

The “Objectivists”: A Website Dedicated to the “Objectivist” Poets

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the formation and early publications of the “Objectivists,” a group of poets whose interrelations and aesthetic program have been inconsistently documented and frequently misunderstood. The “Objectivists” were a group of roughly thirty modernist poets writing in English presented by Louis Zukofsky in the February 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine and the subsequent *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, published in 1932. While the group made little impact upon their initial appearance, several of these poets emerged from obscurity to publish significant work in the 1960s, forming an important bridge between Ezra Pound and other first generation modernists to various post-WWII schools in American poetry. Drawing heavily on contemporaneous archival material, this dissertation argues that the group’s nucleation as “Objectivists” was not the result of a programmatic movement but a strategy to achieve reliable publication.

The section entitled “The Lives” gives a historical account of the group’s formation beginning in 1928 and argues for the existence of an “Objectivist” core, consisting of Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, Basil Bunting, Carl Rakosi, and Lorine Niedecker. In addition, it details the relationships of Ezra Pound, Robert McAlmon, and Kenneth Rexroth to the group and to Zukofsky and Williams in particular. The section also offers capsule biographies for the remaining “Objectivists,” many of whom are lesser-known, and provides an extended biography of Carl Rakosi, the only core “Objectivist” without an extant book-length critical biography.

The section entitled “The Work” provides clear documentary evidence of the group’s efforts between 1928-1935 to gain access to publication, paying special attention to a series of joint publishing efforts and detailing a series of overlapping relationships between Pound, Williams,

Zukofsky and the editors of more than dozen little magazines. The section also provides detailed career publication histories for Niedecker and Rakosi. Much of the material in this section has not been previously examined or presented in detail.

This dissertation is the print analogue of a public-facing website which includes additional interactive and multimedia resources, as well as links to a wide variety of archival material that has been digitized in support of this project.

Introduction

In the half-century since their gradual re-emergence as publishing poets, a considerable amount of mythos has accreted around the second-generation Modernist poets known collectively as the “Objectivists.” Of all of the major groups or movements in 20th-century American poetry, the “Objectivists” are perhaps the most poorly understood and alongside the “Beats,” the most subject to mythologizing. Consequently, it is often difficult for the careful scholar to know whether one’s understanding of the group or its individual members is based on solid evidence.

Consider, for example, the extant critical biographies of Lorine Niedecker and Louis Zukofsky. These two poets were intimate friends, living together in New York City in the early- to mid-1930s and carrying on a rich, continuous, and voluminous correspondence for nearly 40 years until Niedecker’s death in 1970. Anyone who examines that correspondence is forced to conclude that theirs was a deep, complicated, extraordinary literary friendship. And yet, in Mark Scroggins’ otherwise excellent 2007 biography of Zukofsky, Niedecker is described at one point as “a very isolated and needy poet” whose “problematic correspondence” Zukofsky was happy to pawn off on the poet and publisher Cid Corman.¹ On the other side of the coin, in Margot Peters’ 2011 Niedecker biography, Zukofsky is largely portrayed as an unsympathetic villain. Making matters worse, the critical edition of their letters which would establish a more accurate view of their relationship was prohibited from including Zukofsky’s side of the correspondence and has been out of print for the past twenty years, with used copies now selling for two hundred and fifty dollars. Even acknowledging the complicated reasons why things are as they are, the effect upon the average scholar’s understanding of either poet and their relationship is plainly deleterious.

¹ *The Poem of a Life*, 321-322.

Having now spent several years researching this group and their origins, I could cite several more examples of accepted commonplaces about the group and its members that I was surprised to find lacked empirical justification. This state of affairs is particularly ironic considering the group's emphasis on fidelity to what Zukofsky called "historic and contemporary particulars."² Throughout this site I write about these poets as members of a group rather than as founders of a movement, using the term "Objectivist" (in quotations) to refer to the group and generally avoiding referencing objectivism, which simply did not exist as a movement during the 1920s and 1930s.³

In our efforts to define and describe the "Objectivists" as a historical literary formation, we must take care to avoid two reductive though sometimes attractive temptations; namely, the backward projection of intention which appears plausible based on later events but which cannot be supported by particular historical evidence, and the presumption of a monolithic poetics. Despite several obvious opportunities to present a collaborative or mutually-endorsed statement of the group's poetic values or critical aims, the group's name and all of the early statements that can plausibly be read as defining or describing the group are attributable to just one member (Zukofsky)⁴ There was never an "Objectivist" manifesto demanding allegiance, nor rules to obey or disregard, as there had been with Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste." As a consequence, there is no record of anyone, apart from Lorine Niedecker, joining the "group" following their initial appearance in 1931.

² "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," *Poetry* 37.5 (February 1931), 268.

³ Whether objectivism emerged as a legitimate literary movement in the 1960s can be debated, but that question, while interesting, is not a primary concern of this site.

⁴ These include his prose statements in the February and April 1931 issues of *Poetry* magazine as well as his preface to *An "Objectivists" Anthology*.

That there was no “Objectivist” movement available for interested readers or writers to join is notable, particularly in an era defined by political commitment and poetic movements. In the place of Zukofsky’s original multi-page prospectus for an author-led printing cooperative, consider the far more modest statement of purpose written by Reznikoff and printed on the dust jackets of the group’s books: “The Objectivist Press is an organization of poets who are printing their own work and that of others they think ought to be printed.” This might in fact be accurately spoken of as the only truly collaborative “Objectivist” statement of intention, simultaneously rigorous in its simplicity and remarkable for its seemingly deliberate evasion of any loyalty oaths, whether poetic or political. Thus a poet or a poem might be accurately regarded as “objectivist,” though it would be inaccurate to speak of “objectivism,” as their animating ideas were never fully developed, embraced, or adhered to.

This preference for ‘ists’ instead of an ‘ism’ is a function of both the group’s poetics and their epistemology. Zukofsky and his fellow “Objectivists” shared a mutual suspicion of abstraction, with an avowed preference for particulars.⁵ It follows, then, that they would have preferred to think of themselves in a similar vein, a collection of discrete particulars, as distinct practitioners of a particular craft, namely, the art of poetry. While they might in a certain light be regarded as the makers of poetic objects which shared certain formal and physical properties, it is not difficult to understand why Zukofsky bristled at their being regarded as interchangeable representatives of something so flattening as a movement. Crucially, this linguistic preference was not confined to Zukofsky, but shared by others in the original group; they were generally reluctant,

⁵ This was an inheritance from Pound, whose counsel in “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” had been: “Don’t use such an expression as ‘dim lands of peace.’ It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer’s not realizing that the natural object is always the adequate symbol. Go in fear of abstractions.”

even in interviews conducted through the 1960s and 1970s, to encourage or identify with any suggestions of ‘objectivism.’

It should also be emphasized that these writers were decidedly un-“clubbable,” by virtue of both their identity positions (especially their Jewishness and proximity to being immigrants) and their own dispositions. While they built and maintained deep human friendships built upon shared loves and mutual struggles, none of them were much for organizations or hierarchical social structures.⁶ As their complex relationship to the social and political organizations which characterized the political left during their lifetimes made clear, nearly all of them struggled to subsume their individual convictions within any larger group affiliations, even those they felt socially or politically necessary.⁷ This is not to say that members of the group did not share a set of political ideals, literary values or critical aims, simply that they made no concerted effort to broadcast a shared viewpoint.

This is why Zukofsky, generally precise even at his prickliest and most revisionist, could claim in speaking with L.S. Dembo in 1968 that when Harriet Monroe informed him that

‘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,

⁶ Bunting was perhaps the least “clubbable” and most deliberately irascible poet of the 20th century, of whom John Seed has written perceptively: “the critical force of some of Bunting’s thirties poetry comes precisely from its refusal of the comforts of a communal faith of any kind. He preferred an unillusioned use of his own senses” (“Irrelevant Objects: Basil Bunting’s Poetry of the 1930s” in *The Objectivist Nexus*, 140) This is a rather elegant way of saying that Bunting was an antagonistic skeptic who was uninterested in the confounding of art and schemes designed for social improvement, which is entirely true.

⁷ Zukofsky, though an intellectually committed Marxist, never formally joined the Communist Party, for example, and while both Rakosi and the Oppen did, neither lasted long as members, nor did either feel comfortable mixing their political activism and poetic activity. Both poets valued their artistic independence too strongly to submit their craft to party discipline. Feelings ranging from ambivalence and outright antipathy towards political parties and large organizations more generally can be clearly seen in each of the other core “Objectivists.” If we expand our interest to include peripheral members of the group, this tendency towards heterodox Communism becomes even more apparent, with the “Objectivists” including a larger than expected number of Trotskyites and early defectors from the mainline Stalinist party.

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.⁸

The implicit criticism here, of course, is that anyone who would insist on examining or exploring 'objectivism' as a movement is faddish and insane. Well, then! It is true that this insistence on poetic autonomy and the absence of a galvanizing statement of praxis around which a movement could have coalesced has contributed to some dispute over the precise meaning of the term "Objectivist" and who it ought to apply to, even amongst group members. Carl Rakosi, for instance, would later state that he regarded Lorine Niedecker, who was not included in either of the "Objectivists" original publications, as the purest example of an "Objectivist"⁹ and told George Evans and August Kleinzahler in 1988 that "No one name would have fit us all. By restricting the meaning of Objectivist to a poet's process, however, Zukofsky was able to get around the difficulty and not exclude himself, for the things he pointed out in Reznikoff which were Objectivist did not describe his own work. No, if Reznikoff was an Objectivist, Zukofsky was not."¹⁰ It should be noted that Rakosi was not present in New York City in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and thus only had contact with Zukofsky via letters. Consequently, some of his recollections about the initial character of the group may be less accurate than those made by participants in the early meetings. Such bickering about group identities, however, is not uncommon, particularly among poets, and does not disprove the existence of a plausible group.¹¹ More troubling than Zukofsky's twinned assertions

⁸ "Louis Zukofsky," *Contemporary Literature* 10.2 (Spring 1969), 203.

⁹ Rakosi told Kimberly Bird in 2002: "Niedecker, by the way, was not a part of it at this time. I think I was the one really who first called her an Objectivist, because I thought that she was the most Objectivist of us all, and she is" ([A Century in the Poetic Eye](#), 71)

¹⁰ "An Interview with Carl Rakosi," *Conjunctions* 11 (1988), 221.

¹¹ See Kenneth Rexroth's famously dismissive (and possibly apocryphal) riposte to a *Time* magazine article designating him the "father of the 'Beats'": "An entomologist is not a bug" (quoted in the introduction to *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth*, xxvi).

that he had never intended to describe anything like a movement and that there had never been such a thing as objectivism, however, is his assertion that “the objectivist, then, is one person, not a group.”¹²

No matter how much we may sympathize with Zukofsky’s efforts to clear his terminology of unwanted associations and his principled insistence on being read as a particular who takes care in his works for other particulars, taking this objection too literally would do disservice to the historical record. Zukofsky may not have approved of how the label he reluctantly invented was later applied, but “Objectivists” remains, in my view, the best and most accurate appellation for the seven writers considered here. In this, I concur with Tom Sharp, whose has argued that “agreement on fundamental principles need not (and did not) imply surrender of individual character or practice. Zukofsky’s statement that he was never a member of the group of ‘Objectivists’—in the light of such fundamentals—could only be credited to misunderstanding and personal differences.”¹³ Without chasing after a balloon filled with false assumptions (i.e. the notion of “objectivism” as a historically durable, intentionally programmed poetic movement), the preponderance of evidence suggests that the poets gathered here as “Objectivists” did in fact comprise a coherent group by virtue both of several shared aesthetic affinities and of repeated efforts to publish each other’s work.

What were these shared aesthetic affinities? Any effort to understand an "Objectivist" poetics must begin with Zukofsky's prose statements in *Poetry* and *An "Objectivists" Anthology*. In his essay on the writing of Charles Reznikoff, Zukofsky attempted to define two criteria that were

¹² “Louis Zukofsky,” 205.

¹³ While preparing this site, I discovered and was greatly impressed by Sharp’s dissertation, a sustained empirical examination of “Objectivist” relations in the late 1920s and early 1930s. We corresponded, and in 2015, Sharp asked for and received the necessary permissions to place a slightly updated version of the work online, where it can now be read at <http://sharpgiving.com/Objectivists/sections/01.history.html>.

crucial to his understanding of poetic composition: sincerity and objectification. According to Zukofsky, sincerity is present when “[w]riting 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 themselves, and the mind senses and receives awareness.”¹⁴ Later in the essay, Zukofsky described Reznikoff’s narrative verse as “perhaps the most neglected contribution to writing in America in the last ten years” because of the degree to which “preoccupation with the accuracy of detail in writing—which is sincerity—is evident” in his work.¹⁵

If sincerity was, for Zukofsky, effective poetry’s least common denominator,¹⁶ objectification was its ultimate goal, what set a well-made poem apart from mere verse.¹⁷ Zukofsky defined objectification as both the result of careful formal shaping and in terms of its effect on its reader. Regarding the former, he described objectification as “the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity—in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into structure” and as to the latter, he suggested that writing which has achieved objectification “is an object or *affects the mind as such*” and must “convey the totality of perfect rest.”¹⁸ For Zukofsky, the poem possessing objectification was one that had attained “rested totality,” “resolv[ing] into a structure ... to which the mind does not wish to add” such that the “the apprehension [is] satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object.”¹⁹ This, he noted, was far more difficult to accomplish: “At any time, objectification in writing is rare. The poems or the prose structures of a

¹⁴ “Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff,” 273.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁶ “One speaks of sincerity as of that ability necessary for existence if one *is* a writer” (283).

¹⁷ “Properly no verse should be called a poem if it does not convey the totality of perfect rest” (276).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 274, 276, italics added.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 273, 276, 274.

generation are few ... In contemporary writing the poems of Ezra Pound alone possess objectification to a most constant degree; his objects are musical shapes."²⁰ In responding to criticism of his editorial selections, Zukofsky would agree that much of the work he had presented exemplified sincerity rather than objectification, and indeed it was the notion of sincerity rather than objectification that later became something of a talisman for others in the group.

Pressed to explain these terms more than 35 years later by L.S. Dembo, Zukofsky offered this concise clarification: "Sincerity is the care for the detail. Before the legs of the table are made, you can see a nice top or a nice grain in the wood, its potential, anyway, to be the complete table. Objectification is the structure. I like to think of it as rest, but you can call it movement."²¹ This emphasis on structure and achieving poetic form was shared by others in the group as a particular aim, Williams in particular. In his review of *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, Williams claimed the poems Zukofsky selected to make up the anthology

are successfully displayed to hold an objective view of poetry which, in a certain way, clarifies it, showing it to be not a seductive arrangement of scenes, sounds and colors so much as a construction each part of which has a direct bearing on its meaning as a whole, an objectification of significant particulars.²²

In addition to their concern with "the accuracy of detail in writing" (i.e. sincerity) and the careful construction of poetic form ("objectification"), the "Objectivists" shared other basic poetic sympathies. While it is too simple to argue, as some have done, that the "Objectivists" were *merely* purifiers and renewers of Imagiste principles, each of the "Objectivist" writers was familiar with

²⁰ Ibid, 276. Zukofsky also cited a handful of other examples of objectification in recent work by Williams, Marianne Moore, Cummings, McAlmon and a single poem by T. S. Eliot, while noting that even in Reznikoff, the exemplar he selected as the occasion for his essay, "the degree of objectification ... is small" (278).

²¹ "Louis Zukofsky," 209.

²² *Something to Say*, 46.

Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" and F.S. Flint's "Imagisme," published in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry* magazine, and wrote were in general agreement with the basic principles articulated therein.²³ Reznikoff's assertion that "[w]e picked the name "Objectivist" because we had all read *Poetry* of Chicago and we agreed completely with all that Pound was saying," may be an exaggeration, but not by much.²⁴ As I document elsewhere, it was more or less true that Pound was an important, though largely invisible junction through which the group organized itself.²⁵ Both "sincerity" and "objectification," the crucial critical terms Zukofsky used in the essay which accompanied the "Objectivists" poetry in *Poetry* magazine, had their roots in a Poundian lexicon.²⁶ Pound's fellow Imagiste William Carlos Williams may also have contributed to Zukofsky's phrasing, as he had advised him in a July 1928 letter: "Poems are inventions richer in thought as image. Your early poems, even when the thought has enough force or freshness, have not been objectivized in new or fresh observations."²⁷

Consider also F.S. Flint on the imagistes:

They had not published a manifesto. They were not a revolutionary school; their only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition, as they found it in the best writers of all time, —in Sappho, Catullus, Villon. ... They had only a few rules, drawn up for their satisfaction only ... They were: 1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation. 3. As

²³ Pound and Flint's essays can be read online at the Poetry Foundation's website here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=58900> and here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=58898>.

²⁴ "Charles Reznikoff," *Contemporary Literature* 11:2 (Spring 1969), 196.

²⁵ Pound's role in the formation of the "Objectivist" core is discussed at greater length in both "[The Lives](#)" and "[The Work](#)" sections of this site.

²⁶ C.f. Pound's "I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity" in "A Retrospect (Credo)," first published in 1918 (*Pavannes and Divisions*, 103) and Zukofsky's assertion in the essay that "In contemporary writing the poems of Ezra Pound alone possess objectification to a most constant degree; his objects are musical shapes" (276).

²⁷ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 11.

regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.²⁸

Taken alone, it's possible to read this description of the imagistes as fully applicable to Zukofsky's "Objectivists" as well, and their shared respect for individual particulars and general satisfaction with basic Imagiste principles may help explain the absence of a distinctly "Objectivist" manifesto. We might also see a precedent for Zukofsky's vigilance against efforts to recast the group he had presented as a programmed movement in Pound's earlier abandonment of "Des Imagistes" when the -istes became an -ism, grumbling to all that would listen that Amy Lowell's intrusive meddling had produced a bastardized *Amygism*.

Each of these Imagiste "rules" had an analogue or extension in "Objectivist" praxis. The "Objectivist" distrust of abstraction has already been mentioned, and they accompanied their commitment to "direct treatment" of things in their poetry with strong emphases on materiality, embodiment, and sense impressions. This tendency is expressed most succinctly perhaps in these lines from "The Word," Bunting's contribution to the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*: "thought's intricate polyphonic / score dovetails with the tread / sensuous things / keep in our consciousness. // Celebrate man's craft / and the word spoken in shapeless night, the / sharp tool paring away / waste and the forms / cut out of mystery!"²⁹ and Niedecker's short poem "LZ's": "As you know mind / aint what attracts me / nor the wingspread / of Renaissance man / but what was sensed / by them guys / and their minds still carry / the sensing"³⁰ Similarly, Zukofsky would later claim that

²⁸ "Imagisme," *Poetry* 1:6 (March 1913), 199.

²⁹ 260.

³⁰ *Collected Works*, 199.

the theme of *Bottom*, his major work of criticism, was that “Shakespeare’s text throughout favors the clear physical eye against the erring brain, and that this theme has historical implications.”³¹

The Imagiste precept of using no word that does not contribute to the presentation was also integral to “Objectivist” practice. Pound famously cited Bunting as the person who brought the formula *dichten = condensare* (to write is to condense) to his attention after having discovered it in a German-Italian dictionary and Zukofsky wrote in his *A Test of Poetry* that “condensation is more than half of composition,” and that “Good poetry is the barest — most essentially complete — form of presenting a subject; good poetry does not linger to embroider words around a subject.”³² Lorine Niedecker’s “Poet’s Work” provides both a summation and excellent exemplification of the principle: “Grandfather / advised me: Learn a trade // I learned / to sit at desk / and condense // No layoff / from this / condensery.”³³ Perhaps my favorite demonstration of this ruthlessness towards words comes from an elegy for George Oppen written by the poet Charles Tomlinson, in which Oppen is reported to have told his sister June Degnan Oppen: “I don’t know / if you have anything to say / but let’s take out all the adjectives / and we’ll find out.”³⁴

The terms Pound coined to describe the three “kinds of poetry” in “How to Read”:

phanopoeia, *melopoeia*, and *logopoeia*, also figured in important ways in “Objectivist” poetics.³⁵ They be

³¹ “Bottom, A Weaver,” in *Prepositions*, 167. Williams’ July 1928 letter to Zukofsky which had warned him that his early poems had not been “objectified in new or fresh observations” had also included his assertion that “Eyes have always stood first in the poet’s equipment. If you are mostly ear—a newer rhythm must come in strongly than has been the case so far. Yet I am willing to grant—to listen.” (*The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 11).

³² 81, 89.

³³ *Collected Works*, 188.

³⁴ “In Memory of George Oppen,” *Selected Poems*, 199.

³⁵ Pound defined *phanopoeia* as “a casting of images upon the visual imagination” or “imagism”; *melopoeia* as the emotional charging of words “over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the

seen most clearly as influences on Zukofsky's own tripartite distinction between solid (sight), liquid (sound), and gas (intellection) states in poetry: "There are three states of existence: one is solid, another is liquid, and the other is gas. ... It's the same with the materials of poetry, you make images—that's pretty solid—music, it's liquid; ultimately if something vaporizes, that's the intellect."³⁶ Zukofsky would also tell Dembo in 1968: "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, try to be concise."³⁷

As for their practices regarding rhythm and prosody, dozens of examples regarding the "Objectivists" interest in the musical properties of words could be provided, with the best known probably Zukofsky's oft-quoted lines from "A"-12: "I'll tell you. / About my *poetics*— / music / speech / An integral / Lower limit speech / Upper limit music."³⁸ In a university lecture he gave in 1970, Bunting gave his own gloss on the relationship between poetry, music, and dance, suggesting their common roots in human embodiment:

Our bodies make their own music whenever we move ... the lightest tread is still an audible rhythmical sound. ... That is how music is born. The first step is to use a drum to reinforce the sound of the feet stamping, the arms and the breasts flapping. Or perhaps the first is the more or less inarticulate grunts and skellocks that the vigour of the dance forces from your lungs: which must be the first murmurings of poetry. So poetry and music are twins, born of the primitive dance, and so twinnishly alike that they can never be entirely separated. ... [P]oetry is to be heard, to be read aloud or sung.³⁹

bearing or trend of that meaning"; and logopoeia as "the dance of the intellect among words," which Pound called "the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode" (*The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 25).

³⁶ "About the Gas Age (September 23, 1970)" in *Prepositions*, 169.

³⁷ "Louis Zukofsky," 209.

³⁸ "A," 138.

³⁹ "The Use of Poetry," *Writing* 12 (1985).

In a 1955 letter, Williams gave his own view on the importance of sense perception, the body, and the relations between prosody and dance:

The first thing you learn when you begin to learn anything about this earth is that you are eternally barred save for the report of your senses from knowing anything about it. Measure serves for us as the key: we can measure between objects, therefore, we know that they exist. Poetry began with measure, it began with the dance whose divisions we have all but forgotten are still known as measures.⁴⁰

Observe also the importance of music in Zukofsky's definition of in "Sincerity and Objectification" essay as writing "thinking with the things as they exist, and of *directing them along a line of melody*. Shapes suggest themselves, and the mind senses and receives awareness."⁴¹

The poetry of the "Objectivists" could also be characterized by its fidelity to the reality and integrity of external objects and its suspicion of, if not downright hostility to, certain kinds of imaginative or metaphoric transformation.⁴² Notice how the active agent in Zukofsky's description of writing is the external object; it is 'shapes' which suggest, and the poet who 'receives awareness.' Sensible objects are elevated and the poetic imagination demoted, if not overtly dismissed. The "Objectivists" were anti-symbolist, anti-surrealist, and even, in some ways, anti-aesthetic, even anti-art. This was precisely the claim that Wallace Stevens made in his preface to Williams' *Collected Poems 1921-1931*, calling attention to what he saw as Williams' "antipoetic" impulses.⁴³ Framed differently, "Objectivist" poetry could be said to be rooted in and originate from the external world, and not from the poet's imagination. In the 1960s, George Oppen would repeatedly emphasize this

⁴⁰ *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, 331.

⁴¹ 273, italics added.

⁴² Zukofsky told Dembo in 1968: "I'm not for metaphor, unless, as Aristotle says, you bring together unlikes that have never existed before" (211).

⁴³ Stevens used the phrase eight times in three pages, and his insinuation that Williams' impulses were romantic and sentimental was not well-received by Williams. In a 1970 interview, Oppen would even describe himself as "quite strongly anti-art" (*Speaking with George Oppen*, 44).

idea, writing in “World, World”: “The self is no mystery, the mystery is / That there is something for us to stand on,” and claiming in “The Mind’s Own Place,” his only significant work of prose criticism, that

It is possible to find a metaphor for anything, an analogue: but the image is encountered, not found; it is an account of the poet’s perception, of the act of perception; it is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic quality of truthfulness. They meant to replace by the data of experience the accepted poetry of their time, a display by the poets of right thinking and right sentiment, a dreary waste of lies. That data was and is the core of what “modernism” restored to poetry, the sense of the poet’s self among things. So much depends upon the red wheelbarrow. The distinction between a poem that shows confidence in itself and in its materials, and on the other hand a performance, a speech by the poet is the distinction between poetry and histrionics. It is a part of the function of poetry to serve as a test of truth. It is possible to say anything in abstract prose, but a great many things one believes or would like to believe or thinks he believes will not substantiate themselves in the concrete materials of the poem.⁴⁴

What Oppen describes as “the sense of the poet’s self among things” gets us close to the influential distinction made in the 1970s by Charles Altieri between two oppositional positions (which he termed “symbolist” and “immanentist”) regarding questions of priority in the tangle of relations between human imagination, poetic creation, and the ‘bare fact’ of the non-human world.⁴⁵ Altieri’s original intention was to establish a shibboleth for making distinctions between

⁴⁴ *Selected Prose, Daybooks and Papers*, 31-32.

⁴⁵ Altieri suggested that “[m]odernist poetry and poetics are informed almost entirely by the symbolist tradition,” which held that the world “can be satisfactorily explained without analogues from man’s experience of his own being in the world,” and followed Coleridge in stressing the poet’s creative power over nature: “For [Coleridge] the creative imagination is the principle of form responsible for generating the value of the particulars in a poem; complexity and fusion are his primary aesthetic values; organic unity is a creation of the poet . . . not a fact of prior experience; and poetry is in no way imitative, rather it is “secondary creation” (Kant’s term) and thus takes its purposiveness from an act of mind.” The counter-position, which Altieri called “immanentist,” is one in which the poet “imagines the world beyond his self to complement and extend the experience he has of his own body and immediate surroundings,” and is linked to “early Wordsworth’s sense that the subject is created by means of its participation in the object.” In Altieri’s view, the “immanentist” position “stresses the power of nature to create and sustain value,” and insists on “the priority of subject matter or content to form, the call for simplicity of style and a language theory insisting that the world need not be distorted by the words which express it, the precept of looking steadily at one’s subject, and . . . the opposition between various convention-bound ways of viewing the world and fresh ones which allow its value to manifest itself.” These quotations are taken from “From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern Poetics,” an article Altieri published in the Spring 1973 issue of *boundary2*. Later in the decade, he would develop this argument more fully in a Chicago Review article entitled “The Objectivist Tradition” and his book *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry in the 1960s*, which used a revised version of the *boundary2* article as its introduction.

modernist and post-modern poetics, as he argued that modernist poetics were oriented almost exclusively to the symbolist pole, but that manifestations of immanence “are, in fact, the ground of postmodern poetics.” The only significant exception to the modernist preference for symbolist poetics, in Altieri’s view, were the “Objectivists,” and he used this observation to explain their critical neglect by their contemporaries and their belated recovery in the 1960s and 1970s.

Distrust of metaphor and antagonism to symbolism among the “Objectivists” went much further than Pound’s “the natural object is always the adequate symbol.” From their poetry, consider Williams’ oft-quoted “Say it, no ideas but in things” and its echoes of the foundational principle of empiricism, *nihil in intellectu nisi prius in sensu* (nothing in the intellect unless first in the senses) or Niedecker’s brisk 1938 poem: “A monster owl / out on the fence / flew away. What / is it the sign / of? The sign of / an owl.”⁴⁶ Their anti-symbolism can also be found in early “Objectivist” critical prose; in addition to his “Sincerity and Objectification” and “Program: ‘Objectivists’ 1931,” the February 1931 issue of *Poetry* also included Zukofsky’s own translation of a short essay by his friend René Taupin in which Taupin traces the poet André Salmon’s attempts to break from a “dreamy” and “sentimental” Symbolism and its “betrayal of words and emotions.”⁴⁷ According to Taupin and Zukofsky, Salmon tried “to save his art from its anemia” through the production of a “nominalistic poetry” in which could be found the “synthesis of real detail, similar to the art of the primitives; and not abstract or decomposed detail, like the impressionists.”⁴⁸ Salmon’s was a poetry, Taupin and Zukofsky claimed, which sought for “the real” to “strike the poet directly,” offering a glimpse of writing that was “based on choice, on the imagination which apparently does not create but

⁴⁶ Williams’ line was first printed in 1927 in “Paterson” and recurred frequently as the poem lengthened and became a multi-volume long poem. Niedecker’s poem can be found in her *Collected Works*, 113-114.

⁴⁷ “Three Poems by André Salmon,” *Poetry* 37.5 (February 1931), 290.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

discovers, and gives the accomplished fact its maximum of the real: the esthetic of the reporter and the cinematographer,” and which used for its language “not metaphors, but the most immediate projections of the real which does not stop being real, even taking on ... plastic, decorative and emotive value.”⁴⁹ The essay would also claim, in phrasing which echoed some of William Carlos Williams’ long-standing calls, that “the most direct contact is obligatory, more striking than any metaphor tainted with impure interpretation,” that “the event” should “be left to its integrality, to the maximum of the wonderful,” and that if the integral event was properly respected in poetry, the result would be “the perfect form ... not as it is cooked by the imperfect of predatory or sentimental poet.”⁵⁰ In 1934, Bunting wrote to Zukofsky of his belief that “half the evils in the world come from verbalism, i.e. imagining that abstract words have anything more than a grammatical meaning or function. Adjectives, numbers, symbols like the word God, eat away all sense of reality and land us in every kind of social and economic mess, when people begin to think they correspond to anything genuine.”⁵¹

This hostility towards abstraction and interest in a “nominalistic poetry” opened the “Objectivists” up to charges of naive barbarism, unsophistication, and brute sensualism, but their continued interest in complex formal patterning and the musical properties of language also estranged them from the radical left.⁵² They were consummate outsiders whose “style of

⁴⁹ Ibid, 290, 293.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 291-292.

⁵¹ Quoted in Quartermain, *Basil Bunting: Poet of the North*, 14-15).

⁵² See Yvor Winters’ disputes with Zukofsky and Bunting in *Hound & Horn*, as well as Morris Schappes’ highly critical review of *An “Objectivists” Anthology* in the March 1933 issue of *Poetry*: “Nominalism in the psychology of aesthetics is just as inadequate as nominalism in philosophy. There is no artistic communication of particulars only. ... Objectivists, as exemplified in this anthology, lack the power, the intelligence, to organize their poems.” Schappes also attacked Zukofsky’s “A” as having “no coherence, no organization, *no direction*” and suggested that “Objectivism is ... a nominalistic denial of art, of value. Because he has been reduced, in his social status, to Nothing, he thinks All is Nothing” (340-342).

detachment,” in Eric Homberger’s phrasing, estranged them “from their Jewishness (Reznikoff is an exception) ... [and] kept them spectators on the margins of the Communist party.”⁵³ Too common (and, it must be said, too Jewish and immigranty) for the WASPy Harvard tastemakers who ran *The Criterion* and its American imitator *The Hound & Horn*, they were also too artsy and “detached” (i.e. not didactic enough) for Mike Gold and the would-be proletariat-poets who ran *The New Masses*. In the early 1930s, Morris Schappes and Herman Spector would attack “Objectivist” theory on ideological grounds as being insufficiently committed to capitalist critique and revolutionary politics.⁵⁴ Writing in what Samuel Putnam described as “an era of violent partisanship,” there was small room in poetry for Taupin and Zukofsky’s “esthetic of the reporter and the cinematographer,” particularly if it tried to concern itself with “thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody” such that they approached “a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are of no predatory intention.”⁵⁵ As poets, the group’s shared interest in “sincerity” (used as a shorthand for accurate perception, care for particulars, and the integrity of objects, poetic or otherwise) did not lend itself to ideological writing and the

⁵³ “Communists and Objectivists,” in *The Objectivist Nexus*, 107.

⁵⁴ In Schappes’ review, published in the March 1933 issue of *Poetry*, he claimed that “at a certain stage in the decay of a class, its artists turn against it in furious vanity” and proceeded to propose his own “intelligent alternative” to the “rootless esotericism” and childish nihilism of the “deracinated bourgeois poet,” namely, “strid[ing] beyond these premises of the bourgeoisie ... to ally oneself with the revolutionary proletariat” (343). Spector’s review, published in the Summer 1934 issue of radical journal *Dynamo*, similarly criticized Reznikoff for displaying “the limited world-view of a ‘detached’ bystander ... a person whose flashes of perception for the immediate esthetics of the contemporary scene are no so co-ordinated in any way with a dialectical comprehension of the life-process. ... His failure is not the failure of talent or method, which he labors ceaselessly to perfect. It is the failure of the Objectivist school of poets to which he still belongs. More precisely, it is the failure of the bystander to comprehend the world. ... The fatal defect of the Objectivist theory is that it identifies life with capitalism, and so assumes that the world is merely a wasteland. The logical consequence is a fruitless negativism. ... [Reznikoff] must soon realize that history permit him the alternative: either to succumb to the paralysis of reaction, or else to take that great step forward which is the way of revolution. Impartiality is a myth which defeatists take with them into oblivion. The creative man makes a conscious choice” (*Bastard in the Ragged Suit*, 104-105).

⁵⁵ The Putnam quotation occurs in *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 220. The Zukofsky quotations are from “Sincerity and Objectification” and the preface to *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, respectively.

propagandistic aims articulated by the leftist movements that many in the group were drawn to. In 1959, as George Oppen was making his way back into poetry after his long abstention, he wrote his sister June:

Maybe I admire myself more however for knowing what is one thing and what is the other and what are the levels of truth ---that is to say, for simply not attempting to write communist verse. That is, to any statement already determined before the verse. Poetry has to be protean; the meaning must begin there. With the perception. ... A poem has got to be written into the future. I don't mean something about the admiration of posterity (from where I sit, posterity looks like a bunch of damn kids) but simply that it's something that is not the past.

Have to write one's perceptions, not argue one's beliefs. And be overwhelmingly happy if they turn out not to be altogether unconscionable.⁵⁶

In addition to their shared aesthetic and poetic predilections, there is another sense in which we are justified in considering the “Objectivists” as a group. The individual writers who constellated and agglomerated as “Objectivists” did so not simply because they agreed about what poetry was and how it should be written (unsurprisingly, they didn’t always).⁵⁷ Rather, the group’s *raison d’être* as “Objectivists” was more pragmatic than it was aesthetic; put plainly, they came together as a group because they could not find publishers willing to reliably print their work and generally lacked the capital needed to do so alone. The Reznikoff-authored corporate statement printed on the dust jackets of The Objectivist Press’ few publications illustrates this well, as does Reznikoff’s later recollection that

I hate to take any aura from our talks as I remember them, if they have any to begin with, but we talked about something quite practical. We couldn’t get our poetry accepted by regular publishers, so we thought it would be nice if we organized our own publishing firm, with each of us paying for the printing of his own book.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, 22.

⁵⁷ For one example, see Basil Bunting’s “Open Letter to Louis Zukofsky,” published in the Rapallo newspaper *Il Mare* on October 1, 1932 and reprinted in *Basil Bunting: Man and Poet*, 240-241.

⁵⁸ “Charles Reznikoff,” *Contemporary Literature* 11:2 (Spring 1969), 196.

Outside of the slippery questions of aesthetic unanimity or similarity in style or poetics, this site gathers and presents incontrovertible evidence that Zukofsky and others of the writers featured here constituted a group by virtue of their having engaged in a series of collaborative publishing ventures in the late 1920s and early 1930s chiefly concerned with circulating their own writing. Furthermore, the core “Objectivists” treated here perpetuated this group identification by continuing to publish, read, and review each other’s work with special interest until the end of their lives.

I have taken such pains to differentiate between objectivism as an aesthetic or poetic movement and the “Objectivists” as a network of sympathetic writers concerned chiefly with publication because so much of the discourse around objectivism is shot through with misconceptions or distortions and hampered by incomplete, anachronistic, or just plain false information. While this is true to some extent for every provisional literary historical grouping, there are particular reasons why producing an accurate historical account of the “Objectivists” has been especially elusive.

First, one major consequence of the conditions which precipitated the group’s formation is that it is hard to find their early poetry and critical opinions. Even during the group’s brief 1930s zenith, the print record of the “Objectivists” is far scanted than they would have wished; to establish this point, one simply needs to compare the group’s various lists of planned or proposed publications with what they actually managed to publish. Furthermore, when various of the “Objectivists” did succeed in publishing their work, it was typically in ephemeral little magazines with modest circulations or in short-lived publishing schemes, the output of which was difficult even for highly interested readers to locate. Zukofsky’s editorial note near the conclusion of *An Objectivists’ Anthology* plainly admits as much: “The present Anthology presents,” he wrote, “work

never before published, or work which has appeared in limited editions now inaccessible, or in small magazines now defunct.”⁵⁹ The documentary record of proto and early “Objectivist” publications, both aspirational and actual, receives greater attention in “[The Work](#)” section of this site.

Second, the group’s access to publication did not much improve, even as these poets developed and matured. Frankly, when considering the invention of “Objectivists” as a publication or promotional strategy, the group was largely a failure. As early as September 1932, Zukofsky was lamenting privately:

My ‘projects’ — or maybe they’re not mine — don’t go. To has had to postpone publishing indefinitely. With postponement goes my salary. I don’t suppose you know of a job for me, but if you hear —

I sent out about 30 “Objectivists” Anthology for review, and not a murmur, not even a cardiac murmur, in reply, or announcement or anything.⁶⁰

Writing in 1951 autobiography, William Carlos Williams would give a similarly frank assessment of the group from that particular historical vantage point:

The poem being an object (like a symphony or cubist painting) it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day. This was what we wished to imply by Objectivism, an antidote, in a sense, to the bare image haphazardly presented in loose verse.

Oppen supplied the money, as much as any of us. We had some small success, but few followers. . . . It all went with the newer appreciation, the matter of paint upon canvas as being of more importance than the literal appearance of the image depicted. Nothing much happened in the end.⁶¹

Within ten years of their first associations in the late 1920s, many of the “Objectivists” had abandoned poetry altogether, a consequence of shifting political convictions and

⁵⁹ 209.

⁶⁰ Letter to Morton Zabel, September 12, 1932, Lilly Library Special Collections, University of Indiana.

⁶¹ *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, 265.

public indifference or hostility to their work. Except for Williams, who had already established his own reputation and found a publisher for his work in James Laughlin's *New Directions*, even those who continued grinding away did so largely in oblivion. In 1935, shortly after the Objectivist Press had collapsed, Zukofsky wrote to Ezra Pound to make a final plea for assistance in publishing his own manuscript of short poems, which he had completed some five years previous:

You can, if it won't hurt your own name, try and get me published with Faber & Faber. Serly off to Europe with my final arrangement and additions to 55 Poems—a most commendable typescript for you to look at. Time fucks it, and if I keep my MSS. in my drawer or my drawers, I might as well shut up altogether.⁶²

Pound's cruel reply made it abundantly clear that he was unable or unwilling to help:

I am getting an english opinyun on yr/ damn poems/ but I know what it will be/ and damn it I told you so, when you were here.

If you are too god damn dumb to read what is being printed/ and insist on sticking in 1927. . thass thaaat. . . The next anthology will be econ/ conscious and L/Z won't be in it. . . I can't even advise N[ew]/ E[nglish]/ W[EEKLY]/ to print you. . . I think it wd/ be BAD EDITING to print you in England. Be careful or you'll fall back into racial characteristics, and cease to be L/Z at all.

yaaaas, “every man gets more like his father as he gets older.”

Most americans miss the boat/ but it is more irritatin' to see 'em catch it; and then step off . . . I can't hold the boat FOR you.⁶³

In a 1939 letter to Amy Bonner, the eastern business representative of *Poetry* magazine, Zukofsky informed her of his ongoing work on “the ninth movement of my long poem “*A*”, which was started in 1928, and on a new volume of short verse to be subtitled ‘*Anew*,’” and indicated, with

⁶² *Pound/Zukofsky*, 160.

⁶³ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 162-163.

no little pathos, that he also had several “unpublished volumes on hand: *55 Poems* (collected work 1923-1934), various prose including a long essay on Henry Adams, “Arise, Arise”, a play in 9 scenes, *A Workers Anthology* (a collection of verse from Ovid to Apollinaire), *A Test of Poetry*.”⁶⁴ Zukofsky’s *55 Poems* would not appear in print until 1941, more than dozen years after his “Poem beginning ‘The’” had appeared in Pound’s *The Exile*. Despite the volume of finished material he had on hand, publication remained difficult for Zukofsky for some time; he was only able to reduce his backlog by two in the remainder of the decade, publishing *Anew*, a collection of short poems, in 1946, and self-publishing his instructional poetry reader *A Test of Poetry* in 1948.

Similar difficulties faced each of the other core “Objectivists” who lacked the capital needed to self-publish: between 1932 and 1940, Oppen, Williams, and Reznikoff had the means to finance the publication of their own work, and did so; Zukofsky, Rakosi, Bunting, and Niedecker did not, and so there were no books published by any of these authors during these years.⁶⁵ While Bunting self-published his first collection, *Redimiculum Matellarum*, from Milan in 1930, an unscrupulous lawyer defrauded his widowed mother, absconding with nearly all of the family’s money in May 1933. Unable to find any publisher in Europe or the United States willing to print his 1935 collection *Caveat Emptor*, Bunting’s next book of poems was not published until 1950, when his *Poems 1950* was published in Galveston, Texas by the obscure Gleaners Press. Rakosi had planned for a book of his poems to be published by Rexroth’s RMR Press as early as 1931, but this publishing scheme never materialized; Rakosi’s first book did not appear until 1941, when James Laughlin made his *Selected Poems* a New Directions book of the month selection, and his next was *Amulet*, published in 1967. Niedecker’s first book, *New Goose*, was not published until 1946, and her earlier, surrealist-inflected

⁶⁴ The Amy Bonner Papers: 1920-1951, The University of Chicago Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 21.

⁶⁵ The interested reader can find more detailed publication histories for each of the core “Objectivists” on the child pages of “The Work” section of this site.

work remained uncollected in book form until more than 30 years after her death, when her *Collected Works* was published in 2002. After her second book, *My Friend Tree*, appeared in 1962, the same year running water was installed at her tiny lakeside cabin, Niedecker wrote this moving short lyric on the difficulty of having her work published: “Now in one year / a book published / and plumbing— / took a lifetime / to weep / a deep / trickle”⁶⁶

Publishing difficulties and years of silence contributed to additional problems. By the time that a new generation of poets began to show interest in the “Objectivists” and their early publications, many years had elapsed. Even when interested readers and scholars attempted to “go to the source” by asking various living “Objectivists” about the group’s origins or shared poetic ideas, the answers they received came back after having passed through the distorting filter of human subjectivity. The group certainly had its share of interpersonal disagreements, squabbles, and even feuds throughout the years. George Oppen and Zukofsky even managed to fall out with each other twice: once in the 1930s when Oppen admitted he preferred his own poetry to Zukofsky’s, and again in the early 1960s, after an ill-fated joint-family road trip to Mexico and the failure to reach an agreement with New Directions about publishing Zukofsky’s poetry. New friendships and fissures had developed in the intervening years, and not only did the reconstituted “Objectivist” networks of the 1960s and 1970s take on different contours than that of the 1920s and 1930s, they also influenced how early “Objectivists” histories were constructed.

It’s also true that simple bad timing can explain many of the widely-held inaccuracies about the group. Not only did they have the misfortune of emerging during a period when economic pressures limited their access to print and partisanship prevented a fair reading of their work, but by

⁶⁶ *Collected Works*, 189.

the time that other poets and scholars began attempting to recover and reconstruct their history (spurred especially by L.S. Dembo's publication of interviews with four "Objectivists" in *Contemporary Literature* in the Spring of 1969), the three participants who would have been best able to give an accurate recounting of the group's origin were unwilling or unable to contribute to the historical record. Williams had suffered several strokes and was in failing health (he would die in March 1963); Pound was disgraced by his wartime actions and about to enter several years of largely silent exile to Italy following his release from a lengthy confinement in St. Elizabeths mental hospital;⁶⁷ and Zukofsky was generally uninterested in participating in group events with other "Objectivists" (especially George Oppen) and seemed to be increasingly annoyed by and dismissive of questions about their decades-earlier association.

In this vacuum, and without ready access to the archive of primary materials now available, literary historians, scholars, and interested readers turned to other members of the group and began to develop their own working definitions of the "Objectivist" movement, and among the less precise, of "objectivism" (or even "objectism" in Charles Olson's phrasing).⁶⁸ As with any acts of

⁶⁷ For more on this period in Pound's life, see J.J. Wilhelm's *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years*, pp. 336-357, especially.

⁶⁸ Olson used this term in his influential "Projective Verse" manifesto, published in 1950, writing: "Which gets us to what I promised, the degree to which the projective involves a stance toward reality outside a poem as well as a new stance towards the reality of a poem itself. It is a matter of content, the content of Homer or of Euripides or of Seami as distinct from that which I might call the more "literary" masters. From the moment the projective purpose of the act of verse is recognized, the content does—it will—change. If the beginning and the end is breath, voice in its largest sense, then the material of verse shifts. It has to. It starts with the composer. The dimension of his line itself changes, not to speak of the change in his conceiving, of the matter he will turn to, of the scale in which he imagines that matter's use. I myself would pose the difference by a physical image. It is no accident that Pound and Williams both were involved variously in a movement which got called "objectivism." But that word was then used in some sort of a necessary quarrel, I take it, with "subjectivism." It is now too late to be bothered with the latter. It has excellently done itself to death, even though we are all caught in its dying. What seems to me a more valid formulation for present use is "objectism," a word to be taken to stand for the kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as the necessity of a line or a work to be as wood is, to be as clean as wood is as it issues from the hand of nature, to be as shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it. Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment that he

canon formation, anthologizing, and literary-historical movement building, there were simplifications, errors, and partisan exaggerations, though distortions and mythologizing have been exceptionally pronounced in the discussion of and construction of the “Objectivist” legacy.

Zukofsky’s general reticence throughout the 1960s to talk about his private memories regarding the creation of the “Objectivists” was particularly damaging to scholarly efforts to produce an accurate reconstruction of the group and their activities because he was the group’s energetic and editorial center: as noted previously, he solicited and selected all of the work which appeared in the two “Objectivist” publications; he wrote the majority of the poetic and editorial statements connected with the group; he initiated the formation of both *To, Publishers* and *The Objectivist Press*; and it was he who had the broadest and deepest connections with nearly every other member of both the core and peripheral “Objectivists.” Without the cooperation of Williams, Pound, or Zukofsky, and with the print record so difficult to reconstruct, scholarly attempts to document the emergence of the “Objectivists” seem in hindsight almost predestined to failure, or at the very least, confusion. The distorting effects of interpersonal differences and the passage of time are especially visible in Dembo’s *Contemporary Literature* interviews with Zukofsky, Rakosi, Reznikoff, and Oppen. Zukofsky, who had refused Dembo’s invitation to participate in a group reading and discussion with

achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use. It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share. And by an inverse law his shapes will make their own way. It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist’s act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man. For a man’s problem, the moment he takes speed up in all its fullness, is to give his work his seriousness, a seriousness sufficient to cause the thing he makes to try to take its place alongside the things of nature. This is not easy. Nature works from reverence, even in her destruction (species go down with a crash). But breath is man’s special qualification as animal. Sound is a dimension he has extended. Language is one of his proudest acts. And when a poet rests in these as they are in himself (in his physiology, if you like, but the life in him, for all that) then he, if he chooses to speak from these roots, works in that area where nature has given him size, projective size” (“[Projective Verse](#)“).

the others, began his interview by clearly expressing his annoyance with any discussion of *objectivism* as a movement, insisting that the “objectivist, then, is one person, not a group,” and setting off on a dazzling monologue about his own poetics.⁶⁹ Rakosi, who had not been in New York for the founding of the Objectivist Press, claimed (mistakenly) that Williams had little to do with “the objectivist movement” and told Dembo that he

doubt[ed] whether it is a movement in the sense in which that word is generally used. The term really originated with Zukofsky, and he pulled it out of a hat. It was not an altogether accurate way of designating the few people assembled in the anthology and also in the “Objectivist” issue of *Poetry*. But he wanted some kind of name, and he checked out the term with me and, I assume, with some of the other people. The name was all right, but I told him I didn’t think some of the poems in the anthology were “objectivist” or very objective in meaning. He said, “Well, that’s true,” but I’ve forgotten the reasons he gave for sticking to the name. It didn’t matter. . . . I never took my association with Zukofsky and the others that seriously. After all, I was living in the Middle West, except for a brief period in New York when I was seeing Zukofsky, and I didn’t even know any of the other people.⁷⁰

Reznikoff and Oppen each expressed their own perspectives on the founding of the group, with Reznikoff emphasizing their agreement with Pound’s poetic principles and their interest in depicting external objects with integrity and emotional restraint and Oppen stressing the poet’s honesty and sincerity and the importance of form, of making “an object of the poem.”⁷¹ For Dembo and those who followed him, reconstructing the “Objectivists” and their origins must already have felt like the parable of the blind men and the elephant, with various members giving their own subjective recollections of their shared experiences more than 30 years after the events in question.

All this to say that while we now have had 50 years of interest and scholarship in the “Objectivists” and its various members, too many contemporary accounts of this group and the

⁶⁹ “Louis Zukofsky,” 205.

⁷⁰ “Carl Rakosi,” *Contemporary Literature* 11:2 (Spring 1969), 179-180.

⁷¹ “George Oppen,” *Contemporary Literature* 11:2 (Spring 1969), 160.

activities of its various members in the 1920s and 1930s remain murky and factually confused. While each of the difficulties enumerated above plagued even those scholars who had access to the living writers in the group, today's interested literary archaeologist must work primarily with print records, with the "Objectivist" archive, as it were.

This produces two additional problems. First, the "Objectivists" were a large group; all told, more than 30 poets appeared in the two "Objectivist" publications. As Mark Scroggins has noted, "the notion of the "Objectivists" as posse of four – Zukofsky, Oppen, Reznikoff, and Rakosi (with Williams, Niedecker, and Bunting as occasional outriders) – is largely a retrospective construction of literary history ... the term "Objectivist" was originally intended as something quite other than a name for a given half-dozen poets."⁷² Even after bracketing questions about how to define membership in the group and debates over its primary characteristics, studying a literary network is hard, particularly as linear growth in the number of nodes produces non-linear effects on complexity. Even restricting ourselves to just the smaller set of core "Objectivists" proposed here, this network still comprises seven different writers, each with lengthy and varied publication histories and overlapping relationships to dozens of writers either on the periphery or squarely outside of this group. Think of Whitman's famous boast that "I am large, I contain multitudes," only made exponential.

Second, while the historical record is always fragmentary and dispersed, this is especially acute in the case of the "Objectivists." Even for the affiliated writers for whom a well-organized documentary record has been preserved there remain significant and frustrating gaps. The size and depth of the lacunae are worse still for many of the other "Objectivists," particularly when it comes

⁷² "The 'Objectivists' and Their Publications," published at <http://www.z-site.net/biblio-research/the-objectivists-and-their-publications/>.

to records of and from the 1920s and 1930s. In the case of the Oppens, for instance, their large archival holdings contain almost nothing from their lives before 1950, as they discarded or lost most of the material they had in a hasty relocation to Mexico to avoid political persecution in the United States for their previous Communist affiliations. It does not help that many of these writers were deeply suspicious or critical of biographical and scholarly examination, particularly of their private and personal lives. It was Bunting's habit to destroy much of the correspondence he received, for example, and Niedecker and Zukofsky destroyed or mutilated much of their personal correspondence, including nearly everything they wrote each other prior to Zukofsky's marriage to Celia Thaew in 1939. The fragmentariness of the existing archives has been much commented on, particularly by the group's would-be biographers.

