long poems ... is a more unrewarding exercise than reading the whole of Paterson. 14

However, whilst wishing to set himself against the proponents of the birthright of accessibility in literature, Zukofsky also shuns an academic containment and categorising of art which creates an élite of the learned. He had made this clear as early as 'Pocm' beginning "The". Further down the quotation Zukofsky uses a phrase of Johnson's to support this:

that the English Dictionary  
was written with little assistance of the learned, (p396)

Thus it may be seen that the question mark draws the reader's attention to the difficulty of the word 'learned', particularly in its new context in "A", and in doing so becomes the fulcrum for two contrasting ideas. It is from this contrast that the tension in the section arises, in the poem as it had not done in Johnson's original essay.

As the passage continues Zukofsky uses Johnson's words to further reflect on his own work. Johnson 'says for me':

that I set limits to  
my work which would in that time be ended  
tho not completed, that he whose design includes  
whatever language can express must often speak of  
what he does not understand: writes hurried by  
eagerness to the end - that the English Dictionary  
was written with little assistance of the learned,  
and without any patronage of the great: not  
in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under  
the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience



and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow - success and miscarriage .. empty sounds .. having little to fear from censure or from praise.' (ibid)

Clearly, the opening of this section serves as a 'found' description of an 'objectivist's' life-poem, explained here in terms of a contrast. This contrast is contained in the phrase 'that I set limits to/my work which would in time be ended/tho not completed'. Work which will end, but not be completed, is the life poem per se, but Zukofsky found in Johnson a way to preclude the notion of an amorphous, unguided sprawl, with the phrase 'that I set limits to/my work'. In this light the poem may be seen as an eclectic concretion kept constantly in check by imposed 'limits'. Many of these limits are either advertised or obvious, for example, the structure of the fugue, the guidance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion, the form of the sonnet and the sestina, etc. In the context of "A", however, the idea of 'limits' goes much deeper than this into the poetic basis of the work. Indeed, by including the 'limits' passage, Zukofsky refers the reader directly back to "A"-12 and the section which reads:

About my poetics -

$$\int_{\text{speech}}^{\text{music}}$$

An integral  
Lower limit speech  
Upper limit music

(p138)

and then again, later in that movement:

$$\int_{-1}^1 \int_{\text{story-eyes}}^{\text{sound}} \text{thing thought.}$$

(p173)

The imposed limits, then - fugue, sonnet and so on - are reflections, or echoes of limits set deep within the poetic basis of the line and arising out of fundamental 'objectivist' principles. With this level of limitation and control being so firmly established in the initial approaches to the work - in the basic poetic practice - the poet need have no fear of speaking 'what he does not understand'. It is 'ideifying' the material into a structure with the controls built in to take it and, indeed, many of the variables will arise as a consequence of the process of the structure itself. If this sounds like yet another re-definition of 'sincerity and objectification' then the effect is purely intentional, for even here in the late stages of "A", Zukofsky was able to demonstrate that the central principles of his early poetic thinking were still at work and employed far more effectively, with a clearer intention and in the face of more difficulties than they ever had been in the shorter poems.

After this reaffirmation of principle, the movement takes a slight deviation in its direction. It is necessary to emphasise that it is a deviation and not a break because the essential characteristic of the movement (and particularly the section from here to its close) is the smooth flow of its ideas, references and allusions. The flow of subjects and references moves from self to family to the United States, the Vietnam war, U.S. politics and so on. At this point the national and international events take prominence and it should be noticed that these things are all observed, read about or seen on television, and not experienced. Personal experience is confined to minute details such as Celia

watching television, the poet remembering his son playing Ives and the date, 4th of July. These details are dotted about in a mass of major issues flowing from one to another and yet, in the end, it becomes clear that it is these moments of experience that form the context for the entire movement. The scene is that of the poet amidst the celebrations of the fourth of July waiting to hear from his son. Surprisingly, when the resolution of this small intimate need occurs with the hoped for telephone call, it also resolves the larger questions raised in the movement, of life and death, hope and despair.

The resolution is achieved in a firmly crafted section which opens with the telephone call and then quickly expands in a flurry of images and references. It reads:

Midnight opening the door to the telephone ringing  
 (the violinist's timing always right) could not believe  
 the voice after two months' distance. 'P?' 'Yes  
 me.' 'What is't?' 'Naturally I phone because I've  
 something to ask.' What he had: our deep need.  
 An armory shattering, three levitating torahs flying thru  
 a Chagall see with her worries he with  
 his fiddle who with Whose bass the trembling  
string the lighted ha' the red-head priest tempered  
The Seasons Johann Sebastian his clavier, chances of  
 ordered changes changes of ordered chances, song that  
 literally came into and out of one's ears  
 seven horses run Pegasus flying to cleaning house  
 seven words heaven, eight love, nine universe, longing  
 that innocence at nine, a dip of the  
 valley shoots children skating red blue and snow:  
 writing '19 for 47 years later feeling that  
 moment that far back: millennia raiding to nations  
 and still their yes that means no. The  
 young said 'You old, to blame - but we  
 who looked towards no nation, all regions peoples'?  
 That death should sing: the young live after.  
 Vietnamese story: Kung Buddha Christos and no forgiveness  
 not hard to die when gods likewise try?  
 'If it be now, 'tis not to come  
 if it be not to come, it will be now  
 if it be not now, yet it will come.'  
 'As dry pumps will not play till  
 water is thrown into them . . . tho' I light  
 my Candle at my Neighbour's Fire does not  
 alter the Property, or make Wick Wax Flame  
 or the whole Candle less my own' - Swift.