Furthermore, even where archival records related to the group do exist, they are often scattered and distributed, with varying levels of access and permissions. The last decade of my own experience demonstrates the difficulty for a single scholar to find the time and money needed to view all of these geographically disperse and varied collections. I attempt to make this problem easier for future scholars through the "[The Materials](#)" section of this site, which describes the various archival collections related to the "Objectivists," and facilitates or provides online access to relevant material wherever possible. I am especially grateful to the heirs and estates for these writers, each of whom has been enormously helpful and generous to me as I've pursued this work over the past several years. Further details can be found in the child pages of the "The Materials" section and in the site's [colophon](#).

Were I to adopt a single epigraph to encapsulate my intentions for this site, perhaps the most fitting would be George Oppen's lines from his 1968 collection *Of Being Numerous*:

Clarity, clarity, surely clarity is the most beautiful thing in the world,
 A limited, limiting clarity
 I have not and never did any motive of poetry
 But to achieve clarity⁷³

The project of this site is simultaneously both modest and hugely ambitious—it is simply to document, as accurately as possible, the historical actions and reception of the “Objectivist” poets. Interpretation and argument may follow from this grounding, but my primary aim here has been, to borrow another phrase from Oppen’s long poem, to “tell what happens in a life, what choices present themselves, what the world is for us, what happens in time, what thought is in the course of a life and therefore what art is, and the isolation of the actual.”⁷⁴

While I am not immune to the forces that produce the biases and contortions described above, I have also been guided in my work on this site by Reznikoff’s characterization of the Objectivist attitude toward judgment and testimony:

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. . . . 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 courts and the testimony of a poet.⁷⁵

In reconstructing the origins of the “Objectivists,” this has meant that I have attempted to practice good historiography by preferring, whenever possible, to use primary documents produced by direct participants or eyewitnesses writing as close in time to the events they describe as I can

⁷³ *New Collected Poems*, 193.

⁷⁴ From section 27 of “Of Being Numerous,” *New Collected Poems*, 180.

⁷⁵ “Charles Reznikoff,” 194-195.

find. My view is that only by collecting and presenting the extant primary documents, the evidence, the materials, can a plausible group history of the “Objectivists” be written. By providing future scholars with improved access to an accurate primary historical and documentary record, my greatest hope for this site is that it will serve as a resource and a starting place for further inquiry into the lives, work, scholarship and “materials” of these poets.

My own contributions to this work have been licensed with a [permissive creative commons license](#) permitting others to freely share and adapt this work provided they give proper attribution. I hereby designate this work as a *res publica*, a thing made for and dedicated to the public good, or in Pound’s preferred translation, for the public convenience.

Furthermore, as a believer in Linus’ Law: “given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow,” I expect that greater public exposure will help improve the accuracy of this site in the long term, as the eyes and interests this site attracts will help me more readily correct errors and misstatements. If you notice errors on the site, have relevant material you’d like to contribute, or have ideas for how this site could be made more useful or accessible, please feel free to add them to the site’s annotation layer (powered by the open-source annotation tool [Hypothesis](#)) or share them directly with me at swagstaff@wisc.edu.

The Lives

Who were the “Objectivists”?

In their simplest definition, the “Objectivists” were a group of thirty modernist writers gathered and presented by Louis Zukofsky in two explicitly-titled “Objectivist” publications: the February 1931 issue of Chicago’s *Poetry* magazine, and *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, published the following year in France. Beginning in the mid-1930s, many of the writers identified as “Objectivist” ceased writing poetry or faded into obscurity until the early 1960s, when several members of the group reemerged as active poets and enjoyed a surge of attention and retroactive identification as “Objectivists.”

Core “Objectivists”

The seven core “Objectivist” writers featured on this website: Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, William Carlos Williams, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting and Lorine Niedecker, were connected through a shifting web of friendship and joint publication beginning in the mid-1920s and stretching into the early twenty-first century. All of these writers published important work after 1962, and of the seven, all but Lorine Niedecker appeared in both of the foundational “Objectivist” publications. I recognize that my decision to refer to Niedecker as an “Objectivist” poet despite her absence from the early “Objectivist” publishing ventures and group publications could be contested, so some justification for this decision may be helpful.¹ Niedecker became attracted to the group, and to Zukofsky in particular, after reading the February 1931 issue

¹ Jenny Penberthy and other attentive readers of Niedecker’s poetry have long noted her intellectual and poetic independence, including surrealist tendencies, of which Zukofsky did not approve, in both her earliest and latest poetry. See Penberthy in [How2](#) and both Ruth Jennison and Rachel Blau DuPlessis’ contributions to *Radical Vernacular* (pp. 131-179).

of *Poetry* in her local library. This encounter prompted Niedecker to write directly to Zukofsky sometime in mid-late 1931, and Niedecker's first submission to *Poetry* magazine, dated November 5, 1931, mentions her having been encouraged to do so by Zukofsky.² Niedecker's first letter to Zukofsky marked the commencement of an intense, lifelong friendship, developed through frequent correspondence for nearly 40 years.³ Late in 1933, Niedecker traveled to New York City for an extended stay with Zukofsky, during which time she met Charles Reznikoff, George and Mary Oppen, and (probably) William Carlos Williams. Later in life, Niedecker met both Carl Rakosi and Basil Bunting, who in particular had been a longtime admirer of her writing. While I would not go so far as Rakosi in describing Niedecker as the "most Objectivist of all of us,"⁴ it is my view that Niedecker, by virtue of both her personal relationships with other members of the group and her poetic sensibilities, warrants inclusion among the core "Objectivists." Two other writers, Robert McAlmon and Kenneth Rexroth, also appeared in both of the original "Objectivist" publications, but I have chosen to exclude them from my list of core "Objectivists," and discuss the reasons for this decision at greater length below.

Speaking purely in terms of the lives of the core "Objectivists," there are a number of biographical similarities. The group's geographic center was New York City, and though all seven were never in the area at the same time, all core members either lived in the city or spent significant

² That letter reads, in full: "Dear Miss Monroe, Mr. Zukofsky encourages me to send some of my poems to you to be considered for "Poetry". Very truly yours, Lorine Niedecker." Niedecker to Harriet Monroe in [Poetry: A Magazine of Verse Records 1895-1961](#), Box 18, Folder 2, University of Chicago Special Collections.

³ Niedecker and Zukofsky conducted one of the deepest, most fruitful, and longest lasting epistolary friendships among writers of which I know. They destroyed much of their correspondence, but a significant portion of the surviving letters from Niedecker were collected and edited by Jenny Penberthy in [Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970](#), published in 1993 by Cambridge University Press. Fragments of Zukofsky's side of the correspondence are held by the [Harry Ransom Center](#) at the University of Texas at Austin.

⁴ Quoted in [A Century in the Poetic Eye](#), 71.

periods of time there between 1928 and 1935.⁵ Four of the group were Jewish,⁶ four were the children of American immigrants,⁷ and they were generally non-academic; apart from Zukofsky, none held graduate degrees connected to literature or university affiliations of any kind until the 1960s, when some members of the group began to be invited to fill artist-in-residence positions at various American universities.⁸ With the exception of Williams and Reznikoff, all were of the same

⁵ Apart from a stint at graduate school in Madison, Wisconsin during the 1930-1931 academic year and a trip to visit Pound and other artistic friends in Europe in the summer of 1933, Zukofsky spent the entirety of these years in New York City. Reznikoff lived in New York City for his entire life, apart from a year at journalism school in Missouri (the 1910-1911 academic year), a cross-country trip selling hats for his parents' business and extended stay in Los Angeles from April-June of 1931, and a two year stint working in Hollywood for his friend Al Lewin (from March 1937 through June 1939). The Oppens arrived in New York City in 1928, living briefly in Greenwich Village before taking a room at the Madison Square Hotel (on the corner of Madison Avenue and 26th Street, near the north east corner of Madison Square Park) for the rest of the winter. They lived briefly with Zukofsky's close friends Ted and Kate Hecht on Staten Island in the spring, before renting a small house in New Rochelle harbor, the city where George had been born. They returned to San Francisco at the end of the summer in 1929, and lived a rented house in Belvedere for a year before leaving for France in the summer of 1930 around the same time that Zukofsky left New York for Madison. The Oppens arrived in Le Havre, and stayed in France until early in 1933, when they left Paris to return to New York, taking an apartment in Brooklyn Heights near Zukofsky. The Oppens lived in New York from 1933 until the early 1940s, when they moved to Detroit. From 1913 until their deaths, Williams and his wife Flossie made their home some 25 miles northwest of Manhattan at 9 Ridge Road in Rutherford, New Jersey, from which location Williams made frequent visits to the city. Carl Rakosi lived in New York City from 1924 to 1925 and again from 1935 to 1940. Bunting lived in New York City for the last half of 1930: he and his first wife, Marian Culver, were married on Long Island on July 9, 1930 and lived in Brooklyn Heights through January 1931, when Bunting's six-month visa expired and the couple returned to Rapallo, Italy. Although Zukofsky was in Madison during most of Bunting's time in New York City, Bunting met Williams, René Taupin, and others in Zukofsky's circle, and met Zukofsky in person when Zukofsky returned to the city for the winter holidays. Niedecker came to New York City for the first time in late 1933, and over the next several years would spend several months in the city, living with Zukofsky during her sometimes lengthy visits.

⁶ Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Oppen, and Rakosi.

⁷ Zukofsky's parents immigrated from what is now Lithuania, Reznikoff's parents immigrated from Russia, Rakosi was born in Germany and immigrated from Hungary when he was six years old, and Williams' parents had immigrated from Puerto Rico, though his father had been born in England.

⁸ Zukofsky earned a master's degree in English from Columbia University in June 1924, writing his thesis on the writings of the historian Henry Adams. In February 1946, he began a teaching position as an English instructor at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn (now operating as the New York University Tandon School of Engineering), where he taught until his retirement in May 1965. Reznikoff attended journalism school for a year at the University of Missouri and considered pursuing a Ph.D. in history before enrolling in law school, earning his LLB from New York University in 1915 and being admitted to the bar the following year. Reznikoff took a few postgraduate courses in law, but never earned an advanced degree. Oppen dropped out of Oregon State Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) after he was suspended and Mary was expelled from school for their relationship. Neither George or Mary earned university degrees. Williams attended medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, where he befriended classmates Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle [H.D.], graduating in 1906 and filling internships at two New York hospitals and pursuing advanced study in pediatrics in Leipzig, Germany. Rakosi attended the University of Chicago for a year before transferring to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1924 and a master's degree in industrial psychology in 1925. Rakosi attended a wide range of graduate programs in the 1920s and 1930s, briefly enrolling in both the Ph.D. program in English literature and law school at the University of Texas at

‘generation,’ having been born between 1900 and 1908.⁹ Of the five born after the turn of the century, Basil Bunting was the eldest and George Oppen the youngest, with Niedecker, Rakosi, and Zukofsky having being born during the eight month span from May 1903 and January 1904.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, considering his seniority relative to the rest of the group, Williams was also the first of the “Objectivists” to die, in 1963, just as many of the writers who had been published with him as “Objectivists” were beginning to reemerge to greater public notice.¹¹ The last surviving “Objectivist” was Rakosi, who published his final volume of poetry in 1999, and continued sending new work in magazines and giving interviews until shortly before his death, aged 100, on June 25, 2004.

In addition to their shared publication efforts, the “Objectivists” were also loosely united by shared political and poetic affinities. In contradistinction to Pound, Eliot, and Cummings, three of the most prominent American modernist poets of the era, each of the “Objectivists” was leftist in their politics, with each generally expressing Marxist, socialist, or Progressive sympathies.¹² Their

Austin and medical school at the University of Texas Medical Department in Galveston but leaving each program before earning a degree. After choosing a career as a social worker, Rakosi attended the Graduate School of Social Work at Tulane University in New Orleans and eventually earned his master’s degree in Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania in 1940. Between 1952 and 1954, he would complete course work in the Social Work Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota, but he never completed the doctorate. Bunting was enrolled at the London School of Economic from October 1919 to April 1923, but was very casual in his studies and left without earning a degree. Niedecker attended Beloit College from 1922-1924, but family financial pressures forced her to leave without completing her degree.

⁹ Williams was born in Rutherford, New Jersey on September 17, 1883, and Reznikoff was born in New York City on August 31, 1894.

¹⁰ Bunting was born on March 1, 1900 in Scotswood-on-Tyne, a western suburb of Newcastle, England; Niedecker was born on May 12, 1903 on Blackhawk Island near Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin; Rakosi was born on November 6, 1903 in Berlin, Germany; Zukofsky was born on January 23, 1904 in New York City; Oppen was born on April 24, 1908 in New Rochelle, New York.

¹¹ William Carlos Williams died March 4, 1963, aged 79; Lorine Niedecker died December 31, 1970, aged 67; Charles Reznikoff died January 22, 1976, aged 81; Louis Zukofsky died May 12, 1978, aged 74; George Oppen died July 7, 1984, aged 76; Basil Bunting died April 17, 1985, aged 85; Carl Rakosi died June 25, 2004, aged 100. For comparison, Ezra Pound was born on October 30, 1885 in Hailey, Idaho and died on November 1, 1972 in Venice, Italy, aged 87.

¹² Oppen and Rakosi were both members of the Communist Party of the United States of America in New York City during the last half of the 1930s, but neither remained an active member of the party by the end of the decade. Zukofsky appears to have applied for membership in the Communist Party in 1925, when his close friend Whittaker Chambers began to ingratiate himself with the party’s New York leadership, but others recalled that his application was rejected,

poetics might be described as sympathetically heterogeneous, with Ezra Pound and the imagist tradition serving as important common touchstones for the group.

The Formation of the “Objectivist” Core

If there was in fact an “Objectivist” core, comprised of Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Oppen, Williams, Rakosi, Bunting and Niedecker, several questions must be answered. Chief among them: How did these seven writers come to know each other? What were the particular threads of connection and aesthetic principles which united them? How and why were these links forged, maintained, and, in some cases, dissolved?

Zukofsky, Williams, Reznikoff, and the Oppens could be said to form something like the group’s original and most durable nucleus, with their connections beginning to form in 1928 and

though the influence of Marxist ideas on Zukofsky remained prominent in his poetry and private letters through the late 1930s and is clear in his editorial decisions, both in regards to who he selected for inclusion in the “Objectivist” publications and afterward. In 1934 and 1935, Zukofsky spent several months preparing *A Worker’s Anthology* (though never published, many of the poems he gathered for this manuscript made their way into his *A Test of Poetry*), joined the anti-fascist (and Communist-affiliated) League of American Writers and worked briefly as an unpaid poetry editor for the prominent Communist-affiliated literary magazine *New Masses*. He and Bunting both argued politics with the fascist-sympathizing Pound in their letters throughout the 30s, with Zukofsky taking up more Marxist-Leninist positions and Bunting more anarcho-socialist ones. In a July 1938 letter to Pound, Zukofsky wrote: “Can’t guess what Kulchah is about, but if you want to dedicate yr. book to a communist (me) and a British-conservative-antifascist-imperialist (Basil), I won’t sue you for libel and I suppose you know Basil. So dedicate” (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 195). Zukofsky’s multi-hybrid classification of Bunting is a good sign of the difficulty even his closest friends experienced in classifying his political views. Bunting attended a Quaker secondary school and was imprisoned as a conscientious objector during the first World War and for several years as a young adult was, like his father, a dues-paying Fabian Socialist. His mature political views, while largely uncategorizable, resemble something of a fusion between socialism and anarchism, though he was perhaps the most suspicious of ideology of the whole group, arguing strenuously for the separation of literature from both political and economic motives and ends. A flavor of his independent-mindedness comes through in a 1954 to Dorothy Pound: “our only hope for our children is to destroy uniformity, centralization, big states and big factories and give men a chance to vary and live without more interference than it is the nature of their neighbors to insist on” (quoted in *Basil Bunting*, 12). Williams’ politics might be best described as democratic populist, and Niedecker was sympathetic to both the strain of Progressivism led by Wisconsin politician Robert La Follette and Henry Wallace as well as the socialism of William Morris. For more on Niedecker’s politics, see: <http://steelwagstaff.info/lorine-niedecker-and-the-99/>. Reznikoff was the least overtly political of the group, though his writing is profoundly sympathetic to human suffering and what we would today refer to as social justice concerns. He did also work for seventeen years in an editorial capacity on the Labor Zionist journal *Jewish Frontier* alongside his more politically engaged wife Marie Syrkin, who was the daughter of Nahum and Bassnya Osnos, two prominent Socialist Zionists, as well as a close friend of the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir.

each of them having frequent contact with each other in or near New York City over the next half dozen years.¹³ Zukofsky and Williams met in April 1928 at the encouragement of Ezra Pound, and Zukofsky met the Oppens later that same year at a party hosted by their mutual friends, the designers Russel and Mary Wright. It's unclear exactly where and when Zukofsky and Reznikoff met, but Seamus Cooney has plausibly suggested that they met in 1928 at one of the *Menorah Journal* dinners hosted by its editor [Henry Hurwitz](#). The earliest reference I've found to him in Zukofsky's correspondence are a December 9, 1929 from Ezra Pound praising some "Reznikoff prose" that Zukofsky had sent him as being "very good."¹⁴

Basil Bunting lived in New York for several months in 1930 and 1931, during which time he established friendships with both Williams and Zukofsky. On July 11, 1930, two days after his marriage to Marian Culver on Long Island, Bunting sent Zukofsky a postcard that read, simply: "Dear Mr Zukofsky – Ezra Pound says I ought to look you up. May I?" Zukofsky assented and the two men quickly became friends, with Zukofsky spending time with Bunting while back in New York City during the winter holidays from his teaching position in Wisconsin. Williams also references having supper with Robert McAlmon, Basil Bunting and his American wife Marian in a January 15, 1931 letter to Zukofsky.¹⁵ Bunting would continue to correspond with both Zukofsky

¹³ Zukofsky spent the 1930-1931 academic year teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Oppens lived in California and France for significant periods in the early 1930s, and Reznikoff took a cross-country trip selling hats for his parents' business followed by extended stay in Los Angeles from April-June of 1931, but apart from these exceptions, all lived within 20 miles of each other in the New York metro area from 1928 through 1935.

¹⁴ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 26. Zukofsky's prior letter also referenced Reznikoff's having a printing press, which got Pound quite excited. In subsequent letters, Zukofsky clarified the situation and informed Pound of an upcoming meeting with Reznikoff in which he intended to "talk business" regarding the use of Reznikoff's press, which he operated from his basement of his sister's home upstate.

¹⁵ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 77.

and Williams for several years.¹⁶ The Oppens, who were in France while Bunting and his wife were in New York, did however visit Rapallo in 1932, where they met both Ezra Pound and the Buntings, and they met again with Pound in Paris shortly before their return to the United States early in 1933.¹⁷ Rakosi was initially connected with the group solely through correspondence with Zukofsky, as he was living in Texas during the early 1930s and did not move back to New York City until 1935, by which time the Oppens and Zukofsky had broken their friendship and the Objectivist Press had essentially ceased operating as a collective publishing venture. While Rakosi and Zukofsky enjoyed rich social relations between 1935 and 1940, when both men lived in New York City, Rakosi was already drifting away from poetry and towards a long professional career as a social worker.¹⁸ Niedecker began corresponding with Zukofsky shortly after reading the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry* in her local library, and she first travelled to New York City late in 1933. Niedecker met Charles Reznikoff, the Oppens, and Williams while living with Zukofsky in New York City in the 30s, and both Rakosi and Bunting visited her at her home on Blackhawk Island in the late 1960s.¹⁹

¹⁶ See *The Poem of a Life*, 73-74 and *A Strong Song Tows Us*, 162-168 for more detailed accounts of the origin of Bunting and Zukofsky’s friendship.

¹⁷ The Oppens had financed the publication by TO, Publishers of a book consisting of two of Pound’s prose works and met with Pound in a Parisian café to inform him that they were discontinuing the press for financial reasons and would not print his *ABC of Economics*, as he had hoped. For Mary Oppen’s later account of their relationship with Pound and Bunting during this time, see her *Meaning a Life*, 131-137.

¹⁸ Rakosi stopped reading and writing verse entirely towards the end of his time in New York City. Rakosi, who had changed his name to Callman Rawley for professional reasons, earned his master’s degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania and married Leah Jaffe in the spring of 1939. Following what he described as “a dreadful existential state, something grey and purposeless between living and dying, and so physical that for a while I was sure I was going to die” that came on when he realized that he was going to stop writing poetry, Rakosi took a job in Saint Louis in 1940 and “went on with my life as a social worker and therapist” (Autobiography in Contemporary Autobiography series, 208). For more on this period in Rakosi’s life, see <http://theobjectivists.org/the-lives/carl-rakosi/>.

¹⁹ Carl Rakosi visited Lorine Niedecker and her husband Al Millen at their home on Blackhawk Island in March 1970 while he was serving at the Writer-in-Residence at UW-Madison, writing that “moment I walked in her door, she was opposite of recluse: outgoing, of good cheer, very lively. Time flew. Delightful afternoon” (Carl Rakosi Papers, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 4, Folder 4). Though Bunting and Niedecker did not meet in person until June 1967, when Bunting and his daughters visited Niedecker at her Blackhawk Island home, they had known each other through correspondence, and for a short time Bunting had explored the possibility of going into the

As this brief chronology of their meeting demonstrates, and as I argue in greater detail [elsewhere on this site](#), the “Objectivists” 1931 issue of *Poetry* might be more properly considered a mid-point rather than the beginning of the group’s affiliation, serving as a public unveiling more than anything else.²⁰ While *Poetry* marked their initial presentation, the main core of “Objectivists” had already been developing their own affinity and publication network, at least since 1928. Their shared publication history is traced in much greater detail in the “[The Work](#)” section of this site, but here I will detail their personal and biographical connections.

Imagining a Network Graph

There can be no disputing that Louis Zukofsky was the group’s central figure, as both the inventor of the group’s name and the editor who selected the writers and work presented publicly as “Objectivist” and provided the critical framing for the group and their context. As the intellectual, editorial, and in many respects energetic center of the group, Zukofsky was thickly connected to all of the other “Objectivists,” both core and peripheral. What is frequently less appreciated, however, was the significant, though less visible, role played in the formation and

carp-seining business with Niedecker’s father Henry. Niedecker wrote to Cid Corman on June 15, 1966: “Basil Bunting—yes, I came close to meeting him when he was in this country in the 30’s. Some mention at the time of his going into the fishing business (he had yeoman muscles LZ said and arrived in New York with a sextant) with my father on our lake and river but it was the depression and at that particular time my dad felt it best to ‘lay low’ so far as starting fresh with new equipment was concerned and a new partner – the market had dropped so low for our carp – and I believe BB merely lived a few weeks with Louie without engaging in any business. He’s probably a very fine person and I’ve always enjoyed his poetry” (“*Between Your House and Mine*”: *The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960-1970*, 88).

²⁰ The best extant resource which makes an effort to empirically document the pre-1931 “Objectivist” associations is Tom Sharp’s doctoral dissertation, *“Objectivists” 1927-1934: A critical history of the work and association of Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Ezra Pound, and George Oppen*, which he completed at Stanford University in 1982, and which includes a wealth of well-documented research on the extant correspondence between members of the “Objectivist” nexus in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Sharp did not pursue a career in academia and his dissertation remained unpublished until 2015, when he published large portions of it, at my urging, on his own website: <http://sharpgiving.com/Objectivists/index.html>. See Chapters 1, 9, and 11 especially.

coherence of the group by the better established modernist poets William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound.

To draw a graph of the Objectivist network as it existed in the late 20s-early 30s, one might first begin by representing Pound and Williams as two loosely-bound sibling roots, noting that their relationship with each other had predated the formation of the Zukofsky-led group by more than twenty-five years.²¹ Emerging from Pound would be two thick edges connecting him as major influence upon both Louis Zukofsky and Basil Bunting. Pound and Zukofsky's published correspondence makes for engrossing reading: Pound sought to cast Zukofsky as an admiring pupil and ersatz disciple/adopted son, with both men making early references to Zukofsky as "sonny" and Pound as "papa." Zukofsky proved less tractable than Pound would have wished, however, and their relationship began to show serious signs of strain, especially following Zukofsky's 1933 visit to Rapallo, which Pound and Williams had financed. Thinner lines might be drawn from Pound to Rakosi, who Pound published in 1928 in his magazine *The Exile* and in his *Active Anthology*, and to Oppen, who, thanks to Zukofsky's mediation, published a volume of Pound's critical prose, including *How to Read*, in 1932, was also included in *Active Anthology*, and for whose 1934 collection *Discrete Series* Pound wrote the preface. Fainter lines from Pound (indicating influence)

²¹Pound, Williams, and Hilda Doolittle [H.D.] all met in Philadelphia in the early 1900s. Pound and Williams met in the fall of 1902, when both were enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania, where H.D.'s father was a professor of Astronomy. In 1903, Pound transferred to Hamilton College, but continued to see Williams during school breaks when he returned to his parents' home in Wyncote, a Philadelphia suburb. In 1905, Pound returned to Penn to begin work on his master's degree, and they resumed their friendship in earnest. Williams left Philadelphia in 1906 for a medical internship in New York City, and Pound took his ill-fated job teaching foreign languages at Wabash College in a small Indiana town in 1907 (he was fired in the spring of 1908 and left for Europe shortly thereafter). Pound dedicated his 1912 collection *Ripostes* to Williams and included Williams' poem "Postlude" in his 1914 *Des Imagistes* anthology and his poems "In Harbor" and "The Wanderer" in his 1915 *Catholic Anthology*. He also wrote an introductory note to a selection of poems from Williams' book *The Tempers* published in *The Poetry Review* in October 1912 and [reviewed the book in The New Freewoman in December 1913](#). Though no letters from Williams to Pound written prior to 1921 have survived, they corresponded regularly for the next several decades, and a roughly thirty percent of their extant correspondence spanning more than fifty years of friendship can be found in Hugh Witemeyer's *Pound/Williams: The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams*, published by New Directions in 1996. The early years of their friendship are briefly summarized on pages 3-5 of that book.

might also be traced to both Reznikoff and Niedecker, both of whom admired and generally wrote in accordance with Pound's imagist-era poetic prescriptions.

Williams was a far less domineering and dictatorial influence than Pound, though he served as an important American-based elder statesman and first-generation modernist figurehead for the group. Despite being Zukofsky's elder by more than 20 years, Williams quickly came to respect Zukofsky as a superb editor and trust him as a valued poetic interlocutor, inviting him to edit the unpublished manuscript for what would become *The Descent of Winter* less than a month after their first meeting. In addition, Williams provided important linkages between Zukofsky and the peripheral "Objectivists" Robert McAlmon, Emanuel Carnevali, and Richard Johns. Williams also helped serve as a buffer and American counterweight to Pound, modeling a form of artistic independence from the often-aggressive Pound for the younger writers in the group. Williams also contributed to the development of the critical language Zukofsky used in presenting the group, suggesting for example in one of his earliest letters to the younger poet that Zukofsky's poems had not "been *objectivized* in new or fresh observations."²² Williams also influenced or at least agreed with others in the group in his repeated emphases on the importance of making "contact" with what he called the "primitive and actual America," with "holding firm to the vernacular," and insisting that they "make of [their] words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with [their] day."²³

Perhaps even more importantly, Williams also used his own reputation and role as an occasional editorial advisor to provide Zukofsky and others in the group access to a succession of little magazines, like Johns' *Pagany* and his own *Contact*, who sought the credibility that an association

²² *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 11.

²³ The first two quotations come from an editorial "Comment" he published in the second issue of *Contact* in 1932 and the latter is taken from Williams description of objectivism in his 1951 *Autobiography*.

with Williams would provide their publications. He was similarly instrumental to the plans of both “Objectivist” book publishing endeavors, and his collaboration with Reznikoff, Zukofsky, and the Oppens in founding the Objectivist Press in September 1933 would necessitate the drawing of a thickly knotted bundle of connections between all of the principals. As detailed [elsewhere on this site](#), the limited access to print enjoyed by Zukofsky and the other “Objectivists” from 1928 to 1935 would have been far more circumscribed were it not for their association with both Pound and Williams.

A network graph covering the five-year period from 1928 to 1933 would depict Bunting, Niedecker, and Rakosi as the most peripheral members of the group, in no small part because of their geographic distance. Apart from six months in New York City in late 1930-early 1931, Bunting spent these years in Europe, corresponding with just Pound, Zukofsky, and Williams from this group, though he did, thanks to facilitation from Zukofsky, develop an early admiration for Niedecker’s writing.²⁴ Before meeting Reznikoff, Williams, and the Oppens on her first trip to New York City in late fall 1933, Niedecker had been living in rural Wisconsin and had corresponded only with Zukofsky. Rakosi was teaching high school English and enrolled in medical school in Texas during these years; the first of his fellow “Objectivists” he met personally was Zukofsky, and that didn’t happen until after his move to New York City in 1935, at which time much of the group’s energy had already dissipated.

²⁴ In 1928, Bunting was living in London and writing musical criticism for *The Outlook*. The newspaper folded that year and Bunting had rejoined Pound at Rapallo by March 1929, and apart from his wedding and six month interlude/honeymoon in New York City, spent most of his time there until departing in late 1933 for the Canary Islands, where he lived until the middle of 1936.

The Shadow of Ezra Pound

What such a visualization would immediately make apparent is the way in which the main arteries of the Objectivist nexus traverse not just through Zukofsky and Williams, but also through Ezra Pound. The roots of the “Objectivist” nexus were nearly all entangled in some way with the sprawling, colonizing (though frequently generous) ambitions of the Rapallo-based poet. While less immediately apparent than Zukofsky or even Williams, Pound’s efforts as a behind the scenes orchestrator, advisor, and would-be impresario were crucially significant in both providing the impetus for Zukofsky’s efforts to assemble and perpetuate this group as well as providing the platform for the invention of a “movement” in the first place. It was Pound who served as a locus (through letters) of ideas, encouragement, and not-infrequent provocation for Zukofsky, Bunting, and Williams, the three members of the group with whom he carried on regular correspondence throughout the 1920s and 1930s.²⁵

Despite his centrality to the formation of the “Objectivist” nexus, I have chosen not to include Pound as a core “Objectivist” here, for two reasons. First, there is no shortage of published material examining Pound’s life and career, and second, apart from his consenting to have two of his poems of questionable merit included in Zukofsky’s *An ‘Objectivists’ Anthology*, Pound never gave any indication of voluntary affiliation with the label. Zukofsky had also wanted to include Pound in his issue of *Poetry*, ideally through the publication of a Canto, but Pound resisted Zukofsky’s several

²⁵ Williams he knew from their days together at Penn, Bunting he had known for some time as a co-dweller at Rapallo, and Zukofsky had written him with admiration for both his prose statements and the poetic accomplishments of his early Cantos, the first sixteen of which had been published in Paris by Bill Bird’s Three Mountains Press in 1925. Pound also corresponded with George Oppen during these years, though their correspondence was mainly confined to Oppen’s role as a publisher of Pound’s writing.

written entreaties. In the end, Zukofsky's contributor notes indicate that he had planned to include a blank page in the issue as Pound's contribution to the issue:

The editor also regrets the omission of a blank page representing Ezra Pound's contribution to the issue—a page reserved for him as an indication of his belief that a country tolerating outrages like article 211 of the U. S. Penal Code, publishers' "overhead," and other impediments to literary life, "does not deserve to have any literature whatsoever." Mr. Pound gave over to younger poets the space offered *him*.²⁶

This is not to say that Pound somehow held Zukofsky in low-esteem. His regard for Zukofsky and his fellow "Objectivist" (and former secretary) Basil Bunting was perhaps made most apparent when he dedicated his 1938 book *Guide to Kulchur* "To Louis Zukofsky and Basil Bunting strugglers in the desert." Zukofsky in turn had already publicly declared his position viz a viz the elder poet, dedicating *An "Objectivists" Anthology* to Pound and referring to him there as "still for the poets of our time / the / most important."²⁷ For his part, Bunting would offer his own moving assessment of Pound's poetic accomplishment through his later short poem "On the Fly-Leaf of Pound's Cantos," which begins "There are the Alps. What is there to say about them? / They don't make sense" before this concluding stanza: "There they are, you will have to go a long way round / if you want to avoid them. / It takes some getting used to. There are the Alps, / fools! Sit down and wait for them to crumble!"²⁸

²⁶ *Poetry* 37:5 (February 1931), 295.

²⁷ *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, 27.

²⁸ *The Poems of Basil Bunting*, 117.

Pound's writing on poetics were also important to the group, particularly the principles he had developed while promoting "Des Imagistes." In a December 7, 1931 letter to Pound, Zukofsky confided that he viewed his then in-process long poem "A" as "following out of your don'ts almost to the letter," referring to Pound's well-known "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste."²⁹ Similarly, Charles Reznikoff recalled in a 1969 interview with L.S. Dembo:

When I was twenty-one [c. 1915], I was particularly impressed by the new kind of poetry being written by Ezra Pound, H. D., and others, with sources in French free verse. It seemed to me just right, not cut to patterns, however cleverly, nor poured into ready molds—that sounds like an echo of Pound—but words and phrases flowing as the thought; to be read just like common speech—that sounds like Whitman—but for stopping at the end of each line: and this like a rest in music or a turn in the dance.³⁰

When asked about his recollections of his conversations with Oppen and Zukofsky regarding 'objectivist technique,' Reznikoff told Dembo:

We picked the name "Objectivist" because we had all read *Poetry* of Chicago and we agreed completely with all that Pound was saying. We didn't really discuss the term itself; it seemed all right—pregnant. It could have meant any number of things. But the mere fact that we didn't discuss its meaning doesn't deprive it of its validity. . . . I think we all agreed that the term "objectivism," as we understood Pound's use of it, corresponded to the way we felt poetry should be written. And that included Williams, too. What we were reacting from was Tennyson. We were anti-Tennysonian. His kind of poetry didn't represent the world we knew—the streets of New York or of East Rutherford or Paterson. It might have represented the idyllic countryside where Tennyson lived, I don't doubt, or the world in which Swinburne lived—that semi-classical world. We recognized its validity; I'm sure we all felt how good were things like "the hounds of spring are on winter's traces" or the beginning of "The Lotos-Eaters." Some of it was magnificent, but it wasn't us.³¹

In his interview with Dembo published in the same issue of *Contemporary Literature*, Rakosi prefaced his pointed criticism of Pound's personal grandiosity and the epic tone adopted in the

²⁹ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 110-111.

³⁰ "Charles Reznikoff," 194.

³¹ *Ibid*, 196-197.

Cantos by stating that “I had better admit that I believe that Pound’s critical writing—particularly the famous “Don’ts” essay—is an absolute foundation stone of contemporary American writing.”³² In an unpublished draft of his own autobiography as a writer, Rakosi wrote

You might say that Pound’s axioms on writing re-educated me and whatever I wrote after that, followed those axioms. They made such basic sense that they became my second nature. To all intents and purposes they were my principles and it became unthinkable for me to treat subject matter evasively or to use any word that did not (to use Pound’s expression) “contribute to its presentation.” Never, in other words, to be prolix or flaccid or unnecessarily abstract.”³³

Similarly, Pound and Williams were the first two authors the Oppens chose to publish under the To, Publishers imprint; Mary Oppen would tell Serge Fauchereau in a 1976 interview that “We understood the importance of Pound, and to us he was a tremendous figure.”³⁴

As important as Pound was as a poetic predecessor and influence on the “Objectivists,” he also played a much more direct role in the group’s formation as a publisher, facilitator, and erstwhile impresario. His short-lived magazine *The Exile* (four issues appeared in 1927 and 1928) might even be considered something of a proto-“Objectivist” publication,³⁵ as it featured work by Zukofsky, Williams, Rakosi, McAlmon, and Howard Weeks, each of whom would later be featured in Zukofsky’s “Objectivist” issue of *Poetry*.³⁶

³² “Carl Rakosi,” 180. In an unpublished note titled “The Objectivist Connection,” Rakosi had written “I had heeded Pound’s advice on writing. I had immediately recognized it as right and helpful and had incorporated it as my own working principle” (UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 15).

³³ UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 4.

³⁴ *Speaking with George Oppen*, 132.

³⁵ Tom Sharp has argued that the magazine was the group’s “first public meeting place” and that by “express[ing] many of the principles, especially about the importance of group activity, that Pound continued to impress upon them” it placed the “Objectivists” firmly within that “tradition in poetry for which Pound was the principal spokesman” (<http://sharpgiving.com/Objectivists/sections/01.history.html>).

³⁶ Zukofsky’s first major publication, “Poem Beginning “The”” appeared in *The Exile* 3, and the fourth and final issue of *The Exile* included another dozen or so pages from Zukofsky. Williams’ “The Descent of Winter,” which Zukofsky had been instrumental in editing, was published in *The Exile* 4. Williams wrote to Pound on May 17, 1928: “Your spy

In addition to *The Exile*, Pound also included a number of “Objectivist” writers in two anthologies he edited in the early 1930s, featuring Williams, Zukofsky, Bunting, McAlmon, Eliot, Weeks, Tyler, and Carnevali in his 1932 *Profile* anthology and including work by Williams, Bunting, Zukofsky, Oppen, and Eliot in his 1933 *Active Anthology*. Pound also published a brief note in the “Books on Review” section of the February 21, 1933 issue of *Contempo* praising *An “Objectivists” Anthology* as “the first serious attempt since my first Imagiste collection to clean up the mess of contemporary poetry by means of an anthology, and ought to establish just as definite a date.”³⁷

Not only did Pound publish a number of these writers before and after they became associated with the label “Objectivist,” he was also instrumental in recommending that Zukofsky (and other of his disciples) join with other writers to publish and promote significant literature in the United States. In fact, Pound had first begun urging Zukofsky to “form a group” to continue the momentum and impulse of his magazine *The Exile* in his second ever letter to Zukofsky, sent in February 1928, writing: “Also any of your contemporaries with whom you care to associate. Somebody OUGHT to form a group in the U.S. to make use of the damn thing now that I have got in motion. Failing development of some such cluster I shall stop with No. 6 [of *The Exile*].”³⁸

Zukofsky has been going over my secret notes for you. At first I resented his wanting to penetrate- now listen! – but finally I sez to him, All right, go ahead. So he took my pile of stuff into the city and he works at it with remarkably clean and steady fingers (to your long distance credit be it said) and he ups and choses a batch of writin that yous is erbout ter git perty damn quick if it hits a quick ship – when it gets ready – which it aren’t quite yit. What I have to send you will be in the form of a journal, each bit as perfect in itself as may be. I am however leaving everything just as selected by Zukofsky. It may be later that I shall use the stuff differently.” (*Pound/Williams*, 82) Zukofsky and Williams had first met in April of that year, which means that Williams had known Zukofsky for less than 2 months at the time that he sent Pound this remarkable indication his editorial trust. Pound published four poems by Rakosi in *The Exile* 2 and his poem “Extracts from A Private Life” in *The Exile* 4. McAlmon’s short story “Truer than Most Accounts” appeared in *The Exile* 2 and an essay of his on Gertrude Stein was included in *The Exile* 4. Weeks’ poem “Stunt Piece” was published in *The Exile* 3 and was the only place his work had appeared before Zukofsky included him in his “Objectivist” issue of *Poetry*.

³⁷ *Contempo*, 3:6 (February 21, 1933), 7.

³⁸ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 6.

In his very next letter to Zukofsky, Pound attempted to catalyze the formation of such a cluster by forwarding his old friend William Carlos Williams' address to Zukofsky and suggesting that he introduce himself. Zukofsky did so almost immediately; the two writers first met in a NY restaurant April 1, 1928, where Zukofsky asked Williams to read his work, and volunteered his own services as an editor of Williams' unpublished manuscripts. Both liked each other immediately and each quickly sent back to Pound separate reports on their budding friendship. Their growing bond would serve as the basis for what became the "Objectivist" cluster.

In August 1928, after receiving reports that Zukofsky and Williams had hit it off, Pound wrote Zukofsky another lengthy letter, urging him to

make an effort toward restarting some sort of life in N.Y.; sfar as I know there has been none in this sense since old Stieglitz organized (mainly foreign group) to start art. ... I suggest you form some sort of gang to INSIST on interesting stuff (books) (1.) being pubd. promptly, and distributed properly. 2. simultaneous attacks in as many papers as poss. on abuses definitely damaging la vie intellectuelle. ... there are now several enlightened members of yr. body im politic [meaning the United States] that might learn the val. of group action.³⁹

Acting on Pound's suggestions, Zukofsky contacted several more of the writers Pound had recommended to him, including Joseph [Joe] Vogel, an aspiring young writer and recent graduate from Hamilton College where, like Pound, he had studied Romance languages. Vogel responded to Zukofsky's overtures by writing directly to Pound, and Pound sent Vogel his beliefs regarding "the science of GROUPS" in a November 21, 1928 letter, instructing him to share its contents with Zukofsky. His advice included the following recommendations:

[A]t the start you must find the 10% of matters that you agree on and the 10% plus value in each other's work. [Second, he was not to expect a group to remain constant:] Take our groups in London. The group of 1909 had disappeared without the world being much the wiser. Perhaps a first group can only prepare the way for a group that will break through.

³⁹ Pound/Zukofsky, 11.

The one or two determined characters will pass through 1st to 2nd or third groups. [Thirdly, there was] No use starting to crit. each other at start. Anyhow it requires more crit. faculty to discover the hidden 10% positive, than to fuss about 90% obvious imperfection. You talk about style, and mistrusting lit. socs. etc. Nacherly. Mistrust people who fuss about paint and finish before they consider girders and structure.” Fourth, “You ’all’ presumably want some sort of intelligent life not dependent on cash, and salesmanship. . . . Point of group is precisely to have somewhere to go when you don’t want to be bothered about salesmanship. (Paradox?? No.) . . . When you get five men who trust each other you are a long way to a start. If your stuff won’t hold the interest of the four or of someone in the four, it may not be ready to print.⁴⁰

Vogel replied with some hesitation, prompting an exasperated outburst from Pound: “Dear Vogel: Yr. painfully evangelical epistle recd. if you are looking for people who agree with you!!!! How the hell many points of agreement do you suppose there were between Joyce, W. Lewis, Eliot and yrs. truly in 1917; or between Gaudier and Lewis in 1913; or between me and Yeats, etc.?” and telling Vogel that if respected decent writing, writing which expressed a man’s ideas, he ought to exchange his with others who have “ideas of any kind (not borrowed clichés) that irritate you enough to make you think or take out your own ideas and look at ’em.”⁴¹

Not only did Pound introduce Zukofsky to both Williams and Vogel (who would not be associated with the “Objectivists”), he also connected Zukofsky to several other of his acquaintances who would become members of the “Objectivist” group, including Charles Henri Ford, the young editor of *Blues*; Basil Bunting, whom William Butler Yeats famously described as “one of Ezra’s more savage disciples”;⁴² Samuel Putnam, a Paris-based poet and translator who would later publish Zukofsky and other “Objectivists” in his magazine *The New Review*; and Howard Weeks and Carl

⁴⁰ *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, 219-221. Here Vogel is named “James” instead of “Joseph”.

⁴¹ *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, 222. More on Vogel/Pound correspondence in *Paideuma* 27:2-3 (Fall/Winter 1998), 197-225.

⁴² *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, 759.

Rakosi, both of whom he had published in *The Exile*.⁴³ Pound was also indirectly responsible for Zukofsky's meeting the Oppens, since the Oppen-Zukofsky friendship began with George Oppen's chance discovery of the third issue of *The Exile* (which featured Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'") while browsing the poetry section at the Gotham Book Mart shortly after his and Mary's arrival in New York City in the late 1920s.⁴⁴

Zukofsky also attempted to make recommendations of his friends and acquaintances in the "Objectivist" circle to Pound, though Pound generally preferred giving advice and making discoveries than receiving either. For example, Zukofsky sent Pound work by Oppen, Rakosi, Reznikoff, and Rexroth when Pound was assembling his *Active Anthology* in 1933, but of Zukofsky's submissions Pound only included work by Rakosi (whom he had previously published in *The Exile*) and Oppen (who had published Pound) in the final selection. While Pound never became enthusiastic about the work of any of Zukofsky's acquaintances, Zukofsky 'discovered' and introduced him to Reznikoff, Oppen, Niedecker, Rexroth, and Henry Zolinsky, among others.⁴⁵

⁴³ Pound first mentions Rakosi in a letter to Zukofsky filled with advice about assembling his guest edited issue of *Poetry* dated 25 October 1930, indicating that he "may be dead, I wish I cd. trace him" and passing along his last known address in Kenosha, Wisconsin (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 51).

⁴⁴ Mary Wright, the wife of designer Russel Wright, introduced the Oppens to Louis Zukofsky at a party sometime in 1928. See Mary Oppen's account of their meeting in *Meaning a Life*, 84-85.

⁴⁵ Pound and Zukofsky's surviving letters from 1930 make several references to Reznikoff and Zukofsky's "sincerity and objectification" essay on Reznikoff's work. While Pound expressed vague praise for Reznikoff's work, he would reject it for inclusion in his *Active Anthology*. Zukofsky made reference to his having sent Pound several unpublished Oppen poems in a letter dated June 18, 1930. This manuscript was recently been found in the Pound papers held at Yale by the scholar David Hobbs and published by New Directions as *21 Poems*. See *Pound/Zukofsky*, 26-44 for the letters Pound and Zukofsky exchanged during the period in question. Niedecker is first mentioned in the Pound/Zukofsky correspondence in February 1935, when Zukofsky writes "Glad you agreed with me as to the value of Lorine Niedecker's work and are printing it in Westminster," a reference to the Spring-Summer 1935 issue of *Bozart-Westminster*, which Pound edited with John Drummond and T.C. Wilson and included several poems and a dramatic scenario by Niedecker (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 161). This was a particularly strained time in the Pound/Zukofsky relationship, largely exacerbated by political differences over fascism and economic theory, and in his especially nasty response, Pound dismissed Niedecker's work and insulted Zukofsky's critical acumen.

Ultimately, the effect of Zukofsky's relationship with Pound on the "Objectivists" was decidedly mixed. Pound initiated a number of important relationships for Zukofsky, using his prestige and relationship with prominent editors to help him gain access to prominent publications, including *Poetry*, *Hound & Horn*, and *The New Review*, but Pound's difficulty and volatility meant that when things turned sour between Pound and these publications, Zukofsky was also impacted negatively by implication. While some contemporary attacks on Zukofsky may have been the result of personal jealousy or genuine aesthetic disagreement, a greater number of them appear to center on his relationship to Pound, who was suspect both for his bullying bravado and increasingly erratic political and economic views. Joseph Vogel, the writer that Pound had encouraged to form a group with Zukofsky in 1928, publicly denounced Pound in October 1929 in *New Masses* as "the dean of corpses that promenade in graveyards" and suggested that Pound had "tried to organize a group of writers in this country, but the only success—or harm—he achieved was the taking of a smaller Pound under his wings, namely Louis Zukofsky."⁴⁶ The editors of *The Hound & Horn* had similar views, with Yvor Winters writing to Lincoln Kirstein in 1932 that "[o]ur own generation, and the kids who are coming up, seem to be divided more or less clearly between those whose intellectual background is incomprehensible to the older men and who therefore remain largely meaningless to them, and those who imitate them feebly and flatter them in numerous ways (Zukofsky is the most shameless toady extant) and who are therefore praised by them."⁴⁷ Zukofsky's relationship with Pound would even make him suspect to others of the "Objectivists," particularly those who, like Vogel, became most active in Communist Party politics. In his review of Charles Reznikoff's *In Memoriam: 1933*, published in *New Masses* in March 1935, Norman Macleod deplored the fact that "a

⁴⁶ "Literary Graveyards," 30.

⁴⁷ *The Selected Letters of Yvor Winters*, 195.

man of Reznikoff's caliber should be forced to descend to publication by the Objectivist Press, an outfit controlled so far as I can learn by that consummate ass and adulator of Herr Ezra Pound (Heil Hitler and may all his descendants descend), Louis Zukofsky."⁴⁸ Zukofsky bore most of these attacks in silence, preferring to let his work stand for itself, but his reputation was certainly damaged by his closeness to Pound, and their perceived closeness does appear to have impaired the ability of many of Zukofsky's contemporaries to assess his accomplishments dispassionately.⁴⁹

Other “Objectivists”

In addition to Pound and the seven writers already described as core “Objectivists,” Zukofsky’s two “Objectivist” publications included more than twenty other writers, each of whom should also be considered part of what Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain have termed the “Objectivist nexus.” Of these, Robert McAlmon and Kenneth Rexroth perhaps deserve special note, as they were the only other authors to appear in both foundational “Objectivist” publications, and each participated in abortive publication schemes involving other members of this group during the 1920s and 1930s. Recalling the network graph visualization imagined earlier, I have chosen not to include them among the core largely because both writers remained on the fringes of the group. While Niedecker and Rakosi were similarly peripheral in the 1930s, their subsequent careers, particularly their activity in the 1960s, showed that they (and other members of the core group) thought of themselves as members of a network in ways that McAlmon and Rexroth did not.

⁴⁸ “Pain Without Finish,” 23-24.

⁴⁹ Williams and Zukofsky both contributed to Charles Norman's 1948 pamphlet *The Case of Ezra Pound*, giving their views of their old friend as he was preparing to stand trial for treason. Zukofsky wrote: “I should prefer to say nothing now. But a preference for silence might be misinterpreted by even the closest friends. When he was here in 1939, I told him that I did not doubt his integrity had decided his political action, but I pointed to his head, indicating something had gone wrong. ... He approached literature and music at that depth. His profound and intimate knowledge and practice of these things still leave that part of his mind entire. ... He may be condemned or forgiven. Biographers of the future may find his character as charming a subject as that of Aaron Burr. It will matter very little against his finest work overshadowed in his lifetime by the hell of Belsen which he overlooked” (55-57).

Neither McAlmon nor Rexroth ever developed deep connections with any but one other member of the group (Williams in McAlmon's case and Zukofsky in Rexroth's).

Writers Published in the "OBJECTIVISTS" 1931 issue of Poetry

As a group, the "Objectivists" were invented and publicly presented through the publication of the "OBJECTIVISTS" 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine, a special "number" which the magazine's regular editor, Harriet Monroe, had entirely given over to Louis Zukofsky at the urging of Ezra Pound. With space given to him, Zukofsky set out an "Objectivist" program, advanced the critical principles of "sincerity" and "objectification" in a critical essay on the poetry of Charles Reznikoff, provided his own translation of a brief essay by his friend René Taupin on the poetry of André Salmon, and presented poetry and prose from more than twenty contributors. Biographical sketches for each of these original "Objectivists" are given below, in order of their appearance in the February 1931 issue of *Poetry*.

Carl Rakosi, Four Poems

Core "Objectivist."

Louis Zukofsky, [Seventh movement of "A"](#)

Inventor of the term "Objectivist" and chief instigator of the group.

Howard Weeks, ["What Furred Creature"](#)

[Howard Percy Weeks](#) was born on December 13, 1899 in Rochester, New York to Percy Benson Weeks, a varnish salesman, and F. Estelle "Stella" Bush. Weeks enrolled at the [University of Michigan](#) in 1918 and published his own writing regularly in [The Michigan Chimes](#), a student magazine for which he served as humor writer. Weeks graduated in 1921 with a bachelor's degree from the

College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and married Virginia Morrison, the daughter of William Morrison and Ella Peppers, in Detroit on September 26, 1922.