(pp405-6)

Clearly this section is strong enough and sufficiently well carved to stand as a poem in itself, an independent or self-dependent object. Appearing, as it does, here in the eighteenth movement, with connections back and forward into the poem, its effect is different from what would have been achieved had it been presented independently. The compact density of its ideas and references is handled in such a way that the structure forms a curve which starts low and then builds up and up at great speed until the key line is reached, after which it declines quietly to its close. The key line is 'That death should sing: the young live after'. The line is not only essential for the section but also for the movement, since it illustrates the cycle which the movement represents. Beginning on the personal, a valentine between a man and his wife, the movement takes this into a speculation on his death. This theme is taken up by the mass of wider observed concerns and then finally, it narrows down to the personal once again for the resolution, in the person of the son and in the connections between the aging parent and his child. It is the life-death-birth cycle which is presented so completely by the end of the above-quoted section, that the remaining 39 lines appear as a chorus designed to bring the movement to a satisfactory close.

The shape of "A"-18 as represented above has another significance which should not be overlooked, and that is that it represents yet again the structure of the fugue. This, together with the references to Zukofsky's violinist son Paul, prepares the reader for the following two movements which rely heavily on musical references for their content. The junction between "A"-18 and 19 represents the opening of the final phase of the poem. It must be remembered that all the movements in this part of "A" are 'songs beginning an', and yet here the reference to song which opens '19' is used both to introduce and to refer back to the fugue form of

"A"-13. This is achieved by the lines

An other  
song - you  
want another  
encore I

(p408)

Further reference back to '18' is made later in the lines

another  
bowed - fame  
crowds on  
other valentine.

(p409)

The significance of the new phase that the poem is entering at this point is revealed through a gentle build-up. Although the middle section of the movement takes the form of a prospectus for the 'PAGANINI PRIZE', it is surrounded by poetic forms and structures arising out of previous movements. "A"-20 maintains the musical theme but presents the reader with a far more directly presented found object, and then "A"-21 leaves music for verse-drama, but continues to champion the cause of the found object.

At the beginning of this chapter it was suggested that whereas the main thrust of "A" 1-12 was prescriptive that of "A" 13-24 was illustrative. It is here in the closing movements that this achieves its purest expression. Perhaps Zukofsky 'writes hurried by/eagerness to the end' or perhaps he felt willing to try the grand experiment 'having little to fear/from censure or from praise', but either way objectivist principles are approached from a different direction here. Indeed, it could be that an attempt is being made to take objectivism beyond the simple object, and to attack the contrapuntal from a different, more literary, direction. The basis of this change is Zukofsky's rediscovery, or reaffirmation, of the importance of the found object. It certainly takes 'objectivist' principles a long way beyond Pound's 'In a Station of the



Metro' with its insistence on an impression of a scene or object but it is also a different perception of the logical end-product of the poetic use of the discrete object. Of course, the found object had always been one of Zukofsky's chief poetic ingredients, but it had usually been used as part of an overall effect or process. Here, the poet seems to have decided that the time for exploration and integration has passed, and 'objects' such as the verse-drama RUDENS ("A"-21), are allowed to stand on their own, without being fitted into an immediate process. Of course, in one sense they do still have to fit into a process, that of the direction of the whole poem, but in their local context they are allowed to stand unsupported.

Related to this change in approach is the chronological order of the writing of the final movements. "A"-19, which was written between 1965 and 1966, is following by "A"-20 which was held over from 1963. Clearly its place in the poem required the lead-in of 19, as described above. There is then a four year break until "A"-21, its appearance as a discrete found object having been established by the preceding two movements. After a three year break "A"-22 and 23 emerge, being written in 1970-73 and 1973-74 respectively. The poem closes with the 24th movement which was held over from 1968, which is to say that it was written directly after "A"-21. It is no coincidence that the 21st and 24th movements are the most clear cut examples of the move towards the priority of the found object.<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of giving such priority to the found object appears when the nature of the objects chosen is revealed. 'RUDENS' is a verse-drama with two essential characteristics built in to it. Firstly it is self-contained, with its own plot and characters, totally out of time and place with all that has gone before it. Because of this it effectively brings

to a close what may be termed the 'narrative' element of the poem, the story of a man's life and environment.

The second characteristic is that as drama it is essentially a performance medium. Presenting the reader with a performance echoes the very beginning of the poem "A"-1 with

A  
Round of fiddles playing Bach ....  
The Passion According to Matthew  
Composed seventeen twenty-nine,  
Rendered at Carnegie Hall,  
Nineteen twenty-eight,  
Thursday evening, the fifth of April.  
The autos parked, honking.

(p1)

The difference between the two is that "A"-1 is a description of a visit to a performance, whereas "A"-21 presents the reader with the material and then leaves him to get on with it. Neither technique is able to actually present the reader with a performance, although this is not the intention (the problem is far more acute with "A"-24 as will be seen).

A further element of 'performance' is present in 'RUDENS', which stems from its being one of Zukofsky's own idiosyncratic translations, in this case, from Plautus. In common with Zukofsky's Catullus, the translation of 'RUDENS' works by rendering the sound of the original, and by moulding meanings with suggestions which arise both from the sound and the meaning of the original words. The result of this technique is at once at odds with the accepted notion of translation and yet paradoxically very closely bound to the original work. In this sense the translated work is itself a performance of some of the physical and dynamic aspects of the model - the close weave of sound and related meaning.