The couple applied for a passport that same year to take a three-month honeymoon in Europe, stating their intention to depart from Montreal in late September and travel to England, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. Like his older brother Albert, Weeks worked as a journalist. I've been unable to uncover much more about his life and career apart from the fact that he died of a streptococcus infection after an extended illness on June 10, 1928, nearly three years before the publication of the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*.

As a poet, Weeks had been "discovered" by Ezra Pound, who published his poem "Stunt Piece" in the third issue of *The Exile*, and thought enough of it to include it in his *Profile* anthology in 1932, writing: "By 1928 Mr Weeks found material for satire in Mr. Eliot's imitators and detached the externals."⁵⁰ In his essay on *Small Magazines* published in the November 1930 issue of *The English Journal*, Pound wrote: "I printed very little of Weeks because he seemed to me a man of great promise; one felt that his work was bound to be ever so much better in the course of the next few months. The few months were denied him."⁵¹ Zukofsky wrote to Pound on November 6, 1930 with detailed responses to some of Pound's inquiries about his editing of what would become the "OBJECTIVISTS" 1931 issue of *Poetry*. Near the end of that letter he asked Pound: "Never saw too much in Weeks either, but very little outside of Xile was printed—Have you any?"⁵² Pound presumably sent Zukofsky some of Weeks' work, including "Furred Creature," which Zukofsky included in *Poetry*. There is no evidence that Pound, Zukofsky, or anyone else in the "Objectivist"

⁵⁰ *Profile*, 111.

⁵¹ See: <http://library.brown.edu/cds/mjp/pdf/smallmagazines.pdf#page=13>.

⁵² *Pound/Zukofsky*, 68.

circle ever met Weeks in person, and only Pound appears to have corresponded with him before his death in 1928.

Robert McAlmon, “[Fortuno Carraccioli](#)“

Robert Menzies McAlmon was born in Clifton, Kansas on March 9, 1895, the youngest of ten children in a family headed by his father, John Alexander McAlmon, an Irish-born Princeton graduate and Presbyterian minister. McAlmon spent much of his childhood in Minnesota and Madison, South Dakota, and described much of his upbringing, including his close friendship with Gore Vidal’s father Eugene, in his fictionalized 1924 memoir *Village: As It Happened Through a Fifteen Year Period*. At sixteen he left school to pursue a career as a journalist, working briefly as the editor of a small city paper before being dismissed when the owner discovered he had lied about his age. McAlmon then worked in advertising for the National Advertising Agency and briefly attended college before joining the Army Air Corps near the end of World War I. Following the war’s end, McAlmon enrolled at the University of Southern California and worked as a feature editor for the Rockwell Field Weekly Flight, an aviation newspaper published out of San Diego, but eventually left California and moved to New York City.

In 1920, shortly after arriving in New York City, McAlmon met William Carlos Williams at a party hosted by the avant-garde poet Lola Ridge. McAlmon and Williams quickly struck up a friendship and soon after became joint publishers of *Contact*, a cheaply-produced little magazine. Together, they published four issues of *Contact* between December 1920 and the summer of 1921.⁵³ In February 1921, McAlmon entered into marriage of convenience with Bryher (Annie Winifred

⁵³ Williams published a fifth and final issue of *Contact* with [Monroe Wheeler](#) in June 1923, and revived the title of the magazine for a second run in 1932.

Glover), H.D.'s lover and the daughter of Sir John Ellerman, one of the wealthiest men in Britain. Following their marriage, McAlmon and Bryher moved to London (which McAlmon hated) and then to Paris, where McAlmon used his father-in-law's wealth to found the Contact Publishing Company and publish important modernist writing under the Contact Editions imprint, including books by his wife Bryher (Annie Ellerman), Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Williams and himself.⁵⁴

McAlmon's first book, a collection of poems entitled *Explorations*, was published in 1921 by Harriet Shaw Weaver's The Egoist Press. McAlmon followed *Explorations* with several more books published by his own Contact Publishing Company throughout the 1920s. These included the short story collections *A Hasty Bunch* (1922) and *A Companion Volume* (1923); two loosely-autobiographical, largely plotless prose works: *Post-Adolescence* (1923) and *Village* (1924); *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales* (1925), a collection of stories dealing with the 1920s gay subculture in Berlin; and the poetry collections *The Portrait of a Generation* (1926) and *North America, Continent of Conjecture* (1929).

McAlmon and Bryher divorced in 1927 and Contact Editions ceased publishing new work in 1929. McAlmon shuttled between Europe and the United States for much of the 1930s, including a longish stint spent in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He published three books in the decade, including the story collection *The Indefinite Huntress and Other Stories* (1932) with the Black Sun Press in Paris, the poetry collection *Not Alone Lost* (1937) with James Laughlin's New Directions Press and *Being Geniuses Together* (1938), his memoir of the years he spent in Paris among artists and expatriates, published in London by Secker and Warburg. McAlmon was living in France when the Germans occupied Paris, but managed to depart Nazi-occupied France (via Portugal) for the United States in

⁵⁴ For a good description of Bryher and McAlmon's relationship, see Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, 357-362.

1940. Following his return to the United States, McAlmon worked for several years for his family's medical supply company and moved around the southwestern United States, battling alcoholism. He died in Palm Springs, California on February 2, 1956, leaving behind a handful of unpublished manuscripts.

Following his death, the University of Nebraska English professor Robert Knoll authored a brief study of McAlmon's life and work, *Robert McAlmon: Expatriate Publisher and Writer* (1959), which included a forward by William Carlos Williams, and shortly thereafter edited *McAlmon and the Lost Generation: A Self Portrait* (1962), which was largely comprised of McAlmon's autobiographical writing. In 1963, more sexually explicit versions of some of the stories included in *Distinguished Air* were published by Belmont Books in New York under the title *There Was a Rustle of Black Silk Stockings*, and in 1968, Kay Boyle revived and revised McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together*, interspersing her own reminiscences as interchapters between lightly edited versions of McAlmon's original work. This new edition of *Being Geniuses Together* was published to some acclaim by Doubleday.

In 1975, Sanford Smoller published a biography of McAlmon, entitled [*Adrift Among Geniuses*](#), with Pennsylvania State University Press, and in 2007, the University of Illinois Press published *The Nightghouls of Paris*, a previously unpublished work of thinly veiled autobiographical fiction which Smoller had edited from a surviving manuscript. Many of [McAlmon's papers](#) are now held by Yale University's Beinecke Library.

Joyce Hopkins, "[University: Old-Time](#)"

"Joyce Hopkins," was a fictional pseudonym invented by Zukofsky, probably intended as a literary in-joke combining the names of James Joyce and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Zukofsky fashioned the one-line poem "University: Old-Time" from a line in a letter describing the efforts of

his friend Irving Kaplan's wife Dorothy to help elderly citizens in Napa, California apply for state pensions.⁵⁵ Kaplan is probably the same person referred to in several of Zukofsky's letters at Roger Kaigh and at several points in early movements of "A" as Kay.

Irving Kaplan was born in Dzialava, Poland on September 23, 1900, and emigrated to New York City with his parents while a young child. He became a U.S. citizen when his father Morris Kaplan was naturalized in 1910 or 1911, and attended public schools in New York City before enrolling at the City College of New York for a year. After a year at City College, Kaplan transferred to Columbia University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1923 and befriended Zukofsky, Whittaker Chambers, Meyer Schapiro, and other classmates. Kaplan did some graduate work at Columbia and attended Fordham Law School in 1928 and 1929, but left without completing a law degree.

On September 6, 1928, Kaplan married Dorothy Herbst in Manhattan, and the couple lived at 221 Linden Boulevard, near Prospect Park in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn, where Kaplan worked as an accountant. In the fall of 1929 the Kaplans moved to Berkeley, California, where Dorothy enrolled in graduate school at the University of California and Irving worked as an economist for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Zukofsky visited the Kaplans in Berkeley during the summer of 1930, and wrote large portions of the sixth and seventh movements of "A"

⁵⁵ Zukofsky offers a gloss on the poem in a December 14, 1931 letter to Ezra Pound: "Jerce 'opkins, again? That's funny!! Napa—a kind of weed growing in Napa, Calif. I don't know why Persephone's husband, romanized, shdn't be on the west coast now. I don't know that Napa has a university, but it might as well have. The literal meaning of this famous epigram was the bare statement in a letter of Roger Kaigh [a pseudonym for Kaplan] to Mr. L.Z.—D. (Dorothy his spouse, who was dispensing pensions to old folk) is in Napa trailing the sterilized. I added the title & lower-cased napa—which word you can find in Webster's international. I looked it up after I myself <had> begun to doubt the meaning of the poem. The allegorical meaning is that L.Z. in Wisconsin was Pluto in hell following a lot of emasculated peripatetics (tho' it is even doubtful these walked or were ever unemasculated). The anagogical meaning is that even evil (Dis) implies redemption" (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 120-121).

from the attic of their home at 1110 Miller Avenue before taking up his teaching position that Fall at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In the spring of 1932, Zukofsky and Jerry Reisman traveled to Berkeley to visit the Kaplans again, and Reisman remembered Kaplan as a frequent visitor to Zukofsky's apartment in New York City in the early-mid 1930s.⁵⁶ The Kaplans left California in July 1935 for Washington D.C., where Irving worked as a statistician and administrator for a number of federal government agencies, including the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Works Administration and the Office of Production Management (also known as the War Production Board). From late 1935 until the summer of 1938, he worked in Philadelphia under the direction of Harold Weintraub as the Associate Director of the National Research Project on Reemployment Opportunities and Recent Changes in Industrial Techniques of the Works Progress Administration. In 1937, as Whittaker Chambers began to plan his defection from the Soviet underground, Kaplan helped his old college friend and fellow Communist find a job with the WPA.⁵⁷

In 1938, Kaplan left the WPA and returned to Washington D.C. to take a job in the Justice Department working for the Assistant Attorney General Thurman Arnold in connection with the Temporary National Economic Committee. In February 1940, Kaplan took a position as an economist with the Federal Works Administration, and remained there until 1942, when he

⁵⁶ For more on Roger Kaigh/Irving Kaplan, see Andrew Crozier's "[Paper Bunting](#)" in *Sagetrieb* 14:3 (Winter 1995), 45-75.

⁵⁷ Chambers testified before HUAC in 1948 that while beginning to look for government work, he had been referred to Kaplan, his old college friend, and spent an evening with him in Philadelphia, and that within a matter of days Kaplan had arranged a position for Chambers with the federal government. Chambers began work as a "Report Editor" on the National Research Project in October 1937 and was furloughed in February 1938, following which time he found literary translation work through his old college friend Meyer Schapiro.

transferred to the Office of Production Management.⁵⁸ From July through December 1945, Kaplan worked for the finance department of the United States military government in Germany, serving in an important capacity as the economic advisor on liberated areas. From 1948 to 1952 Kaplan again worked under David Weintraub, spending these years as an economic officer for the United Nations.

Kaplan's employment at the United Nations ended precipitously in 1952, however, when he has summoned to testify before HUAC after being the subject of accusations of subversive Communist activity levelled against him by Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers.⁵⁹ Following his appearance before HUAC, which concluded with Congressman Donald Jackson stating that he was "personally convinced that [Kaplan] was a Communist and that he undoubtedly is a Communist today," Kaplan was fired from his position at the United Nations and screened out of government employment.

Kaplan appears to have remained concerned with the United States' relationship with the U.S.S.R. and other Communist states throughout the intervening decade, however, writing a letter to President Johnson objecting to U.S. military involvement in Vietnam in May 1964 and forwarding it to Senator Wayne Morse, praising Morse for his "valiant work on the issue involved ... pressing our Government toward a policy of peace and reason."⁶⁰ About Kaplan's later years I have been able to

⁵⁸ The 1940 census lists the Kaplans as living at 5315 Edmunds Place in Washington, D.C. and records Kaplan as making \$5400 a year as an economist for the Federal Works Administration.

⁵⁹ Bentley accused him of being a member of the Silvermaster spy group and paying dues to the Perlo group. More context for Bentley's accusations can be found in "[The Shameful Years](#)," a HUAC report issued in December 1951. Kaplan's testimony before HUAC in 1952 can be read at <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=odgIAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PA3366>.

⁶⁰ This letter was one of several letters opposed to U.S. involvement in South Vietnam which Morse submitted to the Congressional Record in 1964 and can be read in full at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1964-pt9/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1964-pt9-10.pdf#page=40>.

discover little, other than that the Social Security records list him as having died on July 17, 1988, aged 87.

Charles Reznikoff, “[A Group of Verse](#)“

Core “Objectivist.”

Norman Macleod, “[Song for the Turquoise People](#)“

Norman Wicklund Macleod was born in Salem, Oregon in 1906. While an undergraduate at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque in the late 1920s, Macleod founded a series of increasingly ambitious little magazines, including *Jackass* (1928), *Palo Verde* (1928-1929), *The Morada* (1929-1930), and *Front* (1930-1931), the latter two of which displayed Macleod’s growing interest in international literature and radical left-wing politics, and which published featured work by Pound, Zukofsky, and several other “Objectivists.”

Front ceased publication after its fourth issue, and Macleod moved to Los Angeles to attend graduate school the University of Southern California from 1931-1932. Before finishing his degree, Macleod moved to New York City, where he worked as a reader and circulation assistant for the publisher Harper & Brothers from 1932-1934. During his time in New York, Macleod befriended Zukofsky and Williams and even received Williams’ approval to take over editing the second run of *Contact* following Williams’ resignation in 1933, but the magazine folded before publishing any further issues.⁶¹

⁶¹ See *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 146.

Macleod and Williams remained friends for several years, with Williams including a “Poem for Norman Macleod” in his 1935 collection *An Early Martyr and Other Poems*.⁶² In 1934, Macleod briefly left New York to attend the University of Oklahoma, but was back in New York City by 1935, when he married Vivienne Koch, a literary scholar who published an early critical study of William Carlos Williams’ poetry. With Koch’s encouragement, Macleod made a final attempt at graduate school, this time earning a master’s degree in English from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1936.

In 1939, Macleod helped William Kolodney found the Poetry Center at the 92nd Street Young Men’s Hebrew Association (now called the [Unterberg Poetry Center at the 92nd Street Y](#)), where he worked until 1942. In March of that year, Macleod appeared with Zukofsky and two other poets on a panel about democracy and the poet’s responsibility during wartime at the Poetry Center,⁶³ and later that year Macleod left the Poetry Center to take a teaching job at the University of Maryland (where he edited the *Maryland Quarterly* from 1942-1944). In 1944, Macleod returned to New York, taking a teaching position at Briarcliff College (where he edited the *Briarcliff Quarterly* from 1944-1947). In October 1946, Macleod published a special William Carlos Williams issue of *Briarcliff Quarterly* and included Williams’s “Choral: The Pink Church,” a poem which had been set to music by Celia Zukofsky.

In 1946, Macleod and Koch divorced, and shortly thereafter Macleod left New York City again, embarking on a varied and peripatetic teaching career, holding positions over the next two decades at Lehigh University, Savannah State College (now Savannah State University), San

⁶² *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Vol. 1*, 401.

⁶³ According to Barry Ahearn, Macleod and Zukofsky were joined by Robert Goffin and Sheamus O’Sheal in addressing the questions “What has American poetry contributed to the democratic tradition? What is the American poet’s responsibility in the present war?” (*The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 300-301).

Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University), and the University of Baghdad.

Macleod accepted a position at Pembroke State University (now the University of North Carolina at Pembroke) in 1967, founded *Pembroke* magazine in 1969, and later directed the university's Creative Writing program. In 1973, he received the Horace Gregory Award (a national award created in 1969 to honor emeritus faculty members for their social contributions to arts, letters and research) for his work as a poet, an editor, and a teacher, and he retired from both teaching and editing *Pembroke* in 1979, six years before his death in Greenville, North Carolina on June 5, 1985.

Macleod published several collections of poetry, including *Horizons of Death* (1934), *Thanksgiving Before November* (1936), *We Thank You All the Time* (1941), *A Man in Midpassage* (1947), *Pure as Nowhere* (1962), *Selected Poems* (1975), and *The Distance: New and Selected Poems, 1928–1977* (1977). Macleod's published prose works include two novels: *You Get What You Ask For* (1939) and *The Bitter Roots* (1941), and the autobiography *I Never Lost Anything in Istanbul* (1978). Macleod's papers are now held by [Yale University](#), the [University of Delaware](#), and the [University of New Mexico](#).

Kenneth Rexroth, “[Last Page of a Manuscript](#)“

Kenneth Charles Marion Rexroth was born in South Bend, Indiana on December 22, 1905, and recounted many of his early life experiences in his raucous 1966 memoir *An Autobiographical Novel*. Rexroth published his first poems in Charles Henri Ford's little magazine *Blues*, where he appeared alongside Pound, Williams, and Zukofsky, as well as fellow “Objectivists” Carl Rakosi, Norman Macleod, Harry Roskolenko, and Richard Johns. His first wife Andrée Dutcher, a talented artist, even designed the cover of *Blues* 7.

In November 1930, Zukofsky wrote to Rexroth (who was then living in San Francisco) to solicit work for the upcoming issue of *Poetry* he was editing, explaining that he had read his poetry in *Blues*. Rexroth replied at length, and he and Zukofsky struck up an extended, intellectually intense correspondence.⁶⁴ Zukofsky subsequently included work by Rexroth in both the “OBJECTIVISTS” 1931 issue of *Poetry* and in *An ‘Objectivists’ Anthology*, where to the bafflement of Rakosi and others in the group Rexroth was given nearly 40 pages, making him second only to Zukofsky in total page count among writers included in the anthology.⁶⁵ Despite the intensity of their correspondence, Rexroth and Zukofsky did not meet in person until 1957, when Zukofsky spent the summer teaching in San Francisco.⁶⁶

Though Rexroth knew others of the “Objectivists,” his relationships with other members of the group were never good. At Zukofsky’s urging, Rexroth and his then wife Andrée met George and Mary Oppen in San Francisco shortly before the Oppens left for France in 1930, but the couples did not get along well and their contact was limited to a few social engagements.⁶⁷ For a time in the early 1930s, Rakosi appeared to believe that Rexroth’s mooted RMR Press would publish a

⁶⁴ For those interested to better understand the nature of Rexroth and Zukofsky’s relationship, significant portions of their correspondence have been published. Mark Scroggins presents two long letters from Rexroth to Zukofsky in the early 1930s detailing his philosophical and poetic stances and his disagreements with Zukofsky’s positions in a special Rexroth centenary issue of the *Chicago Review* in 2006: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25742335>, and several long letters from Zukofsky to Rexroth can be found in the edition of Zukofsky’s selected letters edited by Barry Ahearn and published on Z-Site: <http://www.z-site.net/selected-letters-of-louis-zukofsky/> (46-62, 64-72, 138-144, 186-200).

⁶⁵ This includes the entirety of Rexroth’s “Prolegomena to a Theodicy,” which occupied a full 25 pages. In the same anthology, Zukofsky published a four page “revision” of Rexroth’s “Prolegomena,” as a “collaboration,” along with his editorial note that “the suggestion was that Part A of Prolegomena to a Theodicy, as well as the entire poem, would be improved by printing Part A a. above” and Rexroth’s protestation that “I have read this over once more. I cannot allow it to be printed with my signature. You can append a note that it has been abridged by L.Z., if you wish, or print it entire or don’t print it at all. It simply makes no sense to me at all” (*An ‘Objectivists’ Anthology*, 192).

⁶⁶ That same year, Rexroth praised Zukofsky as “one of the most important poets of my generation” in his review of Zukofsky’s recently published collection *Some Time*.

⁶⁷ In *Meaning a Life*, Mary Oppen wrote: “As our year in Belvedere drew to a close and we were preparing to take ship for France, Kenneth Rexroth paid us visit. He had recently come from Chicago, and he probably looked us up because he was in correspondence with Louis; it was but a brief encounter” (106).

collection of his poems, but nothing ever came of this, and the two men had a superficial acquaintance in later years.⁶⁸ For his part, Williams was impressed with Rexroth's 1944 book *The Phoenix and the Tortoise*, but did not like his earlier "Objectivist"-period writing.⁶⁹ As interest in the "Objectivists" began to grow in the 1960s, Rexroth contributed to a number of false rumors about his former acquaintances, telling several people that Rakosi had been a secret Stalinist agent and privately accusing George Oppen of having being a hit man for the Communist Party, neither of which was even remotely true. While he deigned to describe Oppen as "a remarkable poet" in one interview, he also seems to have pursued an affair with George's wealthy and well-connected sister June Oppen Degnan.⁷⁰

Rexroth's relationship to the core "Objectivists" in the late 1920s and early 1930s was largely peripheral and was accomplished primarily through Zukofsky, about whom Rexroth would later claim: "Almost all of the people that Zukofsky picked as Objectivists, didn't agree with him, didn't write like him or like one another, and didn't want to be called Objectivists."⁷¹ However sincere this criticism may have been, it didn't stop Rexroth from insisting on his own centrality at the 1973 National Poetry Conference dedicated to the "Objectivists" in Allendale, Michigan. According to his biographer Linda Hamalian:

⁶⁸ For a good account of Rexroth's association with Zukofsky, Oppen, and Rakosi in the 1930s, see *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 70-76.

⁶⁹ After reading Rexroth's *The Phoenix and the Tortoise*, Williams would write to James Laughlin in November 1944: "Rexroth (King Red) has finally emerged into something very firm and perceptive—hard to say how good he is now (and how bad I found him formerly) It takes everything a man has to be a good artist and then he only succeeds by luck sometimes. . . . [T]here is—as there must be—a genius of the American language. I mean not a human genius but an abstract of the language we speak which must be realized by everyone before we can have a literature. . . . Rexroth is a step in the right direction, not fully as yet realized, he is too bitter, not exalted enough by discoveries of method as the artist must be, the line, the turn of phrase etc etc . . . But he is good" (*Williams / Laughlin*, 104).

⁷⁰ See *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 138-141, 389, 408.

⁷¹ *American Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, 111.

Suffering from a bad back and in a vile mood, Rexroth had shown up a day late. He stormed into the conference dining room and cried, “They can’t do this to me.” Without saying hello, he walked to by the table where Mary and George Oppen, Robert Duncan, Leah and Carl Rakosi were sitting. He was irritated that he had been given a bunk in student quarters, like everyone else.”⁷²

Despite his peripheral relationship to the “Objectivists,” Rexroth was undeniably a central figure in the [San Francisco Renaissance](#) and conducted a long and eventful career as a poet and translator on the West Coast before his death in Montecito, California on June 6, 1982. Rexroth was a prolific author of both poetry and prose, and several of his books remain in print, including a number of translations and edited collections. The Bureau of Public Secrets (operated by Ken Knabb) maintains [a useful guide](#) to many of Rexroth’s published writings, though the site is not easy on the eyes. Linda Hamalian published her biography, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, in 1991, and Copper Canyon Press published *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth*, edited by Sam Hamill and Bradford Morrow, in 2002. Many of Rexroth’s papers are located in Los Angeles, split between collections at [USC](#) and [UCLA](#).

S. Theodore Hecht, “[Table for Christmas](#)“

Samuel Theodore [Ted] Hecht was born July 11, 1895 in Austria, and emigrated to the United States as a young child. Hecht attended Columbia University, where he served on the editorial board of the student literary magazine *The Morningside* with Zukofsky and Whittaker Chambers, and became a close lifelong friend of Zukofsky’s. After graduation, he married Katherine [Kate] (born in 1897 or 1898) and worked as a high school English teacher in the New York City

⁷² *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 389.

area. In addition to his poem in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*, Hecht also published short fiction in Richard Johns’ magazine *Pagany*.⁷³

Zukofsky refers to Hecht in a letter to Ezra Pound dated August 12, 1928: “As I have already intimated Bill [William Carlos Williams] thinks he wants a group, but probably doesn’t. I myself think more than five “real lives” would be too much. At least, for me, one is enough. I’d like Cummings—so would Bill (he had him out once). Both shy, they wd. take long to thaw. Marianne [Moore], yes, but would she? I’ll ask Bill. Add myself—and you have four—three arrived, and one to keep in touch with the younger generation, I mean, such people as I know—Whittaker Chambers, T.S. Hecht, Henry Zolinsky (whose stuff you recently rejected), John Gassner and maybe one or two others.”⁷⁴ Zukofsky also mentioned his friendship with the Hechts in several letters to René Taupin, telling him in November 1930 that he “heard also Ted Hecht wrote you — go see him, if you want to — I hope you’ll like each other. You know, of course, what close friends Kate, Ted & I are — so close that I feel like a fish saying we are.”⁷⁵

The Hechts had two sons, Joseph (born June 27, 1926, died of scarlet fever in a US Naval Hospital on May 4, 1945) and Jaime (born April 23, 1929, died April 19, 2006). In *Meaning a Life*, Mary Oppen recalls being introduced to the Hechts by Zukofsky shortly before Jaime’s birth:

We went once with Louis to visit his friends Kate and Ted and their two-year-old-son Joe, who played Bach for himself on a little wind-up phonograph. Kate, a heavy matriarchal woman, was huge with her second child, soon to be born [Jamie was born on April 23, 1929]; Ted was teaching in a Staten Island high school, and they were living in a non-Jewish neighborhood near Ted’s school . . . Kate and Ted clung to Louis, who was precursor for them in areas where they still felt strange and isolated. George and I may have been their

⁷³ His story “Mamie’s Papa” appeared in the Summer 1930 issue. Two other stories, “Henry Convalescing” and “Winter Stories” were announced for future publication in *Pagany* in 1932 and 1933, though neither ever appeared in the magazine. The manuscript for “Henry Convalescing” is held among the *Pagany* papers at the University of Delaware.

⁷⁴ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 16.

⁷⁵ Letter from Louis Zukofsky to René Taupin, November 7, 1930, Taupin MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

first experience of a couple with no experience of the ghetto. Kate behaved as though she was jealous of Louis' friendship with us; she was afraid, perhaps, that she would be abandoned by Louis, who indeed found them to be a heavy responsibility ... Next day Kate phoned me and said, "Mary, would you and George consider moving in with us, and would you take care of Joey when I go to the hospital?" ...

We were puzzled that Kate chose us—why us? She had not appeared to be at all comfortable with us in her house. George would have to commute to work, but I was tired of city streets, and it was nearly spring. We decided to say yes, so I called Kate and told her, "We'll move in; we'll share expenses until you have the baby."

The baby was delayed, and we were well acquainted but still strange to each other by the time Kate went to the hospital. ... [Ted] dismissed us as soon as he returned from the hospital, "Another boy!" The baby was born and he, Ted, needed us no longer, but Kate wasn't yet home and we were eating supper, Ted was very high with the birth of one more son. He began telling me in great detail how to accomplish each act of housework within the house that I had been doing, apparently satisfactorily, with Kate's approval. Ted was busily demonstrating how to dispose of garbage, wrapping it in newspaper, tying it with string. Somehow he had forgotten that it was Kate who had carried and given birth to the baby, also satisfactorily. Ted was filled with his own importance, his son, his sons! Males, like him! He became round and puffed with his own role—George and I were not audience enough. I was annoyed and wished to bring him back to some simplicity and awareness that he still needed me; that Kate was not yet home from the hospital and that I was going to be there with the first-born tomorrow when Ted went to work. I stood before him and not being able to break through his talk walked up to him and began unbuttoning his jacket, his vest, symbolically to strip him of his unbearable masculine take-over of the roles of two women on whom he was dependent.

Kate came home after ten days in the hospital, and the next day we left. "We want to be alone now with our new baby and Joe," she said.⁷⁶

Zukofsky also introduced the Hechts to Bill and Flossie Williams, and the two couples became friends, a relationship that was strengthened when the Hechts moved from Paterson, New Jersey to a home on 52 Wheaton Place in Rutherford, around half a mile from the Williams' family home at 9 Ridge Road. Williams and Zukofsky's letters to each other contain several references to their ongoing mutual friendship with the Hechts, the last of which is dated 1955. Ted Hecht died in April 1972.

⁷⁶ *Meaning a Life*, 91-93.

George Oppen, “[1930’s](#)“

Core “Objectivist.”

Harry Roskolenkier, “[Supper in an Alms-House](#)“

Harry Roskolenko was born in New York City on September 21, 1907 to Jewish immigrant parents from the Ukraine. His parents had had eight children in the Ukraine, none of who survived to adulthood, and six more in the United States, of which Harry was the second youngest.⁷⁷

In his memoir *When I Was Last on Cherry Street* Roskolenko vividly describes a lively though often violent and sometimes brutal childhood spent near his family’s home, a crowded tenement building at 362 Cherry Street in the city’s Lower East Side. Roskolenko’s father worked in a slaughterhouse until he nearly lost his leg to frostbite after being accidentally locked overnight in a freezer, and his mother, who ran a small newspaper stand, lost her right arm in an accident with an ice truck when Roskolenko was a child. Largely self-educated, Roskolenko had worked in a factory by age ten and ran away from home following a violent quarrel with his father shortly after his bar mitzvah.

By age fourteen, Roskolenko had worked briefly in a country store in the Catskills, as a sailor on a coal barge, and by sixteen he had joined the merchant marine, losing his virginity to a prostitute in Tampico, Mexico and making voyages to England, Germany, France by the time he was sixteen. In 1924, Roskolenko returned to New York City, working a series of part-time jobs and taking high

⁷⁷ The opening lines of Roskolenko’s memoir *When I Was Last on Cherry Street* are stunningly direct: “Of the fourteen children we might have been, the first eight were born in the Ukraine and the next six on the Lower East Side of New York. I was to be the thirteenth. My little Russian brothers and sisters all died in the Ukraine from various infantile diseases, but New York was healthier. It killed only one of us, and that by more mechanical means. My oldest sister, Esther, died at the age of sixteen when a truck ran her down on Lafayette Street on her birthday. We celebrated in the funeral parlor and before a hole in the ground” (1).

school courses at night. In 1926, he again joined the merchant marine taking a position on a ship which made regular service between New York and the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen, on which assignments he spent several months in Hamburg.

In October 1927, Roskolenko returned to New York and made peace with his father, whom he had not seen spoken with since running away seven years earlier, visiting him at the family's new home in the Bronx. Roskolenko accumulated a small fund of savings from a brief but lucrative stint as a bootlegger and lived cheaply, frequently spending his days reading in the New York Public Library and his evenings in Greenwich Village with Marxist radicals and other would-be poets, including [Herman Spector](#), a fellow Marxist poet who had published work in Pound's *The Exile* and was a contributing editor to *New Masses*. Roskolenko recalled that

it was through Spector's intervention that I had my first poem published. I suspected that I was one proletarian he could accept. I had, by then, done everything with my hands; and now, the whirl of the imagination had jacked me up—to whirl with other revolutionary poets. Spector, one day at the library, took a poem from my pocket, wrote a note, mailed an envelope, and soon my first poem, "Head Over an Orange," appeared in a magazine called *Blues*, edited by two southern gentlemen, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler. I was in the great companionship of experimentalists ... and soon other poems, with Spector's few flattering impulsive letters, were to appear in *Pogany*, an esthetic organ ... and then came the revolutionary periodical. ... Finally, Louis Zukofsky, the founder of *Objectivism*, printed me in a special issue of *Poetry* magazine—and he called me an *Objectivist*. But I objected to being in any school. I objected to almost everything else too. It was time to talk revolution.⁷⁸

In the summer of 1928, Roskolenko and a friend hitchhiked across the country, meeting other poets and radicals in the western United States. Roskolenko was a committed Trotskyite, and wrote that he "was told by their leaders to join the official Communist Party, to bore from within as their secret agent; to spread, quietly and subtly, Leon Trotsky's opposition to Stalin's policies on world-wide political and economic questions."⁷⁹ Roskolenko writes that upon his return to New

⁷⁸ *When I Was Last on Cherry Street*, 110.

⁷⁹ *When I Was Last on Cherry Street*, 125.

York City, he duly joined the Communist Party of America, co-founded a proletarian theater company, and got a job working for the city as a drawbridge operator. After a failed attempt to form a Drawbridge Workers Union, he was fired from his job and shortly thereafter officially expelled from the Communist Party for his criticism of Stalin, though he remained active in the tiny Communist League of America and contributed to their irregularly produced Trotskyite newspaper *The Militant*.

It's unclear to what degree Roskolenko and Zukofsky knew each other personally at the time of Roskolenko's appearance in *Poetry*, but the men had similar family backgrounds and political inclinations, and Zukofsky certainly was familiar with Roskolenko's previously published work in both *Blues* and the *New Masses*. In a December 12, 1930 letter to Ezra Pound, Zukofsky wrote:

Anyway, I'll have to launch the issue with what I've got. Mike [Gold, editor of the *New Masses*] shd. be pleased with my redemption of Comrade Roskolenkier—& you shd. see what I had to do to wade thru the stuff & then come out after putting it together (???) with—dignity. I mean certain lines in one poem naturally belong in another—signed L.Z.—But what will happen if I stop running my correspondence courses? If I redeem another “poet” after Sat. Nov. 13, I'll shoot myself.”⁸⁰

Roskolenko also published poems in both the Spring and Summer 1932 issues of Richard Johns' magazine *Pagany*.⁸¹

In 1930, Roskolenko met and began a romantic relationship with [Friede Rothe](#), a young Russian-born pianist who later became well-known as a musical journalist and publicist. After several years of poverty and insecurity, Roskolenko landed a job as a researcher with the Writers' Project of the Works Project Administration in 1935, which allowed him and Friede to rent a

⁸⁰ Pound/Zukofsky, 82.

⁸¹ His contributor's note to *Pagany* read: “Harry Roskolenkier is twenty-four years of age; has been a sailor and an oiler on drawbridges. His work has appeared in *Blues*, *The Left*, *Poetry*, *Nativity*, *Revolutionary Anthology of 1931*, etc.” (*Pagany* 3:2 (Spring 1932), 152).

small two-room apartment on Morton Street. Roskolenko described his work as “research[ing], tongue in cheek and pencil in hand, and writ[ing] at the 42nd Street Library for twenty-three dollars a week ... work[ing] on, among other things, a maritime history of New York, a labor history, and a skiing guide” for a project which he described as “more of a Leftist five-ring circus than a fertile field for thought about research and writing. The communists, who were in the vast majority, had flooded the project with half-authors who had published only in their minds.”⁸²

In 1938, Roskolenko published his first collection of poetry, *Sequence of Violence*, which included an introduction by the urban historian Lewis Mumford. William Carlos Williams wrote a brief, damning review of Roskolenko’s book, though he did not publish it in his lifetime.⁸³

Roskolenko’s father died in 1939, and Roskolenko went to Prairie City, Illinois to assist James Decker in preparing *The Exiles’ Anthology*, an anthology of modern British and American poetry which he had edited with Helen Neville, for publication.⁸⁴ Upon his return from Illinois in late 1939, Friede told him that she was leaving him for another man, and Roskolenko’s violent reaction definitively ended their relationship (and nearly cost Friede her life).

⁸² *When I Was Last on Cherry Street*, 150-152.

⁸³ Williams’ review is included in *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets*, 101-102. The final paragraph reads: “I can see what Roskolenko is at. I don’t think he has succeeded. Yet, in spite of all that, that the book will never be read, that it doesn’t get anywhere, that there isn’t a well-made poem in it, that his words are as flat, often as the debacle he holds up to our disdain—the book is so bad, that by its very depravity it is impressive. It is senseless.”

⁸⁴ The book appeared in 1940. John Wheelwright, a fellow Trotskyite who had also been published in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*, had initially worked on the project, but withdrew before publication after a dispute with Roskolenko. In their introduction, the editors wrote: “Poetry and War, bastard twins, appear in this anthology as the Janus-faced hallucinations of contemporary political and aesthetic activity. This anthology has no set literary formula, nor do the editors wish to establish a new sound, sigh and feel school of poetical but psychic penetration.”

In 1941, Roskolenko published a second collection of poems, [*I Went Into the Country*](#), with the Press of James A. Decker.⁸⁵ In 1940 he succeeded in being registered as a conscientious objector with the Army draft board, but wrote a letter giving up his status and stating his willingness to be drafted into the United States Navy on June 21, 1941, the day before Germany attacked the Soviet Union. After some suspicious questioning regarding the coincidental timing of his letter, Roskolenko was accepted for military service and eventually received a commission as a second officer with the Army Transport Service. During the war he was stationed in New Guinea and Australia, where he became active in the literary scene, befriending Max Harris, the editor of *Angry Penguins*, a prominent Australian modernist poetry journal, and others in the *Angry Penguins* orbit. Harris assisted Roskolenko in publishing two volumes of his own poetry, [*A Second Summary*](#) (1944), and [*Notes from a Journey*](#) (1947), illustrated by Sidney Nolan.

Roskolenko also edited, with Elizabeth Lambert, a special Australian issue of the American poetry quarterly *Voices* ([Summer 1944](#)), which included some poems by the now infamous [Ern Malley](#), a fictional persona invented by two Australian servicemen poets to lampoon what they viewed as the idiocy and lax standards of modernist poetry and of Max Harris, in particular. Upon his return to the United States after the war, Roskolenko wrote a “Letter from America” feature for *Angry Penguins* magazine and solicited contributions from American writers he knew (including Kenneth Rexroth).

In 1948, Roskolenko married the Chinese-American writer [Diana Chang](#) and after Chang’s graduation from Barnard University in 1949, traveled with her to Paris, where she studied French

⁸⁵ Decker also published books by several other former “Objectivists” in the 1940s, including the first books for both Louis Zukofsky and Lorine Niedecker first books. For a complete list of the press’s publications, see <http://www.wiu.edu/libraries/archives/deckerPressBibliography.php>

symbolist poetry at the Sorbonne on a Fulbright. They returned to New York in September 1950, and had one child before divorcing in 1955.⁸⁶ In 1950, Roskolenko published [*Paris Poems*](#), a limited-edition chapbook with lithographs by the Chinese-French painter Zao Wou-ki.

From the 1950s onward, Roskolenko made his living almost entirely from his writing, publishing erotica and other hack work under an array of pseudonyms and contributing frequently under his own name to well-known intellectual magazines, including the *New York Times Book Review*, *New Republic* and *Partisan Review*. In 1952, he published [*Baedeker of a Bachelor: The Exotic Adventures and Bizarre Adventures of a Carefree Man*](#); in 1958, he published [*Poet on a Scooter*](#), an account of his traveling the world, largely aboard a Vespa scooter; and in 1962, he published [*White Man, Go!*](#), an account of his travels across the African continent. In 1968, he published a novel, [*Lan-Lan*](#), about a mixed-race love affair set in Cambodia. Roskolenko also published three well-regarded autobiographical works: [*When I Was Last on Cherry Street*](#) (1965), of which Sanford Sternlicht wrote “As a warts-and-all portrait of an intelligent and talented Jewish American man’s life in the first half of the twentieth century, *When I Was Last on Cherry Street* is unparalleled”; [*The Terrorized*](#) (1967), which primarily treated his post-war international adventures; and [*The Time That Was Then*](#) (1971), which consists of fifteen autobiographical essays largely dealing with his Lower East Side childhood.

In 1969, Roskolenko returned to Australia again, and published [*American Civilization*](#), a slim collection of poetry complete with illustrations by the well-known Australian artists Jack Olsen, Clifton Pugh, and Albert Tucker in Melbourne in 1970. Roskolenko died in New York City on July

⁸⁶ Chang is considered the first published Chinese-American novelist, and conducted a long and illustrious career, including a stint as a creative writing professor at Barnard College, her alma mater. Some of her correspondence and joint writing projects with Roskolenko are part of his papers at [Syracuse University](#), and a larger collection of her material from the 1950s onward are held at [Stony Brook University](#).

17, 1980. His papers are held at [Syracuse University](#), [Yale's Beinecke Library](#), and the [Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center](#) in Austin, Texas.⁸⁷

Whittaker Chambers, “[October 21st, 1926](#)”

Jay Vivian “Whittaker” Chambers was born on April 1, 1901 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Jay Chambers, a graphic artist for the *New York World*, and Laha Whittaker, a former provincial actress and waitress. His parents moved to Brooklyn shortly after his birth, eventually settling in Lynbrook, on Long Island, New York, where Chambers and his younger brother Richard (Ricky) spent largely unhappy childhoods. In July 1919, a few months after his eighteenth birthday, Chambers defied his mother’s wishes that he enroll in a prestigious university and left home with Anthony Muller, a friend who had been stationed abroad during the recently concluded First World War. Muller and Chambers had loosely discussed travelling to Mexico, and spent a few months doing manual labor in Washington and looking unsuccessfully for work in New Orleans. After depleting his savings, Chambers wired home for money and returned to the family home in November 1919, at which time his father got him a job in the mailroom at the advertising agency where he worked as an art director.

In 1920, Chambers decided to enroll at college, spending a few miserable days at Williams College in Massachusetts (his mother’s choice) before transferring to Columbia University. At Columbia, he reinvented himself as Whittaker Chambers, adopting his mother’s maiden name in place of the undesirably effete Vivian. Though he himself was then a Bible-reading Hoover-supporting Christian, many of Chambers’ closest friends at Columbia were Jewish (unsurprising, as

⁸⁷ For more on Roskolenko’s life, see his autobiographical trilogy and Sanford Sternlicht’s [The Tenement Saga: The Lower East Side and Early Jewish American Writers](#), 150-154.

Jews in those years comprised some 20% of the total student population. At NYU, the number was closer to 50%, and at City College, around 80%). Chambers' classmates and friends at Columbia included Mortimer Adler, Jacques Barzun, Clifton Fadiman, John Gassner, Irving Kaplan, Meyer Schapiro, Lionel Trilling, and Louis Zukofsky. Chambers' freshman composition instructor was Mark Van Doren, remembered today as one of Columbia's finest teachers, and Van Doren praised and encouraged Chambers' literary efforts and was a major influence on Chambers' burgeoning desire to become a poet.

Interested in developing his literary abilities, Chambers joined the staff of *Varsity*, an undergraduate magazine, and published a loosely autobiographical short story "The Damn Fool" in the March 1922 issue of *The Morningside*, the recently revived student literary magazine. At the end of his sophomore year, Chambers was elected *The Morningside's* editor-in-chief for the following year, and he oversaw the publication of the highly controversial "profanist" issue of *The Morningside*, published in October 1922. The issue included "A Play for Puppets" by "John Kelly" (an invented name Chambers used to conceal his identity), a short play which was dedicated to the Antichrist and featured lewd banter and a reluctantly resurrected Jesus. The backlash against the story and the "Profanist" issue was instant and severe, with the student committee on publications demanding Chambers' immediate resignation and threatening to suspend the magazine were it again to publish any content similar to "A Play for Puppets."

Chambers resigned his position, withdrew from courses, and left the university in January 1923. He spent the next several months drifting between his family home in Lynbrook and his friendships with other college-age writers in the city, before embarking on a three-month trip to Europe with his friends Meyer Schapiro and Henry Zolinsky in June 1923. Upon his return to New York, Chambers found a job working evenings in the newspaper room at the New York Public

Library and rented an apartment with Henry Bang, a fellow Columbia dropout, near City College in uptown Manhattan.

In the summer of 1924, their apartment caught fire and Chambers and Bang moved to a tent pitched on Long Island's Atlantic Beach, where they were frequently joined by college friends, including Louis Zukofsky and Henry Zolinsky.⁸⁸ Encouraged by the married woman he was having an affair with, Chambers also applied for readmission at Columbia, enrolling in classes in the Fall term, the same time that his younger brother Ricky enrolled at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York.

Chambers' didn't last long in his second stint at Columbia, however, dropping out again at the year's end, followed shortly by his younger brother, who returned to their family home and began his descent into an alcohol-fueled depression. The elder Chambers had also grown increasingly attracted to radical leftist politics during this time, joining the Workers Party of America (a legal front for the Communist Party) in New York City in February 1925 under the mentorship of longtime radical Sam Krieger.

In the summer of 1925, Chambers left his job at the library and hitchhiked around the American West for a month, joining the IWW while in Seattle and writing poetry. In the summer of 1926 he made a similar trip, this time traveling by automobile with the younger brother of his former roommate Henry Bang. He also had some of his first post-college literary successes, with his old

⁸⁸ Chambers describes the joys of the summer in his short play "On the Beach," published as "Julian Fichtner" in January 1926 in the CCNY student magazine *Lavender*. Zukofsky also refers to experiences from this summer in his poetry.

mentor Mark Van Doren publishing two of his poems in *The Nation*, where he was the literary editor.⁸⁹

In the evening of September 8, 1926, a few weeks before his twenty-third birthday, Chambers' brother Ricky committed suicide by gas in his apartment, leaving behind a young wife. Chambers' poem "October 21, 1926" is an elegy for Ricky, who Zukofsky would also memorialize in two of his early important poems: "A"-3 and "Poem Beginning 'The'."

In April 1927, dozens of books that had been surreptitiously removed from the NYPL and Columbia University library were discovered in Chambers' work locker and home apartment. Chambers was subsequently fired from his job at the NYPL and barred permanently from enrollment at Columbia. According to Chambers' biographer, Zukofsky found Chambers a job working at his brother Morris' bookshop in 1927, though Chambers and Zukofsky were "indifferent, sometimes negligent booksellers."⁹⁰ Chambers did not remain in the job for long, returning to his family home in the late 1920s, where he provided shelter to a rotating cast of Communist acquaintances, including, for a time, Henry Zolinsky and his family.

On April 15, 1931, Chambers married his fellow Communist Esther Shemitz; the couple had a daughter, Ellen, on October 17, 1933, and a son, John, on August 18, 1936. While Chambers enjoyed some literary accomplishments during his Communist-affiliated years in the late 1920s and early 1930s, working as an editor at the *Daily Worker* and *New Masses* magazine, he became much better known later in the decade for political reasons.

⁸⁹ Chambers' "Quag-Hole" appeared in December 1925, and his "Lothrop, Montana" was published in June 1926.

⁹⁰ *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography*, 56.

In 1932, Chambers was recruited as a Soviet agent by J. Peters [Sándor Goldberger], resigning his position at *New Masses* and becoming a member of a Communist cell. Chambers rose quickly through the ranks and ran a ring of Communist sympathizers and Soviet spies in Washington D.C. which included several prominent U.S government official before defecting in 1938. Chambers joined *TIME* magazine in 1938, where he worked as a senior editor for several years, before rising to national prominence in the late 1940s for his testimony before HUAC and as a government witness in the Alger Hiss perjury trial.

Chambers is best known today for his public role as an anti-communist and for his two memoirs: [Witness](#), published to great acclaim by Random House in 1952 and [Cold Friday](#), published posthumously in 1964. Chambers, who had long suffered from angina, died of a heart attack on July 9, 1961. His life is discussed at greater length in Allen Weinstein's [Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case](#) (published in 1978, revised edition in 1997, third edition in 2013), and Sam Tanenhaus' well-researched [biography](#), published in 1998.⁹¹

Henry Zolinsky, “[Horatio](#)“

Henry Saul Zolinsky was born on August 19, 1903 in Manhattan, to Edward Nathan Zolinsky, a Jewish immigrant from Germany, and Rosie Geisch. Prior to his inclusion in the “Objectivists” issue, Zolinsky had already made two previous appearances in *Poetry*: he had two short poems in the December 1921 issue as well as two sonnets in the December 1923 issue (published under the name Henry Saul). His contributor note for in the December 1921 issue had read: “Mr. Henry Saul Zolinsky, who, although only seventeen, has already been newsboy, bell-boy,

⁹¹ For more on Soviet espionage in this period, see Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev's *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—the Stalin Era*.

office-boy, electrician, shoe-salesman and ad-solicitor; and who hopes to become a student again some day and finish his interrupted course at college.”⁹²

In the early 1920s, Zolinsky was a student at the City College of New York, where he edited the student literary magazine *Lavender* and became close friends with a number of other literary minded students, including Whittaker Chambers and Louis Zukofsky, then both at Columbia. In June 1923, Zolinsky traveled to Europe with Meyer Schapiro (another mutual friend of Zukofsky’s) and Whittaker Chambers.

I know very little of what Zolinsky did for the next several years, but on April 13, 1929, Zolinsky married Mary Elizabeth Nolan, and their daughter Nancy, was born later that year. In October 1929, Zolinsky was arrested, along with Julius Moss and the publisher Samuel Roth, after Roth’s Golden Hind Press offices were raided by John Saxton Sumner, who headed the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, a state censorship body charged with investigating and recommending obscenity cases to federal and state prosecutors.⁹³ The 1930 census records the Zolinsky family as living with Whittaker Chambers in the Chambers’ family home in Lynbrook, during which time Chambers’ biographer suggests Zolinsky was searching for work as a French teacher. According to the 1940 census, Zolinsky was working as a public school teacher and living at 20 Monroe Street in New York City.

In 1941, the Zolinsky’s changed their name to Zolan, and Henry Zolan taught English and sponsored a high school chess club during the 1950s at what was then Seward Park High School on

⁹² See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=19&issue=3&page=59>.

⁹³ Jay A. Gertzman, *Bookleggers and Smuthounds: The Trade in Erotica, 1920-1940*, 370.

350 Grand Street in New York City's Lower East Side.⁹⁴ Mary died in September 1979 and Henry Zolan died on May 2, 2001 in Laguna Hills, California.⁹⁵

Basil Bunting, “[The Word](#)“

Core “Objectivist.”

Jesse Loewenthal, “[Match](#)“

Jesse Loewenthal was born in the Bronx, New York in 1902 to Louis Loewenthal and Fanny Haas, Jewish immigrant parents from Berlin and Vienna, respectively. Loewenthal earned a degree in English from City College of New York and was linguistically gifted: capable of speaking German, Yiddish, Spanish, French, Italian, and some Arabic, he was also trained in the classics and could read both Latin and Ancient Greek.

Loewenthal and Zukofsky could have met through their network of mutual friends at any point in the 1920s, but if they were not already acquainted, they certainly encountered each other in the late 1920s at Stuyvesant High School, New York City's preeminent public high school, where Loewenthal taught English and Zukofsky was a substitute instructor. Zukofsky references Jesse in a couple of letters to Taupin in April 1931; the context of these references seem to indicate that Zukofsky, Taupin, Loewenthal and Ted Hecht, who also taught high school English, were all friendly with each other by that time.

In 1937, while traveling to Cuba for health reasons, Loewenthal met the Cuban artist Carmen Herrera via a letter of introduction from Herrera's step-brother Addison, the head of NBC

⁹⁴ See Alex Levy's recollections of Mr. Zolan on his personal website: <https://perma.cc/K7LK-URSA>.

⁹⁵ The Zolans are buried in the [Bennett Valley Cemetery](#) in Santa Rosa, California.

radio's Latin American department in New York City. Herrera's father, Antonio Herrera y Neito, had been an officer in the Cuban army during their war for independence from Spain and was the founder and executive editor of *El Mundo*, Cuba's first post-independence newspaper. Her mother, Carmela Nieto de Herrera, was an author and philanthropist who, before marrying Carmen's father in 1913, had previously been married to the American banker John Steward Durland, with whom she had several children. Antonio Herrera died in 1917, leaving Carmela with their combined family of seven children, of which the two-year-old Carmen was the youngest.

Following their introduction in Havana in 1937, Loewenthal and Herrera carried on a two-year distance courtship, with Loewenthal returning to Cuba in the summers and over the holidays whenever he was able. The couple married at Herrera's family home in Havana on July 10, 1939, following which Loewenthal and Herrera honeymooned in Mexico, spending time in Mexico City, Acapulco, and Monterrey before returning to New York City, where they lived in a series of apartments near Manhattan's Union Square Park.

Over the next decade, Loewenthal taught at Stuyvesant and Herrera developed her technique as an abstract painter, occasionally traveling to Cuba for family and art reasons. While in New York, the couple enjoyed a rich social life which included Louis and Celia Zukofsky, Loewenthal's college friend and painter [Barnett Newman](#) and his wife Annalee Greenhouse, the dancer and jazz critic [Roger Pryor Dodge](#) and his wife Ann, and the Colombian artist [Rafael Umaña](#) and his wife, the dancer [Helen McGehee](#).