After the performance of the preceding movement comes the contemplation of "A"-22 and 23. I suggested earlier that there is a sense in which these movements fit in with the idea of a 'found object', in that they

are brought in almost as poetic examples between the performance related movements 21 and 24. The chronology of "A" reveals that they were created separately, 21 and 24 having been written consecutively in 1967 and 1968 with 22 and 23 taking up the years 1970 to 1974. This fact adds to the feeling that 22 and 23 are the true end of the poem, with the 24th movement as something of an appendix. Poetically and thematically they quieten the poem down to a still point, taking as their subject the co-ordinates of a life - the time, space and organic construct that a life inhabits. This intention is signalled by the prefix to "A"-22:

AN ERA  
ANYTIME  
OF YEAR

(p508)

Here the words 'TIME/OF' split the anagrammic "AN ERA ANY YEAR", which suggests that Zukofsky is dealing with his own lifetime as a specific, and life as a human or general condition. Shepherded together into the two movements are suggestions of the history and primeval prehistory (the distinction being a purely human construction) of life on earth and a microcosm of it within the individual. The whole compound is tied back into the poem by means of the recurrence of ideas and suggestions from earlier movements, such as the 'liveforever' of "A"-2, 'autumn' from 5, the 'Grace notes' of "A"-6 and, inevitably, the presence of J.S. Bach. The outcome of this reassessed cartography of a life is a move towards an understanding of the relationship between 'life' and 'poem' in the phrase 'life poem'. This is certainly suggested in the density and complex interweaving of the final passage of "A"-23:

Cue in new-old quantities - 'Don't  
bother me' - Bach quieted bothered;  
since Eden gardens labor, For  
series distributes harmonies, attraction Governs  
destinies. Histories dye the streets:  
intimate whispers magnanimity flourishes: doubts'  
passionate Judgment, passion the task.

Kalenderes enlumined 21-2-3, nigher .. fire-  
 Land or - sea, air --gathered.  
 Most art, object-the-mentor, donn'd one -  
 smiles ray immaterial Nimbus .. Oes  
 sun-pinned to red threads - thrice-urged  
posato (poised) 'support from the  
 source' - horn-note out of a  
 string (Quest returns answer - 'to  
 rethink the Caprices') sawhorses silver  
all these fruit-tree tops: consonances  
 and dissonances only of degree, never -  
 Unfinished hairlike water of notes  
 vital free as Itself - impossible's  
 sort-of think-cramp work x: moonwort:  
 music, thought, drama, story, poem  
 parks' sunburst - animals, grace notes -  
 z-sited path are but us.

(p563)

The passage expresses many of Zukofsky's feelings about the writing of  
"A" - we see the writer 'bothered' by the demands of outside pressures,  
 again using Bach as a personal metaphor, we have the 'task' of 'passion'  
 and 'object - the mentor'. Clearly the line 'music, thought, drama,  
 story, poem' is a conscious, retrospectively written introduction to  
 the 'L. Z. Masque' of "A"-24, but it also adds something to the most  
 interesting line of the passage - 'z-sited path are but us'. The plural  
 'are' renders 'z-sited path' into a component of the list, and in that  
 context its meaning must be Zukofsky's life. It carries within it a  
 number of other suggestions as well, however. 'z-sited' is the end of a  
 sequence beginning "A" ('A/Round of fiddles playing Bach'). There is also  
 a minor suggestion of a mathematical formulation, taking the form of a  
 curve or graph, linked to Zukofsky's insistence on "A" as a conic section.<sup>16</sup>

The most important idea expressed in the phrase is that of a relat-  
 ionship, in which the 'z-sited path' is a joining of the direction of "A"  
 and the 'direction of historic and contemporary particulars' in that most  
 personal sense, the progression of a life.

A further complexity arises in deciding the identity of 'us'. When  
 'z-sited path' is being taken in its general sense as meaning 'life' then  
 clearly 'us' is a general reference to humanity. Since the movement has

built into it the idea of a relationship between the life and the poem there are two more specific requirements of the word 'us'. First it must refer to Zukofsky's family who play such a dominant role in the second half of "A", and secondly there is a suggestion of a relationship between poet and reader, in which the point of contact is the 'z-sited path' which is the poem. The most important suggestion made however, is of an acknowledgement and reconciliation of Zukofsky's 'my two voices', in all its layers of meaning. It will be remembered that these include poet and man, observer and subject, Zukofsky and Bach, the public and private, the historic and contemporary, etc. Indeed, this tension between two conflicting elements is essential to virtually every part of the poem. Here at the end of the poem proper it is stated that out of this tension comes the unified aim or direction, the z-sited path.

If "A"-23 represents an end to the real progression of the poem, then the 24th movement must be seen as something of a chorus or epilogue. As has been suggested earlier, it is an experiment in the outer reaches of an 'objectivist's' technique. Of course it is a 'found object', since the 'L. Z. Masque' was put together by Zukofsky's wife Celia and so the experimental nature of its construction is not of Zukofsky's making. The real experiment lies in his including such a piece in the poem, with its obvious implications for an extension of 'objectivist' theory.

These implications are hinted at in Zukofsky's own postscript to the 'Masque':

"A" - 24  
Celia's  
L.Z. Masque

the gift -  
she hears  
the work ,  
in its recurrence  
L.Z.

(p 806)



Here the two main elements of the 'Masque' are exposed. 'Recurrence' is one of the main devices used to bond the elements of the poem together, and in 'L.Z. Masque' it is translated into the simultaneous performance of five separate elements or 'parts'. These are music by Handel and then four elements of Zukofsky's own work, Thought (Prepositions), Drama (Arise, Arise), Story (it was) and Poem ("A").

The other main element revealed in the postscript is expressed in 'she hears/the work'. The importance of hearing and sound in the relationship between the Masque and 'objectivist theory' is revealed in the opening Act, in which the 'Thought' content is derived from Zukofsky's 'A Statement for Poetry 1950' and the 'Poem' from "A"-12. The 'Thought' quotation (marked 'T') reads:

And it is possible in imagination to divorce speech of all graphic elements, to let it become a movement of sounds. It is this musical horizon of poetry that permits anybody who does not know Greek to listen and get something out of the poetry of Homer: to "tune in" to the human tradition, to its voice which has developed among the sounds of natural things, and thus escape the confines of a time and place as one hardly ever escapes them in studying Homer's grammar. (pp566-570)

This runs simultaneously with the following poetry (marked 'P'):

Blest  
Infinite things  
So many  
Which confuse imagination  
Thru its weakness,  
To the ear  
Noises.  
Or harmony  
Delights  
Men to madness -  
To say the planets  
Whirl and make harmony -  
That they take for things  
Modifications of  
Imagination:

Where before,  
If all things passed  
From the world

Time and space  
Were left,  
They would now  
Disappear  
With the things -

(p 566-71)

The phrase 'a movement of sounds' well describes the 24th movement of "A", since we are told in the prefatory note that 'each voice should come through clearly'. Obviously the effect of five voices coming through clearly is going to be 'to the ear/Noises'. Such speech divorced 'of all, graphic elements' is a logical progression of Zukofsky's views on the 'physical' properties of language, and of his description of his poetics as

$$\int \begin{matrix} \text{music} \\ \text{speech} \end{matrix}$$

An integral  
Lower limit speech  
Upper limit music

(From "A"-12)

(p138)

In this form, however, it must bring 'objectivist' principles a long way from the comparatively simple demands of 'Sincerity and Objectification' and ultimately distinguish them entirely from 'Imagism', in which the exploitation of 'graphic elements' is a defining aim.

Taking this into account, "A"-24 is far more than a space-filler brought in to even up the symmetry and fulfil the poet's desire to have 24 movements. The movement represents a point of departure, although I would suggest that the road it leads down is not a particularly inviting one since it offers, in this form at least, a poetry which is difficult, if not impossible, to read. Further, the technique strays into a grey area between music and poetry which it is hard to imagine containing ground which might not be better covered by one or other of the original forms. The line between 'noise' and 'harmony' is a thin one under these

circumstances. However, as an illustration that objectivist principles still had life and potential, after fifty years of examination and development, the movement serves to close the poem on an optimistic, indeed ambitious note. Right to the end, however, the principle of creating a dynamic through the tension of opposing forces is maintained. Throughout "A" the confrontation of noise and harmony, of lower and upper limits, of age and youth pull apart on the brink of crisis and create an equilibrium which is a dynamic form of 'rested totality', completely at odds with a condition of stasis. Here, in the final movement, the tension is between the open and the resolved. In one sense at least, the poem is resolved in that it forms a cohesive unit or 'poetic object'. "A" begins with an ending - the poet leaving a concert - and ends with the beginning of a possible new phase of objectivist poetics. The result is neat, concrete and 'hermetically sealed'. At the same time, however, the very fact of that new beginning provides a vibrant, living and testing openness outside this one monolithic object.

## CHAPTER VII

### 'The objective lens - bringing the rays to focus'

In his short article 'Pound and "Zuk"', in the Louis Zukofsky Memorial issue of Paideuma, Basil Bunting wrote that

Zukofsky, about 1929 or 30, had selected a few of Pound's more cogent maxims and rephrased them (alas! in what I took to be the obscure dialect of pedants) and he lived up to them and seemed to apply them to all he wrote in verse.  
... Pound was volatile, malleable and acute. Zukofsky was relatively unchanging if somewhat slower to perceive. 1

Leaving aside the question of how far Zukofsky's principles are a rephrasing of Pound's maxims, Bunting is quite right to suggest that Zukofsky applied his principles consistently throughout his work. The phrase 'relatively unchanging' has to be qualified, however. It is used here in relation to Ezra Pound's fluidity of emphasis, and the series of 'personae' he adopted through his career. There is no room in an 'objectivist's' practice for the adoption of personae - and too much can be made of Zukofsky's 'my two voices'. In his recently published (1983) book Zukofsky's "A", Barry Ahearn uses the phrase 'this multiplication of Zukofskys' and goes on to suggest that 'if one is dedicated to garnering the external world, a single personality may be insufficient as a container'.<sup>2</sup> My reading of "A", as of the shorter poems, fails to discover this 'multiplication of Zukofskys' because even at times when a character is allowed to speak for himself, his 'persona' is a function of the poem rather than of the poet, and over all there consistently stands the relationship between the poet and his 'objects'. Rather than a number of different Zukofskys there is but one who, like everyone else, changes and modifies his position, subtly or more dramatically, in response to the day to day pressures of existence.

One of the most helpful commentaries on this unity of perception is Charles Reznikoff's idea of 'testimony' as in a court of law. This is another way of expressing what Zukofsky called 'thinking with things as they exist'<sup>3</sup>, a phrase which concisely charts the dilemma posed by a poetry which claims apparently to devalue the contribution of the intellect in the poetic process. Clearly intellectual action is a defining function of poetic endeavour - it is the bonding medium between perception and output. The phrase 'thinking with things as they exist' places this intellectual function firmly within that transfer process, denying it the opportunity of modifying the 'things', or of acting prejudiciously upon them, in the space between perceived image and written object. Again, the 'my two voices' of "A" is recalled here, in that the objectivist poem is that point of rest between two unresolved elements - perception and language. The successful poem by this analysis will achieve a state of equilibrium, here defined as a dynamic or vibrant state, since it holds opposing or disparate forces in balance, creating stability out of instability. Such a 'perfect rest' is, of course, the definition of 'objectification' and is a manifestation of energy as opposed to the stasis of inertia. It is outside the scope of my current argument to examine how far this may be seen as a twentieth century (i.e. Einsteinian), or Newtonian view of natural processes, but it certainly lends itself more readily to the rocket age than to the howitzer ballistics that headed the 'Program Objectivists 1931'.

What emerges from this analysis is that if the delicate balancing of opposing forces is essential for the achievement of objectification then there can be no room for erratic variables of the kind which a 'multiplication of Zukofsky's' might introduce. What is required is the constant Zukofsky as against the variable Pound, as defined by Bunting.