Between 1948 and 1954, Loewenthal took an extended sabbatical from his position at Stuyvesant and the couple moved to Paris, where Herrera's brother John was the Consul General for Cuba. For most of their time in France, the couple lived in an apartment on rue Campagne-Première in Montparnasse, on Paris' famed *Rive Gauche*, and spent large portions of their summers in

a prominent artist's commune in Alba-la-Romaine which had been promoted by the painter André Lhote in 1948 in the newspaper *Combat*. While living in Paris, Herrera exhibited her paintings on a number of occasions at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and the couple befriended several prominent members of the Parisian art and literary scene, including the playwright Jean Genet.

In 1954, the couple returned to New York City, where Jesse resumed teaching English at Stuyvesant. In 1960, following Castro's revolution in Cuba, Herrera ceased receiving rent payments on property in Cuba inherited from her mother, and Herrera imported and sold many of the family's remaining belongings. Her brother Antonio was arrested as a political prisoner in November of that year and sentenced to a twenty-year prison term, before being released in 1963. In the early 1960s, Loewenthal and Herrera became active in helping refugees leave Cuba and publicizing Cuban abuses of civil liberties and the use of imprisonment as a means of punishing political dissent.

In 1967, the couple moved to an apartment on East 19th Street in the Flatiron district of Manhattan (where Herrera still lives and works today, at age 103). In November 1970, Herrera applied for U.S. citizenship and was naturalized on August 2, 1971. In the early 1970s, Loewenthal retired from his teaching position at Stuyvesant after more than 45 years teaching English there. His teaching manner was described in his colleague Frank McCourt's memoir *Teacher Man*:

My students were patient, but I could tell from the looks they exchanged, and the traffic in notes passing back and forth, that I was in a grammar wilderness. At Stuyvesant they had to know grammar for their classes in Spanish, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Latin.

Roger [Goodman, then head of the English department at Stuyvesant] understood. He said, Maybe diagramming is not your strong point. He said some people just don't have it. R'lene Dahlberg [Edward Dahlberg's wife] had it. Joe Curran certainly had it. After all, he was a graduate of Boston Latin, a school two and a half centuries older than Stuyvesant and, he claimed, more prestigious. Teaching at Stuyvesant for him was a step down in the world. He could diagram in Greek and Latin and probably French and German. That's the kind of training you get at Boston Latin. Jesse Loewenthal had it, too, but of course he would. He was the oldest teacher in the department with his elegant three-piece suit, the gold watch chain looping across his waistcoat front, his gold-rimmed spectacles, his old-world manners,

his scholarship, Jesse who did not want to retire but, when he did, planned to spend his days studying Greek and drifting into the next life with Homer on his lips. It pleased Roger to know he had in his department a solid core of teachers who could be relied on to diagram at a moment's notice.

Roger said it was sad Joe Curran had such a drinking problem. Otherwise he could have entertained Jesse with miles of Homer from memory and, if Jesse was up to it, Virgil and Horace, and the one Joe favored out of his own great anger, Juvenal himself.

In the teachers' cafeteria Joe told me, Read your Juvenal so you'll understand what's going on in this miserable fookin' country.

Roger said it was sad about Jesse. Here he is in his twilight years with Christ only knows how many years of teaching under his belt. He doesn't have the same energy for five classes a day. He asked to have his load reduced to four but no, oh no, the principal says no, the superintendent says no, all the way up the bureaucracy they say no, and Jesse says good-bye. Hello Homer. Hello Ithaca. Hello Troy. That's Jesse. We're going to lose a great teacher and, boy, could he diagram. What he did with a sentence and a piece of chalk would stun you. Beautiful.⁹⁶

In 1996, Loewenthal's health began to decline, and Herrera stopped painting to care for him until his death in New York City on December 11, 2000, aged 98. In 2005, a large retrospective show dedicated to Herrera's work was mounted in a prominent New York gallery, and its success encouraged Herrera to begin painting again in 2006. In the intervening years, Herrera has enjoyed increasing international acclaim.

As a result of Herrera's deserved but belated recognition, Loewenthal is now best known not for his own teaching or writing, but as Herrera's long-time spouse.⁹⁷ In 2016, the Whitney Museum of American Art and Yale University Press partnered to publish Dana Miller's [*Carmen Herrera: Lines*](#)

⁹⁶ *Teacher Man*, 186-187.

⁹⁷ In [a feature article published in English newspaper *The Telegraph* in 2010](#), Herrera is quoted as saying: "Jesse was a saint and I'm thinking back and I never even thanked him for all he did for me. He was the only one I ever spoke to about my paintings. He understood what I was doing and he was always supportive. I made him move to neighbourhoods that were cheap and sometimes dangerous so I could have room to paint. We had a very good life, actually. We became closer and closer and by the end we were one person. We could think without talking. He died right here in this room with me holding his hand. Lately I miss him a lot."

[of Sight](#), a beautiful and thoroughly researched career retrospective full of autobiographical detail and rich visual material related to Herrera (and to a lesser extent, Loewenthal).

Emanuel Carnevali's translations of Arthur Rimbaud, "[Wakes—III](#)" and "[To One Reason](#)"

Emanuel Carnevali was born on December 4, 1897 in Florence, Italy to Tullio Carnevali, an accountant, and Matilde Piano. Carnevali's parents separated soon after his birth and he lived with his mother until her death in 1908 (she was a morphine addict). Carnevali was then sent to live with his father and attended a series of technical schools in Turin, Venice and Bologna. Carnevali did not get along well with his father, and emigrated, alone, to the United States shortly after his sixteenth birthday, leaving from Genoa in March 1914.

After arriving in the United States, Carnevali took an assortment of odd jobs in Manhattan's Lower East Side, and gradually taught himself English, telling Harriet Monroe in September 1917 that he had "learned English by continuous reading; have not owned an english grammar up to a few months ago."⁹⁸ About a year after arriving in New York, he began writing (in Italian), and started writing and publishing poetry in English in 1917. In 1917, Carnevali married Emilia Valenza, a fellow Italian immigrant, who worked to support the couple while he wrote. As an aspiring poet, Carnevali joined the city's literary avant garde and befriended writers like Alfred Kreymborg (the editor of [Others](#)), Lola Ridge, Max Eastman (editor of *The Liberator*), Babette Deutsch, and Waldo Frank. Like Robert McAlmon, Carnevali met William Carlos Williams at a gathering held at Lola Ridge's home, and the two men became friends, with Williams admiring the young Italian's energy, fearlessness, and independence. Around this time Carnevali also began to publish poems regularly in *Poetry* magazine, making his first appearance in the March 1918 issue with six poems collected

⁹⁸ Poetry Magazine Collection, University of Chicago Special Collections.

under the combined title “The Splendid Commonplace.” The contributor notes to that issue quote him as writing: “I want to become an American poet because I have, in my mind, rejected Italian standards of good literature. I do not like Carducci, still less d’Annunzio. . . . Of American authors I have read, pretty well, Poe, Whitman, Twain, Harte, London, Oppenheim, and Wald Frank. I believe in free verse. I try not to imitate.”⁹⁹

In 1919, Harriet Monroe came to New York City and invited Carnevali to move to Chicago and join her as an associate editor of *Poetry* magazine, a position which Carnevali held for six months. While living in Chicago, Carnevali fell victim to the global epidemic of sleeping sickness (*encephalitis lethargica*), a neurological condition which caused him to shake uncontrollably and would afflict him for the rest of his life.

After unsuccessfully pursuing various cures in the midwestern United States, Carnevali left the United States and returned to Bazzano, Italy, a small town just west of Bologna. He would spend most of the next two decades in poverty and in poor health, moving between various hospitals and poorhouses, often reliant on the generosity of former literary friends (including Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound).

Bill Bird’s Three Mountains Press published Carnevali’s collection *A Hurried Man* from Paris in 1925 (the same year Bird published Pound’s *Draft of XVI Cantos*). While this was the only volume of his poetry to appear during his lifetime, Carnevali continued writing and publishing poetry in English and carried on an active correspondence with Williams, Boyle, Pound and others.

⁹⁹ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=11&issue=6&page=57>.

Following his death (by suffocation) on January 11, 1942, a handful of English-language volumes by Carnevali have been published, including an autobiography (edited by Kay Boyle and published in 1967); *Fireflies*, a small letter press edition of seven poems published in 1970); and *Furnished Rooms*, a sloppily edited collection of work published in 2006 which is mainly comprised by poems which first appeared in *A Hurried Man*. Three works by Carnevali have also been published posthumously in Italian: an Italian edition of his autobiography, edited by Maria Pia Carnevali and Luigi Ballerini and published in 1978, *Voglio disturbare l'America* (a collection of letters), published in 1981, and *Diario Bazzanese*, published in 1994. For a good overview of Carnevali's life and work, see Alan Davies' review "[To Call Them by Their Dead Name](#)" in *Jacket*.

John Wheelwright, "[Slow Curtain](#)"

John Brooks Wheelwright was born on September 9, 1897, the youngest of three children in a classic Boston Brahmin household. His father, Edmund March (Ned) Wheelwright, was a prominent Boston architect and a descendent of the Reverend John Wheelwright, Anne Hutchison's brother-in-law and a leading Antinomian in the Massachusetts Bay Colony during the 1630s. His mother, Elizabeth (Bessie) Brooks, was a scion of the Medford Brookses, one of Boston's oldest and wealthiest families, and though deaf from a childhood accident, was a formidable and sometimes terrifying matriarch.

In 1910, while in the midst of supervising the construction of a multimillion dollar bridge he had had designed in Hartford, Connecticut, Ned Wheelwright suffered a nervous breakdown, and was subsequently institutionalized and treated for melancholia. Ned never recovered from his depression, committing suicide in August 1912 in the sanitorium to which he had been discreetly admitted two years previously. The loss of his father exerted a large impact on John, who was then attending an Anglican preparatory school in Rhode Island, including a renunciation of his family's

Unitarianism and a mystical religious conversion to Anglicanism. The impress of his father's death can also be seen in these moving lines from his sonnet "Father": "Come home. Wire a wire of warning without words. / Come home and talk to me again, my first friend."¹⁰⁰

Despite earning generally poor grades at his preparatory school, Wheelwright was active in social and literary endeavors, and his family connections ensured his admission to Harvard College. Wheelwright enrolled at Harvard in the Fall of 1916, but was an indifferent student, earning poor grades and withdrawing from school in June 1920. While he would petition for readmission and made a final attempt to complete his degree in the Fall, in November of that year he was "required to withdraw" by the administrative board after a series of rules infractions.¹⁰¹

Though Wheelwright left Harvard without a degree, he was active in literary circles during his time in Cambridge, contributing to the *Harvard Lampoon*, which his father had helped found, serving as the literary editor of the student magazine *The Advocate*, and joining the Harvard Poetry Society. In 1923, Wheelwright's poetry was included in *Eight More Harvard Poets*, a sequel to the 1917 anthology which had featured E.E. Cummings, S. Foster Damon, John Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, R.S. Mitchell, William Norris, Dudley Poore, and Cuthbert Wright. The title page of the 1923 anthology listed Hillyer and Damon (who later married Wheelwright's older sister Louise) as the volume's editors, but in point of fact Wheelwright himself had done most of the editorial work, including writing the volume's introduction under the pseudonym 'Dorian Abbot.'

¹⁰⁰ *Collected Poems of John Wheelwright*, 78.

¹⁰¹ Wald writes that Wheelwright was warned not to miss any more class sessions after being caught publicly copying a classmate's chemistry notebook as a form of protest to the endemic culture of discreet cheating. When he missed a subsequent chemistry class, his note of excuse to the dean attributed his absence to: "Acute nausea [sic] because 'Way Down East' [a silent film directed by D.W. Griffith and starring Lilian Gish] excited me. I was sick one hour" (quoted in *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 48).

In 1924, Wheelwright printed his poem “North Atlantic Passage” privately in Florence, Italy. In that poem, Wheelwright wrestled with the problem of the relationship between “the One and the Many,” or of the individual and the mass of humanity, much as George Oppen, another disaffected and socially engaged child of privilege, would do in his 1968 poem “Of Being Numerous.” Wheelwright also published his 1920s poetry in some of the little magazines of the day, including *Hound & Horn*, which printed his poem “Forty Days” in the January-March 1929 issue, where Zukofsky likely encountered it.

Through much of the 1930s Wheelwright lived with his mother at the family home at 415 Beacon Street, and pursued a range of political, literary, and artistic interests, writing reviews and contributing frequently to *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, and Lincoln Kirstein’s *Hound & Horn*. Wheelwright’s poem “Come over and help us” was chosen for inclusion in the 1931 edition of Alfred Kreyborg, Lewis Mumford, and Paul Rosenfeld’s annual poetry anthology *American Caravan*, and Wheelwright spent several years writing a series of poems dealing with his interpretation of the Biblical apostle Thomas.

Early in 1932, Wheelwright formalized his long developing political commitment, officially joining the Socialist party of Massachusetts, and published a letter to the editor in the July 13, 1932 issue of the *New Republic* describing “the radical labor movement” as the “most important single influence for the progress of humankind today.”¹⁰² For the rest of his life, Wheelwright remained active in left-wing politics, frequently attending and speaking at labor demonstrations and other political events, and continuing to develop his own idiosyncratic blend of political and religious convictions. These convictions included a distrust of Stalin and the mainstream Communist party

¹⁰² 238.

(which he never joined) along with a deep respect for Trotsky, whom he described as the “world’s incomparable revolutionary.”¹⁰³

Wheelwright also continued to publish his own and others’ socialist poetry through the 1930s, editing a pamphlet series called “Poems for a Dime,” which featured his Brechtian verse-play *Masque with Clowns* in 1936, and his “[Two Tongues in a Tower](#)” was included in Horace Gregory’s May 1936 “Special Poets Number” of *Poetry* magazine which Gregory, himself a Communist, had dedicated to class-conscious leftist poetry. Wheelwright was also connected in the late 1930s to Harry Roskolenko, a fellow Trotskyite and poet who had appeared in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*, helping Roskolenko and Helen Neville establish their Exile’s Press. While Wheelwright withdrew from the publishing venture after a disagreement with Roskolenko before the publication of their proposed *The Exile’s Anthology*, Roskolenko did include work by Wheelwright in the anthology, which The Exile’s Press published in conjunction with the Press of James A. Decker in 1940.

Between 1933 and his death in 1940, Wheelwright published three collections of his own poetry, all with Bruce Humphries in Boston: *Rock and shell: Poems, 1923-1933* (1933); *Mirrors of Venus: A Novel in Sonnets, 1914-1938* (1938), and *Political Self-Portrait* (1940). Wheelwright was struck by a car and killed on September 13, 1940. New Directions posthumously published his *Selected Poems* the following year in their poet of the month series, and published in 1983 a collected edition of his poems, edited by Alvin Rosenfeld. In his 1983 book *The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan*, Alan Wald offers an outstanding survey to Wheelwright’s life and work, neatly summarizing Wheelwright as “a modernist poet, architectural historian, heterodox

¹⁰³ Quoted in *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 160.

Anglican, and highly unconventional Boston Brahmin who devoted the last eight years of his life to revolutionary socialism.”¹⁰⁴ A very good short biographical introduction, also written by Wald, can be found [online at MAPS](#).

Richard Johns, “[The Sphinx](#)”

Richard Johns was born Richard Vernon Johnson on October 29, 1904, to Benjamin Newhall Johnson, a prominent Boston lawyer, and Virginia Vernon Newhall. While he received a classical education grounded in the liberal arts, Johns never graduated from high school, leaving in his late teens to pursue a career as a writer. By the late 1920s, however, Johns had only managed to publish a small number of his own poems and stories in little-known magazines.

In 1929, Johns decided, with the encouragement of his friend Sherry Mangan, who had recently suspended the publication of his own magazine, *larns: the Celestial Visitor*, to found *Pagany*, a quarterly literary magazine named in tribute to William Carlos Williams’ recently published novel *A Voyage to Pagany*. Williams offered encouragement and submitted work to the young, unproven editor, and the first issue of *Pagany* appeared in January 1930. In the summer of 1930, Johns and a girlfriend joined the Williams family for a week-long vacation to East Gloucester, Massachusetts, an experience which formed the basis of Johns’ poem “The Sphinx.”

By the end of *Pagany*’s first year, the magazine had published poetry by Williams, McAlmon, Zukofsky, and Reznikoff, and Johns had moved his offices from Boston to an apartment/office in Manhattan’s Gramercy Park. Johns and Zukofsky met for the first time in person during the Christmas holidays in 1930 when Zukofsky returned to New York City from Madison, and the two

¹⁰⁴ *The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan*, 36-37.

men continued to correspond for the next few years, with Zukofsky regularly submitting his own work and recommending the work of others to Johns.

In February 1932, Johns' father died, dramatically reducing Johns' income and effectively killing *Pagany*, which Johns suspended following the publication of the magazine's twelfth issue in February 1933. In 1934, Johns married Veronica Parker, with whom he collaborated on a series of mystery novels. The couple later moved to Cuttingsville, Vermont, where Johns devoted himself to horticulture and photography.

In 1969, Johns collaborated with Stephen Halpert to produce [*A Return to Pagany*](#), a retrospective anthology which encapsulated Johns' work on the magazine and printed a variety of documentary material from the period. The full archives for *Pagany*, including extensive correspondence between Johns, Williams, Zukofsky, and letters from almost all of the other "Objectivists" (including Forrest Anderson, Basil Bunting, Mary Butts, Emanuel Carnevali, Frances Fletcher, Charles Henri Ford, Norman Macleod, Lorine Niedecker, Ezra Pound, Samuel Putnam, Carl Rakosi (Callman Rawley), Kenneth Rexroth, Harry Roskolenko, Parker Tyler, R. B. N. Warriston, and John Wheelwright) are held by the [University of Delaware's Special Collections](#). Johns died on June 17, 1970.

Martha Champion, "[Poem](#)"

Martha Lee Champion was born in Los Angeles in 1910 to Earl Malcolm Champion, the superintendent of the Southern California Hardwood and Manufacturing Company, and Vera Belle Barber. Champion was a student and friend of Zukofsky's at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he served as a graduate instructor for the 1930-1931 academic year. Champion earned an Honors degree in Greek from the University of Wisconsin in 1933 and went on to study

anthropology and linguistics under Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia University from 1933-1935, investigating peyote songs among the Comanche, Navajo, and Fox people in the western United States as part of her field work. Her poem “After Meleager” was included in Ann Winslow (Verna Elizabeth Grubb)’s 1935 anthology *Trial Balances*, where it was paired with work by Wallace Stevens.

On November 13, 1935, Champion married [Louis Huot](#), a journalist who had been born in 1906 in Duluth, Minnesota. That same year, the couple moved to Paris, where Huot served as the European representative of Press Wireless, a news transmission corporation with headquarters in Chicago, and wrote for the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune. While in France, Martha published an article on peyote songs in Eugène and Maria Jolas’ magazine *transition*.

Following the outbreak of the war, Champion left France in 1940 and returned to the United States, and Huot was reassigned to a position in London before joined the United States Army as an intelligence officer in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). In 1945, Huot published *Guns for Tito*, an account of his entrepreneurial efforts to organize a shipment of weapons from southern Italy to the future Yugoslavian dictator and his Partisan army in the fall of 1943. Huot rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, ultimately serving as the head of the newly organized Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. 3rd Army, then led by General George Patton.

After returning to the United States in 1940, Champion taught anthropology at the University of Southern California and Los Angeles State College and conducted fieldwork among the Iroquois people on Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Canada, passing her Ph.D. examinations in

the department of anthropology at Columbia in 1946 and publishing an article on “Mohawk words of acculturation” in the *International Journal of American Linguistics* in 1948.¹⁰⁵

Sometime between 1948 and 1952 Champion and Huot divorced and Champion remarried, this time to E.P. Randle, a Canadian military officer who had served as the Indian superintendent of the Six Nations of the Grand River near Brantford, Ontario. Champion and Randle had two children together. Champion earned a master’s degree in classical languages from USC in 1958 and subsequently taught Latin in secondary schools in Canada and the United States until her death on July 3, 1965 in London, Ontario.¹⁰⁶

William Carlos Williams, “[The Botticellian Trees](#)“

Core “Objectivist.”

Parker Tyler, “Hymn” and Charles Henri Ford, “Left Instantly Designs” in “Symposium”

Charles Henri Ford was born February 10, 1908 in Brookhaven, Mississippi to Charles Lloyd Ford (1871-1949) and Gertrude Cato (1886-1956), managers of a string of hotels across the southern United States. Charles’ younger sister, [Ruth Ford](#), would go on to become a well-known fashion model and Hollywood actress.

In 1927, Ford published his first poem in *The New Yorker*, and published additional work in the next few years he published poetry in other small magazines, including Norman Macleod’s *Palo Verde*. In 1928, Ford met the African-American poet Kathleen Tankersley Young in San Antonio at

¹⁰⁵ See <https://doi.org/10.1086/463996>.

¹⁰⁶ The anthropologist Richard Slobodin wrote an obituary for Randle in a 1966 issue of *American Anthropologist*: <https://perma.cc/UE7T-UT3X>.

the recommendation of the Greenwich Village publisher Lew Ney, and in February 1929, Ford and Young launched their own magazine *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms*, intending it to serve in part as a successor to Pound's *The Exile*, which had discontinued publication late in 1928.

For the seventh issue of *Blues*, Ford added the New York-based poet Parker Tyler to the editorial masthead as an additional associate editor. Prior to the publication of *Blues 8* in early 1930, Ford moved to Greenwich Village and took on Lew Ney as the magazine's publisher and patron. Ford and Tyler stopped publishing *Blues* after its ninth issue later that year, and began work on *The Young and the Evil*, a loosely-veiled autobiographical novel written in alternating chapters depicting the lives of Karel (based on Parker Tyler) and Julian (based on Charles Henri Ford) two unabashedly gay men living in Greenwich Village in the early 1930s.

The manuscript had already been rejected by several American and English publishers by April 1931, when Ford sailed to France and joined Gertrude Stein's salon. Stein liked both Ford and his writing, and passed his novel on to her powerful literary agent William A. Bradley, who arranged for the book to be published by Jack Kahane's Obelisk Press in Paris in August 1933 with admiring blurbs from Stein and Djuna Barnes. Because of its frank description of homosexuality, however, the book was banned or suppressed in both the United States and Britain, and did not appear in an American edition until 1975 and in England until 1989.

While in Europe, Ford developed an intimate relationship with the writer Djuna Barnes, traveling with her to Vienna in late 1931 and inviting her to join him in the summer of 1932 while he was in Tangier visiting the writer Paul Bowles. Barnes did so, and Ford typed a portion of Barnes' important lesbian novel *Nightwood* during their time together in Morocco. Upon their return to Paris from Morocco, Barnes introduced Ford to the Russian painter Pavel Tchelitchew, and the two men began an increasingly intimate relationship, though not without incurring considerable fallout from

within their bohemian circle.¹⁰⁷ Ford and Tchelitchev spent time in both England and Spain in 1934 before returning to the United States, where for the next two decades they split time between New York City, Weston, Connecticut, and Derby Hill, Tchelitchev's summer home near Pawlet, Vermont (though they continued to make regular trips to Europe in peacetime years).

Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, Ford continued to publish poetry in a series of mostly European little magazines, including the *transition*, Harold Salemsen's *Tambour*, Samuel Putnam's *The New Review*, and Norman Macleod's *Front*; he also had four poems included in *Americans Abroad*, Peter Neagoe's 1932 anthology of expatriate writing. After returning to the United States in 1934, Ford published two poetry collections that decade: *A Pamphlet of Sonnets* (1936), published by Caravel Press and *The Garden of Disorder* (1938), published with James Laughlin's New Directions publishing company. Though Ford had a sustained interest in surrealism that differentiated him stylistically from the "Objectivists," William Carlos Williams wrote in his introduction to *The Garden of Disorder* that the effect of Ford's "particularly hard, dreamlike poetry ... is to revive the senses and force them to re-see, re-hear, re-taste, re-smell, and generally re-value all that it was believed had been seen, heard, smelled, and generally valued. By this means poetry has always in the past put a finger upon reality," offering some insight as to why Williams, Zukofsky and other "Objectivists", with their emphasis on sensual intelligence, might have valued or been interested in Ford's work.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ According to Karen Rood, Tchelitchev had been in a relationship with the American musician Allen Tanner for several years, and was both beloved by Edith Sitwell and disliked by Gertrude Stein. When Ford and Tchelitchev coupled, both Sitwell and Stein ejected the pair from their circles. While Sitwell eventually warmed to Ford and returned the pair to her good graces, Stein never forgave either man.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, "The Tortuous Straightness of Charles Henri Ford," introduction to *The Garden of Disorder and Other Poems*.

In 1940, Ford published *ABCs*, a 26-quatrain abecedarian with the Press of James A. Decker; Robert Lowry and James Flora's Little Man Press published his collection *The Overturned Lake* the following year. In 1940, Ford also began editing and publishing an arts periodical which he called *View*, initially describing it as a "newspaper for poets." In April 1942, Ford altered the magazine's format to allow for the reproduction of artwork, and continued to publish *View* at great cost and with contributions from a dizzying range of international contributors until Fall 1947, when Ford cut his mounting losses and suspended the magazine. Between 1945 and 1946, Ford also published four books under the View Editions imprint: including Eduoard Roditi's translations of André Breton's poetry, a collection of poems by Edith Sitwell, his own collection *Poems for Painters* and a collection of stories *A Night with Jupiter & Other Fantastic Stories*, which Ford selected and edited. In 1947, Ford published his long poem "The Half-Thoughts, the Distances of Pain" as a pamphlet, and New Directions brought out a selected volume, *Sleep in a Nest of Flame* in 1949. His 1972 collection, *Flag of Ecstasy*, published by John Martin's Black Sparrow Press, also included a number of previously uncollected poems Ford had written for little magazines in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1952, Ford and Tchelitchev moved to Italy, where Ford became increasingly involved with the visual arts, especially painting and photography; Ford's biographer Karen Rood suggests that "by 1954 he had virtually abandoned written poetry."¹⁰⁹ Ford held the first exhibition of his photographs in London in 1955 and staged the first one-man show of his artwork in Paris in 1956. Tchelitchev died in Rome in 1957, and Ford continued making and exhibiting his art in Paris for until 1962, when he returned to New York City and became involved with many of the pop artists and avant-garde filmmakers then working in the city. In 1966, Ford published a large-format limited edition of *Spare Parts* a collage-inspired artist's book, which he had published by Vassily

¹⁰⁹ *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 48, 204.

Papachrysanthou in Athens, Greece. In 1968, Ford published *Silver Flower Coo* another collage-inspired, though less lavishly produced, book of what he called “paste-up poems.” He also made two films, *Poem Posters*, a short documentary detailing the staging of one of his art exhibitions, and *Johnny Minotaur*, a sexually adventurous feature film, which he shot in Crete in 1969 and premiered in New York in 1971, and staged a series of art and photographic exhibitions in New York City over the next decade.

In 1972, Ford traveled to Kathmandu, Nepal, a place which would exert a profound influence on his art and writing. While in Nepal, Ford formed a long-lasting and significant relationship with Indra Tamang, a local teenager that he initially hired as a household assistant but who eventually became a member of his household as well as a frequent artistic collaborator.¹¹⁰ His experiences in Nepal also provided much of the impetus for his long-poem “Om Krishna,” published in three volumes between 1972 and 1982, as well as two *Handshakes from Heaven* collections, published with photographs by Tamang and collages by Reepak Shakya.

In 1986, Ford published the poetry collection, *Emblems of Arachne* and in 1989, he published a special tenth issue of *Blues*, nearly sixty years after the ninth issue had appeared. In 1990, City Lights Books published his *Out of the Labyrinth: Selected Poems*. In 1992, Ford published *View: Parade of the Avant-garde*, an anthology of work that had he had published between 1940-1947 in *View* magazine, and he published *Water From a Bucket: a Diary, 1948-1957* in 2001.

Ford died aged 94, in New York City on September 27, 2002, and [is buried in Brookhaven, Mississippi](#), next to his parents and sister [Ruth](#). In 2017, Bloomsbury published the Australian

¹¹⁰ Tamang received a fair amount of attention from New York tabloids as the “Tibetan butler” who served as the caretaker for Charles and his sister Ruth in their final years and then inherited their multimillion dollar estate upon Ruth’s death in 2009.

scholar Alexander Howard's *Charles Henri Ford: Between Modernism and Postmodernism*, a study of Ford's life and work. The bulk of Ford's papers are held by [Yale's Beinecke library](#), [the Harry Ransom Center](#) in Austin, Texas and by [the Getty Research Institute](#) in Los Angeles.

Samuel Putnam, "The Horses of Her Hair" in "Symposium"

Erle Samuel Putnam was born on October 10, 1888 in Rossville, Illinois, a small town about 120 miles south of Chicago, to George B. Putnam, who descended from English immigrants to the Virginia colonies in the 1640s, and Edith Cook. As a young child, Putnam showed an early interest in languages, travel, and global culture that far outstripped what was on offer in his small prairie hometown. After graduating from high school in Rossville, Putnam left home to attend the University of Chicago, where he recalled reading George Bernard Shaw's play "The Devil's Disciple" with noted literature professor Percy Holmes Boynton, studying Marx' *Das Kapital* in the original German with a Russian graduate student, and taking courses from Robert Morss Lovett, who would later prove to be a formative influence in shaping the poetic aspirations of a young Carl Rakosi.

Putnam left school before earning a degree, sharing a room in the Grant Park Hotel with Daniel Reed, then a young actor just developing his one-man play based on Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. He was, at this time, pursuing his own career as a journalist, and eventually became a full-time reporter for the *Chicago Evening Post*, writing art and literary criticism under the direction of C. J. Bulliet, the editor of the paper's art magazine, and Llewellyn Jones, the paper's literary editor.

In 1922, Harold Auer came to Chicago from Detroit to start the literary review *Youth*. Putnam became its editor, and published writing by Emanuel Carnevali, Ben Hecht, Oscar Williams,

and Mark Turbyfill, among others, during its short run. In his memoir *Paris Was Our Mistress*, Putnam wrote that *Youth* “died from lack of funds and its place was taken by *Prairie*. This time the moving spirit was Samuel Pessin of Milwaukee, later to be known as Lawrence Drake, the novelist. ... Once more I found myself an editor, and once again it was not for long.”¹¹¹ In 1925, Putnam married Riva Lillian Sampson, who had been born on November 29, 1893 to Michael and Toby Sampson, Lithuanian Jews who had immigrated to Chicago from Manchester, England. In 1926, Putnam, who had gained some notoriety for his opinionated reviews for the *Evening Post*, was asked by the prominent Baltimore-based journalist H.L. Mencken to write a takedown piece on the literary scene in Chicago for Mencken’s popular magazine *The American Mercury*. According to Putnam:

When my article finally appeared in the August 1926 *Mercury*, it bore the starting caption: “Chicago: An Obituary.” The effect was instantaneous and bordered on riot. I was assailed by columnists and literary organizations all over town. ... In short, it looked as if I had been started on a career as a “debunker,” a role which, soberly, I did not fancy. ... It was about this time that Henry Blake Fuller came walking into the editorial room of the *Evening Post* one afternoon: Go to Paris, young man, go to Paris. You may have to come back as I did, but at least ...¹¹²

Despite their having an infant son as this time, the Putnams had mulling over making the voyage to Europe for some time.¹¹³ By early 1927, Putnam had also begun publishing literary translations, and these had brought him to the attention of the Chicago-based publisher Pascal Covici, who commissioned him to translate the 16th century Italian writer Pietro Aretino and J.K. Huysmans’ 1882 novella *À van-l’eau*. The income Putnam received for these translations allowed him to give up his job writing for the *Evening Post*, and when Covici learned that Putnam was working on

¹¹¹ *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 40.

¹¹² *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 46-47.

¹¹³ Their son, Hilary Whitehall Putnam, was born on July 31, 1926. He would go on to become a prominent analytic philosopher, retiring as [an emeritus professor at Harvard University](#) in 2000, and dying in March 2016.

a translation of Rabelais but “needed to spend some time in France for study and research,” Putnam relates that Covici told him: “Go home, tell your wife to pack up the baby and a few other things, and start looking up boat schedules. ... Never mind how. I’ll see that you don’t starve.”¹¹⁴ With Covici’s assurances, the Putnams boarded a ship to France, where “with an eight-months-old son and a spirit lamp for preparing the baby’s formula ... we were to go from country to country, nine of them in all, living in cheap pensions and traveling third class.”¹¹⁵

For most of the next several years until their return to New York in May 1933, the Putnams made their home in Paris, living on the left bank and involving themselves in the literary and artistic communities active in Montparnasse, which featured no small number of expatriate Americans.¹¹⁶ In Paris, Putnam continued his work as a translator, publishing his translation of Rabelais in 1929 and working as the European representative for Covici-Friede, the publishing house founded in New York in 1928, by Pascal Covici and Donald Friede, previously of the Boni & Liveright house. It was Putnam who helped Pound find, in Covici, an American publisher and distributor for his magazine *The Exile* after custom troubles had plagued first issue, which Pound had printed in Dijon, France.

While in Paris, Putnam also became involved with the little magazine *This Quarter* after it came under the control of the American expatriate writer, bookshop owner, and publisher [Edward Titus](#) in 1929. Titus had married the wealthy cosmetics entrepreneur Helena Rubenstein in 1909 and founded the bookshop At the Sign of the Black Manikin in Paris in 1924. He also founded the Black Manikin Press in 1926, and the press published more than two dozen titles before it folded in 1932,

¹¹⁴ *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 48.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Putnam would write in his memoirs: “[I]t was Paris that was our home. It was to Paris that, sooner or later, we never failed to return” (*Paris Was Our Mistress*, 48).

along with *This Quarter*, Titus' magazine. Putnam had previously worked with Titus as the translator of the sensational memoirs of the French model and artist Alice Prin (Kiki de Montparnasse), which Titus had published under the Black Manikin Press imprint in 1930. Putnam and his wealthy patron did not agree on much regarding their editorial tastes, and while Putnam was proud of his having occasioned the publication of James Farrell's first "Young Lonigan" stories, Putnam and Titus parted company by the Fall of 1930.

Putnam left *This Quarter* to start a magazine of his own, the *New Review*, with Ezra Pound as his associate editor. He was also involved, through much of 1930 and 1931 in compiling and editing work to be included in *European Caravan*, an ambitious "critical anthology of the new spirit in European literature," the first volume of which was published in New York in 1931 and devoted nearly 600 pages to recent developments in France, Spain, England, and Ireland. Planned future volumes to other literary developments elsewhere in Europe were never published.

Putnam's relationship with Pound on the *New Review* lasted just a few issues, and the magazine folded in 1932 after publishing just five issues, with financial pressures making publication somewhat irregular. While publishing the *New Review*, the Putnams moved to the small French village of Mirmande, where an artist's colony had been set up, largely at the instigation of the French painter André Lhote.¹¹⁷

Of their time at Mirmande, Putnam recalled:

My own house ... was a pre-Renaissance structure some centuries old; and as I settled down in it, I thought that here at last was my pied-a-terre; here was where I would sink my roots. In a place like this, far from America and its skyscrapers, far from Montparnasse, one could

¹¹⁷ Mirmande was also home during this time several other notable figures: the art critic Pierre Courthion; the American painter Lewis Stone and his wife Caroline; Putnam's co-publisher of the *New Review* (for its final two issues) Peter Neagoe, and his wife Ann; and Afro-Caribbean writer Eric Walrond. It was just 35 kilometers north east of Alba-la-Romaine, a similar colony which included Jesse Loewenthal and Carmen Herrera during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

really think things out, keep his clarity and his balance, milk his goats of an evening, and be at peace. ... My semi-medieval retreat, my "isolation," was as false as the man-made "ruins" about me. ... it was no longer so easy to make a living, if one had to earn his way as I did. We nevertheless stayed on for a year or so, until one day a New York publisher cabled me asking if I could translate a certain book in a month's time. The fee was five hundred dollars, and something told me that this was the last job I would be having; so I accepted it. It was the hardest month's work I ever did in my life. The moment the five hundred dollars was cabled me, I left half of it with my family and took the remaining two hundred and fifty dollars and started for New York via Paris, with one last night in the Quarter of which I remember absolutely nothing except that everybody I ever knew, it seemed, was there. ... I was feeling decidedly tearful, in a self-pitying mood, but New York soon cured me of that. I had expected to find "hard times"; I had been back in these summer of 1931 and things were bad enough then; but I was wholly unprepared for what I found now: writers all around me, and some of the best of them (including one or two of America's well-known poets) on home relief, starving, organizing, demonstrating. Jobs were unheard-of things, publishers had cut their lists to the bone, and nobody wanted the services of a translator. Fortunately, I had my newspaper experience to fall back upon, and through the kind offices of my friend George Britt of the *World-Telegram*, who procured me a temporary place on the rewrite desk, and of J. G. Grey, literary editor of the *Sun*, who gave me book reviews to do, I contrived to hold on until I had succeeded in persuading another friend, publicity agent for a steamship line, to advance me homeward passage for my wife and child. In this manner I managed to get us all back once more on American soil.¹¹⁸

Following their return to the United States in 1933, the Putnams moved around the eastern United States before settling in Philadelphia in 1936, which they would make their home for most of the next decade, except for two years Putnam spent receiving treatment for tuberculosis at a sanatorium in Saranac Lake, New York, which concluded with the surgical collapse of one of his lungs. Putnam, who had been largely apolitical up to this point in his life, also joined the Communist Party around this time, contributing frequently to leftist magazines like the *Partisan Review*, the *New Masses*, and *The Daily Worker* through the end of the Second World War, when he became disillusioned by Stalinist purges and quit the party in 1945 and focused his energies on his growing interest in Latin American and Spanish literature.

¹¹⁸ *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 251.

During their years in Philadelphia, Putnam continued to work on literary translations, with the University of Chicago Press publishing his translation of Euclides da Cunha's enormous novel *Os Sertões* in 1944 as *Rebellion in the Backlands* and Viking Press publishing his very highly regarded translation of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1949 after more than a dozen years of labor. In May 1946, while living in Gary, Indiana, the Putnam's received temporary immigration cards to visit Brazil, returning to the United States by ship from Buenos Aires in October 1946. In 1947, they left their home at 3225 Powelton Avenue in Philadelphia and moved to the nearby countryside. In June 1948, Putnam published *Marvelous Journey*, a survey of four centuries of Brazilian literature, with A. A. Knopf. Putnam died January 15, 1950 in Lambertville, New Jersey and was buried in Rossville, Illinois. Riva died December 27, 1979 in Arlington/Middlesex, Massachusetts. [Putnam's papers](#) are now held by Southern Illinois University in Carbondale and [his correspondence from the *New Review*](#) is at Princeton University.

Rene Taupin, “[3 Poems by Andre Salmon](#)” (prose, translated from the French by Louis Zukofsky)

René Taupin was born in France in 1905 and moved to the United States in the 1920s, where he took a teaching position as a professor of literature at Columbia University, publishing *L'Influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie Américaine (de 1910 à 1920)* (*The Influence of French Symbolism on American Poetry (from 1910 to 1920)*) in 1929. An English translation of the book by William Pratt and Anne Rich was published by AMS Press in 1985.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Taupin and Zukofsky were very close friends, and Zukofsky corresponded intensely with Taupin throughout his year at Madison, with Zukofsky's planned issue of *Poetry* magazine and their coordination of separate Guggenheim Foundation grant applications frequent topics of discussion in their letters. While neither of their Guggenheim

applications proved successful that year, Zukofsky had enlisted Taupin's help in paring down and arranging a large manuscript of Zukofsky's short poems to include with his application. In a letter dated August 23, 1930, Zukofsky told Taupin he was sending 161 poems and asked him to "please select no more than 50" and to "tear them out of their clasps, clips, groups, and arrange them in any order that he deems most fitting for consumption. . . . Repeat: Clip these 50 together in delectable order as would make a 'smooth' volume."¹¹⁹

The manuscript appears to have been lost in the post for some time, but Taupin eventually received it and complied with the request, returning a typed and reordered selection of Zukofsky's short poems sometime in late October or early November. On November 7, Zukofsky wrote Taupin exuberantly:

Only one copy of the short poems & The? Have you one carbon or two? Keep one, of course. And please send me bill (may have to keep you waiting, but send it, anyway).
 Typographical errors of course, but splendid I suppose as these things go — And as for your arrangement, it's simply marvelous: the uniform calibre of the stuff in each section! The first section is an arrangement of extraordinary judgment. How you could see a tendency is beyond me, but to relate all that formal stuff so that it all seems one is, well—genius. The stuff gains 1000% by your arrangement. Uncanny also how you grouped poems of an autobiographical nature without really knowing anything about the facts. Did a woman's intuition help you? Well, it's grand—that's all!"¹²⁰

Zukofsky included his own translation of Taupin's essay on the "nominalistic poetry" of the French poet André Salmon in the prose section of the "OBJECTIVISTS" issue of *Poetry*.

After Zukofsky and Salmon received the disappointing news early in 1931 that their Guggenheim applications had each been unsuccessful, they began planning further writing and

¹¹⁹ Zukofsky to Taupin, August 23, 1930, Taupin MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

¹²⁰ Zukofsky to Taupin, November 7, 1930, Taupin MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

translating collaborations, the most fruitful of which eventually became Taupin's book *The Writing of Guillaume Apollinaire/Le Style Apollinaire*.¹²¹

Taupin briefly left New York City to take a teaching position at Haverford College, before returning later in the 1930s to fill a position at Hunter College, where he was appointed chair of the Department of Romance Languages in 1954. In 1968, Taupin retired and moved with his wife Sidonia to Paris, where Taupin died on February 13, 1981.

Almost Contributors

In the magazine's small print, Zukofsky also included the following editorial note:

A poem by Horace Gregory, arriving too late to be included this month, will appear in a later issue. The editor regrets the delay; also the limitation of page-space which prevent his presenting contributions by Helene Margaret, Herman Spector, John W. Gassner, William Lubov, B.J. Israel, Chrystie Streeter, Sherry Mangan, Donal McKenzie, and Jerry Reisman. The editor also regrets the omission of a blank page representing Ezra Pound's contribution to this issue—a page reserved for him as an indication of his belief that a country tolerating outrages like article 211 of the U.S. Penal Code, publishers' "overhead," and other impediments to literary life, "does not deserve to have any literature whatsoever." Mr. Pound gave over to younger poets the space offered him.

Gregory's poem, "[A Tombstone with Cherubim](#)," appeared in the March 1931 issue.

Gregory (1898-1982) had attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he married the Ukrainian-born poet Marya Zaturenska and was a peripheral member of the circle which included Carl Rakosi, Kenneth Fearing, Margery Latimer, and Leon Serabian Herald. Gregory went on to be a prominent literary critic and longtime English professor at Sarah Lawrence College in New York.

¹²¹ Of this project, Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas has written: "LZ appears to have worked on this book during the latter part of 1931, after returning to NYC from his short academic year at the University of Wisconsin, and finished it on 16 April 1932. Two of the three parts of the work were published in *The Westminster Magazine* 22.4 (Winter 1933) and 23.1 (Spring 1934)—excluding "Part II—Le Poète Rressuscité," which consists entirely of quotations from throughout Apollinaire's works. René Taupin's French translation of the complete work was published as *Le Style Apollinaire* (Paris: Les Presses Modernes, 1934), but apparently soon after most of the copies were destroyed in a warehouse fire" (<http://www.z-site.net/notes-to-prose/the-writing-of-guillaume-apolinairele-style-apolinaire-1934/>).

Spector (1905-1959) was a prominent left-wing poet and radical activist then living in New York City. He was a friend of Pound's and Roskolenko's poetic mentor. Much of his writing was collected in [*Bastard in the Ragged Suit*](#), published in 1977 by Synergistic Press.

Gassner (1903-1967) was a Hungarian-born friend of Zukofsky's from Columbia, and later went on to be a prominent historian of the dramatic arts. [His papers](#), like Zukofsky's, are now held by the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas.

I have not been able to discover any firm biographical detail on William Lubov. The surname Lubov resembles the Russian noun ЛЮБОВЬ (meaning love or affection), which is sometimes transliterated Lyubov, Ljubov, or Lubow.

Boris J. Israel (1910-1943) was born on February 8, 1910 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania to Theodore Israel, a clothing merchant, and Rhea Kobecher, both of whom were Jewish immigrants from Poland. Israel grew up in New York City, and attended Ohio State University, where he founded the short-lived literary magazine *Nativity* in 1930.¹²² Israel left school after two years and joined the Communist Party in 1932, working as a journalist for the *Federated Press* and *New Masses* and party organizer. He was involved in investigating racial terror and mining labor disputes in Harlan, Kentucky, where he was shot in the leg, and later travelled to Memphis on behalf of the International Labor Defense after six white police officers murdered an unarmed African-American in the city, but was arrested, charged with sedition, and essentially run out of town.¹²³ In 1937, Israel was back in New York City, living at a Gramercy Park address from which he received a passport for foreign travel under the name Blaine Owen. In May 1937, he left for Spain to fight with the

¹²² The 1930 census shows the Israel family as living at 337 Beach 69th Street in the Far Rockaway neighborhood of Queens.

¹²³ See Michael Honey's *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Labor in Memphis*, 56.

Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. While in Spain, he served as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and was later reported missing in action. He survived the war, however, returning to New York City (as Blaine Owen) in February 1939, and subsequently moving to Los Angeles, where the 1940 census records him as living with his widowed mother. Israel died in Los Angeles on December 12, 1943.

Chrystie Streeter was a pun slipped in by Zukofsky, who was born and raised at 97 Chrystie Street on New York City's Lower East Side, just a few blocks from what is now the site of Manhattan's [Tenement Museum](#).

Mangan (1904-1961) was a Harvard-educated friend of Richard Johns who had previously published his own magazine *larus*, and who published poetry and criticism in a number of "Objectivist"-affiliated little magazines. He was the subject, along with John Wheelwright, of Alan Wald's excellent 1983 book *The Revolutionary Imagination: The Poetry and Politics of John Wheelwright and Sherry Mangan*. His papers are held at [Harvard](#), [Syracuse](#), and [Kent State](#).

McKenzie was the European editor of both the fifth issue of Norman Macleod's *Morada* and his subsequent *Front*. In the lead-up to the publication of the issue Pound had made several unheeded suggestions to Monroe that she "temper" Zukofsky's editorial control over the issue by pairing him with McKenzie.

Reisman was a student of Zukofsky's at Stuyvesant High School and is treated at greater length in the section on *An 'Objectivists' Anthology*, to which he contributed, as a collaborator with Zukofsky.

Writers Published in An “Objectivists” Anthology

An “Objectivists” Anthology contained work by 15 writers, eight of whom had also been included in the ‘Objectivists’ 1931 issue of *Poetry* the year before. The most notable inclusions to the anthology were T.S. Eliot, whose poem “Marina” Zukofsky particularly admired, and Ezra Pound, who refused Zukofsky’s requests to contribute a Canto but did give Zukofsky two short lyrics, one of which, “Gentle Jheezus sleek and wild,” reads as both aggressively racist and anti-Semitic. In addition to some 200 pages of poetry, the anthology included “Recencies in Poetry,” a talk Zukofsky had given at the Gotham Book Mart in August 1931 to clarify his editorial statements in the February 1931 issue of *Poetry* as its preface, and reprinted Zukofsky’s “Program ‘Objectivists’ 1931” from *Poetry* as the book’s appendix.¹²⁴ The full table of contents of the anthology can be found at Z-Site: <http://www.z-site.net/biblio-research/the-objectivists-and-their-publications/>.

Louis Zukofsky

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

Basil Bunting

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

Mary Butts

Mary Francis Butts (1890-1937) was an English modernist writer who was well-known to Ezra Pound and had previously been married to the poet and publisher John Rodker. Butts was born on December 13, 1890 in Poole, a large seaport in Dorset on the southern coast of England, the oldest of two children born to Frederick John Butts, a military officer, and Mary Jane Briggs.

Following her father's death in 1905, Butts was sent to boarding school, and her mother remarried in 1907. From 1909 to 1912 Butts studied at London's Westfield College but left before taking a degree, completing her undergraduate studies at the London School of Economics in 1914. In 1916, she began keeping a diary, which she would maintain more or less continuously until her death in 1937, more than 20 years later.

In May 1918, Butts left a lesbian relationship to marry the pacifist poet John Rodker, and helped Rodker found his Ovid Press in 1919. The press lasted less than year, but published poetry by the American expatriates T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, as well as drawings by Wyndham Lewis and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, and Rodker succeeded Pound as the foreign editor of *The Little Review* in 1920. In November 1920, Butts gave birth to their daughter, Camilla Elizabeth, and the couple spent parts of the early 1920s living among other writers and artists in Paris. Shortly after the birth of her daughter, Butts began an affair with the Scottish artist Cecil Maitland, and appears to have developed a drug addiction while on an extended stay at Aleister Crowley's utopian Abbey of Thelema on Sicily. In 1927, Butts and Rodker divorced, and Butts married Gabriel Aitken in 1930.

Butts published fiction regularly throughout the 1920s, with stories frequently appearing in prominent literary magazines like *The Little Review* and *The Dial*. In 1923, Chapman & Hall printed her short story collection *Speed the Plough and other stories* in London, which was followed by her novel *Ashe of Rings*, printed in Maurice Darantiere in Dijon as a joint project by Robert McAlmon's Contact editions and Bill Bird's Three Mountains Press (it was printed in the United States by Albert & Charles Boni in 1926, and a revised English edition was printed by Wishart & Company in London in 1933); *Armed with Madness* (published in 1928 by Albert & Charles Boni in the United States and Wishart & Company in England); *Imaginary Letters*, published with line drawings by Jean Cocteau in Paris in 1928 by Edward Titus, the proprietor of the bookshop At The Sign of the Black

Manikin. In 1932, she published four new books, *Death of Felicity Taverner*, a novel published by Wishart & Company in London; *Several Occasions*, a new collection of stories and *Warning to Hikers* a short pamphlet (also published by Wishart); the short prose essay *Traps for Unbelievers* published by Desmond Harmsworth in London. She then wrote two historical novels about significant figures from antiquity which were published by William Heinemann in London: *The Macedonian*, a study of Alexander the Great (1933), and *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra* (1935). She was working on an unfinished novel based on the life of the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate at the time of her death, in 1937, after a surgery to repair a perforated gastric ulcer.

Shortly after Butts' death, a memoir of her childhood, *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* was published by Methuen and Company in London, and Brendin Publishing Company brought out a final collection of her stories, entitled *Last Stories* in 1938. Over the past few decades, much of Butts' oeuvre has been brought back into print in England and the United States, culminating with the publication of her journals, edited and annotated by Nathalie Blondel, by Yale University Press in 2008, and the 2014 publication of *Mary Butts: The Complete Stories* edited by Bruce McPherson. Good resources on Butts' life and work include *A Sacred Quest: the Life and Writings of Mary Butts* (edited by Christopher Wagstaff and published in 1995) and Nathalie Blondel's 1998 biography *Mary Butts: Scenes from the Life*, both of which were published by McPherson and Company. [Butts' papers](#) are now held by Yale's Beinecke Library.

Frances Fletcher

Frances Sarah Fletcher was born in Bridport, Vermont on May 20, 1894 to James H. Fletcher, a merchant, and Anna Bells. Fletcher graduated from Vassar College in 1914, after which time she worked as a teacher and translator for the banking industry.

Fletcher published two slim volumes of poetry in Philadelphia in the mid 1920s: [*The Banquet and Other Poems*](#) (1925) and [*A Boat of Glass*](#) (1926) and began corresponding with Zukofsky sometime before the end of 1931, probably after reading the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*. Zukofsky submitted her short story “Being Exclusive” to Williams for consideration for *Contact*, and while Williams told Zukofsky in a January 22, 1932 letter that he was keeping it for the magazine, it did not appear in any of *Contact*’s three issues. In May 1934, Fletcher was living in Chatham, Virginia, where a local newspaper noted that a literary society held a farewell meeting in honor of her impending move to Staunton, a town 120 miles north near Shenandoah National Park.