Having said that, however, it must be clear that the concept of dynamic equilibrium or potential created by the tension of opposing forces contains within it some suggestion of the structure and energy of the atom and, from there, of pure energy. Appropriately, the idea of energy in poetry brings the argument back to Pound:

To recapitulate, then, the vorticist position; or at least my position at the moment is this:

Energy, or emotion, expresses itself in form. Energy, whose primary manifestation is in pure form, i.e., form as distinct from likeness or association can only be expressed in painting or sculpture. Its expression can vary from 'wall of Troy pattern' to Wyndham Lewis's 'Timon of Athens', or a Wadsworth woodblock. Energy expressing itself in pure sound, i.e., as sound distinct from articulate speech, can only be expressed in music. When an energy or emotion 'presents an image', this may find adequate expression in words. It is very probably a waste of energy to 4 express it in any more tangible medium.

The beginning of the quotation - 'at least my position at the moment' - seems to back up Basil Bunting's view of Pound, but the idea of energy expressed in form would seem to find a parallel in Zukofsky's poetic theory. The ground inhabited by Pound's 'energy presents an image' is a similar territory to that bounded by Zukofsky's 'lower limit speech, upper limit music'. For Zukofsky the 'objectivist' however, Pound's 'Vorticist' phrase 'energy presents an image' must be inverted, for it is the image and its presentation, or the process of building a poem, that releases the energy. This is implicit in the 1931 definition of 'sincerity' and 'objectification' as 'the care for detail' and 'its ideation into structure'.

Two further phrases from the above quotation emphasise this difference between Zukofsky and Pound. Pound's 'adequate expression in words' and 'any more tangible medium' imply an attitude towards language far removed from the position adopted by Zukofsky. Zukofsky's view of the importance to the poet of the body and the senses, the ear and the eye, coupled with his idea of language as itself physiological and close to the body, gives

language a status in the art of poetry far higher than that which Pound, in 1915 at least, seemed willing to allow.

The priority given to language and structure in this way is reflected in all of what I have called the objectivist principles - 'sincerity and objectification', 'the objective lens', 'the direction of historic and contemporary particulars', 'lower limit speech, upper limit music', 'thinking with things as they exist', etc. To give the lie to one critic's description of "A" as 'a triumph of the poet's art over his theory'<sup>5</sup> it is equally evident in Zukofsky's poetry including 'Poem Beginning "The"', 'Prop LXI', 'I's (pronounced eyes)' and "A". Remember, for example, 'To cipher each drop - the eye - shot in the rain around' (Prop LXI) or 'Spoke: words, words, we are words, horses, manes, words' ("A"-7).

This kind of poetry is demanding - not only on the reader, as William Carlos Williams suggested when he wrote 'this is a dangerous sort of writing for if it doesn't click, if it doesn't do the magic and arouse the reader ... it becomes a mere jargon and a reaching',<sup>6</sup> but also for the poet since the attention given to language and structure demands constant precision and control. Such an intense commitment, bound up in and focussed down to every syllable of each poem, would seem to suggest that an 'objectivist's' poetics would limit him to the short poem in the manner of the imagist haiku percolation and yet, paradoxically, the framework of the objectivist principle makes the writing of an epic life-poem such as "A" virtually a necessity.

The key to this is partly contained in Zukofsky's view of the image. In 1931, whilst agreeing with Pound's 'Imagiste' definition, Zukofsky wished to take the image further:

The image is at the basis of poetic form. Elsewhere, Pound has defined the image as that which represents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. One can go further, try to dissect capillaries or intelligent nerves - and speak of the image felt as duration or perhaps the image as the existence of the shape and movement of the poetic object. 7

The latter part of the quotation suggests the flexibility and scale which would allow a poem of the dimensions of "A". It is the reference to 'capillaries' which really suggests the necessity of such an undertaking, however. This refers back to two previous suggestions in the same essay. The first of these is the definition of the poem as an object which 'arose in the veins and capillaries' and in 'the materials which are outside the veins and capillaries - the context'. Secondly, there is the belief that it is

Impossible to communicate anything but particulars - historic and contemporary - things, human beings as things their instrumentalities of capillaries and veins binding up and bound up with events and contingencies. (p16)

Already, there appears in these words a prescription for "A" in the idea of the poem as close to the body and the human being as 'bound up with events and contingencies'. Reverse this construction and you arrive at events and contingencies through the human being to the poem. The route to "A" becomes clear, particularly when reinforced by Zukofsky's conclusion from all this, again in the same essay:

A desire to place everything - everything aptly, perfectly, belonging within, one with, a context -  
A poem. The context based on a world  
... The desire for inclusiveness - The desire for an inclusive object.  
A poem. This object in process (p15)

'The desire for an inclusive object' in a poet who believes in a physiological language cries out for a 'life poem', but the objectivist principles go further and provide the mechanism by which the sustained

intensity necessary for a long poem can be achieved. In 'Recencies' Zukofsky, quoting Taupin, suggests that poets need 'to find again the essential distinction of the epic which is neither love nor hate but the restitution of these sentiments to a chain of facts which exist'. (p23) The prerequisites for this 'essential distinction' are then presented in the following passage:

Other examples of the complexity of the epic not limiting their content to the U.S.A. are few: Eliot's Waste Land, McAlmon's Portrait of a Generation and North America, L.Z.'s "The" and unfinished "A", and the greatest poem of our time Pound's Cantos.

The word complexity used several times now is perhaps misleading. Ultimately, the matter of the poetic object and its simple entirety must not be forgotten. The Cantos meaning is The Cantos in spite of all the complexities they deal with. Restituting love and hate to a chain of poetic fact they have for instance devoted the duration of one Canto to Confucius.

I.e. order and the facts as order. The order of the Cantos as the order of all poetry is to approach a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are of no predatory intention. A hard job, as poets have found reconciling contrasting principles or facts. In poetry the poet is continually encountering the facts which in the making seem to want to disturb the music and yet the music or the movement cannot exist without the facts, without its facts. The base matter, to speak hurriedly, which must receive the signet of the form. (pp23-24)

Once again Ezra Pound takes centre stage and yet, bearing in mind that 'Recencies' was written concurrently with the early stages of "A", it is easy to deduce that Zukofsky had more personal reasons for an exploration of the route to an American epic (or a twentieth century epic, or indeed both). The key to this formulation is the idea of 'restituting love and hate to a chain of poetic fact', which itself expresses the apparently paradoxical central practice behind an 'objectivist's' poetics, involving the setting up of contrasting elements in opposition and deriving the energy or direction of the poem from this dynamic apparatus, seen here as 'order and the facts as order'. Elsewhere in 'Recencies' this is expressed as 'an equilibrium of meaning determined by new meanings' of



word against word contemporarily read'. The 'epic' form therefore aspires to equilibrium as a dynamic state, rest derived from energy. Zukofsky even found the patience to spell it out in large letters in case it be missed in "A"-9, and after consideration of new potentialities in "A"-24. 'Word against word' is extended to include object against object, idea against idea, and is expressed in 'historic and contemporary', 'upper limit speech, lower limit music'.

The long poem clearly gives a greater scope for the exploration of this structural technique than is made available by the short poems. After all, the American epic results from 'the desire for inclusiveness'. In 'A Statement for Poetry' Zukofsky said that

The length of a poem has nothing to do with its merits as composition in which each sound of a word is weighed, though obviously it is possible to have more of a good thing - a wider range of things felt, known and conveyed.

8

At first glance this would seem to be almost dismissive of the long poem but in the context of 'Recencies' and "A", the offhand understatement suggests at least an equality of potential merit between the long and short poems, and indeed 'the greatest poem of our time (is) Pound's Cantos'. This 'desire for inclusiveness, this wider range of things' provides a solid foundation for the assertion that 'the meaning of the Cantos is the Cantos' (or the meaning of "A" is "A"), for the poem (the 'object in process'), results from the act of placing each 'object' in its proper relation with other 'objects', rather than from the discrete manifestation of individual and separated objects. Thus the poem is itself one self-integrated object, rather than a conglomeration of its parts; it is neither a reflection nor a reproduction of anything other than itself. The question of 'openness' as against 'resolution' or 'closure' does not arise therefore, since the resolution into poetry comes about through a



deliberately 'open', unresolved content. The structure of the poem does not provide a conventional answer to this question, since its root lies in 'energy', or 'direction', created by the focussing of the disparate rays, rather than the intentional choice of one or the other.

At its most successful, this process results in a poetry which gains nothing from externally-derived annotations or explorations. An example of how this works is the 1959 poem, 'Jaunt':

1

Verona, Ohio  
right 3 miles  
highway is past  
alfalfa

plain of corn  
wheat, clover, rye,  
slips of -

younglings of  
peach, pear, apple, .

weeping willows  
hang down only  
to bring up  
maid Barbary's song

all at one side  
all on a wall  
orange  
day lilies  
pore as tho over  
red -

evening

after their kind

alpha and omega

a first sight  
of seven palomino  
horses  
white tails  
out of their cream  
bodies  
almost sweeping  
the ground

and as if  
these are  
human haunches  
of an Eastern world.

vines  
bind the  
landscape with who  
named it Verona

after one  
first trip to Europe  
perhaps  
reading  
Two Gentlemen

Proteus and Valentine  
or about the still  
younger lovers  
from fatal loins

male and female

imagining  
one night  
foreign farmer  
or native teacher

2

The cow scraped by  
the hood of the car  
leaped its frightened  
dung its avatar  
that gentle  
(not the hood)  
the ungentle  
driver  
escaped.

3

49 states  
filly  
rearing on  
the wind  
3 ways

a little housewife  
the lacy love

4

Rune  
ruinin'  
runs

Mexico

Physical  
geography  
a sea of cotton or  
a fluff of icebergs or  
waterfalls, trees, gigantic

mushroomed ivories  
Chinese of whatever animal, or  
huge herbs soar trunkless  
banana trees

white

illusion it is slow  
the aircraft humming  
at 330 miles an hour  
is 5 minutes passing  
a plot of plan, delta, gulf  
two glints of ships  
over 20,000 feet below  
or just as soon  
there is no  
earth, God's people  
are below the clouds, His  
sun above, the plane  
banks over virtually  
a field of Arctic snow  
that with the rainbow to spare  
skyscape promises better than landscape.

9

The story behind this poem is that George Oppen after losing contact with Zukofsky for a number of years, either arrived in New York and persuaded Zukofsky to accompany him home for a visit by car, or that, taking into account Zukofsky's fear of flying, Oppen decided that the only way he was going to get Zukofsky to Mexico City was himself to take a car and drive him there. Either way the curious and fraught journey (since Zukofsky apparently was not too happy about cars either) took place with Oppen driving and Zukofsky noting down and making a poem of what passed by his window. Oppen then refused to accept the rigors of driving him back, so Zukofsky had no choice then but to overcome his fear and take an aeroplane if he was to get home again to New York.

This story whilst amusing and of interest adds precisely nothing to the poem on the page since all that is important about the 'Jaunt' is expressed in the verse. Even the typography of the early sections describes the moving ribbon of roadside 'objects' which the poet gathered.