In 1935, Fletcher married Spahr Hourlland, a construction engineer for a retail department store who had served as a Captain in the United States Army during the First World War, and changed her name to Frances Hourlland. By 1940, the couple had moved to Los Angeles. Spahr died on October 22, 1954 in Sacramento, California.

Following her husband’s death, Frances returned to Holliston, Massachusetts, near Boston, where she lived until her own death in February 1978. Some of Fletcher’s work was published under the pseudonym Anne Woodbridge. Many of [her papers](#) are now held by Bowdoin College, including letters from Marianne Moore which span nearly thirty years (1939-1968).

Robert McAlmon

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

George Oppen

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

Ezra Pound

So well-known as to need no introduction here.

Carl Rakosi

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

Kenneth Rexroth

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

Charles Reznikoff

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

William Carlos Williams

Also included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*.

Forrest Anderson

Forrest Clayton Anderson was born on August 9, 1903. About his early life or college experiences, I have been unable to discover much, but it appears that Anderson published his first poem, “S2,” in the Fall 1929 issue of Charles Henri Ford’s magazine *Blues*. Anderson would go on to publish work in each of the magazine’s final three issues, where they appeared along with work from other “Objectivists” Rexroth, Williams, and Zukofsky. Between 1929 and 1931, Anderson and

Richard Johns corresponded frequently, and Anderson published work during those years in Johns' magazine *Pagany*, Samuel Putnam's *The New Review*, and Eugene and Maria Jolas' *transition*.¹²⁴

Following his appearance in the "Objectivist" anthology, Anderson's trail becomes more difficult to follow. It appears that signed on to the U.S. Naval vessel Benjamin H. Brewster while it was in port in New York City in December 1944, and later settled in San Francisco, where he developed a reputation as a "sailor-poet," publishing sea-themed poetry in the fourth issue of George Leite's important Berkeley-based literary magazine *Circle* in 1944, several issues of [ONE: The Homosexual Magazine](#), the first openly gay or lesbian national publication in the United States, between 1954 and 1962, and in two issues (1960 and 1966) of the little magazine *Poetry Score*, published out of Carmel, California.

Over the course of his lifetime, Anderson published several collections of poetry, many of which deal with marine or homoerotic themes; these included: [Sea Pieces and Other Poems](#) (1935),¹²⁵ [Further Sea Pieces](#) (1945), [Circumnavigation of the Halo of a World](#) (1951), [In the Forests of Hell and of Heaven](#) (a long prose poem in nine sequences published in 1958), [Toward Other Shores](#) (1961), and [Portlights](#) (1972). Anderson's poetry was included in Stephen Coote's *Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* (1983). Anderson died on April 16, 1977 in Josephine, Oregon. A collection of [his publications along with some letters](#) are now held at the University of Idaho.

¹²⁴ Anderson's "Sonnet" appeared in the inaugural issue of *Pagany* alongside work by Mary Butts, McAlmon, Rexroth, Williams, and Zukofsky. Anderson's "Hotel for Sailors" appears in the third issue of *Pagany* along with work by Zukofsky, Reznikoff, McAlmon, and Emanuel Carnevali, and two poems by Anderson were featured in the Autumn 1931 issue along with work by Butts, Carnevali, McAlmon, Rakosi, Williams, and Zukofsky. Anderson had work published in two issues of *The New Review*: the third issue included his poem "Esthetic for Sunday Afternoon" and the fourth issue contained his poem "More Hominem" as well as a notice that his "American Letter" (presumably correspondence) would appear in the fifth issue, though nothing under Anderson's byline ultimately appeared in the magazine's final issue.

¹²⁵ *Sea Pieces* received [a brief review](#) in the April 1936 issue of *Poetry* from Howard Nutt, who described the collection as twenty years behind its time and indebted to the work of E. E. Cummings and Hart Crane.

T.S. Eliot

So well-known as to need no introduction here. Zukofsky included his poem “Marina.”

R.B.N. Warriston

Apart from the fact that he lived in the early 1930s in White Plains, New York, I’ve been able to discover little tangible evidence about Warriston. In addition to his inclusion in *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, Warriston published work in the early 1930s in both *Pagany* and *Poetry*.¹²⁶

Because Warriston is such an unusual surname in the United States, I consider it plausible that Warriston was a pseudonym for someone Zukofsky knew. One intriguing possibility might be someone connected with Gilbert Seldes, the former editor of *The Dial*, as the 1930 census lists the Seldes household employing a Finnish servant named Mildred Wariston, the only time I could find that surname appearing in the entire census for that year. As far as I can tell from Seldes’ biography, he was living on Madison Avenue during these years, not upstate New York, and I have no other evidence to suggest that he or someone known to him was the author of Warriston’s poems.

Jerry Reisman

Samuel Jerome Reisman was born on December 9, 1913 in New York City. He met Zukofsky in 1929, while he was a student and Zukofsky was a substitute teacher at Stuyvesant High School in New York City and is included in *An “Objectivists” Anthology* as a collaborator with Zukofsky on a short poem. Reisman went on to study physics at the City College of New York in

¹²⁶ His poem “Sea Gulls” appeared in the Summer 1931 issue of *Pagany* along with work by Rakosi, Reznikoff, McAlmon, Zukofsky, Williams, and Howard Weeks, and his “Herald-Tribune Acme” in the Winter 1932 issue next to work by McAlmon, Rakosi, and Frances Fletcher. His poem “[Sanctuary](#)” appeared in the July 1933 issue of *Poetry*.

the early 1930s and later worked as an electrical engineer for an aviation firm. He advised Zukofsky on the mathematical portions of Zukofsky's "A"-8 and "A"-9 and collaborated with Zukofsky on several writing projects, including a never-produced cinematic treatment of James Joyce's *Ulysses* that was encouraged at various moments in the early 1930s by both Ezra Pound and Joyce himself.

In September 1936, Reisman and Zukofsky visited Niedecker on Blackhawk Island, and Reisman wrote a detailed account of his friendship with Niedecker and his view of Zukofsky and Niedecker's relationship in 1991.¹²⁷ At the conclusion of World War II, Reisman founded Techlit Consultants, a technical writing firm, and employed Zukofsky from March 1946 until January 1947, when Reisman ended his friendship with Zukofsky.¹²⁸ Reisman died on January 1, 2000 in Saratoga, California.

¹²⁷ "Lorine: Some Memories of a Friend," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, 35-47.

¹²⁸ See *The Poem of a Life*, 181-189, 225, 473-475 for Mark Scroggins' view of the Zukofsky-Reisman friendship, and "On Some Conversations with Celia Zukofsky," in *Sagetrieb* 10, no. 3 (Winter 1991), 139-150, for Reisman's account of his relationship with Louis and Celia.

Carl Rakosi Biography

Family Background

Born on November 6, 1903, in Berlin, Germany, Carl Rakosi was the only first-generation American immigrant among the core “Objectivists.”¹

Parents

Rakosi’s parents, Leopold Rakosi (born Leopold Rozenberg sometime between 1872 and 1873)² and Flora Steiner (born 1879), were Hungarian Jews who had married in Budapest in 1897. Their first son, Lester, was born in 1898, and the family emigrated to Berlin, Germany for business reasons shortly thereafter. At the time of Carl’s birth, Leopold was one of three Hungarian partners in a firm that manufactured canes and walking sticks, making him a respectable member of the Jewish merchant class in Wilhelmine Germany. Rakosi described his father as looking like “an ideal Swede,” with a “trim moustache and grey eyes and straight gentlemanly nose and fair complexion ... looks, clothes, manner clean-cut ... the voice big and resonant, unexpected in such a small man, and an air of utter integrity.”³

While he was never especially active politically, Leopold had deep emotional sympathies for socialism, which originated during his years working in Germany. According to Carl, while on a lunchtime walk through Berlin’s Großer Tiergarten, his father chanced one day upon a public

¹ Basil Bunting was born in Northumberland, England and lived in the United States for short stints at various points, but remained a British citizen until his death.

² Various government documents give different dates. His naturalization record gives his birthday as May 16, 1873, his WWI draft registration card gives his birth as May 13, 1872.

³ “Carl Rakosi,” *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, Vol. 5, 194.

address being given by prominent German socialists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and found himself:

dazzled by the power of the words, moved in every cell by the speaker's deep moral passion, which he felt at white heat, and his commitment to a cause from which he himself could not benefit, and the realization came to my father then that this was the noblest thing a man could do . . . he could not conceive of anything nobler . . . to have a great cause, to be a spokesman, an advocate, a champion of the oppressed and downtrodden. He never got over that. There was awe in his voice, almost reverence, and a hush, and his face became transformed when he mentioned the names of the speakers, and I, sitting at my favorite spot next to his right elbow by the workbench, basked in the glow of his idealism. And when he went on about the brotherhood of man and the necessity for justice, his favorite themes, a wave of emotion surged through me and lifted me up, and I was glad.⁴

The first year of Rakosi's life was a very difficult one for his family. Just as the cane manufacturing firm was beginning to prosper, Leopold's wealthier partners bought him out of the firm, leaving him without a job. Furthermore, although Rakosi was too young to remember this time clearly, he later suspected that his mother probably experienced severe postpartum depression (then called *melancholia*), which prevented her from fulfilling the maternal responsibilities expected of her. In later life, Rakosi was unable to recall any precise memories of his mother, and knew only that others described her as very beautiful, with waist-length black hair and dark, expressive eyes.⁵

Rakosi told Kimberly Bird in 2002:

What I remember . . . is always being alone. At least that's the way I remember it. I was really terrified. This is from birth to my first year. Now, whether this is an actual memory or not, I'm not sure, but it feels like a memory of being utterly alone, in a huge room. That has left me with a fear to this day of being alone in a house. This is not a dream; it's a memory, and I am bonded to it. It's a memory of no one being there and no one coming. A mother was not there. I'm sure.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In a brief autobiographical essay Rakosi related that he did not remember seeing his mother or her ever touching him, even in the 5 years he lived with his grandparents in Baja (Ibid, 196).

⁶ "Scenes from My Life" in *Collected Prose*, 85. In another published autobiographical account of his childhood, he relates a similar memory: "I am in a very long room, so long that I can not see its end. There is very little furniture. The ceiling

Whatever the precise cause of the rupture, Leopold and Flora separated in 1904, and divorced soon after. Following their separation, Leopold emigrated to America (via Budapest) while Flora and the two boys returned to her parents' home in Baja, Hungary, a city of around 25,000 near the Serbian border. Rakosi remembered this time with mixed feelings:

I don't remember ever seeing my mother, don't remember her ever touching me or holding me when I was little. My father left her when I was only one year old and my brother Lester and I were brought up for the first six years of my life by her mother in a small town in southern Hungary. My mother lived somewhere in our house but always out of sight and hearing. Not that I felt anything was missing ... but it has left a great mystery in my biological past. A big chunk is missing, the part that would have told me who I am biologically. As a consequence, there has been a slight psychic discontinuity, both things which look as if they belong in the making of a poet-self.⁷

Maternal Grandparents

While he could recall no interaction with his birth mother, Rakosi had a much happier relationship with his maternal grandparents, Samuel and Rosalia [Róza] Steiner. Rakosi was especially fond of Róza, who he described as being “my mother, but more gentle and kind than a mother.”⁸ He would later recall her with deep love:

The eyes are sad and reflective, the face tired, beginning to show wrinkles, but the mouth smiles and an incomparable sweetness, her character, exudes from her, holding nothing back, and envelops me. She leans towards me, attentive, smiling, and I respond in like, as I had learned to do from her, also smiling, all inside me light. But I can not do her justice.⁹

Rakosi recalled his Steiner grandfather as

is very high and vast. There are shadows. The further away they are, the longer and heavier. There is no one there. I lie in my crib. All I'm aware of is that I *am*. And the silence. The silence is loud. No one comes. The silence is all there is. The nothing is oppressive. Hours go by and it becomes harder and harder to bear. There is no end. There is only the silence. And nothing. But beyond what I can see is something ominous looming (Ibid, 195).

⁷ Archive for New Poetry, UCSD Mandeville Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 4.

⁸ “Scenes from My Life” in *Collected Prose*, 85.

⁹ Ibid.

a formidable gentleman with a Bavarian-style beard. At this time in his life, he was reduced in circumstances to owning a small umbrella and notions store, where he did his own repairing, but I gather that at one time he had done well in business but had gone broke, trying to help his sons establish themselves. He had to work hard. In my memory of him there was something stern despondency probably which I couldn't understand.¹⁰

The Steiner's had four children, three sons and a daughter (Carl's mother, Flora). Their youngest son, Karoly was Carl's namesake (Karoly is the Hungarian version of the German Karl/Carl) and had died as a young man in a building collapse. Flora's other two brothers had emigrated to Munich, where they married German women and converted to Catholicism. Rakosi recalled somewhat strained relations within the family, largely the result of economic, cultural and religious disagreements (he would later learn that his grandfather had been essentially bankrupted in trying to help these two uncles, who the rest of the family viewed as dissolute, lazy, and dishonest, establish themselves financially in Germany).

Apart from the total absence of his mother and occasional rock fights between the local Serbian and Hungarian Jewish children in the neighborhood, Rakosi's other memories of his childhood in Baja were generally idyllic. His grandparents lived in a modest home, with a barn and mulberry trees behind, owned a horse, and kept chicken and geese. At age five, he was enrolled in a local Jewish community school, and he and Lester lived happily with their grandparents in Baja until the following year, when the two boys left to join their father in America.

Paternal Grandparents

Rakosi never met his paternal grandparents (Barbara Mayer and Abraham Rozenberg), Hungarian-speaking Jews native to *Szilágy megye* (Sălaj county), a mountainous, forested region of Transylvania which became a part of Romania following the signing the Treaty of Versailles. His

¹⁰ UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 6.

grandfather made his living as a grain merchant and was a tall man with a long “biblical” beard that marked him as visibly Jewish among their mainly Transylvanian peasant neighbors, who referred to him as “Father Abraham.”¹¹

The Rozenbergs had four children, two boys and two girls, all of whom moved to Budapest as teenagers in search of better educational and vocational opportunities. Their eldest son, Jacob, had been an exceptionally promising student at the Jesuit gymnasium in Szilagyemege, and the teachers there wanted him to continue his studies at the University of Budapest. Because the family both lacked the money to support him as a student and the university had strict quotas on the number of Jews that could be admitted, his Jesuit instructors proposed that the church could pay for his university studies provided that Jacob converted to Catholicism. Jacob and his parents agreed to this arrangement, but Rakosi recalled that his father Leopold:

was deeply disturbed by this because nothing offended his moral sense more than a Jew giving up his religion and identity to become a Christian, especially for practical reasons. He avoided talking about it because he was very fond of his brother and looked up to him.

Jacob graduated with honors from the University and went on to teach philosophy there for many years. What must have been for reasons of expediency he changed his name to Rakosi, a variant of Rakoczy, Hungary’s great national hero. With that, he ended once and for all his connection to the world of Szilagyemege and “Father Abraham.” In Budapest, however, it was not at all unusual for Jews to take on Magyar names, not necessarily because of expediency but because they had become Magyars in spirit and wanted Hungarian names to show it. ...

Towards my father he acted as a guardian. Knowing that my father would have to have some kind of a trade to make a living, Jacob arranged a watchmaker apprenticeship for him with a master craftsman in Budapest, a reputable Christian approaching retirement age. My father was only thirteen then. By agreement he was to work and learn under this master for the whole time, a period of seven years. In return he lived in the master’s home, got room and board and pocket money, and agreed to behave decently, according to the life-style in the

¹¹ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 194.

house. Living there, he came to feel like a member of the family, and the master felt the same towards him and looked out for his welfare.¹²

Following the completion of his apprenticeship, Leopold served as a hussar (cavalry officer) in the Hungarian army. Just as Jacob had done, Leopold changed his surname to Rakosi upon coming of age in honor of Rákóczi Ferenc [Francis II Rákóczi], a Hungarian folk hero who led an uprising against the Habsburgs in the early eighteenth century. Though he did not follow Jacob in adopting Catholicism, Rakosi described his father during that period of his life a well-integrated patriot who “regarded himself as a Hungarian first and a Jew next.”¹³

Emigrating to the United States

Following his dismissal from the cane-making partnership in Berlin, and the dissolution of his marriage to Flora, Leopold emigrated to the United States, hopeful that his training as a master craftsman in Europe would provide better economic prospects in an environment with greater demand for skilled workmen. Leopold arrived in the United States in June 1905, settling first in Chicago, where he found work as a jobber, repairing chronometers for Moore and Evans, a large wholesale jewelry firm. In Chicago he also met and married Rose Kulka, a fellow Hungarian whose family came from what is now Slovakia.

In 1910, when Carl was six years old and Lester was eleven, Rose made a solo voyage to Baja to fetch the boys and bring them to live their father in the United States. Neither Carl nor Lester had ever met their step-mother before, and only Lester had any memories of their father, so one can

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 28.

only imagine the feelings that accompanied her arrival and Carl's separation from the only family he had ever known. Rakosi would later write of this parting from his grandmother:

I can imagine the final moment. The bags are packed. We are all dressed, ready to leave. The time has come. All I am thinking of is the going and the necessity to act as if this were like any other day. She has suppressed her tears so as to make the parting bearable to me. I walk up to her and like my granddaughter Julie, also six at the time I wrote this, let myself be hugged and kissed with that self-possession and vigilance which protect children. And I leave without recognizing her grief or even acknowledging that this is a separation.

Forgive me.¹⁴

After emigrating to the United States, Rakosi had no further contact with his mother or her parents. Rakosi returned to Baja in search of his childhood home with his daughter Barbara and her husband Dan Nordby in the 1980s, however. While there, they chanced upon the building which had previously been the town's synagogue (and is now the Baja public library), and found his mother and grandmother's names listed on a monument to local Jews murdered during the Second World War:

We were walking down the street, and I see a big new building there, a synagogue. First of all, it was a new building; and, then, a big synagogue? I couldn't understand. Ninety percent of the Jews had been killed at Auschwitz. How could it be? So, we walked in and I learned that it was no longer a synagogue, because there weren't any Jews left. The building had been converted into a public library, but there was a Jewish altar at one end. And the librarian told me that—I no longer had enough Hungarian to talk to her in Hungarian, but I could manage the German pretty well—that there was one Jew who worshipped every Friday night at the altar there. So, I asked the librarian, "How come there is this synagogue, a big new synagogue, here?" She said, "We thought the Jews would come back to Baja, that they simply had left, fled." ...

Anyhow, then we were walking out and there was this long stone plaque, a handsome plaque outside the building. It was like a wall. It had many names engraved on it. I was going to go on, I wasn't going to pay any attention to it, but I paused. "Let's see what's here." Auschwitz

¹⁴ "Scenes from My Life" in *Collected Prose*, 85-86.

was written on it. I looked down and I see the names of my grandmother and my mother.¹⁵ So that was how I learned that they had been killed in Auschwitz.

So, that was it. Well, the death of my natural mother didn't mean that much to me because I really had had no personal relationship to her; it had all been with my grandmother. My grandfather must have died before Auschwitz.¹⁶

After leaving Baja in 1910, Rose, Lester, and Carl made stops in Budapest and Vienna before embarking on the long transatlantic journey. The family went second-class, which impressed itself clearly upon Rakosi's memory, as did the fact that he became sick after nearly every meal of the long voyage. The ship arrived at Ellis Island, where the two boys completed a nerve-wracking health examination (Lester was slender and suffered from kyphosis) and passed through the immigration desk to life on a new continent.¹⁷

During the journey from Baja to Chicago, the two boys began to get to know their "father's wife" (she had not yet come to be felt as their step-mother), forming the initial bonds for what would be one of the most important relationships of Carl's young life. Rakosi would later recall his

¹⁵ See: Flóra and Róza Steiner: <http://data.jewishgen.org/imagedata/hungary/holocaust/Baja16.jpg>.

¹⁶ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 202. Another variant of the story can also be found earlier in this oral history document: "I went back with my daughter and son-in-law, and we went back to Baja, partly in order to find out what had happened to my family. So, we went to the city hall, but during the Communist regime, they had transferred all of the birth records to Budapest, so I couldn't find out anything, but when I was walking down the street, I immediately recognized the houses, the kind of houses they were. So, we were walking down the street, and all of a sudden I see a synagogue there, a very handsome, rather new synagogue. Well, after the Holocaust, how could there be a brand-new synagogue in a city? So, we went inside and it turned out that they had transformed it into a library. So I was talking to the librarian who—I didn't remember much Hungarian anymore. So I tried talking in German, and we got along fairly well. So I said, "How come there's a synagogue here?" She said, "We thought that the Jews would come back." Well, they had all been killed. There was only one single Jew left in the whole city of Baja. Everybody had been killed, sent to Auschwitz or other places. But, it shows—and this will interest you—that not everybody there was anti-Semitic, interested in killing Jews. They really thought that Jews had gone away to work somewhere, and this was the way to invite them back. It was an eye-opener for me. This is a dramatic story actually. Just one Jew. They had set up a tabernacle at one end of the library, and this single Jew, who apparently didn't have a family anymore, used to come to Friday night services and perform the rituals. ... So my daughter and I, and Dan, my son-in-law, walk outside, and I see there's a wall there and some names inscribed carved into the wall, and just for the hell of it, I looked to see who's there. Well, that's how I discovered that my mother and grandmother had been killed in Auschwitz. Apparently my grandfather had died before that (6-7).

¹⁷ Rakosi describes the stress of this health screening in his autobiography: "There into what looked like an enormous, barren barracks, the immigrants poured and stood around, waiting nervously in their best clothes to check out their papers and to go through the required medical examination, and it hit them head-on for the first time that no one knew exactly what state of health they had to be in order to pass" (*Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 199).

stepmother as “not a woman of great natural warmth, but a tremendously gutsy, courageous woman, very solid in her feelings and thinking. Not much of a thinker, but enough.”¹⁸

A Midwestern Childhood

Once they disembarked in the United States, the family lived in Chicago for about a year. In 1911, Leopold borrowed capital and equipment from Moore and Evans, his previous employers, and opened a small jewelry and watch repair shop in Gary, Indiana, a town of about 17,000 inhabitants located roughly thirty miles southeast of Chicago. As a child, Rakosi faced a very rapid assimilation into an entirely new and bewildering culture. This assimilation also had a linguistic component. Rakosi's first language had been Hungarian, and his parents spoke Hungarian and German in the home.¹⁹ Regarding his rapid immersion in a new linguistic and educational context, he told Kimberly Bird in 2002:

I started out not knowing one word of English, not a single word. I remember in Gary I had to pick up English immediately, and a little kid picks it up on the playground. . . . Gary at that time had a very progressive education system. They would test you and put you in the grade the test showed you belonged. . . . [O]ne day someone comes into the classroom and says they want to see me in the principal's office. So I go to the principal's office. The principal tells me, “Well, we're going to change your class; we're going to put you in this other class.” This other class was a year ahead. After about three or four weeks, I get another call to the principal's office. This time I'm put into another class, a still higher class. So, I'm pushed around two years in just a few weeks time. I'm now in a class where I'm the littlest guy.²⁰

¹⁸ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 4.

¹⁹ In a letter to Andrew Crozier, Rakosi wrote: “My first language was Hungarian, but all educated Hungarians in those days spoke German, so I heard German at home in Kenosha too, and my ear for its natural cadence has never left me.” (UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 5.)

²⁰ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 11. He gives a similar account in his autobiography: “Gary's school system was better than you'd expect in such a rough steel town. That was because it happened to have a bold, innovative superintendent at the time who assigned children to grade levels not on the basis of age but mental ability. Thus, one day I was sent to a room I had never seen before and given a test; I had not the foggiest notion why. The next day I was called out of class to the principal's office and told I was going to be moved ahead a grade. I couldn't understand it. Then a month later, the same thing, another grade ahead. I had no difficulty doing the work in the upper grades, but now everybody in the class was two years older than I, and that did make a difference in my life because henceforth everybody in class would always be two years older and bigger and I would always be two years younger and smaller, even at the university” (199-200).

In a 1985 letter to a reader from Gary, Indiana, Rakosi wrote of his youthful introduction to race relations in the Midwest:

I remember the steel mills, of course, but in addition a terrifying experience on the school playground on day: five huge, wild-eyed black boys, shrieking war cries and wielding clubs with nails, driving all the white kids off the premises. That was my first sight of blacks.²¹

Another memory. It's a very hot night. We're all sitting outdoors on the street and a little black puppy comes running up, his tail wagging joyously. That was Teddy, and love at first sight, for him too. He stayed with us until we were grown.²²

In a letter to his granddaughter Jennifer in 1996, Rakosi remembered Teddy as

my first dog, a black and white puppy who came into my life one hot summer evening in Gary, Indiana when I was about seven years old. We were sitting outside my dad's store ... to get away from the heat inside when this little puppy came wobbling up to us kids with his tail wagging a mile a minute and complete trust and hope in his eyes. At last he had found us, he said with his tail. Talk about love at first sight! Since he was a stray, he instantly became a part of the family.²³

While they stayed long enough for Carl to learn English and acquire a puppy, Leopold struggled to establish his business in Gary, and in 1912 the family moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin, a rapidly growing industrial town located about 100 miles northwest of Gary and 65 miles north of Chicago.²⁴

Following their move to Wisconsin, Leopold and Rose lived in a small apartment above their shop at 317 Orange Street. The family would later move to 61 North Main Street, with Leopold owning and operated a store in a modest brick building located at 5040 Sixth Avenue, a working-

²¹ Rakosi spoke of a similar memory with Kimberly Bird late in life: "on the playground in Gary, it was a terrifying experience, because the steel workers were big guys, and they had big sons, and they were mostly black at that time, I remember, and these guys would come running out with brickbats, or wooden bats with nails in them and come at you, and they would take over the whole playground. You wouldn't dare go out to play there." (*Century in the Poetic Eye*, 11)

²² Letter to Jim Gross, 12 June 1985. UW Madison Special Collections, Box 2, Folder 37.

²³ Carl Rakosi papers, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 8, Folder 31.

²⁴ Kenosha's population in 1880 was just over 4,000 people. By 1910 it had grown to over 21,000, and to more than 40,000 by 1920, meaning that it had sustained an average annual growth rate of nearly 6% for 40 years.

class neighborhood very near to the Kenosha Harbor on Lake Michigan. Leopold's business letterhead identified Leopold as an "expert watchmaker and jeweler" and indicated that the shop, established in 1915, carried "diamonds, watches, jewelry, clocks, silverware, chinaware and optical goods."

Rakosi remembered his family home as loving and supportive, but far from affluent. Money was always tight, and his parents scraped by from their month-to-month earnings. Rakosi would later write that his parents' concern over their precarious financial situation "locked in and dominated their lives, subsuming their softer, convivial qualities. It locked me in, too. It locked me into a lifelong concern about making a living and affected my personal habits and the way I deal with practical matters."²⁵

Rakosi's older brother Lester had something of a tragic life. Born with a spinal deformity that left him with a noticeably hunched back, Lester did not get along well with his parents and did not apply himself well at school, although Carl remembered him as being very intelligent. He eventually learned watchmaking as a trade, like his father, and for many years ran a modest business repairing watches and working for a jeweler in Milwaukee. Lester never married, and died of cancer in July of 1958. He was buried in Spring Hill, a Jewish cemetery in West Milwaukee's Story Hill neighborhood.

At the time that Carl and Lester were growing up there, Kenosha was mainly populated by people of German and Polish descent, and the economic life of Kenosha was dominated by two

²⁵ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 200.

factories at opposite ends of town: the Simmons bed factory and the Nash automobile factory.

Rakosi's first "real" job, as a fourteen-year-old, was in the spring department at Simmons:

[T]he springs were spread out on some kind of a mat. Then you had to pull the springs tight and connect them to a hook, and you did that constantly, all day long, and your hands would be bloody after a while. There was a tray in front of you with lye, some solution of lye, because lye was probably too strong, but you'd dip your hands in this lye, oh, it would burn like fire. So, you had that experience for three months. It made a deep impression on me.²⁶

There was a small Jewish community in Kenosha (Rakosi remembers it consisting of fewer than one hundred people) and an Orthodox synagogue, which the family attended. While Carl had a bar mitzvah upon coming of age, he recalled having only "very rudimentary" religious instruction, learning just enough Hebrew pronunciation as to be able to perform the expected readings.²⁷

Kenosha was also the place where Carl 'became American,' linguistically, culturally, and officially. On June 25, 1917 the entire Rakosi family was officially naturalized as American citizens by the Kenosha County Circuit Court. Carl felt fairly well assimilated, remembering that apart from being keenly aware of his small stature, his teen years had been pretty typical for a middle-class Midwesterner:

I was one of them, playing baseball and basketball and soccer and ice hockey, and swimming and roller-skating and ice-skating, flying along in long musical lines, and riding a bike without hands, all my natural medium—my song of summer, turned crystal in winter. I was utterly content and absorbed.

After school I found odd jobs. I washed dishes in an ice-cream parlor, I did menial chores in a barbershop, things like that. . . . I was in fact an all-American boy.²⁸

In addition to his sporting and social interests, one of the most important influences on Rakosi's adolescent development was his discovery of Kenosha's Gilbert M. Simmons Memorial

²⁶ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 16.

²⁷ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 28.

²⁸ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 200.

Library, an attractive public library housed in a spacious neoclassical building designed by the Chicago architect Daniel Hudson Burnham. Though his father had high regard for learning, there were no books in the Rakosi home, so the discovery of the public library represented an entry into an enormous, majestic new world for the teenaged Carl.²⁹ In an autobiographical account of his life, Rakosi called the library “my secret home and my secret vice,” and stated that:

I read everything, everything. And I found there the mental universe which suited me, and I discovered its scope and depth and excitement, but I had no one to share this with or the wild nature of my excitement.³⁰

In a 1981 letter to an admiring reader from Kenosha, Rakosi described his memories of the library with great enthusiasm:

What a library that was in my day! What magic! I used to rush there from school, then slow to a genteel walk as I entered the vestibule, and slip into the stacks on tiptoe, making myself as small as possible, avoiding at all cost a look at the librarian, for that might make her question my entrance. For I never got over the feeling that there was a mistake somewhere, it couldn't be that all those marvellous [sic] books, row after row, in that dim light, which seemed somehow appropriate to their mysterious contents, were there for me, and that if it were found out what I was doing touching, handling, poring , a halt would be put to it. I realized, of course, that the opposite was the case: the librarians positively beamed at the little kid who came out of the stacks with an armful of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Max Stirner, Huneker, Dickens, Chekhov, George Eliot. I was their prize habitué, their precocious reader, a living proof that what they were doing was worthwhile. Nevertheless, I never quite got over the feeling that there was something not quite licit about extracting so much out of those books. The City Fathers just didn't know; so I had to be careful not to betray the secret when I emerged from the magic grotto in the back. But I couldn't hide the excitement on my face, and it must have been that too which made the librarians beam.³¹

²⁹ “Although my father and stepmother were intelligent and had a high regard for learning (he had a European's great respect for culture), she was too practical and literal to be interested in more than a newspaper, and his eyes at the end of a day were too tired to be able to read. Thus, there were no books in our home.” (*Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 200).

³⁰ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 201.

³¹ Letter from Carl Rakosi to John Kingsley Shannon, October 21, 1981, in UW-Madison Special Collections. Box 2, Folder 31.

Rakosi did most of his reading outside of his home, surreptitiously, believing that his burgeoning literary interests would be ridiculed by other townspeople and misunderstood by his pragmatic, practically-minded parents were they to become public. As to his earliest literary interests, he told Andrew Crozier that his first reading

was into English, not American literature: Shakespeare, Chaucer, Keats Blake, Burns and Herrick came later ... then suddenly Yeats and those late 19th Century poets with the haunting, sad cadences, Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dawson. This was not by choice but simply the order of priority in the American school system.³²

Though Rakosi loved books, his first and deepest affinity was for music, an enthusiasm which he was not ashamed to pursue openly at home. As children, both he and his brother saved for several months in order to buy a mandolin and instruction manuals so that they could teach themselves to play, and Rakosi asserted late in life that “If we had lived in a big city, and if my folks could have afforded it, I would have become a musician and a composer rather than a poet. To this day music means at least as much to me as poetry.”³³

The origins of Rakosi’s identification as anything more than just a reader of literature were in high senior year of high school, when he wrote an essay on English Victorian poet and novelist George Meredith. He would later recall: “To my wonderment the teacher wrote back a long enthusiastic response as to an intellectual equal, with comment after comment indicating that she respected my literary mind. That is how I learned that I had one and that I could express it.”³⁴ In later accounts of his life, Rakosi would consistently credit this experience as the first significant one in the formation of his desire to become a writer.

³² "Answers to Questions from Andrew Crozier," UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 5.

³³ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 18.

³⁴ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 201.

For example, while compiling notes in response to questions about his writing life from Marty Rosenblum, who was then writing his dissertation on Rakosi's poetry, Rakosi made the following handwritten sketch of "Major formative events in my life":

- 1a. My English teacher in last yr. in h.s.
- b. Discovery of public library in Kenosha
2. My writing associates at U of C[hicago] & U of Wisc[onsin]
3. My appearance in *Little Review* & *The Exile*
4. The Depression and my Leftist involvement
my marriage & cli[nical] resp[onsibilitie]s.
5. My total entry into soc[ial] w[ork] & psychotherapy
6. Andrew Crozier's letter & my re-entry into writing

How small this seems for a whole life, yet to Marty seemed extraordinary & fascinating.³⁵

More details regarding Rakosi's development as a writer and a history of his publications can be found [elsewhere on this site](#).

College Years

In 1920, following his graduation at age 16 from Kenosha High School near the upper third of his graduating class, Rakosi enrolled at the University of Chicago. The transition from life as a teenager in Kenosha to life on the campus of a prestigious private university in a city of nearly three million people was mixed for Rakosi, presenting opportunities that were awesome, daunting, and intimidating. Near the end of his life, he described some of the more memorable parts of this transition:

I'm sixteen years old, and I go to Chicago, which is ... a working-class, Middle Western city, very industrial in its character, but the campus there puts you into a different world. The

³⁵ Carl Rakosi collection, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 4, Folder 4.

campus—the architecture, the buildings are modeled after either Cambridge or Oxford, I don't know which. They are almost like cathedrals, semi-Gothic. It was my first exposure to that. I was overawed. I used to hang around the International House there, and that was a fascinating place to be. To my amazement—you know that I come from Kenosha, I am sixteen years old. I had never met graduate students from India before, from all over the world. They came to the International House. There was great talk there.³⁶

In his first quarter, Rakosi took courses in elementary French, intermediate German, and rhetoric and composition. In the winter quarter, Rakosi took a course in early Medieval European history, elementary German composition, and an introductory English literature course taught by Robert Morss Lovett, a well-known scholar who had served as the dean of the junior college for more than a decade. It was in Lovett's course that Rakosi first began to write poetry, and Rakosi later described himself as being influenced by two of his fellow students: George Schuyler, “who wrote poems in a style like Rudyard Kipling's, very robust,” and would later go on to be a prominent African-American journalist, and an unnamed older Japanese man who “wrote quite short poems in the style of a haiku”.³⁷ Rakosi would later recall “like the invisible way I had learned English, one day I was a reader of literature and the next day, there was the knowledge, as if it had always been there, that I wanted to be a writer and that I could best express myself in poetry, not prose. It happened in this class [the course he took from Lovett].”³⁸ In a 2002 interview, he remembered that it was at this time that he first “knew without any reasoning it out in any way that I was going to be a poet—that my calling would be that of a poet.”³⁹

While he enjoyed his studies, Rakosi struggled to make friends, due both to his youth and because he lived in a dormitory on campus, which quickly became a social desert after classes let out.

³⁶ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 189.

³⁷ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 21.

³⁸ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 202.

³⁹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 21.

He told an interviewer that “I was too lonesome in Chicago. I had no friends and the students never hung around on the campus after class. I couldn’t meet friends; there was nobody there. So I transferred to Madison, because I don’t think that I had to pay any fee in Madison at that time. ... At that time, I think that Wisconsin was the most progressive university in the country, and the most progressive in their ideas about education.”⁴⁰

In April 1921, Rakosi left the University of Chicago and transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he enrolled in summer school and was admitted as a full-time student beginning in Fall 1921. In contrast to his experience of the imposing intellectual environment at Chicago, he found his peers at Madison quite different, recalling that

There’s nothing awesome about the campus there. On the contrary. The student body were mostly kids from the farms in Wisconsin. ... I didn’t feel that the students in Madison at that time were real students. They were there because they could afford to go to college, but they were primarily interested in girls—the men—and similarly, I suppose, the girls in men. ... They were interested in anything but studies and learning.⁴¹

Rakosi did not feel that he fit particularly well with the general student body at this time, writing:

Madison in those days was a very clean, respectable small town of one-family homes with well-kept lawns. The University had some ten thousand students, mostly from Wisconsin farms and small towns, blond young Babbitts of North European stock, their hair cropped close. It was a place for youth fed on fresh country milk and Iowa corn where time was suspended and they looked each other over and saw that they were comely, and flirted and horsed around, and the big events were football and the Big Ten pennant ahead. And standing guard was a smugness hard to imagine these days, although Nancy Reagan comes pretty close to it.

Entered I, poor little Jewish boy, stewing in an inner life, sensitive, mystical, with Tolstoyan idealism and Nietzschean yearnings, feeling as if I had been branded by a stigma.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 22-23.

⁴¹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 189-190.

⁴² “Scenes from My Life” in *Collected Prose*, 90.

While Rakosi didn't see himself reflected very well in the broader student body or university culture in Madison, there were a few social factors which helped him to achieve a much higher degree of integration than he had enjoyed at Chicago. The first of these was a change to his living situation. Instead of the university dormitory he had occupied at Chicago, in Madison he moved in with two older undergraduates he knew from the Jewish community in Kenosha. He and his roommates took their meals with a young Jewish widow with several small children whose home cooking and convivial hospitality did much to put Rakosi at ease and helped him feel that he arrived in a more socially comfortable situation.⁴³

Second, the University of Wisconsin at Madison was at that time actively developing its growing reputation as a leader in progressive principles of education, which both appealed to and shaped Rakosi's political idealism. While he may have expressed contempt for many of his fellow undergraduates, he had great respect for many of the professors then teaching there, and he took courses from such luminaries as William Ellery Leonard, one of the region's most prominent poets and scholars, who had developed an unusual English course in which he taught what would now be called creative writing; the philosopher Max Carl Otto; and the sociologist E.A. Ross.

Most importantly for Rakosi, however, was the continued development of his identity as a writer and the formation of deep friendships with other students in Madison who shared his literary interests and ambitions. Rakosi's deepest friendships in Madison were with Leon Serabian [Herald]

⁴³ He wrote in an autobiographical account of his life: "As soon as we sat down to her table and saw spread out before us all the dishes heaped high, steaming hot from the kitchen, and rich spicy smells all around, like at home, we unwound and started jabbering away, joking and bantering and laughing, and she stood by our chairs with a big smile, as if entranced, and took in every word, laughing hard along with us and making herself a part of us without intruding. How she enjoyed seeing us eat heartily! And when the food ran out, how happily she ran into the kitchen for more. The place had the jovial spirit of Dickens when she was there, and the warm, giving spirit of a genial mother who knew how to keep hands off. How much she gave us! And how uncertain her own future was" (*Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 202).

(an Armenian immigrant and part-time student), Kenneth Fearing (with whom he lived as a roommate), and Margery Latimer (a young protégé of Zona Gale's from Portage, Wisconsin), each of whom would go on to achieve some measure of literary success. He was also acquainted with Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, both of whom lived in Madison at that time.⁴⁴ Although he was strongly attracted to philosophy and sociology, Rakosi ultimately decided to major in English, and, along with Fearing and Latimer, served as an editor of *The Wisconsin Literary Magazine*, a student publication where Rakosi's first published poems appeared.⁴⁵

In many ways, Rakosi must certainly cut something of a strange figure in Madison during those years, not only by dint of his age and family background, but also because of his personality. Writing in the *Wisconsin Alumnus* magazine, a classmate remembered Rakosi as “a little fellow with an intense manner and tragic eyes, whose soulful verse appeared in the *Literary Magazine*,” and related a humorous story in which Rakosi comes off as sweet but otherworldly.⁴⁶ Rakosi also appeared as a character in Latimer's 1930 roman à clef *This is My Body* as Schevel Pukalski, a young, ambitious, uncompromising modern poet, whose ideals and harshness put him at odds with his more conventional literary peers:

She recognized a boy from her English class. He was Schevel Pukalski. She had seen him showing Mr. Beers a book of his poems one day. When he left the room he had clapped his hand over his forehead and hurried stiffly down the hall. He always had an anguished pucker between his brows and his red mouth was drawn up as if it hurt him. Now he sat looking at his knees.

⁴⁴ He describes these relationships in greater detail in “Scenes from My Life,” a brief biographical essay in *Collected Prose* (the college friendship section occurs pp. 88-104).

⁴⁵ In March 1924, shortly before his and Rakosi's scheduled graduation, Fearing was forced to resign his position as the editor-in-chief of the magazine by disgruntled university administrators. The student newspaper *The Daily Cardinal* reported that “it was held that the editorial policy of the magazine has been irritatingly satirical and intolerably misanthropic, sour and biting.”

⁴⁶ [*Wisconsin Alumnus*](#), 22.

“Mr. Pukalski,” said one of the girls on the couch, “I just loved that poem you read in class the other day.”

He looked at her coldly. “You women certainly have a limited vocabulary.”

They began giggling. The springs of the couch screeched as the girls flounced about, making themselves comfortable.

“No, I mean it. Everything is always lovely and adorable and grand and just lovely.” He held his mouth open for a minute, his red lips scornful. “I should think before you even try to write you’d learn words with meaning and strength to them.”

[After another student reads a poem and shares some fawning praise he claims to have received from a “professor in a southern college,” Pukalski erupts:]

“Say, cut out that crap!” cried Schevel. He clapped his hands over his ears. “It’s bad enough to listen to those cliches in the classroom. Had I better read now?” he asked stonily. He opened his papers. The poem was short and full of odd words and sensations. The silence he received was terrible. He looked around at them, his chin held high. “Of course you don’t understand,” he said proudly. “But I am like Yeats. Absolutely without compromise.” He opened “Thus Spake Zarathustra” and began reading.

“Cut it out, Pukalski,” said one of the men; but he went on in low throaty tones.⁴⁷

Later in the book, Latimer describes fierce resistance to Pukalski’s being elected as an editor of a student literary journal and describes the savage dismissal of a Pukalski-submitted poem when it is read among a group of student editors. In the conversation, Pukalski is dismissed as “nothing but a child” who says “embarrassing things in class about Wordsworth and these new poets ... being as good or better ... than the old ones,” and is defended only by the characters representing Latimer and Fearing.⁴⁸ Elsewhere in her novel, Latimer describes Pukalski’s ambitious desire to get his work published, start his own magazine, and hold onto his self-belief and idealism in the face of the world-weary cynicism of Fearing’s character. She also describes his enduring public humiliation from

⁴⁷ *This is My Body*, 162-165.

⁴⁸ *This is My Body*, 203.

an English professor (probably based on Leonard) who interrupts his reading of an essay in class to make several disparaging remarks.

Starting a Career

Despite the sometimes awkward fit between this young, idealistic poet of Hungarian Jewish descent and the broader Babbitesque environs at Madison, Rakosi graduated in 1924 with his B.A. in English. Following his graduation, Rakosi began almost immediately to worry about his job prospects. As he recalled to [Tom Delany and Olivier Broussard](#) in 2001:

I had given no thought to how I was going to make a living, so as graduation approached, I was in a panic. I had to return to Kenosha and wait for something to turn up and to my great surprise, something did. In my desperation it seemed like a miracle. I came across an announcement that the American Association of Social Workers was interviewing applicants in Chicago for work-study positions. At that time there were almost no men in the field and they were especially interested in recruiting men. I didn't have the slightest idea what social work was then, but it didn't matter. I could now make a living and I leaped at the chance and they accepted me very cordially and with great warmth in Chicago.⁴⁹

Cleveland

His interview in Chicago led to his taking a job in Cleveland, Ohio as a social worker-in-training with Family Service, a family counseling agency that partnered with Case Western Reserve University to train social workers. While in Cleveland he met and appears to have dated or at least formed a deep friendship with Mary Biggs, a local woman who worked as a hairdresser in town. Of this period of his life, would later recall:

The Associated Charities needed a trainee right away, so I moved at once to Cleveland. This was 1924, before a professional postgraduate curriculum and faculty for social work had been developed in universities. One was just starting at Western Reserve in conjunction with the Associated Charities. Members of the agency's supervisory staff taught courses in theory part of the time and supervised and helped the trainees with their cases the rest of the time. The trainee was paid a modest salary. I found the courses rather dull but immediately

⁴⁹ <http://jacketmagazine.com/25/rak-devan.html>.

became deeply involved with my clients, more deeply and disinterestedly than I had ever been involved with anyone before. And I discovered in myself a great urge to listen deeply to their distress, to understand it, my whole attention in it, and be helpful. In this I discovered a great excitement and a gay self-fulfillment unknown to me before.⁵⁰

He also had his first taste of actual social work in Cleveland:

I remember as clearly as if it happened yesterday, my first client. It was in a poor neighborhood, I rang the doorbell of his house, and somebody yelled from upstairs, "Come on up." So, I walk upstairs and I find a black man lying in bed. He had things rigged up so he could open the door, by pushing a button—that sort of thing—and I started to deal with his problems and his situation and I got hooked. I knew then that that was going to be my profession, that there was a deep impulse in me to be helpful to people in need. There was something fulfilling in doing that.⁵¹

Although Rakosi quickly fell in love with the work and with his clients, he still thought of himself primarily as a poet, and began to feel divided between his writing impulses and the powerful psychic and emotional demands of social work, a conflict which would dominate his life for at least the next decade. Feeling restless in Cleveland, and believing that New York City would be both more exciting and provide him with more time and opportunity for his writing, Rakosi quit his job in Cleveland within a year and moved to New York in late 1924/early 1925. This decision was a very difficult one for him, as he had formed deep attachments to the social work he had been doing and possible also with Biggs. It's unclear exactly how serious Rakosi regarded his relationship with Biggs, as the tone of her letters indicates that her affection for him may have been stronger than his for her, but he did visit Biggs again during a brief trip to Cleveland in late summer 1927, though their correspondence appears to have stopped shortly thereafter.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 205.

⁵¹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 44.

⁵² Several letters from Biggs to Rakosi (written between February 1926 and September 1927) are held with Rakosi's papers at UCSD, MSS 0355, Box 1, Folder 21.

New York City

Shortly after his arrival in New York City, Rakosi experienced his first major literary success, thanks in large part to encouragement from Margery Latimer. Upon his move to New York City, Latimer had advised Rakosi to call on Jane Heap, the famed editor of *The Little Review*. Like many aspiring writers of his generation, Rakosi was somewhat in awe of Heap's magazine, which not many years before had serially published James Joyce's *Ulysses* to great controversy, and was then publishing writers like W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot. Rakosi did summon up the courage to visit Heap at her Greenwich Village offices, and when she invited him in, he presented her with a manuscript of his poems. She agreed on first sight to publish them and printing three of Rakosi's poems in the Spring 1925 issue of *The Little Review*.⁵³ Rakosi was elated, later describing his publication in Heap's magazine as "one of the great moments of my life. To get into the *Little Review* was the achievement."⁵⁴

Restless, young, and eager for adventure, Rakosi became briefly obsessed with going to sea. Enlisting Kenneth Fearing's help in forging a document of prior service so that it would look like he had previous experience in the merchant marine, Rakosi was taken aboard a merchant ship carrying cargo to Australia as a messboy in 1925. The hard work and strict class structure of life aboard a merchant ship quickly stripped him of any romantic illusions he may have been harboring regarding the seafaring life, and following his return to New York City, he took a job as a boys' counselor with The Jewish Board of Guardians, a treatment center for psychologically disturbed and delinquent boys. He shared an office at this time with Harmon S. ["Sol" or "Sollie"] Ephron, who

⁵³ They were "Sittingroom by Patinka," "The January of a Gnat," and "Flora and the Ogre." Rakosi describes this meeting in some detail in "Scenes from My Life" in his *Collected Prose*, 90.

⁵⁴ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 31.

would go on to become one of the founders of the Association of Advancement of Psychoanalysis and the American Institute for Psychoanalysis. The two men became close friends, corresponding regularly until Ephron's death in 1992, and Ephron's wife Judith would be instrumental in helping Rakosi find work upon his return to New York City in 1935.

Rakosi did write poetry while in New York, but continued to keenly feel the conflicting demands on his time and energy made by his art and professional social work. He would later describe the job as "too much of a good thing, too absorbing, too demanding, too rigorous. It was making it hard for me write."⁵⁵ Still harboring the desire to become a poet, Rakosi would later write that "in desperation" he decided to try pursuing a career that he found less exciting, "like teaching or industrial psychology."

Back to School in Madison

After less than a year in New York City, Rakosi returned to Madison, enrolling in a master's degree program in industrial psychology (then being offered by the Education department) at the University of Wisconsin in the fall of 1925. Having recently reached the age of majority, he changed his name legally to Callman Rawley on August 7, 1925. On the application itself, where the form asked for the "Object and purpose of alteration or change of name," Rakosi wrote "Being an American citizen, I desire to have an Americanized name, also because my present name has been subject to frequent misspelling, and that in the professional world, I have found my present name of considerable handicap."

Rakosi's motives for this change were various; but it seems that, much like his father and uncle before him, he saw professional advantages in removing a marker of Jewishness or foreignness

⁵⁵ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 205.

in a society prejudiced against both Jews and certain kinds of foreigners, and that further, he wished to continue writing but did not want his professional associates to know of this other identity.⁵⁶ With this change, Rakosi began the bifurcation of his identity, preserving Carl Rakosi as a private, literary self, and embarking on a public, professional career in the persona of Callman Rawley. Though most who would meet him over the next 45 years would know him as Callman Rawley and his wife and children would take on the Rawley surname, he would tell an interviewer near the end of his life: “I have much more attachment to Rakosi, because it was really my family name, and it’s my literary self.”⁵⁷

While in Madison for graduate school, Rakosi founded and edited *The Issue: A Forum of Student Opinion*, a short-lived satirical magazine with Alexander Schindler, a Swiss medical student who would later become a prominent doctor. During his first semester of graduate school, “The Holy Bonds,” a short poem about marriage, was published in the December 23, 1925 issue of *The Nation*, but apart from these efforts, much of his time was consumed by his course work and professionalization efforts. During the Fall 1925 and Winter 1926 semesters, Rawley completed a number of graduate courses in education and psychology, earning his masters of arts degree at the end of the Spring 1926 semester.

Upon completion of his master’s degree, Rawley took a job as a psychologist in the personnel department of the Milwaukee Electric, Railway & Light Company. The position entailed

⁵⁶ In his published autobiography he says “For one thing, Rakosi was forever being mispronounced and misspelled, but the main reason was that I didn’t think anyone with a foreign name would be hired, the atmosphere was such in English departments in those days. I kept Rakosi as my pen name, however, and no one who knew me as one, knew me as the other. This suited my purpose, as I didn’t want professional colleagues to know that I was a writer. It was not just that I wanted to keep that private: I thought it would color and contaminate their perception of my understanding and practice of the profession” (*Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 205-206).

⁵⁷ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 14.

using physical equipment to test motormen's responses to simulated experiences and to form psychological profiles of these employees based on their performance. He later recalled

The director of that program was an older man already in his sixties, quite a gentleman. He had built up a safety testing program for the streetcar company, which he had developed himself, a system in which there was the interior of a streetcar with a motorman and a screen on which images would be flashed, and the motorman would be expected to react to a sudden turn or sudden stop, and his reaction time would be measured, and his efficiency would be noted. It was a safety kind of instrument device. I didn't have anything to do with the creation of that, but I operated the thing with motormen.⁵⁸

Though he had intended to pursue a "less exciting" career in order to give him the time and energy to devote to writing, he appears to have been a little too successful with this job. While he found Milwaukee "a pleasant place to be," he found the work "deadly dull" and left within a year to take a job as a psychologist in the personnel department of Bloomingdale's department store in New York City. After the store experienced poor sales over the 1926 holiday season, he was fired (along with the superintendent who had hired him). Following the loss of his job at Bloomingdale's he returned to social work, taking a position early in 1927 as a family counselor with the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Boston, Massachusetts.

Boston

Upon moving to Boston, Rakosi took an apartment with three roommates, first living near the Massachusetts State House before briefly renting an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue. Rakosi enjoyed the city, recalling that "Boston was so different from the Middle West. It had so much history; it was almost like going to Europe."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 193.

⁵⁹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 194.

The nature of his work as a social worker with children who had often been severely neglected or abused there meant that he had a close connection to the juvenile court there. Although he encountered a number of families in particularly dire situations and regularly worked on behalf of children living in great precariousness, Rakosi was particularly impressed with the humaneness and decency of the judge who presided over the court, a patrician gentleman from one of the old Boston families:

What I remember about my social work experience in Boston was the dignity of the juvenile court process, and really there was a certain decency about it that was quite wonderful, but it all emanated from the judge. I had great respect for the judge and the workings of the court. ... I loved the way he looked and how he presided over the court with the children. He was really a benevolent, fatherly figure, but not a pushover, not soft. He relied on the judgment of the social workers on what to do in these cases.⁶⁰

Though he enjoyed this job immensely, Rawley still felt enormous conflict about his desire to have more time and leisure for writing. Having tried industrial psychology and found it lacking, and experiencing social work as too engrossing to afford the time and energy he needed for writing, he turned to his fallback plan of university teaching, hoping that it would be more conducive to his writerly ambitions.

(More) Graduate School in Texas

In the fall of 1928, Rawley enrolled in the English Ph.D. program at the University of Texas at Austin, where he was assigned to teach freshman composition to engineering students from November 1928 through the end of the summer session in 1929. It did not go well. “You can’t teach literature to engineers,” Rakosi would later complain, “their imagination was made out of

⁶⁰ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 194, 124.

wood.”⁶¹To make matters worse, Rakosi found the English department at Texas to be an “awful, a sickening, sycophantic atmosphere. Death would be preferable.”⁶² He would later explain:

The work was easier, all right, and there was time for my writing, but now it was the young prigs in the department I couldn’t stand. They acted as if they had brought Oxford to Austin, and unlike young professors these days, were so affected and British high-toned that I felt nauseated and was faced with having to spend the rest of my life with clones. I could see too that what I would be doing as a professor would be so specialized and of so little value except in English departments that I would be like Tom in the old English joke:

“What are you doing, Jack?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“And what are you doing, Tom?”

“I’m busy helping him.”⁶³

Dismayed by his experience in the literature department, Rawley enrolled in law school, where he enjoyed the curriculum, but was “scared off by the fierce competitiveness and boundless verbal fluency [required] at a moment’s notice, and again I quit.”⁶⁴ Still hopeful about the prospects of conducting a writer’s life while working as a teacher, Rawley took a job as an English teacher in San Jacinto High School in Houston, working evenings at the Rusk Settlement House as a group worker with Mexican immigrants. Though he loved his evening job, he quickly found that “the heavy teaching load and the disciplinary problems in my classes bec[a]me a nightmare. By this time I am sure that what I would like to do best of all, where I would have most control of my time, would

⁶¹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 194.

⁶² UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 6.

⁶³ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 207.

⁶⁴ “Rakosi Chronology,” UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 6.

be psychiatry. So during the summer vacations I return[ed] to the University in Austin to study the pre-medical sciences.”⁶⁵

It also appears that though he had already left off teaching high school by this time, Rakosi had fulfilled all the legal requirements and received his certification as a permanent high school teacher in the state of Texas in July 1931, entitling him to teach in all grades of Texas’ public schools for as long as he liked.

Rakosi and Zukofsky

Even as Callman Rawley wandered from job to job, exploring various graduate programs, Carl Rakosi continued to write and sporadically publish poems. It was while he was teaching high school English in Houston in the winter of 1930, in fact, that he received a letter from Louis Zukofsky, introducing himself and soliciting poems for a forthcoming issue of *Poetry* magazine on the recommendation of Ezra Pound. Zukofsky’s letter could not have arrived at a better time for the floundering Rakosi:

I had a job teaching English literature to high school seniors in Houston. What I thought would be a relatively easy, mild experience turned out to have a monstrous work load, and I loathed the students’ lack of interest and cutting up in class and the fixed Victorian course of study from which one was not allowed to deviate. Zukofsky’s letter came when I was in despair. I had tried every occupation I could think of in which I could make a living and still have time and mental energy to write without success. There was no place else to go. It seemed like the end of the line.⁶⁶

Zukofsky and Pound had been corresponding for some time, with Pound consistently urging Zukofsky and others of his American correspondents to organize a group or movement of young, like-minded poets in the United States. While Zukofsky had shown much less enthusiasm (or

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “An Interview with Carl Rakosi,” *Conjunctions* 11 (1988), 220.

entrepreneurial skill) for movement building than Pound had, Pound had cajoled Harriet Monroe into giving Zukofsky an issue of *Poetry* magazine in order to present his “new group.” Pound had never met Rakosi in person, but had published some of Rakosi’s poems in his short-lived magazine *The Exile*. Consequently, though he had no recent news on the Rakosi’s whereabouts, Pound duly forwarded on to Zukofsky his last known address is Kenosha, along with a warning that “Rakosi’ may be dead, I wish I cd. trace him” as he had sounded deeply depressed in their brief previous exchanges.⁶⁷

Rakosi, though depressed, was decidedly not dead, and he and Zukofsky quickly established a warm epistolary friendship, with each finding succor and encouragement from the other. Rakosi later wrote:

[Zukofsky] had just come on as a teaching assistant in the English department at the University of Wisconsin and had discovered immediately that this was the wrong medium for him, the wrong place, the wrong responsibilities, the wrong people ... I was in somewhat the same situation. I was beginning my second year as an English teacher in a Houston high school and was crushed by the teaching load and the disciplinary problems, and sick from alienation from it all. We had the desperate psychic problem, therefore, and consequently instant rapport.⁶⁸

Zukofsky’s second letter to Rakosi was written on November 17, 1930 and contained high praise:

Permit me to say that your poems are the best in America—these U.S.A—that I have seen since, well 1926. But that doesn’t say what I want to say. And you gave up writing? Gave up—? ...

My issue of “Poetry” is as much of a surprise to me as I suppose my invitation to you is to you. ... My intention is to print 32 of the best unpublished material written in the last 10 years. Naturally, I should like to show off at least 8 poets—if I can’t find 12. Or at least six. But I do want to print as much of you as I can—say 5 to 7 pages, depending on other

⁶⁷ Pound/*Zukofsky*, 51.

⁶⁸ “Notes to Zukofsky Letters,” UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 11, Folder 12.

available genius. . . . What I don't keep I'll try to pass off on Hound and Horn, Pagany, Morada, or future issues of Poetry.⁶⁹

Rakosi responded positively to Zukofsky's initial letter, and Zukofsky used four of Rakosi's poems to open the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*, presenting them just before a selection from his own "A"-7. He also included nine sections of Rakosi's "A Journey Away" and the short poem "Parades" in his *An 'Objectivists' Anthology* published in 1932. After their initial contact, the two writers continued what Rakosi characterized as "a long, intensive correspondence on questions of poetics, mostly having to do with my own work" for the next several years and enjoyed regular social contact with each other from 1935 to 1940 when both men lived in New York City.⁷⁰ In a 1984 letter to Burton Hatlen, Rakosi recalled:

I described LZ as a superlative editor. I should have added that, as he practiced it, editing was a form of high art, in the sense that he perceived quite clearly what, in my case, for example, my true literary character was and held me strictly to that. There was no question, therefore, of his teaching anything; I already knew. What he did instead was to put himself into the shoes of an intelligent reader and point out what was me and what was sham or derivative. But doing this is almost as rare as great poetry. Ever good editors are too walled-in by their pre-conceptions and their own personality and stylistic needs to perceive the other poet's true literary character, let alone refrain from trying to re-do his poem as he thinks it should have been done. Since my literary character, naturally, at that age was not fully formed yet, what he did was very helpful. He did the same thing for the others too (except Reznikoff, as you noted), and particularly for Lorine Niedecker.⁷¹

Apart from Rexroth, Rakosi had little contact with other of the "Objectivists" until the 1960s and 1970s, when he befriended Oppen and Reznikoff, and met Bunting and Niedecker.⁷²

⁶⁹ Letter from Zukofsky to Rakosi, November 17, 1930. The originals of Zukofsky's letters are now held at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. This passage quoted from Rakosi's typed transcription in UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 11, Folder 12.

⁷⁰ "Scenes from My Life" in *Collected Prose*, 107.

⁷¹ Letter from Carl Rakosi to Burton Hatlen, February 14, 1984. UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 15.

⁷² Rakosi writes penetratingly of his relationship with Zukofsky and his relationship to the label "Objectivist" in "Scenes from My Life" in *Collected Prose*, 104-108.

Though Zukofsky's letters and the promise of publication in *Poetry* provided some much-needed encouragement to his flagging poetic ambitions, Rakosi was still in search of a meaningful career. In a 1983 letter to André Lefevere, who was then just about to take a teaching position at the University of Texas, Rakosi recalled his impressions of Texas and his general feelings about this time of his life:

I lived in Austin during the 1930s. It was then a city of about 50,000, very pleasant, with girls whose beauty used to drive me wild. There were not many blacks in Texas then but an unknown number, well over a million, of Mexicans, who were treated with contempt. I could never understand it because these mostly illiterate, very poor laborers had far more natural dignity and integrity than the Texans. I was a teaching assistant in the English Department then but that didn't last long. I couldn't stand the Anglophile affectations, the jostling for power, the sycophancy and the covert throat-cutting and got out before it was too late. Switched to medicine, which I studied at the Medical School in Galveston but had to give up eventually when my money ran out.⁷³

As his letter to Lefevere indicates, after a few years of teaching and taking pre-medical courses part-time, Rawley moved to Galveston in 1931 to study medicine at the University of Texas Medical School. Once again, Rawley enjoyed his course work and performed well academically (he felt particular pride in his having received A's in each of his anatomy courses despite such squeamishness that he could never bear to perform the dissections himself), but felt deeply alienated from his fellow students, whom he described as "cultural ~~underheads~~ simpletons from the sticks, with no interests but getting through the medical school."⁷⁴ At every turn, it seems, Rawley felt frustrated by finding a group of students more interested by items in their field of study, than outside of it. Not surprising to those of us who assume that people are going to school because they're interested in the field they're studying, but for Rakosi, who was continually educating himself

⁷³ Letter from Carl Rakosi to André and Pat Lefevere, December 20, 1983, UW-Madison, Box 2, Folder 30.

⁷⁴ "Rakosi Chronology," UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 4.

in search of a side career that could subsidize his true (though non-paying) vocation, that of a poet, this is perhaps unsurprising.

In addition to his social isolation, Rawley began to run out of money to continue his studies. Since the medical school had no financial loan programs for needy students at that time, he gave up his study of psychiatry in 1932 and rode back north to Chicago on freight cars, traveling with a friend he had made at the University of Texas “partly for the experience, partly to save money.”⁷⁵

Becoming a Social Worker

Chicago

After leaving the study of psychiatry and riding the rails from Galveston to Chicago in 1932, Rawley returned to the field of social work, working in Chicago as a social worker providing services to the elderly for the Cook County Department of Public Welfare and taking graduate courses in social work at the University of Chicago.

New Orleans

In 1933, particularly concerned with unemployment and the plight of migrant laborers, Rawley took a job in New Orleans, Louisiana as a Director of Social Services in the new Federal Transient Bureau. His introduction to the different culture of the “Big Easy” began as early as his initial train ride to the city from Chicago:

I take the train in Chicago, in a twenty degree temperature, and I wind up in New Orleans, and it is about eighty-five, ninety degrees hot, so in that short time, it was a hundred-degree change. I'm young, I feel great. I pick up two women on the train who are from New Orleans. New Orleans then was a very fast town. By fast I mean, fast women. Sexual mores, very fast. Drinking, not in any repulsive way, it is almost like a different civilization down

⁷⁵ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series* 207. Rakosi also describes his experience riding the rails in some detail in his interview in *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 67-68, 214).

there. Talk about contrast, New Orleans was the place to be if you were young. So the first thing we do, the three of us, is go out to the racetrack. Apparently, they love to bet on the horses there. So, my first experience in New Orleans was at a racetrack, even before I settle in. I had never bet on horses before. I had never seen a horse race before, in fact. I go to the cashier to make my bet, and by the time I get back, the race is all over, and I hadn't even had a chance to see the horses run.⁷⁶

Upon arriving in New Orleans, Rawley lived in a small apartment on Bourbon Street, and threw himself both into his work and the rich social life available to a young, unmarried white professional at that time. He described the job in an interview with Kimberly Bird:

What was happening was that there was no work for anybody and the men couldn't stand just sitting around at home without working, so they used to ride the freight cars to different cities. ... There were maybe as many as a million men traveling on freight cars from city to city and it was demoralizing. They were demoralized. By the time they got to New Orleans when I was there, none of them really thought they could get work. They were demoralized, unshaven, they had lice, and the government had set up a kind of a camp for them. Well, it wasn't really a camp. It was a facility, let's say, on the other side of a river there. They were all sent there first to be deloused, to get a bath, probably to shave, and then they were sent into the city where our offices were, to talk and to get help from social workers. At that time, I was director of casework for the bureau. Actually, the job was too big for the staff. There weren't nearly enough trained social workers to treat them all. So, I was fully trained by that time, but the people that came to work for us as social workers simply had a BA, it could be in any subject. The government was desperate to have a staff in place. You wound up with—I remember some of the staff members needed help themselves.⁷⁷

After a year in this position, Rawley was invited to join the faculty at the Graduate School of Social Work at Tulane University, which was just beginning its program in social work (making it one of only two such programs in the whole country, along with Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland). Rawley taught courses in case work there for a year and enrolled as a graduate student in a number of additional social work courses at the school.

⁷⁶ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 195.

⁷⁷ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 42-43.

Return to New York City

Still restless, however, Rawley decided to return to New York City in 1935, and took an apartment on West 69th Street, near Broadway, just above a restaurant called Fleur du Lys, where he met and had occasional conversations with the composer Aaron Copland, who was then teaching at the New School for Social Research. With help from Judith Ephron, the wife of his old friend H.S. Ephron, he secured a position with the Jewish Family Service, a family counseling agency. Rawley remained in this job for five years, by far his longest stint to date in one position.

The culture at the Jewish Family Service at the time was characterized not only by a strong commitment to Freudian psychological principles, but by a widespread concern with improving the methodology of their practice and intensive, voluntary professional development, both of which appealed to the restless and inveterately curious Rawley. One of his coworkers, [M. Robert Gombert](#), began pioneering the practice of family therapy at this time, and Rawley recalled that “there were three of us in that office who’d ... stay after hours to make the most detailed recording of everything that happened during an interview, and then examine it afterwards and talk about it.”⁷⁸ It was in this open, questioning professional environment that Rawley spent a brief internship in psychotherapy at the Lebanon Hospital Mental Health Clinic in the Bronx and underwent psychoanalysis himself for the first time. Most significantly, however, Rawley began yet another graduate program, commuting twice a week to Philadelphia for several years to pursue a Master’s degree in Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania, eventually earning his degree in 1940.

⁷⁸ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 195.

While the Jewish Family Service was dominated by Freudians, the social work program at Pennsylvania was directed at that time by [Jessie Taft](#) and [Virginia Robinson](#), both of whom had been strongly influenced by the psychologist Otto Rank. Rawley admired Taft and Robertson a great deal, and became dedicated for the rest of his career to the pragmatic [“functional” approach](#) Taft and Robinson had championed in place a Freudian “diagnostic” approach, particularly in regards to his own psychotherapeutic practice. For Rawley, respect for the capabilities and autonomy of the patient were Rank’s great contribution to the field, he identified these values as the bedrock of his own orientation to psychotherapy:

Rank differed fundamentally from Freud. Rank himself had been a poet to start with, and had then studied philosophy and joined the circle that Freud had in Vienna ... Freud’s method essentially was to figure out what the problem was, and then tell the patient what the problem was, and that that would cure him. Rank thought, “That’s all wrong.” Rank’s method essentially was not to become theoretical at all, but to start with the patient’s problem as he saw it to begin with, and then let him try to work out the solution himself—to see that what he had been doing was counterproductive, it was getting him into trouble. It was making him anxious and so on. That was my method too when I was doing psychotherapy, and it works.⁷⁹

Joining the Communist Party

Another significant aspect from this party of Rawley’s life was his association with the U.S. Communist Party. Already inclined to socialism (in part thanks to his father’s sympathies), Rawley’s experiences as a social worker during these bleak years and his friendship with several Communists eventually drew him into formal membership in the Communist Party. While he did not long remain an active Party member, he retained a basic sympathy for Marxist-inspired socialist principles throughout his life.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 47.

⁸⁰ In 2002, he told Kimberly Bird: “I’ve always been a Marxist. the idea of communism is noble. There’s nothing wrong with the idea. It’s just that the kind of Marxists who became leaders just took advantage of it and corrupted it” (*Century in the Poetic Eye*, 57).

Recalling his actions more than 50 years later in a letter, Rakosi wrote “I became convinced along with millions of others that Capitalism had failed, was finished, that the only remedy was some form of socialism. The suffering of people was so great that we were all swept along in a mass movement of such extraordinarily imperative moral urgency that it subsumed our critical faculties.”⁸¹

In an autobiographical account of his life, he wrote:

I had become convinced by 1935 that capitalism was incapable of providing jobs and justice to people and that the system had to be changed, that there was no other way. Normally, this would have remained in my mind as just an idea, but I was seeing a lot of Leon [Serabian] Herald, my old friend, then. He was a starry-eyed Communist from way back, and prodded and cajoled me until I ventured in, hesitantly. I found the best minds in my agency already in. After a couple of years, however, I stopped going to meetings, and that ended it. Nobody noticed because all I had ever done was listen, and march occasionally on picket lines with people I didn't know, and cheer and feel uplifted at mass rallies.⁸²

In a 1987 letter to Eliot Weinberger, Rakosi recalled that once he had joined the party, he

found its mission was to march in May Day parades and protest marches of all kinds. I did do this and found it exhilarating. At last I was doing something useful, no matter how small. Occasionally someone from the Central Committee I'm not sure of the name ... would come in and expound the Party line, which was made necessary because the Soviet Union kept changing its policies. These were guys who talked in the inexpressibly dry language of Higher Theory, always so sure of what they were saying that to question them ... was to put yourself immediately on the spot, either as a dumbbell or a secret enemy. They would accept questions about what they meant but not challenges. ... These expounders of Higher Theory

⁸¹ Carl Rakosi papers, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 4, Folder 4.

⁸² *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 208. Rakosi gave an account of his joining the party in a 2002 oral history interview with Kimberly Bird: “In those days some of the Communists were organized according to where they worked and some according to where they lived. [Leon Serabian Herald] belonged to a street area group. He kept talking to me about, “Why don't you join the Party?” Well, he finally persuaded me, but I was also persuaded by my curiosity as to what it was like to be an actual member of the Party. I was very curious. So, I decided to join. Well, the Party wouldn't take just anybody. You had to be recommended by a Party member, so Leon recommended me enthusiastically [laughter] to become a member. However, I didn't join the street Communists, I joined the workplace Communists. They were called cells. I was astonished to find that the members of my cell, which was the social agency I was working in, were really the brightest, the most sensitive, the most perceptive people in the agency. ... So, what happens at meetings, well, they had to do entirely with how to influence the minds of the other workers, to make them knowledgeable about communism and want to join. I think I was in it for two years. After a while, I realized, “I'm not really interested in changing other people's minds.” Finally I decided, “No, I'm just not going to do it.” I remember that speakers would come in from the central committee of the Party and speak to us. They were like creatures from Mars. They weren't like us at all. I was repelled also by the strict dogmatic party line that they were there to teach us. So, I left the party (*Century in the Poetic Eye*, 56).

(Communist theory, of course) left a dead pall on everybody's spirits. Where did they come from? And where did they go when they left us? etc. At the same time I have to add that the day to day members of the Party whom I came to know were the most intelligent, the most ethical, the most idealistic people around.

After a year I was transferred to a social work cell in the large agency where I was employed [Jewish Family Services]. Our sole mission there, it turned out, was to figure out ways to convert the other social workers to the Communist mission. This was interesting for a while, like a game in psychology, but for a good cause. But after a while I realized that I was not that committed to the task and simply stopped coming to meetings. Nobody noticed that I was gone, maybe because I had relapsed into my writing self, an observer, a listener.⁸³

In addition to attending local party meetings, Rakosi also attended Camp Unity, a left-wing summer camp for adults in Wingdale, New York, but later claimed that he enjoyed the camp primarily because he “was single and young then” and “I used to go there and meet the most beautiful young women . . . They were lovely looking, very bright young women and social-minded—really the best kind of people.”⁸⁴ He also told Kimberly Bird that his involvement with Camp Unity “may have been the only really bright experience I had in the Party that was really enjoyable in every way.”⁸⁵

Apart from deepening his exposure to socially engaged co-workers and beautiful and intelligent women, Rawley's membership in the Communist Party and interest in 1930s leftist politics in the United States also exerted a significant impact on his poetic identity as Carl Rakosi. Already struggling to reconcile writing poetry with his burgeoning professional life, he was further confounded by the extreme antipathy expressed by Mike Gold and other leading Communist-affiliated writers and editors towards any poetry that might be regarded as merely

⁸³ Originally published in *Exquisite Corpse*, included in *Thus Spake the Corpse: An Exquisite Corpse Reader 1988-1998: Volume 1, Poetry & Essays*, 37-40.

⁸⁴ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 62-63.

⁸⁵ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 63.

aesthetic or lyrical. In a 1987 letter to Jim Cohn, Rakosi recalled that while *The New Masses* extended both some measure of power and a place of honor to poets,

the honor was paid only to social realism or to exaltation of the working man. If you didn't write like that ... and I didn't, I wrote lyrical poetry ... you were flayed and boiled alive for pandering to the decadent tastes of the bourgeoisie by the editor, Mike Gold, and his editorial assassins. This happened to Reznikoff, for example. It made me feel there was something wrong with me (and of course with lyric poetry) for not being able to write what was expected of all good men.⁸⁶

That same year, he told Eliot Weinberger:

That poetry was branded bourgeois, the ultimate in scorn at that time, and elitist, which nobody at all sympathetic to The Party wanted to be caught dead with then. So when the attack came against such poetry, the savagery of it stunned its author. The poetry was not simply criticized, it was demolished and to make sure that it registered, the poet himself was demolished. I fell into the black hole because lyric and aesthetic poetry was the only kind I could write, and I wouldn't write propaganda poetry, so the only thing I could do was to withdraw from the scene. ... Had I not myself been divided in my mind, a part of me thinking that *New Masses* was right, I would have reacted the way I did when William Ellery Leonard ... made fun of my poetry in a class [and] ... I said to myself "What the hell does he know?" But I couldn't do that with the Communists. I had too much inner conflict about it and I was too much of an idealist.⁸⁷

Marriage to Leah Jaffe

In addition to ideological pressures from the Communist Party and his growing professional responsibilities as a social worker and psychotherapist, Rawley's poetic energies were also diverted in these years by his romantic interests and newfound familial responsibilities. The other major development in Rawley's life during his years in New York City was his courtship of and eventual marriage to Leah Jaffe.

⁸⁶ Carl Rakosi papers, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 4, Folder 4.

⁸⁷ Quoted in *Thus Spake the Corpse*, 38-39.

Born in New York City on November 8, 1910 to Jewish immigrants from Russia, Jaffe was the youngest of three children. Her father had died when she was in her early teens, and following his death she became particularly close to her older brother George, who functioned as the head of their household.⁸⁸ As a young single woman working in the city, Leah lived with a woman named Betty Foster, who later married Carl's close friend Leon Herald Serabian. When Carl and Leah first met in 1938 at a party hosted by the Serabians, Leah was working as an artist's model and dating a mutual friend, the painter Arthur Gunn.⁸⁹ Rakosi told Andrew Crozier:

I was immediately drawn to her irrepressible vivacity and good nature ... she was pretty much on her own after adolescence. Hence her freedom to have her own apartment amidst the Bohemianism of the Village. She supported herself as a computer operator but her interests had always been in the arts and she knew many of the leading painters of the time, who were all on WPA then. Impossible to exaggerate the influence she has had on my life.⁹⁰

Recalling his first impressions of Leah, Rakosi later remembered:

I instantly liked her whole personality—everything about her. She wasn't as good-looking as the young women that I had been going out with, but she had a wonderful nature. I instantly took to her and we got along wonderfully in conversation. She said, I'm going out with Art ... but he's so neurotic, so wrapped up in his problems that I don't know, so I said to her, "If you break up with him, let me know." Well, a few weeks later, she called me, and that was it. So, we moved in together on Fourteenth Street and had an apartment right next to Leon's and that's where we lived for a while.⁹¹

⁸⁸ In an interview given near the end of his life, Rakosi said of Leah: "She had lost her father when she was a teenager. She had just adored him. He must have been a great father. Her mother was kind of a non-figure in the family, so she was more or less on her own, with an older brother George who was a great guy, actually. That whole family was an interesting family. She had one brother called Irving who was an absolutely typical New Yorker: he talked like a New Yorker; he thought like a New Yorker; he was never out of New York City in his life; he was a car salesman; he talked like a car salesman; he didn't read books. When he learned that I had written books, he went to the library, and my God, there was a book of mine there. He couldn't get over it. He couldn't get over the fact that his brother-in-law had written a book" (*Century in the Poetic Eye*, 94).

⁸⁹ Rakosi told an interviewer: "Leah was an artist's model. She had lovely legs ... I was hooked on her legs. She was getting jobs as an artist's model. That's how she originally became interested in art. That's how she supported herself and came to know many of the avant-garde painters of that time." (*Century in the Poetic Eye*, 95).

⁹⁰ "Answers to Questions from Andrew Crozier (for the Dictionary of Literary Biography," UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 5.

⁹¹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 94.

Carl and Leah had much in common, sharing an interest in art, music, literature, a commitment to leftist social causes, as well as a fundamental human sympathy. In an interview given several years after her death, Rakosi recalled that “There was a great calmness about her, a maturity. I described her this way once to a friend, that she was the most psychologically wholesome person I have ever met.”⁹²

The two moved in together soon after beginning their relationship. While neither of them held conventional attitudes about marriage, the couple decided to marry on May 6, 1939, shortly before a planned visit to Rakosi’s parents in Kenosha. Rakosi would later recall that they had chosen to wed largely to satisfy his parents’ expectations about marriage and children.⁹³

Abandoning Poetry

Having achieved something resembling stability in both his professional and personal life, Rawley/Rakosi gradually took less and less time for his own creative writing, before finally stopping writing and reading poetry entirely sometime in 1938 or 1939. This was an extraordinarily difficult decision for him to make, psychologically, as he explained in an autobiographical essay:

[M]y evenings were swallowed up by the things that a man who is not a writer normally spends his time on in a big city; the theater, concerts, professional meetings, friends, girlfriends. It was impossible to pile on top of this daily regimen a night of writing. When I tried it, I turned into such a live wire that I could neither sleep afterward nor do my work right the next day. In addition, my Marxist thinking had made me lose respect for poetry

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ He told Kimberly Bird in 2002: “At that stage in our life, we both thought that marriage was totally unnecessary, that it was something that the state imposed on human beings, so we didn’t get married, and that went on for about a year. Then she became pregnant and we were going to visit my parents in Kenosha and she said to me, without having any other intent behind it, “I wonder, what will your mother think if she knows I’m pregnant and we’re not married.” I thought about that for a moment and I had to say, “She’d be baffled by it. Not comfortable.” So that’s what made us get married at that point, which is kind of an interesting commentary on the times. In other words, that we didn’t feel it was necessary to get married for security reasons. We were absolutely sure of our relationship, and it made no sense to us then” (*Century in the Poetic Eye*, 96). The timing appears a little off, as their daughter Barbara was born in December 1940, not 1939, but the essence of Rakosi’s recollection may well be true.

itself. So there was nothing to hold me back from ending the problem by stopping to write. I did that. I also stopped reading poetry. I couldn't run the risk of being tempted.

When it came to me what I had done, that there would be no more writing in my life, I was stricken by what Kierkegaard, for a different reason, had called a "sickness unto death." Living became a dreadful existential state, something grey and purposeless between living and dying, and so physical that for a while I was sure I was going to die. This lasted about two years and then stopped, and I went on with my life as a social worker and therapist. This was 1940.⁹⁴

Writing to Jim Cohn in 1987, Rakosi described the pressure to conform to the propagandistic demands placed on Marxist writers in the 30s as contributing to his decision to stop writing, but noted that "the main thing was that I couldn't work all day as a social worker and psychotherapist, spend time with my wife and children, socialize with our friends, do the chores around the house and write. I would have had to be up all day and all night."⁹⁵

In 1940, after five years in New York City, Rawley took a job as a supervisor of case work services for Jewish Family Service in Saint Louis, Missouri. In December of that year, their first child was born, a daughter they named Barbara. Of their time in Missouri, Rawley recalled:

St. Louis is a very friendly city. I've always liked it. It's neither South, nor North; it's middle Southern. It has the real friendliness of the South, without being sloppy. Also, some of the holding back of the Middle West. I was there for about three years, and I taught supervision at Washington University. ... I think I was perhaps happiest in St. Louis, because it is great to have your first child. It's a happy time.⁹⁶

Although he was no longer writing any new poetry by this time, James Laughlin's New Directions Press published his first book of poetry, *Selected Poems*, in 1941, as part of the multi-publisher Poet of the Month series. Following the publication of this volume, Rakosi made one final effort to integrate his artistic and vocational ambitions, planning an application for a Guggenheim

⁹⁴ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 208.

⁹⁵ Carl Rakosi Papers, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 4, Folder 4.

⁹⁶ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 196.

fellowship to study the psychology of the poet. In support of his application, he wrote to Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore describing his plans and asked if they would provide letters of recommendation. Though Williams and Stevens offered personal encouragement and praise for his poetry, none of the three agreed to write the desired letters, and Rakosi abandoned the project. Following the appearance of *Selected Poems*, Rakosi did not publish (or write) any subsequent poetry until 1965, when Rawley received a letter from Andrew Crozier inquiring about his past life as the poet Carl Rakosi.

Callman Rawley, Therapist and Social Work Administrator

Cleveland

In 1943, the Rawleys moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where they lived at 10514 Shaker Boulevard, and Callman worked as the assistant director of Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau, a residential treatment center for psychologically disturbed children with severe behavioral problems in Shaker Heights. At Bellefaire, Rawley was responsible for training staff, supervising case workers and psychiatric service, and carrying out other administrative functions. While in Cleveland, the Rawley's lived Callman and Leah welcomed their second child into their family in August 1944, a son they named George.

Putting Down Roots in Minneapolis

In 1945, the family moved again, this time to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Rawley had been hired as the executive director of Jewish Family and Children's Service, a counseling agency, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1968. Rawley also began a private practice in psychotherapy in Minneapolis, and saw clients for the next two decades. While he wrote no poetry, Rawley completed course work for a doctorate in social work from the University of Minnesota from 1952 to 1954, and authored several dozen articles in psychotherapeutic-research journals in his

field.⁹⁷ Elizabeth Losh has noted that “During the quarter-century in which he developed the career of “Callman Rawley,” however, Rakosi was known primarily as a successful administrator at Jewish Family and Children’s Service in Minneapolis.”⁹⁸

Retirement and the Return to Poetry

In 1965, shortly before Rawley was set to retire from his long-time position as director of the Jewish Family and Children’s Service, he received an unexpected letter from Andrew Crozier, a young English poet who was at studying with Charles Olson on a Fulbright scholarship at the State University of New York-Buffalo. Deeply impressed by Rakosi’s early work, and having compiled a sizable amount of information about Rakosi’s publications from the 1930s, Crozier had written to many of Rakosi’s known acquaintances from that era.

James Laughlin replied to one such inquiry, reporting that he thought Rakosi’s real name was “Calman Rawley” and that he had “once heard rumors that he was a secret agent of the Comintern, and it was hinted that he had disappeared back behind the Iron Curtain, but this is just gossip, as far as I am concerned.”⁹⁹ Crozier eventually obtained an old work address for Rawley from Charles Reznikoff, and sent the following letter:

Please excuse me if I make any intrusion upon your privacy but I would like to write to you about the poems you published under the name Carl Rakosi. I have your address from the Hennepin County Welfare Department, to which I wrote at the suggestion of Charles Reznikoff in New York.

⁹⁷ A description of these publications is outside the scope of this biography, but many can be read online at the Berman Jewish Policy Archive: <https://www.bjpa.org/bjpa/search-results?Author=Callman+Rawley&search=%22Callman+Rawley%22>.

⁹⁸ “Carl Rakosi,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 299.

⁹⁹ Letter from James Laughlin to Andrew Crozier, March 3, 1965 in UW-Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 3. This rumor was probably circulated by Kenneth Rexroth. Laughlin referred Crozier to George Oppen with a warning that he should not repeat the Comintern rumor.

I have been interested in your poems since I saw your name mentioned by Kenneth Rexroth some three years ago, but until I came here last autumn was only able to turn up “A Journey Away” printed in *Hound and Horn*. I have now been able to find about eighty poems of yours, published between 1924 and 1934, and what immediately strikes me is the discrepancy between that body of work and your *Selected Poems*. And the way, say, long poems like “The Beasts” and “A Journey Away” are chopped up into smaller units in that volume.

I wonder, too, why you have stopped publishing since 1941 and whether you have been writing since then or not.

Again, please excuse me if this letter is an impertinence, but I like and admire your poems very much and feel impelled to write to you now, my interest is so engaged with them.

Rakosi recalled that upon reading Crozier’s letter:

My heart gave a leap. Something was moving in my distant young past. I began to feel slightly nervous . . . This not at all unusual letter knocked the wind out of me. I sat there, I don’t know how long, not thinking anything, yet sensing that something big had just happened, something had changed. Was it possible I could write again? This time it was possible. I would be free in two years, and with great joy I started. The first poem I wrote was “Lying in Bed on a Summer Morning.”¹⁰⁰

Rakosi’s first book following his return to poetry was *Amulet*, published in 1967 by James Laughlin’s *New Directions*. Following the publication of *Amulet*, Rakosi was invited by L.S. Dembo to visit the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1968, where he gave a reading and was interviewed for an issue of *Contemporary Literature* that Dembo was preparing on the Objectivist poets.

In December 1968, he retired from social work and psychotherapy, marking the end of Callman Rawley’s professional career. Upon his retirement, he essentially reverted to being Carl Rakosi, as his identity as a poet and writer became his most important public role for the remainder of his life. While Rakosi plunged himself back into the work of writing and publishing, his later statements about poetics and literary criticism were laced with a withering irony which sometimes bordered on contempt and he frequently sought to maintain his own personal distance from

¹⁰⁰ This is a poem which ends by addressing the sky on a note of exuberance: “Your blue is clear / as on the first day. // In your presence I am man / and feel as if I / could live forever” (*Amulet*, 22).

conventional notions of the poet's identity, concluding a published autobiographical account of his life by asserting: "Looking back, it seems to me that three things in my life have made a man of me . . . humane, that is . . . the example of my father, social work, and Leah. Not poetry. I had to struggle to make a man of it."¹⁰¹

From 1968 to 1975, Rakosi attended the Yaddo writer's workshop in Saratoga Springs, New York each summer, greatly enjoying its bucolic setting and the camaraderie it offered for the various writers and artists who gathered there each year. In 1969, Rakosi became Writer-in-Residence at his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in which capacity he taught a few undergraduate courses, gave a public reading, and helped to host and entertain other visiting literary dignitaries, including the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges.¹⁰² During his time at Madison, Rakosi also met the poet Lorine Niedecker for the first time, visiting her and her husband Al Millen in March 1970 at their home on Blackhawk Island. In a handwritten note recalling their encounter, Rakosi would later write:

Visited her in March (1970) — rumors: total recluse — something wrong with her? Mental breakdown? ordinary cleaning woman in mental hospital — so, trepidation — fears groundless / moment I walked in her door, she was opposite of recluse: outgoing, of good cheer, very lively. Time flew. Delightful afternoon — much in common with Al. — House only a few steps from water, ground-level (no basement or steps) so small, if three of us had called on her instead of two, we cdn't have moved past each other.¹⁰³

Rakosi's return to poetry and his interview with Dembo also helped him initiate contact with others of the group that he had never met. At the time of his retirement, in fact, of all the writers included in the two early "Objectivist" publications, Rakosi had only ever met or corresponded

¹⁰¹ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 209.

¹⁰² His brief encounter with a then 70-year old Borges made a deep impression on Rakosi and is discussed in some detail in his essay "Scenes from My Life" in *Collected Prose*, 110-115.

¹⁰³ Carl Rakosi Papers, Mandeville Special Collections, UCSD, MSS 355, Box 4, Folder 4.

directly with Zukofsky, Rexroth, and Williams. Of the remaining “Objectivists” Rakosi would become closest to George and Mary Oppen, eventually moving to San Francisco largely due to the strength of their friendship. Rakosi and Oppen did not meet each other in person until 1971, however. Of their initial encounter, Rakosi recalled:

The way it happened was that we sat around his kitchen table in San Francisco and talked and ate cheese and bread, and the more we talked and the more I looked into his steady eyes, the deeper down we got to something solid and brotherly between us, older than he or I. That is how we became old, old friends in one night.¹⁰⁴

Rakosi also met Reznikoff for the first time in 1971. In a tribute published in the little magazine *Margins* after Reznikoff’s death in 1976, Rakosi recalled:

Although Reznikoff’s name and mine have been linked for over forty years, we did not meet until 1971, I believe. It was in his apartment in New York. There he chattered away for hours as happily as a sparrow until it was time for me to leave and he realized I had hardly spoken. The only other time we were together was at The National Poetry Festival in Michigan in 1973. The young poets there were drawn to his sweet, boyish smile and, it seemed to me, to his age, and to something winsome in the combination. He acted shy but he talked a blue streak, and they liked to sit with him in the lunch room and listen and ask questions, and he liked to have them. It was a new experience for them to rap with an older man who was so artless and unassuming.¹⁰⁵

Rakosi’s next book, *Ere-Voice*, was published by New Directions in 1971, and in January 1972 he took over John Berryman’s “American Character” seminar at the University of Minnesota after Berryman committed suicide by jumping from the Washington Street Bridge the week before classes were scheduled to begin. In 1972 and 1979 Rakosi received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1973 he attended the National Poetry Festival at the experimental college at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan from June 14-24, along with Charles Reznikoff, George and Mary Oppen, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Charles

¹⁰⁴ “Scenes from My Life” in *Collected Prose*, 115

¹⁰⁵ This recollection was printed in *Margins* in 1976, a clipping from which I found at UCSD Special Collections, MSS 0355, Box 4, Folder 8.

Enslin, Ed Dorn, George Economou, and Rochelle Owens. In 1974 he became poet-in-residence at Michigan State University, where he spent an extraordinarily cold winter teaching a group of students he regarded as fairly untalented.

In 1974, Rakosi traveled to England, where he read at Morden Tower in Newcastle and met Basil Bunting for the first time. The English poet Richard Caddel, who was in attendance at that reading, wrote his memories of the encounter:

In the smoke-filled, partly-furnished room, Rakosi reads, it seems to me, the most Williamsesque of his poems from *Amulet* and *Ere Voice*: plenty of experiential fact and natural speech; less of the interior or ornate. Bunting listens, impassive, nodding at times. In the hubbub of the interval the two talk together, alone, quietly. Through the crowd, I'm aware of the open friendship, sympathy, which is emerging between the two: a gentle animation, as of schoolboys sharing confidences, as they meet, at last, in reality.¹⁰⁶

Rakosi and Bunting carried on a brief correspondence, and Rakosi would later contribute a memorial poem for Bunting to a posthumous collection edited by Michael Farley and published in March 1986.¹⁰⁷

In 1975 John Martin's Black Sparrow Press published *Ex Cranium, Night*, a longer book (~175 pages) that combined poetry with aphoristic prose meditations. In 1981, Rakosi published two small-press chapbooks: *History* (with Ian Robinson's Oasis Books in London) and *Droles de Journal* (with Allan and Cinda Kornblum's Toothpaste Press), and in 1983, Ric and Ann Caddel's Pig Press published *Spiritus, I*, which explored metaphysical ideas about poetic inspiration. Under the direction of Carroll Terrell, the National Poetry Foundation published his *Collected Prose* in 1983 and

¹⁰⁶ "Rakosi and Bunting," in *Rakosi: Man and Poet*, 116.

¹⁰⁷ This poem, "A Minor Poet Not Conspicuously Dishonest," was included in Farley's *A Dog Nose* and can also be found in *The Collected Poems of Carl Rakosi*, 241.

his *Collected Poems* in 1986, though the titles of these two books is slightly misleading, as neither made an effort to collect Rakosi's work in a comprehensive or scholarly fashion.¹⁰⁸

Move to San Francisco

In 1978, Carl and Leah moved from Minneapolis to San Francisco, where they rented an apartment on the eastern edge of the Sunset District at 128 Irving Street, just behind the UC San Francisco Library and less than two blocks south of Golden Gate Park. Carl and Leah had previously wintered in San Francisco, and had come to appreciate the city's temperate winter weather, but the climate alone was not their primary reason for their move. In an interview with Kimberly Bird in 2002, Rakosi recalled that

I came here primarily because I had two poet friends living here: Robert Duncan and George Oppen. And once here, I can't say that I disliked the city, but it didn't seem quite right to me. It didn't seem altogether American. In the Middle West, you feel that, well, you are right in the heart of the country since so much of American industry really started in the Middle West. I always had the feeling that this was the real America. ... [I]t took me a long time to find San Francisco interesting. Interesting in its—first of all—its political life. There's a lot of back and forth disputes and controversies and differing ideas. The architecture suddenly struck me, "Hey, this is really interesting." Then recently I've really come to love San Francisco, but it took me about fourteen years to do it, to get the Middle West out of my system. Now when I return to Minneapolis to visit my daughter and granddaughter, it seems odd. Everything is flat there, although Minneapolis has its own interest, partly because of the university there, but it's not as interesting as San Francisco or the whole Bay Area. Where else can you drive for about fifteen minutes and get out into beautiful Marin and other beautiful country? It's special, it's different.¹⁰⁹

In 2003, just a few months before his death, Rakosi would write to Andrew Crozier: "I marvel at how lucky I've been to be living in San Francisco, I think the most interesting city in the country, and beyond question, the most beautiful."

¹⁰⁸ While Andrew Crozier produced a very carefully documented edition of Rakosi's early work in the form of *Poems 1923-1941*, Rakosi's post-1965 publications remain uncollected.

¹⁰⁹ *Century in the Poetic Eye*, 41.

In October 1984, Carl and Leah were involved in a frightening car accident; while waiting at a traffic light their car was struck by another driver and the force of the impact crashed them into a third vehicle also waiting at the light. Their vehicle was totaled, Rakosi sustained whiplash injuries, and the stress of the incident increased Leah's already elevated blood pressure, but no further harm came of the incident. Rakosi credited their survival to having been wearing seat belts, but they were both shaken by the incident.

Unfortunately, they were to face an even more serious health crisis in February 1986, when Leah was diagnosed with lymphoma. The news was a terrible blow to them both, and Carl's anguish and despair was reflected in a series of morose letters to several friends in 1986 and 1987. Although the cancer went into remission after intense chemotherapy, it was to return soon after, claiming Leah's life on January 21, 1989. Carl and Leah had been married for more than 50 years. In his autobiographical account of his life, written in the summer of 1986 (between bouts of chemotherapy for Leah) Carl wrote of Leah:

In 1938 I met Leah Jaffe. I liked her immediately. We were married in 1939. A few years ago, in a letter, Cid Corman had remarked that he couldn't visualize Leah or me without each other, and I, to confirm that there was a solid base to that, wrote back that ours must be one of the great marriages of all time. When I told Leah what I had written, she looked at me in disbelief. I was startled. Didn't she believe the same thing? I examined her face. It looked serious. But something told me she was going to lower the boom on me. With a straight face, after a moment of suspense, she said, "If you feel that way, why don't you bring me more presents?" We burst out laughing. She has a great spirit of fun. You can see why, in the words of young Mozart to his father, I hope she lives "till there is nothing more to be said in music."¹¹⁰

Last Years

Though his private life was upended by Leah's struggles with and death from cancer, the late 1980s were also a time of great recognition for Rakosi as poet. Though his degree of satisfaction for

¹¹⁰ *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, 208.

this long-craved recognition was much tempered by events closer to his heart, Rakosi received a lifetime achievement award from the National Poetry Association in 1988 and an award from the Fund for Poetry in 1989. In September-October 1989, Rakosi attended the international conference on the American Objectivists organized by Emmanuel Hocquard in Royaumont, France. As the only living member of the original Objectivists in attendance, Rakosi found himself in a number of disputes with several prominent LANGUAGE poets and critics whom he felt had badly misunderstood Objectivist poetics and had developed warped affections for Louis Zukofsky, in particular. Following the conference, Rakosi became involved in a spirited exchange of letters published in *The Poetry Project Newsletter* about LANGUAGE poetry and the Objectivist tradition.

Burton Hatlen organized a conference dedicated to Rakosi's work in Orono, Maine which was the impetus for the publication of the Michael Heller-edited volume *Carl Rakosi: Man and Poet* by the National Poetry Foundation in 1993. Andrew Crozier collected and edited all of Rakosi's early published work in *Poems 1923-1941*, which was published by Sun and Moon Press in 1995. Rakosi's final two books of poems, *The Earth Suite* and *The Old Poet's Tale* (an elegy for George Oppen) were published by Nicholas Johnson's Etruscan Books in 1997 and 1999. In addition to these two books, Rakosi also published a number of poems in *The American Poetry Review* during the 1990s.

Life After Leah

Following Leah's death, Carl entered a long-term relationship with Marilyn Kane, a former nun who had been a neighbor and friend of Carl and Leah's. In 1994, Rakosi and Kane moved to 1456 17th Avenue, a row house two blocks south of Golden Gate Park and about a mile west from Rakosi had previously made his home. In personal correspondence with the author, Marilyn recalled:

I only met him when he was 85, but he was still a rugged looking, handsome guy. You would never have known he was that old. He walked briskly. Used to walk down to the ball park in Golden Gate Park and circle it several times.¹¹¹

Rakosi died in San Francisco on June 25, 2004 after a series of strokes. At the time of his death, he was 100 years old and had been the last surviving “Objectivist” for more than 15 years.

Marilyn Kane died in San Francisco on May 19, 2016, aged 80.

¹¹¹ Email correspondence, July 29, 2015.

The Work

In addition to the cluster of friendships among the various “Objectivist” writers initiated in the mid- to late-1920s and cemented by regular correspondence, the core “Objectivists” were also connected by their longstanding mutual interest in one another’s poetry. Through a series of little magazines, cooperative book publishing ventures, and other schemes, these writers spent considerable time and effort reading, publishing, and reviewing one another’s work, with several members of the group sending each other their new publications for the rest of their lives, in some cases more than fifty years after their initial association.

While the first explicitly “Objectivist” poems as such appeared in the February 1931 issue of *Poetry*, most of the poets included in that group had already been publishing their writing for some time, usually in some of the era’s many little magazines. In fact, William Carlos Williams, the oldest member of the group by more than a decade, published his first collection, *Poems*, in 1909, just a year after George Oppen, the youngest core “Objectivist,” was born. Apart from Williams, who published poetry and prose more or less continuously from 1909 until his death in 1963, the remainder of the “Objectivists” had two distinct periods of intense publication activity (from 1928-1935, and from 1959-1978) interrupted by almost 25 years during which some members of the group wrote almost nothing and those who continued writing found it very difficult to have their work published.

While each of the authors featured on this site enjoyed their own rich individual publication history, explored in greater depth on separate pages for each individual writer, this page will detail several of the collaborative publication efforts that various of these “Objectivist” writers participated in during their first period of activity (1928-1935), with a special emphasis placed on the several little

magazines, anthologies and publishing cooperatives the “Objectivists” appeared in, edited, published, and financed.

“Objectivist” Publications

The “OBJECTIVISTS” 1931 issue of Poetry magazine

The seeds of what would be published in February 1931 as the “OBJECTIVISTS” 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine had their roots in Louis Zukofsky and Ezra Pound’s correspondence, which began in the summer of 1927 when Zukofsky sent Pound his “Poem Beginning ‘The’” for consideration in Pound’s newly established magazine *The Exile*. Pound’s favorable response to Zukofsky’s poem and, later to his critical writing (it helped that one of Zukofsky’s essays was an appreciative and perceptive review of Pound’s *Cantos*), initiated a lively correspondence which intensified and broadened over the next several years as Zukofsky formed his own developing relationships with others in Pound’s circle of American contacts. In December 1929, Zukofsky sent Pound an article he had written on the poetry of Charles Reznikoff (which would later become the “Sincerity and Objectification” essay included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*), few months later, Pound began mentioning Zukofsky’s promise as a critic to Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*, telling her in March 1930: “I think you miss things. Criterion and H[ound] & Horn both taking on Zukofsky. If you can’t liven up the verse; you cd. at least develop the critical section”¹ On September 26, 1930, Pound told Zukofsky he informed Zukofsky that he had recently gotten around to reading two of Zukofsky’s prose essays, including his piece on Reznikoff and told him “I don’t think either essay any use for Yourup = I think they both (after emendation) ought to appear in Poetry. & will write same to Harriet ... today or tomorrow = and if you like will edit the mss when I get back to

¹ University of Chicago Special Collections.

Rapallo.”² True to his word, he dashed off a quick letter to Monroe boosting Zukofsky’s critical acumen:

Before leavin’ home yesterday I recd. 2 essays by Zukofsky. You really ought to get his Reznikof [sic]. = He is one of the very few people making any advance in criticism. = he ought to appear regularly in ‘Poetry’ ... A prominent americ. homme de letters came to me last winter saying you had alienated every active poet in the U.S.—one ought not to be left undefended against such remarks. ... Zuk has [a] definite critical gift that ought to be used. ... You cd. get back into the ring if you wd. print a number containing [Zukofsky’s writing] ... Must make one no. of Poet. different from another if you want to preserve life as distinct from mere continuity.³

In the top left corner of Pound’s letter, Monroe added this brief summary of Pound’s letter: “Sug’d a Zukofsky number.” Shortly thereafter, Monroe took Pound up on his suggestion, writing to Zukofsky in October 13, 1930 and offering Zukofsky editorial control of an upcoming issue of her magazine. In her initial letter to Zukofsky, she emphasized some of her expectations for his editorial practice, telling him “I shall be disappointed, if you haven’t a ‘new group,’ as Ezra said.”⁴

[include some of the waffling and then some of confidence in his establishment of a group]
At Pound’s urging, Zukofsky was given editorial power over a single issue of Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry* magazine, and, however awkwardly or unwillingly, used the issue to present “OBJECTIVISTS” 1931, which was published in February 1931. [more on the back story]

On October 14, 1930, shortly after getting the news that he’d be given an issue of *Poetry* to edit as he saw fit, Zukofsky wrote to his friend Rene Taupin telling him:

I need “book reviews” — I mean we can’t let her contribute any — and yours is the best I can get — So get busy. All material must be in by Dec. 20 — if you’re writing English verse send it on.