Details of the actual writing of the poem add nothing either, since they

too are processed into its form. For example, the original version, as sent to Cid Corman only thirty-eight days after announcing his intention of making the trip,<sup>10</sup> finishes at the end of section 4 with the word 'Mexico'. Clearly, this was the part of the poem completed during the event, and the details of the visit and the flight back are left until they have been processed and reflected upon. Without this knowledge, however, close examination of the poem itself reveals the fact through the radical change in form and the treatment of content which occurs at this break. This division can be illustrated in a number of ways, the first of which (since it is the most immediately clear), being the structural and formal change. In the first part of 'Jaunt' the syntax is fractured and minimal and the lines short and often truncated. The line endings are used to reinforce and direct meaning, shaped by syntactic omission, and so create a more complete image through structural control. From '5' onwards, however, the syntax tends increasingly towards the shape of the fuller sentence and towards regularity. Lines become generally longer and the role of line endings becomes comparatively less critical.

The handling of content alters across the same division. A good example is the way in which the vehicle and the ground covered are specifically stated. In both parts these are treated consecutively. In the earlier part there is

The cow scraped by  
the hood of the car  
leaped its frightened  
dung its avatar  
that gentle  
(not the hood)  
the ungentle  
driver  
escaped.

3

49 states  
 filly  
 rearing on  
 the wind  
 3 ways  
  
 a little housewife  
 the lacy love.

On the return journey, however, the presentation is very different:

5

the aircraft humming  
 at 330 miles an hour  
 in 5 minutes passing  
 a plot of plan, delta, gulf  
 two glints of ships  
 over 20,000 feet below

In the first quotation the car and the '49 states' are merely a suggestion, a brief reference to the vehicle as a particular in an anecdote, a realisation of the size of the entire nation brought on by a journey along a good part of its length. In complete contrast the second quotation displays an almost obsessive detailing of facts and figures concerning the aircraft, the landscape over which it passes and the relationship in time and space between the two. Out of this contrast emerges the way in which the theme is built up. In the earlier sections of the poem, the response of the poet to the day to day experience of the journey is established, whilst the latter part of the poem concentrates on the nature of the journey itself, its physical and non-personal reality.

This contrast, as of two sides of the same coin, exists not only between the two sections, but can be found within each part. For example, the comparatively slow, time-consuming car journey is expressed in a fast moving verse, the rapidity of the aeroplane in much slower deliberate steps. Further, it can be discovered between lines as in 'highway is



past/alfalfa', 'foreign farmer/or native teacher' or 'Physical/geography'. Contrast is signposted moreover, internally, within the line as in 'wheat', clover, rye', 'alpha and omega', 'male and female', 'earth, God's people' and 'skyscape promises better than landscape'. Thus the 'electromagnetic bond'<sup>11</sup> is to be found at whatever level the reader wishes to probe. Here are the elements of 'melody' shown up as the process of 'objectification', with all the ingredients and implications of Zukofsky's 1931 definition.

The result of this is a poem which has its context built into it, so that all that a reader needs to know about 'Jaunt' is there to be read in the text. The requirements for such a self-dependent poetry are great care for detail - 'sincerity' - and, as has already been suggested, a finely controlled working of this into structure - the process of 'objectification'. What is striking is that 'Jaunt' was written twenty-eight years after 'Sincerity and Objectification with Special Reference to the work of Charles Reznikoff' and 'Program: 'Objectivists 1931''. Yet the terms still apply and describe the steps by which such a poem may be achieved.

Here again, perhaps, we have Basil Bunting's 'relatively unchanging' Zukofsky, but reasons can be found for the survival of the objectivist principles intact, within those principles themselves. The first of these is the 'universality' of Zukofsky's criteria. Indeed, in 1960 he told Cid Corman in a letter that 'in 1931, those who complained against obscurity of critical statement also complained that what I said poetry ought to be was no different from what it is'<sup>12</sup>. One of the implications of this statement is that objectivist principles have general application - they can be used as criteria for all poetry, rather than being limited to a narrow prescription or manifesto for a poetic movement. An indication of this is the way in which Zukofsky applied the criteria to other poets

in the early critical statements, notably to Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Zukofsky emphatically was not attempting to establish a movement as such, but rather was attempting to initiate a new critical idiom, applicable to a newly invigorated twentieth century American poetry.

It may be argued that as a framework for critical sensibility the 'objectivist principles' failed, since they achieved no great general acceptance outside their role as points of reference for Zukofsky's own work. This suggests a second reason for the durability of the principles within Zukofsky's poetic practice. The critical idiom as such can be applied to the work of Williams or Ezra Pound, and yet when it is used with reference to Zukofsky's poetry it takes on a different significance, since Zukofsky himself obviously accepted its terms. This is illustrated by his inclusion of the 'L.Z. Masque' as the twenty-fourth movement of "A", with all its implications of continuing vitality and newly realized potential in the objectivist principles. It is further illustrated by the recurring use of objectivist poetic criteria as content in "A". While the objectivist principles can be applied as criteria by which to assess the work of other poets, they are part of the basis of Zukofsky's poetry, sustaining it and guiding its development through the years. Poetry and criticism are thus part of the same job, so that Zukofsky could state in 'Recencies' that

as a critic the editor of Feb. Poetry began as a poet, and that as a poet he had implicitly to be a critic. Wm. Carlos Williams had said before him, in Spring and All, - "I believe it possible, even essential, that when poetry fails it does not become prose but bad poetry".

A poet finds the continuous present analysis of his work preferable to criticism so-called. Yet what other criticism exclusive of his poem seems permissible? In preference to the brands of circumlocution requisite to ponderous journals and designated by Mr. Pound as backsidebeforeness, a "prose" criticism whose analysis follows without undue length of misinterpretation the more concise analysis of a considered poem seems permissible, if the general good demands such a prose.

The direction of this prose, tho' it will be definition, will also be poetry, arising from the same source or what to a third reader might seem to be the same source as the poetry -- a poetically charged mentality. Tho perhaps gratifying to the poet whose work is under observation -- this prose, with all its poetic direction and right impetus, should, to the critic himself with his merely poetically charged mentality, seem secondary even tertiary and less i.e. compared with that act which is a poem, not, of course, compared with "critical" backsidebeforeness.