² *Pound/Zukofsky*, 43-44.

³ University of Chicago, Special Collections.

⁴ University of Chicago Special Collections.

I'm afraid The Symposium has accepted the Am. Poetry 1920-1930, but they're still trying to get me to emend a word here & there — they wanted, to begin with, to omit the Finale on Bill but I said all or nothing —

No compromises with
Louis [signature]

[as a postscript] My “new group” will probably include W.C.W. Rez. myself (maybe) E.E.Cs if I can get him, McAlmon, Geo. Oppen etc — maybe E.P. Know anybody else or can recommend anyone?⁵

Within a week, Zukofsky had already formulated the rough contours of the issue, telling Taupin in a letter dated October 20:

Of course, I'll select — or I'd be truly “couvert.” What I meant was that she'd print what I accept. Like all powerful men, I wanted an assurance of power.

We'll say:

poetry: “Wms – “Alphabet of the Leaves” / Chas Reznikoff / Geo. Oppen / Rob't McAlmon / L.Z. (A VII) / Maybe E.P. maybe Cummings / Maybe a half dozen people Pound knows of – / Maybe a half dozen lines by some of my friends

prose: My Rez: Sincerity & Object. which Pound has offered to cut — it will be interesting to see what he does to it / Mr. Yourself – André Salmon / maybe 2 lines by E.P — may ½ word by W.C.W. maybe a punctuation mark by E.E.C.⁶

While much has been made over Zukofsky's reticence to be the standard-bearer of a movement and hemming and hawing over whether he had the “new group” Monroe was expecting, these very early letters to Taupin make visible how quickly Zukofsky had already formed a sense of the issue's core contributors. Before he received the first of many advisory letters from Pound, Zukofsky already seemed confident that he wanted his issue to contain poetry Williams, Reznikoff, Oppen, McAlmon, and Zukofsky, plus work by Pound and Cummings if he could get it, along with a handful of contributions from people “Pound knows of” and work by “some of my friends.” This is more or less exactly what the issue ended up including, with Carl Rakosi, Howard Weeks, Basil

⁵ Taupin MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

⁶ Taupin MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

Bunting, Norman Macleod, Emanuel Carnevali, Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford and Samuel Putnam comprising the former group and Joyce Hopkins/Irving Kaplan, Ted Hecht, Whittaker Chambers, Henry Zolinsky, Jesse Loewenthal, Martha Champion, and Taupin himself constituting the latter.

Of the four remaining writers to appear in the “Objectivists” issue, three of them: Kenneth Rexroth, Harry Roskolenko, and Richard Johns, were known to Zukofsky through their publication alongside him in *Blues*, the magazine Charles Henri Ford and Kathleen Tankersley Young had founded to continue the work of Pound’s *The Exile*. The only exception to this configuration was John Brooks Wheelwright, whose work Zukofsky had presumably read in *Hound & Horn*, and whose interest in Henry Adams, socialism, and revitalizing traditional forms likely all sounded sympathetic chords in Zukofsky.

This point is made explicit in a later letter from Zukofsky to Monroe, in which he reassured her

I shall probably—in fact, most certainly,—have more of a group than I thought. The contributions I have already—McAlmon, Rakosi, T.S. Hecht, Oppen, Williams, my own—tho never talked over by us together, *go* together. The Rakosi I received yesterday is excellent – the man has genius (I say that rarely) and he says he stopped writing five years ago—a curious case.⁷

These letters also help establish Zukofsky’s editorial independence from his mentor and benefactor. Pound’s editorial advice, crucially, didn’t begin to arrive until later in October. On October 24, Pound wrote to announce he had received the news from Monroe and to offer

⁷ University of Chicago Special Collections.

Zukofsky the beginning of what would be a torrential stream of advice as Zukofsky's self-appointed "venerabilis parens":

Wonnors will neuHH cease. I have just recd. nooz from Harriet that she is puttin you at the wheel for the Spring cruise. ... At any rate since it was a letter from donal mckenzie that smoked me up into writing Harriet that awoke in her nobl booZUMM the fire of enthusiasm that led her to let you aboard

I // wd. appreciate it if you wd. invite mckenzie to do one of the prose articles and state his convictions as forcibly as possibl

after which I see no reason why you shdnt. add a editorial note saying why you disagree.

Poetry has never had enUFF disagreement INSIDE its own wall.

need hardly to say that I am ready to be of anny assistance as I can. I do NOT think it wd. be well to insert my point of view. I shd. like you to consider mckenzie's point of view and your own.

IF there is anyone whom you want to include and cant get directly, I might be of use in raking them in, but I dont want to nominate any one.

I shldnt. be in any hurry. Take your time and you can produce something that will DATE and will stand against Des Imagistes. ...

The thing is to get out something as good as Des Imagistes by any bloody means at yr. disposal. (also to learn by my errors).

mckenzie might provide the conviction and enthusiasm (which you somewhat lack) and leave you to provide the good sense

I shd. in general be inclined to neglect anything already on file with "Poetry" waiting to be printed, and INVITE contribution from the active sperrits who wdnt. normally send their stuff to E. Erie St.

I can not GODDDDDAMMMMIT find mckenzie's LIST of just men but am asking him to send it to you.

It mentioned <I think> McAlmon, Johns that edits Paganny, you, norman macleod at j'en oublie, several I did not know but all whom I cd. verify by ref/ to current periodicals seemed good.

(he also mentioned Dunning, not knowing that Cheever was ten years older than I am and already dead (in physical sense).

I cant see that you need be catholic or inclusive; / detach whatever seems to be the DRIVE / or driving force or expression of same

I shd. try to get a fairly homogenius number; emphasis on the progress made since 1912; concentrated drive, not attempt to show the extreme diversity; though it cd. be mentioned in yr. crit.

This also wd. make it a murkn number; excluding the so different English; ... if you cover yourself with glory an' honour, H.M. might even let Basil try his hand at showin what Briton can do. ... or still also prejektin in to the future; Basil cd. crit. your number after the act, that wd. prob. be the best; you do yr. american damndest and then call in the furrin critic to spew forth his gall and tell what the Britons wd. LIKE to do that you aint done.

... thet wummun she nevuh trusted me lak she trusts you!!!⁸

[more from these letters]

Responding to Pound's advice in a letter dated November 6, 1930, Zukofsky expressed clear reservations about the homogeneity of the writers he had gathered, emphasizing his own belief in particularities:

Seems to me I have no group but people who write or at least try to show signs of doing it ... The only progress made since 1912—is or are several good poems, i.e. the only progress possible—& criteria are in your prose works. Don't know (my issue) will have anything to do with homogeneity (damn it) but with examples of good writing.⁹

Later in the same letter, however, he would also insist:

I'll have as good a "movement" as that of the premiers imagistes—point is Wm. C. W. of today is not what he was in 1913, neither are you if you're willing to contribute—if I'm going to show what's going on today, you'll have to. The older generation is not the older generation if it's alive & up—Can't see why you shd. appear in the H[ound] & H[orn] alive with 3 Cantos & not show that you are the (younger) generation in "Poetry." What's age to do with verbal manifestation, what's history to do with it ... I want to show the poetry that's being written today—whether the poets are of masturbating age or the fathers of families don't matter. ... Most of the men I choose will not be people who have been in touch with you. Satisfied?¹⁰

⁸ Pound/Zukofsky, 45-47.

⁹ Pound/Zukofsky, 65.

¹⁰ Pound/Zukofsky, 67.

Apart from Zukofsky's insistence on individuation and his illuminating choice of gendered collective noun (i.e. "most of the *men* I choose will not be people who have been in touch with you"), what's most striking about this passage is his insistence that his issue would be concerned with the "poetry that's being written today," and his emphasis not on ages or generations but on poetry as something like a timeless or durable "verbal manifestation." It's not so much that Zukofsky didn't understand the strategies of movement building and generations that Pound was insisting on as that he disagreed with them. This seems clearly understood by both men, and is a large part of why Pound wanted to pair Zukofsky with the more bombastic McKenzie (since he would "provide the conviction and enthusiasm (which you [meaning Zukofsky] somewhat lack)" and told Monroe that "[m]y only fear is that Mr. Zukofsky will be just too Goddam prewdent."¹¹

Though Zukofsky stuck to his principles and largely presented the group in his own way, Pound's insights were largely accurate. Following the issue's appearance in February, the responses began to roll in, and nearly all of them were negative, ranging from hostility at one extreme to baffled confusion at the other.¹² The March 1931 issue of *Poetry* included "The Arrogance of Youth," Monroe's editorial response to Zukofsky's issue expressing her dismay at Zukofsky's summary dismissal of nearly all of the poetry published (in *Poetry* and elsewhere) over the previous few decades.¹³ In her editorial, Monroe also noted the strictness of what she termed Zukofsky's "barbed-wire entanglements," before ending on a more catholic, conciliatory note, offering a "glad

¹¹ *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, 307.

¹² A January 16, 1931 letter from Zukofsky to *Poetry* magazine's associate editor Morton Zabel begins "I gather from your letter that the Feb. issue is being attacked already. Who are the "attackers"—or should I not ask the question? No, it isn't all objectification — perhaps very little of it is — but I think it is sincerity as defined in the editorial. Some objects, however, are tenuous — McAlmon's poem, for instance, — for the sake of certain accents of speech a slow projectile gathering acceleration as it comes home?" (University of Chicago Special Collections).

¹³ Monroe's editorial can be read online at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=59518>.

hand to the iconoclasts” and stating that while *Poetry* “will try, in the future as in the past, to keep its head and its sanity,” she can “at least cheer ... Zukofsky and his February friends ... on. They may be headed for a short life, but it should certainly be a merry one.”¹⁴ Just as tellingly, citing difficulties that had arisen in the production of the issue as a result of Zukofsky’s distance from Chicago (he was less than 150 miles away in Madison), Monroe expressed reservations in a letter to Basil Bunting about their proceeding with plans to give Bunting editorial control of a British poetry issue to be organized along similar lines.¹⁵

In the April issue Monroe included an edited selection of letters from readers along with a reply from Zukofsky. Many readers seemed to be genuinely confused by Zukofsky’s prose statements. [Stanley Burnshaw](#), then working as an advertising manager for the Hecht Company, wrote in to ask: “Is Objectivist poetry a programmed movement (such as the Imagists instituted), or is it a rationalization undertaken by writers of similar subjective predilections and tendencies[?] ... Is there a copy of the program of the Objectivist group available?”¹⁶ In his reply to Burnshaw, Zukofsky emphasized the fundamental individuality of the serious writer: “Interpretation differs between individuals and sometimes there are schools of poetry; i.e., there is agreement among individuals. But linguistic usage and the context of related words naturally influence an etiquette of

¹⁴ *Poetry* (March 1931), 333.

¹⁵ Pound had hoped that Zukofsky’s issue might be an ‘American’ issue, and he hoped to persuade Monroe to follow it up by allowing Basil Bunting to edit an ‘English’ issue, and René Taupin to edit a ‘French’ issue. While Monroe never again gave full editorial control of an entire issue of *Poetry* to anyone Pound had recommended, the February 1932 issue of *Poetry* was something of a compromise. Promoted as an “English Number,” it featured Bunting’s “[English Poetry Today](#),” a review of contemporary verse in England that began with the claim that “There is no poetry in England, none with any relation to the life of the country, or of any considerable section of it,” and went on to savage just about everyone then publishing in Britain, with T.S. Eliot coming in for particular abuse (264). The poetry included also bore the mark of Bunting and Pound’s editorial preferences, as it included Bunting’s satirical poem “Fearful Symmetry” as well as work by Ford Madox Ford, J. J. Adams, and Joseph Gordon Macleod, all of whom Pound had previously praised.

¹⁶ 53.

interpretation (common to individuals, and, it has been said, “for an age”—though all kinds of people live in an “age”))” before both dodging and dismissing Burnshaw’s question, claiming: “To those interested in programmed movements “Objectivist” poetry will be a ‘programmed movement.’ The editor was not a pivot, the contributors did not rationalize about him together; out of appreciation for their *sincerity* of craft and occasional *objectification* he wrote the program of the February issue of *Poetry*” and brusquely recommending Burnshaw reread the other prose statements in the issue.¹⁷

About the only praise for the issue came from Ezra Pound, who sent a postcard claiming “this is a number I can show to my Friends. If you can do another eleven as lively you will put the mag. on its feet,” though Monroe tempered his enthusiasm with her deflating riposte: “Alas, we fear that would put it on its uppers! [teeth]”¹⁸

An “Objectivists” Anthology

Shortly after the appearance of his “OBJECTIVISTS” 1931 issue of *Poetry*, had Zukofsky begun to work on selecting and editing a larger collection of work to be published as an “Objectivists” anthology. Zukofsky appears to have believed based on his correspondence with Ezra Pound that the finished anthology would be published by Samuel Putnam, the Paris-based publisher of the magazine *The New Review*. The May-June-July 1931 issue of *The New Review*, which had been titled “The New Objectivism,” had included two sections of Zukofsky’s “A” as well as a lengthy editorial entitled “Black Arrow” in which Putnam praised the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry* and

¹⁷ Ibid, 56. In a letter to Morton Zabel written on February 19, 1931, Zukofsky detailed the responses he had sent to Burnshaw and Horace Gregory, telling him “One can’t give too much time to these things—let what’s clear speak for itself” and provided detailed responses to Zabel’s apparent criticism of McAlmon’s work (University of Chicago Special Collections).

¹⁸ The full exchange of correspondence published by Monroe in the April 1931 issue can be found online on the Poetry Foundation’s website: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=38&issue=1&page=65>.

described Zukofsky as “the best, the most important critic that I am able to think of in America.”¹⁹ In October 1931, Zukofsky finished his edits for the anthology and sent a manuscript to Putnam, and the fourth issue of *The New Review* (published in Winter 1931-1932) included an announcement for *An “Objectivist Anthology”* to be edited by Zukofsky and published in Spring 1932.

Unfortunately for Zukofsky, he had done the work entirely on speculation, without securing either a contract or payment for the anthology from Putnam, and late in 1931 Putnam began to ghost Zukofsky, leaving his letters unanswered. As the months ticked by without further word from Putnam, Zukofsky became increasingly anxious that Putnam would not publish the anthology. In February 1932, Zukofsky’s worst fears were confirmed when he received Putnam’s rejection.²⁰ In May 1932, Pound informed Zukofsky that his association with *The New Review* had been ended: “Sam Puttenham is drunk half the time/ over works the other two thirds / worries I shd/ think about his health (which is the worst known to man) the remaining fifth/ His last issue New Rev. inexcusable on any other base/ass. Sorry!//he’za sympathetic kuss/ Have said faretheewell to his orgum.”²¹ After his publishing plans with Putnam collapsed, Zukofsky persuaded the Oppens to bring out the anthology, and in August 1932 the Oppen’s oversaw its printing in Dijon, France as *To, Publishers’ final publication.*

¹⁹ See *New Review*, 1: 2 (May-June-July 1931), 71-89.

²⁰ According to Tom Sharp, Zukofsky wrote to Pound on 15 March 1932 chastising himself for sacrificing his money, time, and energy without a serious promise of publication, and announced that “he would no longer submit work unsolicited or without pay, especially for editors like Putnam,” though there would be several more cruel lessons for Zukofsky to learn about the poetry and publishing “biz” in the years to come.

²¹ *Pound/ Zukofsky*, 126.

An "Objectivists" Anthology was divided into three sections: lyric (section 1), epic (section 2), and collaborations (section 3) and contained work by 15 contributors, eight of whom also had also appeared in the "Objectivists" 1931 issue of *Poetry*.²²

As with the "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*, Zukofsky's anthology failed to make the impact he had hoped for. He told Zabel in September 1932

I sent out about 30 "Objectivists" Anthology for review, and not a murmur, not even a cardiac murmur in reply, or an announcement or anything. I hope at least that "poetry" will not let the book go stillborn. You received your copy at "Poetry"'s office? What do you think of it?²³

Zabel's reply indicated that they had not received their copy, which led to Zukofsky sending two additional review copies to the magazine in January, suggesting to Harriet Monroe that perhaps it might be assigned to Marianne Moore. Instead, the anthology was assigned to Morris Schappes, who wrote a hostile review which appeared in the March 1933 issue and to which Zukofsky's reply was printed in May 1933.²⁴

Book Publishing Efforts, Real and Imagined

In addition to their involvement in a network of little magazines published during the era (discussed below), several members of this loose alliance were also united in a number of schemes to

²² The eight authors included in both publications were: Bunting, Rakosi, Reznikoff, Oppen, Williams, Zukofsky, Robert McAlmon, and Kenneth Rexroth. The six writers who appeared in the anthology but not in *Poetry* were Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, both well-known enough not to need an introduction here; Mary Butts (1890-1937), a English modernist writer who was well-known to Ezra Pound who had previously been married to the poet and publisher John Rodker; Frances Fletcher, a teacher and graduate of Vassar College who had published two slim volumes of poetry in 1925 and 1926; Forrest Anderson, a San Francisco native who had published poems in *Blues, Pagany, Tambour, and transition*; and R.B.N. Warriston, an acquaintance of Zukofsky's who lived in White Plains, New York. The anthology also included a collaboration between Zukofsky and Jerry Reisman, his friend and former student at Stuyvesant High School. More detailed biographies of each of these contributors is available in [The Lives section of this site](#).

²³ University of Chicago Special Collections.

²⁴ See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=59581>.

form and operate a press which would issue book-length collections. Two of these proposed publishing schemes, *To, Publishers* and The Objectivist Press, succeeded in issuing books by various “Objectivist”-affiliated writers in the years immediately following the appearance of the February 1931 issue of *Poetry*.

To, Publishers

Upon his twenty-first birthday in April 1929, George Oppen had come into a small inheritance from his deceased mother’s estate. It was with this money as the necessary starting capital that the Oppens founded *To, Publishers* in late 1931, with Zukofsky as the firm’s managing editor. The name appears to have been Zukofsky’s idea, and is certainly of a kind with his famous preference for “little words” (like “The,” “*A*,” W.E., etc.).²⁵ Zukofsky glossed the firm’s name in a letter to Morton Zabel:

Strange to say we wanted a name to sink into the public mind & *To* promises to be as good as any. Let alone direction, if one wants to be cordial — the dative of the noun *To* (the name of our business) means to *To* or for *To*. I’ve heard allegiance is necessary in business. Mm ... if I were only Mussolini.²⁶

In light of his later interest in acronyms for publishing ventures (*Writers Extant* or W.E. Publishers), another possible reading of the company’s name is as an acronym for *The Objectivists*, though I have not found any documentary evidence that makes this intention explicit.

²⁵ Zukofsky wrote in “For My Son When He Can Read”: “The poet wonders why so many today have raised up the word ‘myth,’ finding the lack of so-called ‘myths’ in our time a crisis the poet must overcome or die from, as it were, having become too radioactive, when instead a case can be made out for the poet giving some of his life to the use of the words *the* and *a*: both of which are weighted with as much epos and historical destiny as one man can perhaps resolve. Those who do not believe this are too sure that the little words mean nothing among so many other words” (*Prepositions*, 10).

²⁶ University of Chicago Special Collections.

In the summer of 1930, Zukofsky travelled to Berkeley, California where he spent a few weeks staying with his Columbia friend Irving Kaplan. Sometime after Zukofsky left the Bay Area to take up his teaching position in Wisconsin, the Oppens left San Francisco for France.²⁷ After their arrival in Le Havre, the Oppens purchased a horse cart and spent some months traveling across the French countryside, stopping in Paris, Marseilles, and Cannes before settling in Le Beausset, a small village in the south of France near Toulon. The Oppens established To late in 1931, paying Zukofsky \$100 a month to act as the firm's managing editor from New York City.²⁸

On December 10, 1931, Zukofsky shared To's publishing plans with Ezra Pound, indicating that they expected to print a book every two months, and providing this list for their first year's publications:

1. Bill Walrus [William Carlos Williams].
2. E[zra].P[ound]. Section I.
3. If Oppen agrees—Tozzi/Buntn.²⁹
only objection: we may have to pay Tozzi—is he alive?—& we c'dn't afford to pay both Bunting & Tozzi—But you write Oppen & see what he says. No, I don't think we propose to be purely amurikun. In fact, we expect you to be on lookout for foreign material and make suggestions all the time.
4. Possibly L[ouis].Z[ukofsky].
5. Reznikoff. (probably)

²⁷ The historical record is somewhat confused on this point. Mary Oppen seems to suggest in her memoirs that they left for Europe in 1929 or 1930, but the ship manifest detailing the Oppen's return to the United States in June 1933 indicates that their passports were issued in March 1931.

²⁸ This money helped soften the blow of giving up his teaching position in Madison, for which Zukofsky had been paid \$1000 during the 1930-1931 academic year and which he had been offered a renewal the following year. On October 15, 1931, Zukofsky wrote to Pound: "Geo Oppen is planning a publishing firm—To, Publishers, and I'm the edtr. We'll probably begin with Bill's collected prose—or at least—Bill's been spoken to" (Qtd. in *Pound/Zukofsky*, 101).

²⁹ Pound had suggested in a letter the previous month that Bunting might translate the Italian poet Federigo Tozzi's novel *Tre croci* (written in 1918 and published in just before his death of influenza and pneumonia in 1920). Bunting never produced this translation.

6. E.P. (2nd section).

Bob McA—cd. be taken care of the second year. We don't want the same homicide squad allee time. By that time he shd. be rejected by everyone else & (have) polished off his Politics of Existence³⁰ which has fine things in it—what I've seen—but needs to be cut (& I mean cut). Not just circumcised.³¹

On December 28, 1931, Zukofsky sent a letter to Morton Zabel in Chicago on To Publishers' letterhead, telling Zabel the firm's name was to be pronounced "like the preposition. The noun wd. indicate the dative," and explaining that it was a

new publishing venture: Geo. Oppen, publisher, L.Z. editor. Books to printed in France, brochure, 50¢ each. At least six a year. Present list:

1. Wm. C. Wms – A Novelette & other Prose
2. Section I – Ezra's Prolegomena (Collected Prose)
3. (Probably) Bunting's Translation of Tre Croce by Tozzi
4. (If I'm convinced) something by L.Z
5. (Probably) Reznikoff – My Country 'Tis of Thee
6. E.P. Section II Collected Prose (there'll be about six of these E.P.'s – & ultimate folio)

7,8, etc Rakosi, Rexroth etc etc³²

Sometime in late 1931 or early 1932, Oppen also sent Pound a letter from Le Beausset describing To, Publishers as

A new press, printing in France. Publishes chiefly brochures to sell for 8 Francs. Its program for the year includes: Prolegomena (collected prose) of Ezra Pound (to be published as a

³⁰ This McAlmon book was never finished and remained unpublished at his death in 1956. A undated draft of the manuscript with a 1952 letter explaining the project of the novel can be found among [his papers in Yale's Beinecke Library](#).

³¹ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 117

³² University of Chicago Special Collections.

series); *A Novelette and Other Prose*, by William Carlos Williams; a novel by Charles Reznikoff; poems by Louis Zukofsky.³³

As their proposed list of publications makes clear, To, Publishers was nothing if not an “Objectivist” publishing venture: funded and operated from France by the Oppens, it employed Zukofsky as the managing editor, and in addition to *An ‘Objectivists’ Anthology* published (or planned to publish) work by Williams, Pound, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Oppen, Bunting, Rakosi, and Rexroth.

As was the case with so many other depression-era publication schemes, To’s ambitions far exceeded their actual capabilities. In February 1932, the Oppens oversaw the publication William Carlos Williams’ *A Novelette and Other Prose*, which was followed in June 1932 by Ezra Pound’s *Prolegomena 1: How to Read, Followed by The Spirit of Romance, Part 1*, both of which were produced as paperbacks (in pamphlet form) by a print shop in Toulon. The press was immediately beset by a number of problems, however, including a number of difficulties in the production and import processes. Some of these difficulties can be seen in a series of letters Zukofsky sent to Morton Daubel. On January 26, 1932, Zukofsky sent a postcard noting that the price of the publications had been raised to 75¢, to accommodate both a 25% customs duty and increased production costs, and he followed this note up in March of that year by writing

The books haven’t arrived from France yet. The French printer doesn’t read English, & Oppen has had to read proof at least seven times, so far. Incidentally, please do not mention Oppen’s (the owner’s) and my (the editor’s) name in your extenso notes of To in Poetry. Thanks for the trouble.³⁴

According to Mary Oppen:

When we shipped the books of To Publishers from France to Louis in New York, he found that he could only get the books by paying a duty. Customs declared them to be magazines, not books, but a loophole existed—if we wrapped them in bundles of twenty-five or less

³³ [Ezra Pound Papers](#), Beinecke (Yale), YCAL MSS 43, Box 38, Folder 1613.

³⁴ University of Chicago Special Collections.

they could come in duty-free. This entailed numerous trips by us and by Louis to the Post Office. . . . neither of us [meaning George & Mary] understood anything of business, and neither did Louis. It is perhaps surprising that we actually did get books printed. Financially we had taken on too big a burden; we could not support ourselves, Louis, and the printing and publishing of the books unless at least a small amount of money came back to us. And no money came back to us.³⁵

While some of the details in Mary Oppen's recollections may have been warped slightly by the passage of time, the fundamentals appear accurate. The company's financial viability was probably hindered some of Zukofsky's personal limitations; while an undeniably gifted editor, he was, by his own admission, never a very skilled (or tremendously interested) marketer or salesman. He was described as being an "indifferent, sometimes negligent bookseller" when working at his brother Morris' Greenwich Village bookstore in the late 1920s;³⁶ Pound wrote about hearing of others' lack of confidence in his business sense as early as 1931;³⁷ and sales records of each of the publishing ventures he was involved with did little to inspire confidence in his ability to arouse public interest. Whatever the precise reason, sales of To's first volumes lagged far behind Zukofsky and the Oppens early hopes. In December 1931, when Zukofsky was finalize the financial arrangements surrounding To's publication of *How to Read*, he had quoted a letter from Oppen which referenced their willingness to "pay twenty percent on copies sold over the number (about 3000) necessary to pay 100 dollars on a ten percent royalty. That comes to the same thing as my original suggestion to you, except that it gives us our clear (almost) profit on the copies sold from

³⁵ *Meaning a Life*, 131.

³⁶ After Whittaker Chambers was fired from his job at the New York Public Library in April 1927 when dozens of "missing" books were found in his coat locker, Zukofsky found him a job working with him at his brothers bookshop. Chambers' biographer Sam Tanenhaus writes: "Chambers and Louis were supposed to help customers at noon, when the regular staff broke for lunch, but were indifferent, sometimes negligent booksellers, seldom stirring from their seats. Henry Zolinsky, a frequent visitor, once put them to a test, asking for a volume. When Chambers and Zukofsky assured him it was not to be found, Zolinsky walked over to the shelves and pulled down the book himself" (*Whittaker Chambers: A Biography*, 56-57).

³⁷ Barry Ahearn quotes a November 29, 1931 letter in which Pound informs Zukofsky that "[René] Taupin has filled Basil [Bunting] with firm belief in yr. utter incapacity to transact ANY business operation" (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 121).

1600 (which is necessary to break even) to 3000. Which profit we'll probably have use for it we ever get it."³⁸ In May 1933, Zukofsky gave Pound a report on total sales of To's three publications, a far cry from the 1600 copies Oppen had earlier asserted they would need just to "break even":

Since you ask: Bruce Humphries have brought [sic] to date from To
 25-W.C.W. [Williams' *A Novelette*]
 75 – H.T.R. [Pound's *How to Read*]
 71 – "Obj" [*An "Objectivists" Anthology*]

To's total sales in U.S.A.:
 150 – W.C.W. (Bill bought 50)
 109- H.T.R.
 130- Obj.

In Europe as far as I know
 12-W.C.W.
 28- H.T.R.
 10-Obj.³⁹

With dismal sales and the difficulties already described, the Oppens quickly realized that they were on pace to exhaust their limited capital. In August of 1932, George Oppen informed Zukofsky that he would be unable to continue operating the publishing company (or pay Zukofsky to act as its managing editor) beyond the end of the year, and that they would have to scrap nearly all of their remaining plans for publication. Zukofsky wrote to Pound on August 8, 1932: "Latest news from O[ppen]:—"Can't continue To." Which means my salary goes as well when the year is up—& will probably be reduced to \$50 (if George can spare that much) a month, while it lasts. "The year is up"—may be this Sept. 1932—I'm not sure when my year started, since Buddy [George's nickname] and I made no formal legal arrangements."⁴⁰

³⁸ Pound/Zukofsky, 114-115.

³⁹ *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 102.

⁴⁰ Pound/Zukofsky, 132. Zukofsky's salary was in fact reduced to \$50 in August, and discontinued altogether after October 1932 (Letters from Zukofsky to Pound, 8 October 1932, Yale).

The publication of *An "Objectivists" Anthology* in August was the press's final gasp, and once it was printed, from Dijon rather than Le Beausset, which the Oppens had already departed, the company's was disbanded. To's dissolution was confirmed in a letter from Zukofsky to Zabel on September 12, 1932:

N.Y. has become about as impossible as Madison was 2 years ago.

My "projects" — or maybe they're not mine — don't go. To has had to postpone publishing indefinitely. With postponement goes my salary. I don't suppose you know of a job for me, but if you hear —⁴¹

Writers Extant

Chastened but not wholly discouraged by the failure of To Publishers and the loss of his monthly editor's salary, Zukofsky's next scheme was a proposed writers' union to be called Writers Extant with a publishing arm to be called W.E., Publishers. Early in 1933, Zukofsky circulated a detailed prospectus for the idea among several friends, including both Pound and Williams, asking for their feedback and support. In a letter to Ezra Pound, Zukofsky indicated that the editorial board would be comprised of Tibor Serly, René Taupin, and himself, and its members would include Reznikoff and Williams, and possibly Rexroth, McAlmon, Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, Wallace Stevens, and others.⁴² In early April 1933, Williams sent an initial reply, which was decidedly negative:

What the hell can I say about Writers Extant? I don't see how it can be done. I think your prospectus is too complex. Where in hell is one to begin?

It's all very well to name off twenty or more names of those you'd like to see members of such an organization but can you get them and can you keep them and can you manage them when you have them? I doubt it very much.

⁴¹ University of Chicago Special Collections.

⁴² Qtd. in Sharp's dissertation: <http://sharpgiving.com/Objectivists/sections/22.history.html?visited=1#22history-51>, Zukofsky, Letter to Pound, 17 April 1933, Yale and referenced in *Pound/Zukofsky*, 141-142.

Personally I could at a pinch give up a couple of hundred dollars, but why? For two hundred dollars I could in all probability get my poems published and although that is a most selfish viewpoint yet it <is> one which must have weight with me since a sum of that sort is not easy for me to detach from my ordinary expenses. And unless I gave it I wouldn't take a thing from the organization.

It is possible that we might get a book that would sell and so bring us in a profit. But don't imagine for one minute that if some book were profitable it wouldn't be taken away from us damned quick by the author or the firm to which he would sell out his rights.⁴³

Williams' next letter, sent on May 6, was more conciliatory:

Having thought (waited!) doubtfully with your "Writers Extant" in mind I have come to the conclusion that there's no other way out of our difficulties. It is basically the only way for us to proceed. BUT I do not think we have as yet hit upon either the correct name for the venture nor upon the proper method or procedure.

You have made a start and the motion is not lost. We are all searching for the phraseology. Part of the next step and it may take some time to develop it, come what may, is for you to see the men involved, personally. It will not be until after that that a program can be put down on paper. When you have done this (supposing for the moment that you are the permanent secretary indicated in your project) and after you have seen certain theoretical scripts, including my White Mule. Then we can band together, publish one book, the best we can find, and then, with some solid ground under our feet and snarl in our voices we can begin. LAST will come what is written down as a contract – after we have had some experience. Everything else must be tentative up to that time.⁴⁴

Along with that letter, Williams also included his own revised and severely abbreviated version of Zukofsky's lengthy prospectus which he instructed him to show to Tibor Serly:

The Writers Publishers, Inc.

1. Membership in the group is limited to those writers who have in actual possession an available and complete book manuscript of high quality which is unacceptable to the usual publisher.
2. Manuscripts to be published by the group are to be selected (with advice) by a Director who shall be elected by a majority of the group members for the term of one year.

⁴³ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 154.

⁴⁴ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 155.

3. The business end of the group activities will be under the direction of a paid Secretary-Treasurer, under bond, who shall occupy the office indefinitely, or until removed by a two thirds vote of the existing membership at any time.
4. Initial funds are to be contributed by the charter members as may be agreed upon, to be added to later as the business of the group may prove profitable.
5. The first membership will be made up of a selected, voluntary group who by a majority vote, after the first requisite is satisfied, will add to their numbers from time to time.
6. Resignation from the group may take place at the discretion of the member by which he is absolved from further financial responsibility at the same time relinquishing any claim he has had upon the group's resources.
7. Dissolution of the group as an organization will be conditional upon an equal distribution among the members of all funds and other rights enjoyed by the group under its incorporation.
8. Further additions to these rules will be made from time to time.⁴⁵

Williams urged that any revision be kept to no more than “2 pages in all” and indicated that “a few paragraphs may be added: Reznikoff can take care of a proper arrangement of the items.”⁴⁶ Zukofsky forwarded Williams’ revisions to his prospectus to Pound within the week, urging Pound to take his own turn at revising them:

Continuin’ with *organization*—objection has been raised to “exclusiveness” of trade name. The Writers Publishers, Inc. has been suggested instead—& I enclose a copy of Bill’s “revision” of the prospectus. I don’t think he gets the real purpose of the original prospectus. But maybe you can do better in an *idle* moment. I mean tho his draft *wd seem* to be more business-like than *mine* he doesn’t see how he’s trapped himself again in the “highbrow licherary circle of viciousness.” Fer gord’s sakez, you don’t think I wrote all the detail of that prospectus—the Organization section especially—without for a moment having my tongue in my cheek! But the serious intent of the prospectus which makes it a thing not merely of this administration (an attempt to work with the dead), but at *least a working chance* that shd. fit in with the “new” economy when people begin to realize it—and they’ll have to—is *in* the prospectus, I mean L.Z.’s. No use backsliding, whatever the “difficulties ” of “style.” And if you’re afraid that “the idea is no good *until* L.Z. starts trying to write simple readable prose”—you write to letters to edtrs. now, you can write *declarations* in the future as of the Board of Writers Pubs. And L.Z. doesn't intend to sit down to write 4

⁴⁵ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 156-157.

⁴⁶ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 156.

pg. Prospectii in the future. When the time comes he'll find it more simple to use the technique of advertising, and say: Prof. So & So is still going to the stool, ethically. Messrs. Splinters and Plate persist in cutting the razor of morality.⁴⁷

While Pound did not appear to have attempted a revision, the proposal remained very much on Williams' mind, as he wrote Zukofsky twice more in May to express his concerns about their proposal. His first letter, dated May 24, 1933, read:

I've tormented my soul long enough over our Writer-Publisher proposal: I think it's no go and we should give it up. As far as you personally are concerned I think it would be an excellent thing for you to get to see Pound this summer. I'll be glad to contribute my bit to assist you as agreed with Serly. I'll believe we'd all derive some benefit from it by clarifying our present more than a little muddled thinking. Go and take a look. In the fall we can appraise the situation again if we want to.

And don't forget that with every advantage in their favor large publishing houses are going broke. While even such a venture as Angel Flores' Dragon Press has cost its sponsor two or three thousand dollars which he'll never see again. It can't be done today. Pound said it over and over again in his letter. We've got to heed such evidence.

The only possible way out of our difficulties, aside from hoping against hope, would be to print a series of six books at our own expense and then give someone like Harcourt, Brace 15% to market them – as others have done before us. But could we find six saleable new books? I doubt it. And even if we could find them, where would the next six come from? No, I can't see it.⁴⁸

A week later, Williams wrote again:

It means this: I saw [Nathanael] West and <he> would have nothing to do with a self-publishing venture. Quite correctly I think, he pointed out that no book should be self-published until it had been the rounds of all the commercial publishers. This would take a year. And if all of them turned it down you could be reasonably sure that it would not sell fifty copies under any circumstances. We should simply lose our money.

Besides, there are not twelve books in the country that would be available for our uses.

⁴⁷ *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 98-100.

⁴⁸ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 158.

As for Josephine Herbst: she is about to become a successful author. Under those circumstances I refuse point blank to approach her. What for? To ask her for money? Never. To ask her for a script? Insane.

[Wallace] Stevens is under contract to Knopf.

It's simply an impossible situation.⁴⁹

And that is more or less where things stood when in June when the Oppens returned from France (they arrived in New York City on June 7) and Zukofsky left on his long-awaited tour of Europe. On this trip, financed largely by Pound, Williams, and others of Zukofsky's friends, Zukofsky met with Tibor Serly (in Budapest), René Taupin (in Paris), and Pound and Bunting (at Rapallo). Following his return to New York City at the end of the summer, Zukofsky made another push, arranging a meeting to discuss the launch of a collaborative publishing venture.

The Objectivist Press

This meeting was held on September 24, 1933 at the Oppens' Brooklyn apartment at 214 Columbia Heights, and was attended by Zukofsky, Williams, Reznikoff, and the Oppens. At this meeting, the group established an advisory board (consisting of Williams and Pound with Zukofsky to serve as the executive secretary), made a tentative publishing list, and drew up a plan to request subscriptions. A letter from Williams to Zukofsky dated October 2, 1933 included his synopsis of what they had discussed:

Writers-Publishers to be incorporated:

1. A possible list of subscribers to 1 book of poems to be circularized and approached by whatever means possible. The book to sell at \$2 and to be the most saleable we can find.
2. This book to be published on the basis of whatever advance subscriptions are obtained.

⁴⁹ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 159.

3. The proceeds, if any, from this sale to be divided, 60% to the author, 40% to the group which 40% is to be used to publish book #2 and to pay the Executive Secretary who will be the sole officer of the group.
4. On this basis books are to be continued to be printed and sold as often and for as long a time as practicable.

Notes: When the first book is advertised it will be put forward as one of a series of four which will all be published and offered, separately, for subscription during the first year.

The original suggestion of E[zra].P[ound]. to be rewritten to conform to this plan.

As a feature of the plan distinguished (?) modernists of the day will write introductory pages to these books – their names (with consent) to be given out when the first notices appear: such names as Marion [sic] Moore, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, etc etc. This in effect will be a sponsoring Committee without putting too much of a burden on names.

Harriet Monroe and Poetry to be approached from the first with intent to get as much backing from that source as being the official (?) poetry organization in U.S.

Mr. Zukofsky be named to Executive-Secretary etc. etc. with power to keep records, see individuals, arrange for publishing, correct proofs ? ? ? select format, wrote letters, devise lists, compose advertising matter, push sales, etc, etc — God help him!⁵⁰

Williams also included his enthusiasm for the plan, telling Zukofsky that “That scheme as outlined has the earmarks of feasibility, the best yet! I am grateful to you for your vision and persistence, I’ll back you in every way possible. To begin with you may count on me for the first hundred toward my book. I’d pay it all but I decided long ago not to. And I’ll go after Marianne and Wallace Stevens at once.”⁵¹

Over the next few weeks, the group considered other names for their venture (including two of Williams’ suggestions: Writers-Publishers and Cooperative Publishers), ultimately settling on the singular form of The Objectivists Press.⁵² They also adopted a simple statement of purpose,

⁵⁰ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 165-166.

⁵¹ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 165.

⁵² On October 23, 1933, Zukofsky had written to Pound asking him to join himself, Williams, and Reznikoff as a partner in The Objectivists Press (a spelling he also included in a follow-up query to Pound dated October 29), but by

proposed by Reznikoff, which was printed on the books' dust wrapper: "The Objectivist Press is an organization of writers who are publishing their own work and that of other writers whose work they think ought to be read."

The press launched itself into existence in January 1934 through the publication of Williams' *Collected Poems 1921-1931*, printed in an initial edition of 500 by J.J. Little and Ives Company, in New York, and was sold by subscription. As the first book issued by the Objectivist Press, the book's dust jacket prominently featured the press' name and address,⁵³ as well as praise from Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, and René Taupin. Williams' book, which featured a preface written by Wallace Stevens, was a modest success, both critically and commercially; it was reviewed by Charles Poore in the *New York Times Book Review* in February, and nearly sold out its initial edition at \$2 a copy, netting the press a small profit.

The press also published Reznikoff's *Testimony* (a prose work which featured an introduction by Kenneth Burke, Williams' friend and former editor of *The Dial*) that same month, and followed the publication of these two books in January with two volumes of poetry in March: George Oppen's *Discrete Series* (which included an introduction by Ezra Pound) and Reznikoff's *Jerusalem the Golden*. The back cover of the dust jacket for Oppen's book is particularly illuminating in regards to how The Objectivist Press presented itself: it included the press' mission statement and advisory board, listed their three already accomplished publications and announced their plans to bring out

November they had dropped the plural and reverted to The Objectivist Press, which is the name under which all their subsequent books were published.

⁵³ 10 West 36th Street, two blocks northeast of the Empire State Building in midtown Manhattan.

“verse and prose by Basil Bunting, Tibor Serly, Carl Rakosi, René Taupin, Louis Zukofsky and others.”⁵⁴

While the venture had begun with Zukofsky’s lofty ambitions and a lengthy list of works they intended to publish, the Objectivist Press did not prove to be long-lived, collapsing as a functional cooperative within a year. Fissures in the organization had appeared almost immediately, in fact, with Zukofsky writing privately to Pound of his exhaustion and the possibility of his leaving the press as early as April 12, 1934:

have been sick myself tho working on a C.W.A. [Civil Works Administration] job, now transferred to Dep’t of Pub. Welfare, N.Y.C.—6 hrs of continual insult to the intelligence, 2 hrs travel, 1 hr. “lunch.” 9 hrs a day, & then 1-3 hrs of the Obj. Press when I get home. Municipal salary \$19 a week. Other salary \$0. Which leaves very little time for writing, but I’ve done some. . . . May have to resign Sec’y of Obj. Press if burden of work continues, & the effort spent on the press does not repay in the way of enough sales allowing us to continue. It’s a ha-a-rd job, & besides there may be necessity for direct action in another field (in add. to poetry)—and aside from publishing—I’m afraid there is now only I’m holding back. You were right last summer about staying clear of becoming an office boy—besides people dun’t appreciate.⁵⁵

By the end of the year, the press had issued just one additional book after Oppen’s *Discrete Series*, Reznikoff’s *In Memoriam: 1933* and was no longer operating as a functional collective. A number of things contributed to the press’ demise: Zukofsky and Oppen quarreled⁵⁶ and the

⁵⁴ Williams shared his first year’s publication suggestions with Zukofsky in a letter written sometime late in 1933: “The names I’d suggest for the first year would be my own (not because I wish it so but because the general opinion seems to be that my book would be a good one to start with) the Zukofsky, Bunting, Rakosi. I believe we’ll have our hands full trying to get a book out every 3 months” (*The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 166-167).

⁵⁵ Pound/ Zukofsky, 156-157.

⁵⁶ In *Meaning a Life*, Mary Oppen relates one version of the story: “Walking with Louis when *Discrete Series* was in manuscript, George was discussing it with him before showing it to anyone else. Louis turned and with a quizzical expression asked George, “Do you prefer your poetry to mine?” “Yes,” answered George, and the friendship was at a breaking point” (*Meaning a Life*, 145). This elliptical account leaves much unsaid, my own view of the split was that it was probably exacerbated by the fact the Oppen, who had money, was publishing his book of poems (and with an introduction from Pound), while Zukofsky, who did not have money, was not. “Do you prefer your poetry to mine?” may have been the Oppens recasting of a request by Zukofsky to underwrite the publication of his work and George’s

Oppens traveled to Mexico in the summer of 1934, joining the Communist Party and devoting their energies to what Zukofsky referred to in the letter just cited as “direct action in another field” as organizers for the Workers Alliance soon after their return to the United States;⁵⁷ Williams’ plan to develop an opera with Zukofsky’s friend Tibor Serly fell apart, damaging Williams’ friendship with Zukofsky; and Zukofsky resigned as the press’ secretary. The relationship between Williams, Zukofsky, and the Oppens appears to have been strained by late 1934; Zukofsky wrote to Pound in November 1934 asking about the possibility of Faber & Faber printing his poem “Mantis,” and again in February 1935 asking explicitly for help in getting his *55 Poems* manuscript published in England:

You can, if it won’t hurt your own name, try and get me published with Faber & Faber. Serly off to Europe with my final arrangement and additions to *55 Poems*—a most commendable typescript for you to look at. Time fucks it, and if I keep my MSS. in my drawer or my drawers, I might as well shut up altogether. ... Pleased also with your choice of my work for the same amphoty [the Spring-Summer issue of *Westminster Magazine*]. Enclosure should have probably gone into Westminster, if it reached you in time. No place now to print it in ‘Murka. Do you think Mr. Eliot would see it? And Random House continues to print beeyutiful volumes of shit by Spender and Auden.

If you consent, think it opportune etc, to try my *55* on Faber & Faber, you need not worry about an introduction—I don’t want it—you can write a blurb for the dust-proof jacket if it jets out of you.

Noo Yok at a standstill. Haven’t heart from Bill Willyums in moneths.⁵⁸

Further confirmation of the timing of the split can be found in a letter from Williams to Zukofsky in March 1935 which indicates both that Williams hadn’t heard from Zukofsky for roughly 6 months and that he had heard that Zukofsky and the Oppens had fallen out.⁵⁹ Zukofsky’s

refusal to do so. Elsewhere in her account, Mary Oppen tells other stories that indicate class-based stressors in the relationship between Zukofsky and her husband (208-209).

⁵⁷ In *Meaning A Life*, Mary Oppen dates their decision to join the party to Winter 1935, and the context of her statement lends itself better to the assumption that she meant January or February of that year rather November or December.

⁵⁸ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 160-161.

⁵⁹ See *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 212.

inquiries with Pound about publication opportunities can probably be read as signs that the Objectivist Press had failed, since Zukofsky had clearly intended for the press he had worked so hard to establish and for which he was serving as the secretary to publish his own work.

The various schisms between Zukofsky, Williams, Pound, and the Oppens and their departures from or disillusionments with the press left Reznikoff alone among the collective's founding members. Reznikoff, who had both trained as a lawyer and was the only member of the group to own, in the form of a hand-operated printing press, the literal means of production, also retained the copyright for the press. Following Reznikoff's solo publication of his collection *Separate Way* under the imprint in 1936, the Objectivist Press imprint remained dormant until Louis and Celia requested its use from Reznikoff for their private publication of Louis' *A Test of Poetry* in 1948.⁶⁰

The collapse of The Objectivist Press also led Williams to seek other publishers for his poetry; he turned first to Ronald Lane Latimer's Alcestis Press, publishing his collections *An Early Martyr and Other Poems* and *Adam & Eve & the City* with Latimer in 1935 and 1936, before James Laughlin's New Directions Press became his regular publisher starting with the publication of his *Complete Collected Poems* in 1938. Because he had lacked the capital to finance the publication of his *55 Poems* through either To, Publishers or The Objectivist Press, Zukofsky's manuscript was among the last of their proposed publications to appear in print, as it was not published until 1941, when the James. A Decker Press of Prairie City, Illinois, brought it out in a handsome hardcover edition.⁶¹

⁶⁰ See Mark Scroggins' "[The Objectivists and their Publications](#)," on Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas' Z-Site.

⁶¹ Decker's press had previously volumes of poetry by several other contemporary poets, including Zukofsky's friends and fellow "Objectivists" Norman Macleod, Charles Henri Ford, and Harry Roskolenko.

It is against this backdrop of frustration that we Zukofsky's oft-quoted contributor's note in the Spring 1934 *Westminster* magazine "disclaim[ing] leadership of any movement putatively literary or objectionist" appeared.⁶² What is less-commonly observed is that this note accompanied the second of two installments from Zukofsky's "The Writing of Guillaume Apollinaire." The first, published in the Winter 1933 issue, had included the following contributor's note: "MR ZUKOFSKY is the leader of Objectivism in America; his work has appeared in the better American and European magazines." It's certainly plausible to see Zukofsky's subsequent statement as emerging largely out of frustration at this gross biographical mischaracterization.

Rather than seeing this claim as evidence that he had never intended a group, a more plausible reading of Zukofsky's disavowal would require giving more than usual attention to what Zukofsky intended by the words "movement," "literary," and "objectionist." If we read the Objectivists' concerns as primarily oriented towards reliable access to publication rather than the achievement of a particular aesthetic or political program, much of the apparent conflict in Zukofsky's actions and this seemingly defensive statement can be resolved. When it came to the problem of publication, Zukofsky devoted a great deal of energy to trying to form and sustain two publishing collectives for which he had provided the central organizing force and served as editor. Yes, the "Objectivists" may well have begun as a contrivance conjured up to satisfy Harriet Monroe's desire that Zukofsky present a "new group" in *Poetry*, but it is equally true that Zukofsky named and defined the group himself and further chose to perpetuate the "Objectivists" name for several years after their first appearance.

⁶² "Notes on Contributors," *Westminster Magazine* 23:1 (Spring 1934), 6.

A May 11, 1935 letter to Pound is perhaps Zukofsky's most explicit statement on what he took as the lessons of the failure of his publishing efforts:

But you needn't tell me that "All good books are Blocked by the present fahrty system"—why 'n hell do you think I asked your aid? Between the New Masses crowd who can't get the distinction that yr. poetry is one thing & yr. economics another, & yr. unwillingness to even look at my work to see what it says because I won't embrace Social Credit, these last 3 years—I've not only lost whatever chance I might have had with commercial publishers, but have ostracized myself completely. I ain't weeping about it—I'm just seeing by my own lights. ... I've sacrificed a good deal of my time with To, Objectivist Press, corresponding with 152 "poets" etc. to get up an issue of Poetry, an anthology etc., & the good things which resulted were their own cheque. However, I don't care to do it again. I've even stopped seeing "close friends" who've envied my station—to put an end to the bad taste of it all.⁶³

While Zukofsky's interest in collaborative publishing efforts and the organization of writers to achieve the aims of literature in the United States did not die with the collapse of the Objectivist Press, his efforts to conduct this organization under the group name "Objectivists" did.⁶⁴ While the Zukofskys did revive the Objectivist Press (in name at least) to publish Louis' *The Test of Poetry* in 1948 and corresponded for a short time thereafter using The Objectivist Press letterhead with their home address as its current location, they did not use the imprint again for any subsequent publications and it appears that both Williams and Zukofsky considered the term defunct by the early 1950s, when Williams published his retrospective look at the group in his *Autobiography*.

⁶³ *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 120.

⁶⁴ On January 22, 1935, the *New Masses* published a call to convene an American Writers' Congress to address "all phases of a writer's participation in the struggle against war, the preservation of civil liberties, and the destruction of fascist tendencies everywhere" (quoted in *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 215). The Congress, convened at New York City's Mecca Temple from April 26-28, concluded with the establishment a League of American Writers and elected the novelist Waldo Frank to serve as its first chairman. Zukofsky invited both Williams and Pound to join him in supporting what he called an "united front of writers," joining the League and participating in various of its activities over the next few years (quoted in *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 215). For more on Zukofsky's involvement with the League of American Writers, see *The Poem of a Life*, 149, 169. Later in 1935, Zukofsky also appears to have relayed to Williams an invitation he had received to become a part of a group of "literary people of different countries" connected to Pound which would regularly exchange "technical, mostly prosodic, information, suggestions, etc," which Williams was decidedly uninterested in (*The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 218-219).