But a critic-poet-analyst is interested in growing degrees of intelligence. He has an economic bias. He has been doing a job. It will perhaps as soon not as be his salvation. He does not pretend it to be more than a job .... At any rate -- poetry defined as a job, a piece of work. (pp10-14)

The fact of the poetry and the critical statements being part of the same job provides a way to read the poems of a man who insisted that the poem should stand or fall on its own with the minimum of external 'predatory intent'. Part of the reason behind Zukofsky's desire to create a critical idiom tied closely to the poetic object was his mistrust of an academic criticism which concentrates on biography and historical chronology; hence his refusal to declare in public any more than the sketchiest of autobiographical detail. As he wrote to Cid Corman:

It never occurs to nobody, contributors to "Test of Poetry" included, that only live poetry -- which has very little to do with "history" whose poetic making is sometimes also poetry -- that poetry only should be taught and only by live people. 13

Indeed, such a contextual criticism has little to offer the new American poetry that was being created -- who, after all, needs to know the details of William Carlos Williams' New Jersey medical practice in order to read 'To Elsie' or 'Pictures from Brueghel'? The inadequacy of academic contextual criticism in dealing with the new American tradition is a direct result of the cohesive unity of the poem brought about by its deliberately-structured self-dependency -- by its being what Williams called 'a machine made out of words' <sup>14</sup> or Zukofsky's 'object in process'.

This in turn results from the pre-eminence of language and structure in the objectivist's approach which provides the energetic unit, or web of dependencies and contrasts, harmony and dissonance. Language itself is here defined as a complex rather than a fixed intermediary in a chain of simple communication. Built up from words which are 'absolute symbols of things', it contains elements of 'music' and of 'noise', simple meanings, and meanings compounded and modified by the positions and relationships between words in the sentence or poetic line. Thus, each word or unit within the language requires all the other units around it, in order to fully reveal its function within any given context. Consequently, a word used in a line of poetry will be changed in some way from the same word used elsewhere, since its function will be different. So, language may be seen in a sense as an organism, as 'physiological' or 'close to the body'. Consciously appreciated in this light by the poet it creates the demand for a poetry of 'inclusiveness', whose context is sufficiently present in its own structure.

At last we have the reasons for, and the qualification of, Basil Bunting's 'relatively unchanging Zukofsky' quoted at the beginning of this chapter. If the objectivist's critical framework was created to encompass the new American poetry, then obviously it is suited to charting that poetry through the process of its development. With Zukofsky's own poetry the link is more intimate, since the poetry and the criticism arose from the same 'job'. Therefore, Zukofsky is 'relatively unchanging' in relation to his stated poetic aims and principles. It is not to be understood from this, however, that adherence to objectivist poetics implies stasis and lack of development. As suggested above, a critical frame of reference which does not allow for development is of little practical use. Zukofsky's view of the physiological nature of language writes the demand for development into the critical framework, allowing the poetry



to grow and pass through changes, whilst remaining loyal to the original definition. The idea of a poetic with 'lower limit speech, upper limit music', coupled with the requirements of 'sincerity' and 'objectification' provides the room for this development to take place.

Finally, it must be said that such a critical idiom has consequences for the shape and form of a long 'life' poem such as "A". Whilst on the one hand it would seem to actually demand the large scale 'epic', at the same time it results in a poem which is very difficult to define in any other frame of reference. A poem which allows for the organic dependencies of language, taking into account its sound and aspiring to a structure analogous with that of music, a poem of 'inclusiveness' with an inbuilt context, has a strong resistance to inappropriate critical approaches. It is, to use the word again, 'hermetic' to any but its own implied and explicit critical idiom. Zukofsky himself saw the poem as a 'curve', and whether you view its axes as being speech and music, life and structure, 'sincerity' and 'objectification', or any of the other potentialities of 'my two voices', it is clear that any chosen point on that curve depends for its value and potential on all the other points in the curve and consequently less on anything outside the axes. Again, 'the meaning of the Cantos is the Cantos'. The outcome of this is that certain conventional critical questions appear tangential to the curve - for example, the question of openness against resolution, particularly since the opposition of these two states is one of the binding tensions in the poem. The use of Zukofsky's own critical idiom, presented here as the 'objectivist principles', is the only way to break the hermetic seal and so open the poetry to a critical reading. Only thus can we begin to make a more realistic assessment of Zukofsky in relation to the wider development of twentieth century American poetry.



Zukofsky commented on "A" as follows:

I don't know about the structure of "A". I don't care how you consider it, whether as a suite of musical movements, or as something by a man who said I want to write this as I thought I saw the "curve" of it in twenty-four movements, and lived long enough to do so. I don't know, how would you consider Mahler's Song of the Earth or something like that? No, I didn't think of Mahler. I simply want the reader to find the poem not dull. As I said on another occasion, not anxious to say it then:

"Written in one's time or place and referring to other times and places, as one grows, whatever ways one grows, takes in and hopes to survive them, say like Bach's music". Maybe you get that out of it; maybe it will make its music. I feel a curve or something like that. But in working it out ... it's the detail that should interest you all the time.

I feel that life makes the curve. That's why Williams kept adding to Paterson; he found he had more and more to say and that it was all part of the poem. (You know, the poet is insatiable. I could go on forever.) Otherwise, you get down to the old argument, there is no such thing as a long poem; there are some good lines, and so forth. Maybe, I don't know. A long poem is merely more of a good thing, shall I put it that way? 15

Whatever Zukofsky's feelings about the structure, the poem 'makes its music' and it is through following the 'curve' and attending to the detail in the light of the critical idiom that surrounds it that the nature and consequences of that 'music' may be discovered. At least, it is a good place to begin the job.





