RMR Press

In the early 1930s, Kenneth Rexroth planned to found a press with his friends Milton Merlin and Joseph Rabinowitch. As they conceived it, the RMR Press (the initial letters of their last names) would publish a series of pamphlets and short books, with a special emphasis on poetry. Zukofsky, Pound, and Williams all wrote to Rexroth in support of the venture, offering selections of their own work for consideration and providing extensive lists of authors they felt might be interested in being included in the series. Zukofsky named Reznikoff, Oppen, Bunting, René Taupin, Whittaker Chambers, George Crosby, and Harry Roskolenko; Pound recommended Rexroth approach Wyndham Lewis, Man Ray, Hilaire Hiler, Robert McAlmon, and Ford Madox Ford. Pound and Zukofsky discussed Rexroth and his proposed publishing venture in several letters from 1931 and 1933, with Zukofsky telling Pound in a letter:

Rexroth—if the business end of him still bothers you—said some months ago that he had got a “very friendly letter” from you and that only an extended vacation in the Calif. rockies was preventin’ him from answerin’ you. Also it seems he has been quarrelsome with his patrons. I hope his scheme does go thru—since he was wantin’ to get out my essays & poems.⁶⁵

Carl Rakosi, in particular, appears to have believed that Rexroth would be shortly publishing a book of his poems, telling both Richard Johns and Harriet Monroe in the summer of 1931 that he was “planning to put out a book soon.”⁶⁶ In August 1931, Zukofsky told Morton Zabel that “the Rakosi volume to be published probably by RMR, Los Angeles — a new venture in printing books cheaply in brochure form, Rexroth is connected with the firm. You might write him and mention particulars he sends in *Poetry*. Of course, I should like to do [i.e. review the book for *Poetry*] the

⁶⁵ Pound/Zukofsky, 107.

⁶⁶ Pagany letters from Rakosi, University of Delaware, and Poetry papers U Chicago.

Rakosi, if it appears.”⁶⁷ Unfortunately for Rakosi and others who may have had been making similar plans with Rexroth, the RMR Press never advanced beyond the planning stage, despite the several recommendations and clear expressions of interest by both Pound and Zukofsky.⁶⁸

Other 1930s Anthologies

In addition to the explicitly “Objectivist” publications already described, three other anthologies published between 1932 and 1934 included work by several of the writers who had appeared in “Objectivist” publications. Two of these were edited by Ezra Pound, and one by Parker Tyler, each of whom had appeared one of the Zukofsky’s “Objectivist” publications.

Profile

In May 1932, Ezra Pound published *Profile*, a 142-page anthology printed privately in Milan by John Schweiler in an edition of 250 copies. The anthology included a prefatory note from Pound describing it as “A collection of poems which have stuck in my memory and which may possibly define their epoch, or at least rectify current ideas of it in respect to at least one contour,” as well as a very short introduction, “Spectacle,” in which Pound wrote: “I am making no claim to present the ‘hundred best poems’ but merely a set of poems that have ut supra remained in my memory. I have tried to omit repetitions, whether by the same author or a different one.”⁶⁹ The anthology itself offered a patchy historical narrative of the previous few decades in English-language poetry, beginning with Pound’s assertion that

This ‘anthology’ is merely the collection of poems that I happen to remember, that is, it is selected by a given chemical process. I don’t mean that I could quote these poems verbatim,

⁶⁷ Letter from Zukofsky to Zabel, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

⁶⁸ For more background on RMR, see Linda Hamalian’s *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, pp. 65, 75-76.

⁶⁹ *Profile*, 10.

but that they have had, each of them, during the last 30 years sufficient, individual character to stick in my head as entities.

The omission of certain writers before 1920 implies generally a direct censure or disapproval, that of writers since 1920 implies merely unfamiliarity or ignorance of their work.⁷⁰

Of the “Objectivists,” Pound’s old friend Williams is the best represented in the anthology, with four poems in total: “Hic Jacet,” dated about 1910, “Postlude,” dated 1912, and “Portrait of a Woman in Bed,” published in 1917, as well as “The Botticellian Trees,” which Zukofsky had included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*. Pound also included work by six other writers Zukofsky had presented as “Objectivists” the year previously: McAlmon’s 1924 poem “The Bullfight”; the third, fourth and fifth “movements” of Zukofsky’s “Poem Beginning ‘The’”; Howard Weeks’ “Stunt Piece”; sections 1 and 2 of Bunting’s “Villon”; Emanuel Carnevali’s “The Girls in Italy” and “Italian Farmer”; and Parker Tyler’s “Experience Without Succeedent.”

In the anthology’s editorial content, Pound was spare with his prose commentary, but reserved much of his praise for Williams and Zukofsky. For example, following a brisk summary of the appearance and impact of Des Imagistes he noted that “Out of several hundreds of American writers, Williams still continues to develop,” and described two tendencies in “the individualist American verse” over the previous dozen years, one of which, “only recently apparent or effective ... perhaps showed first in Carlos Williams’ prose *The Great American Novel* and later in his poetry ... [in which] a new sort of unity has been achieved, and that the parts are more definitely *of* the entirety than they had been in earlier sorts of poem which could be taken piecemeal or in quotation.”⁷¹

Pound also indicated the overlap between his and Zukofsky’s editorial tastes via his provision of this list of “extant” writers: “Post war: Hemingway, McAlmon, Cummings. 1925 and after: Zukofsky,

⁷⁰ *Profile*, 13.

⁷¹ *Profile*, 46, 127.

Dunning, Rakosi, Macleod, Bunting,”⁷² particularly when one notes that of the five writers listed in the last group, only Ralph Cheever Dunning, an expatriate poet from Detroit who died in Paris from a combination of tuberculosis and starvation in 1930, was not included among Zukofsky’s “Objectivists.”

Reading *Profile* as “a critical narrative” in which Pound “attempted to show by excerpt what had occurred during the past quarter of a century,”⁷³ the most ready conclusion to hand is that he considered Zukofsky’s “Objectivist” publications, alongside of his own magazine *The Exile*, as the source of the most significant developments in modern poetry since 1925. Pound made this approval explicit on the anthology’s final page by referring the reader in search of further information to “Zukofsky’s notes in ‘Symposium’ for Jan. and ‘Poetry’ for Feb. 1931” as well as the “Objectivist number of *Poetry* ... and Mr. Zukofsky’s Objectivist Anthology, announced for publication.”⁷⁴

Active Anthology

On October 12, 1933, Ezra Pound published *Active Anthology* with the London-based publishing firm Faber & Faber, where T.S. Eliot served as a literary advisor. In an explanatory note preceding the table of contents, Pound noted that

My anthology *Profile* was a critical narrative, that is I attempted to show by excerpt what had occurred during the past quarter of a century. In this volume I am presenting an assortment of writers, mostly ill known in England, in whose verse a development appears or in some case we may say “still appears” to be taking place, in contradistinction to authors in whose work no such activity has occurred or seems likely to proceed any further.

⁷² *Profile*, 113.

⁷³ The prefatory “Note” included in his *Active Anthology*, 5. He described it in similar terms in *Contempo*, writing that the anthology was “a narrative of what has happened to verse during the past twenty-five years.

⁷⁴ *Profile*, 142.

In the volume's preface Pound announced that he would be "confining [his] selection to poems Britain has not accepted and in the main that the British literary bureaucracy does NOT want to have printed in England" and claimed that:

the unwelcome and disparate authors whom I have gathered in this volume have mostly accepted certain criteria which duller wits have avoided. They have mostly, if not accepted, at any rate faced the demands, and considered the works, made and noted in my "How to Read". That in itself is not a certificate of creative ability, but it does imply a freedom from certain forms of gross error and from certain kinds of bungling which will indubitably consign many other contemporary writings to the ash-bin. ...

I have not attempted to represent all of the new poets, I am leaving the youngest, possibly some of the brightest, to someone else or to future effort, not so much from malice or objection to perfect justice, as from inability to do everything all at once.

There are probably fifty very bright poems that are not here assembled. ... Someone more in touch with the younger Americans ought to issue an anthology or a special number of some periodical, selected with *criteria*, either his or mine.

The assertion implicit in this volume is that after ten or twenty years of serious effort you can consider a writer uninteresting, but the charges of flightiness or dilettantism are less likely to be valid.⁷⁵

Pound repeated many of these points in a brief "Notes on Particular Details" at the end of the anthology, writing

I do not in the least doubt that quite a number, say 20 or 30 poets between the ages of 20 and 40 have written better poems than some of those here included. But in a fair proportion of the cases where I have considered inviting an author and then refrained from doing so, I have very strong doubts as to that author's capacity to progress or develop any further.

I expect or at least hope that the work of the included writers will interest me more in ten years' time than it does now in 1933.⁷⁶

Pound's list of eleven authors for the anthology included a strong "Objectivist" core; he included William Carlos Williams, Basil Bunting, Louis Zukofsky, and George Oppen among its contributors.⁷⁷ Pound had assembled the anthology fairly quickly, sending Zukofsky a carbon copy

⁷⁵ "Praefatio," 23-24.

⁷⁶ *Active Anthology*, 253.

⁷⁷ In addition to these four core "Objectivists," *Active Anthology* also featured writing by Louis Aragon (translated by E. E. Cummings), E. E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, Marianne Moore, D. G. Bridson, T. S. Eliot, and Pound himself.

of a call for submissions in late February. In the letter which accompanied it, Pound told the younger poet:

I take it this is a chance to print all of THE and all of A. that is ready /
 also send suggestions/ re other of yrs/ the chewing gum poem, and items of interest.
 //
 also has Rakoski anything new/ or have you any snug gestions

Oppen meritis causa?? couple of short poems??
 lemme know if there are?

Basil [Bunting] seems to think Reznikoff is some good??? any piece d'evidence?

Can you help ole Bill Walrnss [Williams] to sort hiz self out.⁷⁸

Zukofsky complied, sending Pound work by Williams, Reznikoff, Rakosi, and Rexroth for consideration. Pound's next letter to Zukofsky, sent in April 1933, expresses enthusiasm for Williams, Zukofsky and Oppen's work

The Bill W[illia]ms/ is damn good. Shall prob. omit Footnote/ Ball Game / and Portrait of Lady (the latter simply because the subject is less interestin' than a lot of Bill's other work.) I want another 15 Pages of him.

Your best stuuf is "The" and parts of A. ...

Young Oppen has sent in stuff/ think three of 'em good enough to include.⁷⁹

but lays out several reservations regarding Reznikoff, Rakosi and Rexroth:

The Reznikoff will appear to the Brit. reader a mere immitation [sic] of me, and they will howl that I am merely printin my followers.

It is I think just as good as parts of Lustra (1915, 1916) neither better nor worse. Very cleanly done but no advance in methodology. ((in most of it.))

⁷⁸ Pound/ Zukofsky, 143.

⁷⁹ Pound/ Zukofsky, 144

Possibly by pickin' out the Hebe element we can get something that will arouse interest. Remember an anth. like this has got to AROUSE interest without AT ANY POINT terminating ANY of the interest it arouses.

Its the sample of next weeks film, not the giving away of the end of the story.

The title of the Anth. is "The Active Element". If I omit H.D. how am I to put in most of the Reznikoff you have sent.

my thesis bein that the **ART of writing** is (is still now continuously developing

... So far Rakosi weak. Rexroth and the rest unsatisfactory.⁸⁰

In keeping with his tendency to simultaneously promote and criticize out of either side of mouth, Pound used his final editorial statement to draw attention to the group and sound a note of caution, stating that "a whole school or shoal of young American writers seems to me to have lost contact with language as language. ... In particular Mr Zukofsky's Objectivists seem prone to this error, just as Mr Eliot's followers tend toward neo-Gongorism," later wondering aloud

How far is a writer justified in 'mathematical' rather than linguistic use of language? ... I think the good poem ought probably to include that dimension without destroying the feel of actual speech. In this sense Zukofsky's earlier poem is better than his later, though you cannot expect a writer to develop all his merits simultaneously and *pari passu*. I know of no case where an author has developed at all without at least temporarily sacrificing one or several of his initial merits.⁸¹

Modern Things

In 1934, New York City's The Galleon Press published *Modern Things*, a 92-page anthology edited by the poet Parker Tyler. In his introduction to the anthology, Tyler stated that his intention was to

present an elect body of work, composed by those moderns who have worked successfully in literary styles for a number of years to the accompaniment of ever-growing critical and general recognition, together with those younger moderns who, not yet entrenched in the libraries with volumes of their own or with anthology reputations, and while not,

⁸⁰ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 144.

⁸¹ *Active Anthology*, 254-255.

consistently, so typical of thoroughly individuated styles, have had successes definitely meriting critical attention. These poems have been collected with applied reference to the unity of a continuous contemporary literary impulse, operating through related and developing modes of writing. If any work pertinent to this process has been omitted, the omission is either casual or, where certain fakeries are involved, deliberate.⁸²

In the anthology, Tyler included his own work as well as writing by sixteen other writers, six of whom had been published in the previous two years as “Objectivists”: Eliot, Pound, Williams, Charles Henri Ford, Rakosi and Zukofsky.⁸³ Of the “Objectivists,” Tyler included Eliot’s “Triumphal March”; excerpts from Pound’s “Canto XXXIV”; seven of Williams’ poems: “St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils,” “Tree and Sky,” “Flowers by the Sea,” “Simplex Sigillum Veri;” “Wedded are the River and the Sky,” “The Death of See,” and “The Locust Tree in Flower”; Charles Henri Ford’s “Roots,” “Voyage,” “Syllabus,” and “Commission”; Rakosi’s “The Beasts” and “The Wedding”; Zukofsky’s “Tibor Serly” and “Madison, Wis., Remembering the Bloom of Monticello (1931)”; and his own “Hollywood Dream Suite,” “Address to My Mother,” “Sleep Mood,” and “To Raskolnikoff.” In describing tendencies he observed among the poets selected for inclusion in the anthology, Tyler wrote:

the techniques of symbolism, imagism and Rimbaudian hallucination have determined the effect on the purely technical side, while Corbière-Laforguian irony and Pound’s theory of poetry as history have determined it largely on the more emotional and ideational side. For instance Wallace Stevens has an elegant form suggestive of both Laforgue and Valéry, Mallarmé’s disciple and various poets, such as Marianne Moore and Louis Zukofsky, have types of contemporary documentation influenced by Mr. Pound’s notion of the complementariness of historic facts, or what might be called the solution of the past in the present. In this way, tradition has been emphasized rather than slurred in modern poetry.⁸⁴

By way of explanation of his inclusion of Rakosi and Zukofsky, Tyler wrote:

⁸² “Introduction,” 5.

⁸³ The full list of contributors to the anthology is as follows: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, E.E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Harold Rosenberg, H.R. Hays, Paul Eaton Reeve, Joseph Rocco, Lionel Abel, Charles Henri Ford, Carl Rakosi, Louis Zukofsky, Raymond Larsson, and Parker Tyler.

⁸⁴ “Introduction,” 8.

Carl Rakosi, who has the excellence of a sterling pupil. He has been influenced largely by Pound and Williams and forms an inescapable similarity to Louis Zukofsky, than whom, however, he is less variable; his good workmanship and confidence of carriage always command attention, and his poems often seem to be fresh and whole results, despite the tendency toward fragmentariness.

Louis Zukofsky, who brings a gracile metric and a swift apprehension to his subjects; he is as philosophical as an experimenter can be, and when he observes a certain precautious depth is always rewarding. His “note” is usually in exact musical place. ...

It is apparent, in my opinion, ... that Mr. Rakosi and Mr. Zukofsky are passionate masters of their apprenticeship.⁸⁵

Little Magazines

The little magazine is something I have always fostered; for without it, I myself would have been early silenced. To me it is one magazine, not several. It is a continuous magazine, the only one I know with an absolute freedom of editorial policy and a succession of proprietorships that follows a democratic rule. There is absolutely no dominating policy permitting anyone to dictate anything. When it is in any way successful it is because it fills a need in someone’s mind to keep going. When it dies, someone else takes it up in some other part of the country – quite by accident – out of a desire to get the writing down on paper. I have wanted to see established some central or sectional agency which would recognize, and where possible, support little magazines. I was wrong. It must be a person who does it, a person, a fallible person, subject to devotions and accidents.

— William Carlos Williams⁸⁶

The value of fugitive periodicals “of small circulation” is ultimately measured by the work they have brought to press. The names of certain authors over a space of years, or over, let us say, the past score years, have been associated with impractical publication. Carlos Williams has communicated with his readers almost exclusively via the reviews I have mentioned or by others even less public. ...

The last twenty years have seen the principle of the free magazine or the impractical or fugitive magazine definitely established. It has attained its recognized right to exist by reason of work performed.

The work of writers who have emerged in or via such magazines outweighs in permanent value the work of the writers who have not emerged in this manner. The history of contemporary letters has, to a very manifest extent, been written in such magazines. The commercial magazines have been content and are still more than content to take derivative

⁸⁵ Ibid, 11-12.

⁸⁶ In *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, 266.

products ten or twenty years after the germ has appeared in the free magazines. There is nothing new about this.

Work is acceptable to the public when its underlying ideas have been accepted. The heavier the “overhead” in a publishing business the less that business can afford to deal in experiment. This purely sordid and eminently practical consideration will obviously affect all magazines save those that are either subsidized (as chemical research is subsidized) or else very cheaply produced (as the penniless inventor produces in his barn or his attic).

Literature evolves via a mixture of these two methods.

— Ezra Pound⁸⁷

Besides their appearance in various anthologies and their abortive book publishing ventures, Zukofsky and the other “Objectivists” operated or published their work together in a series of little magazines between 1928 and 1935. If, as I’ve already argued, Zukofsky’s invention and subsequent promotion of the group should be understood as a strategy oriented primarily around publishing concerns (chiefly, how could various members of the group consistently see that their work was printed), no attempt to understand the historical formation of the “Objectivists” can succeed without a deeper understanding of the landscape (and economics) of literary publishing in the preceding decade, especially the significant role played by Anglophone little magazines.

The emergence of the “Objectivists” coincided with the trough of the Great Depression, an economic event which produced a precipitous decline in literary publishing, especially of poetry. Al Filreis has noted that while American publishers had recorded sales of 214 million new books (and corresponding profits of \$42 million) in 1929, by 1933 that number had been almost halved, with sales falling to just 111 million. Poetry publishing was hit especially hard, with the number of new poetry titles issued in the United States decreasing more than 20% in 1932 alone.⁸⁸ As depression-era economics contracted a book publishing market for poetry which had already shown profound

⁸⁷ “[Small Magazines](#),” 689-704.

⁸⁸ *Modernism from Right to Right*, 114.

disinterest in their work, not only did Zukofsky and his fellow “Objectivists” attempt to print and distribute books through the several publishing schemes previously described, they also participated vigorously in the longtime staple of the avant-garde, the little magazine.

Though the circulation of these magazines tended to be fairly modest, little magazines had been crucial in the promulgation of both modernism and avant-garde or experimental American literature at least since the 1910s.⁸⁹ These aspirational, combustible, and often short-lived publications were particularly important in the emergence and formation of a group of writers like the ‘Objectivists,’ many of whom were little-known writers who not only lacked the means needed to reliably print their own work but whose aesthetic sensibilities (and ethnic/religious identities) frequently placed them squarely outside the mainstream of their age.

Pound and Williams, the group’s eldest affiliates, had been active in reading, contributing to, and occasionally editing little magazines since as early as 1909, when Pound made his first appearance in Ford Madox Ford’s *English Review*, and both men continued actively engaging with little magazines on both sides of the Atlantic well into the 1930s.

Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman have offered a thorough account of Pound’s shifting but frequently intense involvement with various literary magazines through the first several decades of his career, noting that Pound was involved in various capacities with ten separate magazines in England and the United States between 1909-1923, that during 1912-1920 (his prime years in London), Pound averaged around *one magazine publication per week*, and that he had averaged more

⁸⁹ Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry* in 1912 with Ezra Pound as foreign editor, to cite just one very well-known example, with the magazine playing an important role beginning the next year in promoting what later came to be known as imagism.

than 91 magazine publications a year during the four year stretch from 1917-1920.⁹⁰ Scholes and Wulfman observed that while Pound's anti-Semitism and support for fascism "have not endeared him to many people," they also argue that

the Pound of the first three decades of the twentieth century was a different figure: a brilliant and indefatigable supporter of other writers and artists, a talented and learned poet, and a literary and cultural critic of enormous energy and biting wit. ... Quite simply he had more to do with our present understanding of modernism than any other individual. He was a pioneer of comparative literary studies, of cultural studies, and of periodical studies ... However one may rank his creative achievement as a poet, one much put him at the very top as an impresario and propagandist for the view of modernism that prevailed in the English-speaking world.⁹¹

While Scholes and Wulfman's close attention to Pound's involvement with literary magazines wanes after 1923, Pound continued to be deeply interested in the quality of literature available to readers in both England and the United States, and continued to make suggestions, interventions, and attempts at editorial colonization well into the 1930s. Leonard Greenbaum provides a more balanced and less laudatory view of Pound's combustible and often predatory relationship to little magazines in his *The Hound & Horn: The History of a Literary Quarterly*, noting that in addition to his involvement with *Hound & Horn*, Pound served as an editor or foreign correspondent for at least nine other little magazines between 1912 and 1935.⁹² Williams' involvement with little magazines is similarly legendary, if somewhat less volatile.

Intense involvement with little magazines was not merely confined to Pound and Williams. A careful study of the "Objectivists" and their pre-February 1931 publishing history offers abundant evidence of the importance of little magazines to each of the group's core members, just

⁹⁰ *Modernism in the Magazines*, 4-8.

⁹¹ *Modernism in the Magazines*, viii.

⁹² Namely, *Poetry* (from 1912-1917), *The New Freewoman* (1913), *The Egoist* (1914), *Blast* (1914), *The Little Review* (from 1917-1921), *Two Worlds* (from 1925-1927), his own magazine *The Exile* (published between 1927- 1928), *The New Review* (from 1931-1932), and *Westminster Magazine* (1935). See pages 96-124 especially.

as even the most cursory perusal of their correspondence indicates that frustration about reliable access to publication (especially in the United States) was among their chief literary concerns. In fact, the members of “new group” Zukofsky presented as “Objectivists” in February 1931 would have been known to American readers (if at all) almost exclusively by their prior appearance in little magazines. Of the roughly two dozen writers Zukofsky included in his issue of *Poetry*, only Williams and Reznikoff had previously published volumes of any of their work in the United States.⁹³ Even these two exceptions can be a little misleading, however, since Williams’ most recent volume of poetry had appeared in 1923, meaning that for almost a decade all of Williams’ new poetry had appeared exclusively in little magazines.⁹⁴ Similarly, Reznikoff’s largely self-published poetry was little known outside of a very small circle in New York City. The only two volumes of Reznikoff’s poetry that had not been self-published had been issued more than a decade previously, neither of which had attracted much notice.⁹⁵ Reznikoff had also self-published three volumes of poetry, three collections of drama, and an additional prose work, each of which had been typeset and printed by hand on a small printing press which he owned.

⁹³ While Williams was certainly the best-known writer included in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*, the list of books he had published in the United States was limited to his self-published 1909 collection *Poems* (which he later regarded as embarrassing juvenilia), his 1917 collection *Al Que Quiere!*, his 1920 hybrid work *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*, and his 1921 collection *Sour Grapes* (all published by Four Seas in Boston), and his prose works *In the American Grain* (published by Albert and Charles Boni in 1925) and *Voyage to Paganry* (published by the Macaulay Company in 1928). Robert McAlmon had published several books by this time (mostly through Contact Editions, a publishing company which he owned and operated), but all had been printed in Europe. McAlmon’s Contact Editions had also published Carnevali’s *A Hurried Man* from Paris in 1925. Basil Bunting had published a private edition of his collection *Redimiculum Matellarum* from Milan in 1930, but this collection would have been obscure even to the most assiduous collector of poetry in the United States.

⁹⁴ His hybrid work *Spring and All* (published by McAlmon’s Paris-based Contact Editions) and his chapbook *Go Go* (published by Monroe Wheeler’s Manikin Press in New York City) were both issued in 1923

⁹⁵ *Poems*, a slim collection, had been issued in 1920 by the Samuel Roth Bookshop, and *Uriel Acosta: A Play and a Fourth Group of Verse*, had been published by the Cooper Press in 1921. A prose work by Reznikoff, *By the Waters of Manhattan*, was published by Charles Boni in 1930.

During the mid to late 1920s and early 1930s, the years during which the “Objectivist” nexus was first formed, Pound, Williams, and Zukofsky each enjoyed fluctuating editorial affiliations with a number of little magazines, many of which served as overt and sometimes covert vehicles for the development and promotion of the “Objectivists” both singly and as a group. In fact, nearly all of the “Objectivists” were either close friends of Zukofsky or had recently been published with Zukofsky in Pound’s *The Exile*, Charles Henri Ford’s *Blues*, Richard Johns’ *Pagany*, or Norman Macleod’s magazines *The Morada* and *Front*.

A few surviving letters from the era help to document the contours of interest for various members of the group when it comes to the then-extant little magazines. One particularly interesting document, entitled “Publications in English,” was sent by George Oppen to Ezra Pound, probably either late in 1931 or early in 1932. “Publications in English” comprises 3 typed pages which give Oppen’s brief survey and description of several contemporary little magazines, including *Blues*, which “[p]ublishes excellent work ... [m]any would wish, however, that there should be indicated some distinction between the work of Williams and work still relying for distinction chiefly on ‘modernity’,” *Pagany*, which “publishes work by the group of authors also represented in *Blues*, (tho they can be classified as a group only by a similarity in degree of merit), but maintains that standard more consistently,” *The New Review*, which “contains the best of available work ... [and is] less inhibited in explaining itself to the “general public” than are most magazines of its class,” *Hound and Horn*, which was “ordinarily described as scholarly. Certainly can be relied on for an intelligent and informed attitude,” *American Mercury*, edited by H.L. Mencken, who “is said to have a large following among college students, and is probably in accord with the most intelligent to be found in any number. It would not be accurate to say that the magazine is devoted to advertising, but it is probably felt that the justification of its existence is indicated by the price it is able to charge for

space,” *Poetry*, described as a “fairly conservative publication. Nevertheless often of interest,” and *Contempo*, a “magazine concerned with liberal or radical political theses” which had “praised or declared allegiance to William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Burke, Benjamin de Casseres, and Eugene O’Neil[.]”⁹⁶

Similarly, a letter Zukofsky sent to Ezra Pound on February 5, 1931, provides another glimpse into the little magazines Zukofsky was most aware of at the time of the “Objectivists” creation. Commenting on Pound’s recent suggestion in Norman Macleod’s magazine *The Morada* that American writers organize their own publishing cooperative,⁹⁷ Zukofsky advised Pound:

why not begin with your suggestion in Morada 5 and organize a writer’s syndicat (membership rules up to you) You can get 100 writers to contribute \$5—or you can get 50 writers to contribute \$5 and 10 to contribute \$10 and use that to pay for your first or first two volumes. You can, or should be able to, get free advertising (or credit) from Hound & Horn, Symposium, Blues, Pagany, Morada, Front, The New Review, Criterion, etc. That should give you the 300 or 400 or 500 subscribers you want. There are also the subscription lists (?) of these magazines to circularize. Breathes there a pote with putt so dead he wd. spent more than 10¢ for breakfast even if [he] had the \$5 I suggest he “give away” to his syndicat?⁹⁸

More than anything, what these letters demonstrate is the degree to which Zukofsky, Oppen, and others in the group were aware of and actively engaging with a range of short-lived but sometimes quite vibrant literary magazines as part of their operational understanding of the state of

⁹⁶ This document, owned by Yale’s Beinecke Library, can be accessed online: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4300755>.

⁹⁷ “The intellectual business of the next thirty years may have to be done by pamphlet. The greatest material obstacle to mental life in America is publishers’ overhead. The American publisher expects to keep up palatial offices on Fifth Ave and to support fat family and forty employees on proceeds of a few books. European publishers often issue their stuff from one room or from the print shop. Difference of being able to print for 25 cents WHEN a few hundred people are ready, or of waiting till five thousand are ready to pay three dollars. The net result is that America is twenty years behind Europe in every branch of thought save those expressed, often quite able, by our dear friend Henry Ford” (“mike and other phenomena,” 46).

⁹⁸ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 91.

contemporary poetry. It is through these under-examined little magazines, in fact, that the “Objectivists” coalesced and took shape, beginning as early as the late 1920s. In what follows, I’ll provide brief sketches of several of these little magazines and detail their relationship to Zukofsky and other members of the “Objectivist” group.

The Dial

Years in operation: 1916-1929

Editors: Scofield Thayer [1920-1926], Gilbert Seldes [1921-1923], Kenneth Burke [1923], Alyse Gregory [1923-1925], Marianne Moore [1925-1929]

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky

While *The Dial* never functioned as an “Objectivist” outlet *per se*, it was significant as the preeminent American little magazine devoted to literature in the years just prior to the formation of the “Objectivists.” In addition, it had also provided, at various points in the 1920s, a hospitable forum for writing by both Pound and Williams, and was the second paying publication to publish Zukofsky’s poetry.⁹⁹

Publishing History

*The Dial*¹⁰⁰ was founded as a political literary fortnightly in Chicago in 1880 by Civil War veteran Francis F. Browne, who published it continuously until his death in 1913. His heirs sold the magazine a few years later to Martyn Johnson, who announced himself as the magazine’s new publisher in July 1916. Following his purchase of the magazine, Johnson quickly began work on two tasks: the installation of a new editorial staff and the relocation of the magazine’s headquarters to

⁹⁹ The first was *Poetry*, which had published his sonnet “Of Dying Beauty” in the January 1924 issue: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=16224>.

¹⁰⁰ Named after Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous transcendentalist magazine of the mid-19th century.

New York City. After his first choice for editor, George Bernard Donlin, was forced to leave the magazine to pursue treatment for his tuberculosis, Johnson hired the former *New York Post* reporter Harold Stearns to serve as associate editor, and Stearns persuaded Clarence Britten to leave his teaching post at the University of Wisconsin to serve as the magazine's assistant editor. By the spring of 1918, Johnson had recruited Scofield Thayer, a Harvard graduate and son of a wealthy wool merchant in Worcester, Massachusetts, to act as the magazine's financial backer and had relocated the magazine to an editorial office at 152 West Thirteenth Street in Greenwich Village, where it would be housed until it ceased publication in 1929. Johnson and Thayer had a series of disagreements over the board's editorial policy. These came to a head late in 1919, when Thayer joined forces with Dr. James Sibley Watson, a fellow Harvard graduate and the grandson of two of the founders of the Western Union Telegraph Company, to buy the magazine outright from Johnson.

Following Watson and Thayer's purchase of the magazine, all of *The Dial's* previous editorial staff departed, save Clarence Britten, who remained on staff to aid in the transition to new ownership. Watson became the magazine's publisher, Scofield Thayer became its editor, and Stewart Mitchell was hired as managing editor. Watson and Thayer also reorganized the magazine as a monthly publication and began to place a greater emphasis on its coverage of literature and the arts. In February 1920, Gilbert Seldes was added as the second associate editor, with Britten leaving the magazine before the publication of the April 1920 issue. Mitchell resigned as managing editor by the end of the year, following which Seldes became managing editor. Shortly after *The Dial's* reorganization, Thayer also hired Ezra Pound as a foreign advisor, proposing in March 1920 that

Pound be paid \$750 a year to act as an agent in finding suitable work.¹⁰¹ In addition, Thayer worked assiduously not only to attract contributions from well-known writers, but also recruited a series of European correspondents who sent regular letters with updates on developments in arts and literature from their various locales; *The Dial's* list of foreign correspondents included Ezra Pound, John Eglington, T.S. Eliot (who had been Scofield Thayer's schoolmate at both Milton Academy and at Harvard), Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Thomas Mann.¹⁰²

In July 1921, shortly after Seldes' appointment as managing editor, Thayer left New York City for Europe, settling in Vienna and submitting to psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud by the end of that year. For the next two years, Thayer was both significantly engaged with the publication of *The Dial* and active in European literary and cultural circles, meeting a number of significant continental writers and amassing a significant collection of modern art. In January 1923, Seldes took an extended trip to Europe where he worked with Thayer on assembling *Living Art*, a book containing reproductions of artworks in Thayer's collection, and writing his own book *The Seven Lively Arts*. Upon Seldes' departure, Kenneth Burke began serving as de facto managing editor of the magazine, with significant assistance from Sophie Wittenberg. Thayer returned to New York City in July 1923 and initiated a weekly series of "Dial dinners" at the end of that year. Unfortunately, Thayer's mental health began to deteriorate, and he shuttled between New York, Bermuda, and Europe through much of 1924.

¹⁰¹ Not long previously Pound had left *The Little Review*, where he had served for more than two years as their "London editor." Pound continued working in this capacity until April 1923, when Thayer informed him he was no longer wanted.

¹⁰² Pound's first "Paris Letter" appeared in the October 1920 issue; Eglington's first "Dublin Letter" appeared in the March 1921 issue; Eliot's first "London Letter" appeared in the April 1921 issue; Hofmannsthal's first "Vienna Letter" appeared in the August 1922 issue; and Mann's first "German Letter" appeared in the December 1922 issue.

Seldes did not return from Europe until September 1923, and despite Burke's pleading, he never resumed his managing editor duties. When a burned-out Burke temporarily departed the magazine in late 1923, *The Dial* was functionally without a managing editor until January 1924, when Seldes was officially replaced as managing editor by Thayer's close friend Alyse Gregory, who retained Whittenberg and Burke as assistants. Early in 1925, however, Gregory informed Thayer that she would shortly be returning to England with her husband, the novelist Llewelyn Powys, and would be thereafter unable to continue her duties with *The Dial*. Thayer moved quickly to recruit Marianne Moore as Gregory's replacement; by late April 1925, Moore had agreed to leave her job at the New York Public Library and Thayer announced her appointment as the magazine's new acting editor in the May 1925 issue.¹⁰³

Soon after Moore's editorial appointment, Thayer left New York City for Europe again, and effectively ceased fulfilling any editorial duties for the magazine. *The Dial* announced Thayer's resignation as editor of the magazine in June 1926 (though it continued to list him as an "advisor"), and Moore's promotion to full editor in January 1927, but Thayer's involvement in the day-to-day affairs had been minimal since early in 1926.¹⁰⁴ Moore carried on editing *The Dial* for three more years, but without Thayer's subsidy, the magazine eventually suspended publication after issuing its July 1929 issue.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Sophie Wittenberg also left the magazine at this time and was replaced as an assistant by Thayer's cousin Ellen Thayer.

¹⁰⁴ In February 1926, while living in Germany, Thayer suffered a severe mental breakdown, and was institutionalized for several months following his return to the United States. No known extant correspondence to any of his previous literary or artistic contacts from Thayer exists after February 1926, and Thayer spend much of the rest of his life in and out of sanatoria and accompanied by caretakers and guardians.

¹⁰⁵ This thumbnail sketch relies heavily on both Nicolas Joost's *Schofield Thayer and the Dial: An Illustrated History*, especially pp. 3-20, 30, 74-113 and [the overview to Schofield Thayer's papers](#), held by Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

While *The Dial* enjoyed a fairly large circulation for a literary review, it had always been operated at a fairly steep deficit, and the magazine's inability to increase its subscription or advertising revenues and heavy reliance on subsidy from its wealthy owners were to prove its downfall later in the 1920s.¹⁰⁶ During its heyday in the 1920s, however, *The Dial* published a broad range of important literary and artistic work from a broad base of transatlantic contributors, and through its generous rates for accepted work, did much to subsidize the production of modernist visual and literary art through the 1920s. In particular, *The Dial* was notable for its annual award, announced in June 1921 and first given in January 1922, of two thousand dollars to "acknowledge the service to letters of some one of those who have, during the twelvemonth, contributed to its pages," as well as the generous regular rates it offered to its contributors: it paid two cents per word for prose in English, twenty dollars per page of verse, and twenty-five dollars per picture for the right to reproduce a picture or object which had not been previously exhibited, all of which were considerably higher rates than those on offer from most other comparable literary reviews of the time.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Joost estimates that the magazine had a circulation of roughly 10,000 in 1920, and that while printing costs were around \$750 per issue, the magazine's running deficit was \$4,000-5,000 per month. Thayer wrote to Ezra Pound in September 1920 that their current deficit was about "\$84,000 annually" and that they would need to increase circulation tenfold to ever clear expenses. The magazine's business manager would later estimate the cash deficit for 1920 at around \$100,000, offset by cash receipts of just \$24,000. By 1922, they had nearly doubled cash receipts (to \$45,000) but cash deficits had only been cut to \$65,000, with some 85% of this total going to editorial and manufacturing costs. Sales from newsstands averaged about 3,500 per issue in 1920, climbing to just over 4,500 by November 1922 and reaching a high-water mark of 6,261 with the December 1922 issue (which contained Eliot's *The Waste Land*). Typical monthly sales figures ranged between 4,000-5,000, and revenues from these sales can be estimated using the published sales price: 35 cents a copy for first several four months of 1920, 40 cents per copy from May-December of 1920, and then 50 cents per copy from January 1921 until its final issue in July 1929. Subscriptions, which had numbered just under 3,000 in 1920, had risen to 7,440 by February 1923. The print run appears to have peaked with the January 1923 issue, of which 18,000 copies were printed. While "The Waste Land" had been an enormous success, nothing else the magazine was to print would have quite an impact on sales or the international literary world. For more details on the finances and circulation of the magazine, see *Schofield Thayer and the Dial*, 20, 30, 40-42, and Alan Golding's "The Dial, The Little Review, and the Dialogics of Modernism" in *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, especially note 10 on page 70).

¹⁰⁷ *Schofield Thayer and the Dial: An Illustrated History*, 52, 59-61.

Connection to the “Objectivists”

As far as the “Objectivists” are concerned, the magazine’s strongest connections were with Pound and Williams, each of whom appeared frequently in the magazine during the years that Pound served as foreign correspondent and again when Marianne Moore was its editor. Both men were also chosen as recipients of the Dial’s lucrative annual award, with Williams receiving it in 1926 and Pound in 1927. While Williams frequently bad-mouthed the magazine in letters to Pound, Zukofsky, and his friend Kenneth Burke (who worked for *The Dial*), his feelings about the publication were not so negative as to lead him to stop sending them new work for publication (they were the best paying game in town, after all). Marianne Moore also published four poems by Louis Zukofsky in the December 1928 issue; these were among Zukofsky’s earliest publications.¹⁰⁸

The Little Review

Years in operation: 1914-1926; 1929 [one issue]

Editors: Margaret Anderson [1914-1923], Jane Heap [1916-1929]

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Carl Rakosi

Publishing History

Often mentioned in the same breath with *The Dial* in histories of influential American Modernist magazines, *The Little Review* was a monthly literary magazine founded in Chicago in March 1914 by Margaret Anderson, who had previously worked as a book reviewer and critic for a number of publications, including *The Dial*. In its [earliest issues](#), the magazine championed the anarchism of Emma Goldman and evinced strong sympathies for both feminist issues and Imagist-inflected poetry. In 1916, Anderson met the artist Jane Heap, and the two women became lovers and literary

¹⁰⁸ The poems were “*tam cari capitis*”; “Song Theme”; “Someone said, ‘earth’”; and “The silence of the good”.

collaborators, with Anderson inviting Heap to become a co-editor of the magazine. Anderson and Heap briefly moved the magazine to the San Francisco Bay Area before relocating to Greenwich Village in 1917, the same year they enlisted Ezra Pound to serve as the magazine's "London editor."¹⁰⁹ Heap and Anderson continuing publishing the magazine as a monthly until the conclusion of their sixth volume, when financial strains prompted them to begin publishing the magazine first as a bi-monthly (starting in May 1920) and quickly thereafter as a quarterly (starting in September 1920).

While the magazine never had anything approaching the financial clout or circulation numbers enjoyed by *The Dial*,¹¹⁰ *The Little Review* nonetheless did enjoy a reputation as a bold and daring publication, earned by its willingness to discover and publish significant modernist and avant-garde visual art and writing from an impressive range of international contributors.¹¹¹ *The Little Review*, to a much greater extent than *The Dial*, also reveled in its avant-gardism, cheekily describing itself in the Spring 1922 issue, for example, as "AN ADVANCING POINT TOWARD WHICH THE 'ADVANCE GUARD' IS ALWAYS ADVANCING."¹¹² Anderson and Heap also gained

¹⁰⁹ Pound's affiliation with the magazine was announced in the April 1917 issue and he published an editorial explaining his decision to join *The Little Review* in the following month. Pound remained the magazine's "London editor" until 1919. His name was absent from the editorial page of the May 1919 issue and the June 1919 issue contained only the cryptic note "Ezra Pound has abdicated and gone to Persia. John Rodker is now the London Editor of the Little Review." Pound returned to the editorial staff of the magazine in 1921 at the invitation of Margaret Anderson (by which time he was living in Paris and serving as the foreign correspondent for Scofield Thayer's *The Dial*). His name is featured in the "Administration" section of the magazine's front matter along with Anderson, Francis Picabia and jh [Jane Heap] beginning with the Autumn 1921 issue, and remained there until he left the magazine for good in the spring of 1923. For more on Pound and Anderson's relationship, see *Pound/The Little Review: The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson: The Little Review Correspondence*, published in 1989 by New Directions.

¹¹⁰ *The Little Review* did not pay its contributors, for example, and estimates of its circulation have generally ranged between 1,000-2,000.

¹¹¹ See Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review Anthology*, published in 1953, for a good cross-section of work published by the magazine during its heyday.

¹¹² See <https://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1299781611562504.pdf#page=63>. The remark is unattributed, but should probably be ascribed to one or more of the listed editorial staff, which at this point consisted of Anderson, Heap, and Pound.

some measure of infamy (and respect) both for championing the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's Dadaist poetry and for serializing James Joyce's *Ulysses*.¹¹³ This latter decision ultimately led to a high-profile obscenity case in February 1921 which Anderson and Heap lost (they were fined \$100 and ordered to cease publishing installments of *Ulysses*).¹¹⁴

In 1923, Anderson turned over most of the magazine's editorial duties to Heap and moved to France, where she became, at Heap's urging, a student at G.I. Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at a château just south of Paris. In January 1924, Heap opened The Little Review Gallery, a gallery dedicated to modern art, in New York City, operating it at first from the magazine's offices before moving it into its own space on 5th Avenue (now home to the Parsons School of Design) in late 1925, and to a Midtown address near Bryant Park in 1927, where it survived just a few months before it closing permanently. Late in 1925, Heap moved to France to study more closely with Gurdjieff, and following the publication of the Autumn 1926 issue of *The Little Review*, Anderson and Heap suspended publication of the magazine until May 1929, when they published a final issue of the magazine from Paris which included over 50 responses to a questionnaire designed by Heap.

¹¹³ Anderson and Heap published 23 installments of Joyce's work, beginning with their March 1918 issue and ending with their September-December 1920 issue. Three of the issues containing installments from Joyce's work were seized by the United States Post Office and burned as obscene, but it was Joyce's "Nausicaa" chapter which appeared in the July-August 1920 issue which directly precipitated the obscenity suit.

¹¹⁴ Shortly after the trial concluded, Anderson published her own account of the trial, "['Ulysses' in Court](#)," in the January-March 1921 issue of *The Little Review* and discussed the case at some length in her 1930 autobiography, *My Thirty Years' War*. For later scholarly discussions of the obscenity trial, see Holly Baggett's "The Trials of Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap." *A Living of Words: American Women in Print Culture*. Ed. Susan Albertine. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995 (169-188) and Marisa Anne Pagnattaro's "[Carving A Literary Exception: The Obscenity Standard And Ulysses](#)". *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 47.2 (2001), 217-240.

Connection to the “Objectivists”

While its importance as a vehicle for significant modernist artistic expression is well established, *The Little Review's* relationship to the “Objectivists” is far subtler, being comprised of a deep but fairly early connection to both Pound and Williams and the publication of three poems by Rakosi in 1925. Between 1917 and 1920, *The Little Review* frequently published work by both Williams and Pound, who served as the magazine’s foreign editor for much of this time.¹¹⁵ *The Little Review's* other connection to the “Objectivists” was as the organ which provided Carl Rakosi with his first “major” literary publication. In 1925, at the recommendation of his friend, the novelist Margery Latimer, Rakosi called upon Jane Heap at her Greenwich Village office/apartment and presented her with a sheaf of his own writing. To his surprise (and elation), Heap agreed on first sight to publish his poetry in *The Little Review*, and three of Rakosi’s poems: “Sittingroom by Patinka,” “The January of a Gnat,” and “Flora and the Ogre,” appeared in the Spring 1925 issue.¹¹⁶ As with *The Dial*, *The Little Review* should be seen as an immediate predecessor to the “Objectivists.” Both of these magazines were publications that the younger poets in the group followed closely, but to which the younger poets in the group were not quite ready to publish in themselves by the time that each magazine folded. The disappearance of these two major modernist publications, did however, open up the field for a number of new little magazines which sought to assume many of their duties, including both Lincoln Kirstein’s highbrow Harvard-affiliated *The Hound & Horn* and several of the

¹¹⁵ Williams’ first appearance in the magazine came with the October 1917 issue, which featured three of his “[Improvisations](#).” He appeared in another eleven issues between 1917 and the May-June 1920 issue, which carried his story “[Danse Pseudomacabre](#).” His relationship with the magazine was much reduced after Jane Heap took over primary editorial duties, though he did publish [a notable letter](#) in the Autumn 1922 issue praising the magazine’s Spring 1922 issue, which had featured the work of the French painter Francis Picabia, whom Williams admired.

¹¹⁶ Rakosi, then a young and totally unknown poet who had just moved to the city, would later describe this success as one of the great moments of his life. See [his biography](#) on this site for more details.

smaller publications founded by various writers who would later be included by Zukofsky among the Objectivists (like Ford, Johns, and Macleod).

The Hound & Horn

Years in operation: 1927-1934

Editors: Lincoln Kirstein [1927-1934], Varian Fry [1927-1929], R.P. Blackmur [1928-1929], Bernard Bandler [1928-1934]

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Carl Rakosi, Norman Macleod, John Wheelwright

Publishing History

The *Hound & Horn* was founded in 1927 by Harvard undergraduates Lincoln Kirstein and Varian Fry. Initially published as a magazine for the Harvard undergraduate community (it had been subtitled “A Harvard Miscellany”),¹¹⁷ the magazine took its title from the concluding couplet of Ezra Pound’s 1908 poem “The White Stag”: ”Tis the white stag, Fame, we’re a-hunting / Bid the world’s hounds come to horn!” From the magazine’s inception, Kirstein and Fry were clear about their intentions to use the magazine to break from nineteenth-century aesthetic influences and more fully embrace the spirit of literary modernism on the Harvard campus.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ There was a Harvard undergraduate literary magazine then extant (the *Harvard Advocate*), but Kirstein and Fry both felt that the current editorial staff was uninterested in admitting them to their clubbish circle. They initially appear to have sought to establish their breakaway publication on the model provided by *The Harvard Monthly*, which had been published at Harvard between 1885 and 1917 and which had been edited by and published contributions from several Harvard undergraduates who later went on to achieve various measures of literary success.

¹¹⁸ In the first issue, Fry published an “Announcement” which concluded by asserting that “*THE HOUND & HORN* takes as its point of departure what is at once a valediction and a call to action. . . . [I]t bids farewell to land whose long familiar contours have ceased to stir creative thought: it bids farewell — and sounds the hunting horn.” Fry would further clarify his editorial intentions, writing in a 1934 letter that he wrote to “hail the new and glittering world they [Joyce, Eliot, Stein, Picasso and Stravinsky] and their influences were creating, and to bid farewell to the stodgy in the nineteenth century and its heavy hand on the twentieth” (Quoted in Leonard Greenbaum’s *The Hound & Horn: The History of a Literary Quarterly*, 26-27).

In the summer of 1928, the magazine added two new editors, Bernard Bandler, a close friend of Kirstein's who later went on to a significant career in psychiatry, and R.P. Blackmur, a cultured autodidact who ran a Cambridge bookshop and later went on to an illustrious career as a critic, poet, and English professor at Princeton University. Of the two founding editors, Kirstein had grander ambitions for the magazine, seeking to model the magazine on T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion*, and hoping to occupy some of the cultural space that had previously been filled by *The Dial*, which ceased publication in the summer of 1929.¹¹⁹ Like Kirstein, Bandler and Blackmur both wanted *The Hound & Horn* to expand into an international literary periodical, an opportunity which seemed particularly ripe with the recent failure of *The Dial*. Disagreement over this issue, along with Bandler's editorial enthusiasm for the Humanism movement, became a major source of tension with Fry, who quit the magazine late in 1929. Fry's departure was followed a short time later by Blackmur's resignation as an editor, for reasons unclear, though he continued to be a regular contributor to the magazine.

Having emerged victorious in his conflict with Fry, Kirstein pushed ahead with his plan to establish *The Hound & Horn* as the American equivalent of Eliot's *The Criterion* and position it as the cultural successor to *The Dial*. While the *Hound & Horn* did not pay contributors as handsomely as had *The Dial*, its rates were far more generous than most other little magazines, which helped it to attract intelligent criticism and modernist-inflected literature during the darkest years of the Great Depression.¹²⁰ Following Kirstein's graduation from Harvard in 1930, he and Bandler moved the

¹¹⁹ In his foreword to *The Hound & Horn Letters*, Kirstein wrote that "The *Criterion*, later the *Dial*, were models of what magazines might be; both seemed so elevated and comprehensive in their spectra that, at the start, *The Hound & Horn* aimed to have been modestly enough, a mere "Harvard Miscellany." But we printed a trial issue and secretly hoped that somehow it would please Eliot [the issue had included a two-part critical essay on Eliot by R.P. Blackmur and a bibliography of Eliot's published work by Varian Fry]. . . . Eliot seemed to me, at the time, the most important authority in the world for anything and everything that could occupy me" (xvi).

¹²⁰ For more on *Hound & Horn's* relationship to *The Dial*, see Greenbaum's *The Hound and Horn*, 40-44. Regarding payment for contributors, *The Dial* had paid \$20 / page for poetry and \$10 / page for prose. In a 1929 letter to Ezra Pound, R.P. Blackmur indicated that the *Hound & Horn* provided rates of \$7.50 / page for poetry and \$3.50 for prose.

magazine's editorial offices to Manhattan, where it operated until ceasing publication in 1934. In October 1931, the magazine added A. Hyatt Mayor to the editorial staff, and early in 1932 added Allen Tate and Yvor Winters as regional contributing editors (with Tate serving as "southern editor" and Winters as "western editor").¹²¹

Heavily subsidized by Lincoln Kirstein (or, to be more accurate, by Kirstein's father, Louis, the chairman of Filene's, a prominent Boston-based department store chain), the magazine ceased publication following the publication of the Summer 1934 issue, when Kirstein withdrew his patronage in order to devote his energies and resources towards the foundation of the School of American Ballet and the New York City Ballet with George Balanchine.¹²² Kirstein would later recall:

I abandoned the magazine after seven years, not entirely because my interests had altered and I was otherwise magnetized (by the ballet). The real reason I did not fight to continue *Hound & Horn* ... was that I didn't give a damn for politico-philosophical tendencies which I felt were devouring the magazine's space, and I was neither equipped to deal nor interested in dealing with them. I felt inadequate, and still do, with those delighted by ratiocination, with energies that mentate as sport.¹²³

Connection to the "Objectivists"

The relationship of the "Objectivists" to *The Hound & Horn* was accomplished primarily through Ezra Pound and, to a lesser extent, through Louis Zukofsky and William Carlos Williams.

While much reduced from the rates offered by *The Dial* in its heyday, this was still considerably more than that offered by other prominent modernist little magazines. For example, Eugene Jolas' *transition* had paid contributors just 50 cents / page, while Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* did not pay contributors at all (*The Hound & Horn Letters*, 25).

¹²¹ For a thorough history of the magazine, see Leonard Greenbaum's [The Hound & Horn: The History of a Literary Quarterly](#) and Mitzi Berger Hamovitch's [The Hound & Horn Letters](#).

¹²² Greenbaum indicates that the magazine's financial records show that the magazine's circulation fluctuated between 1,500 and 4,000 and that the magazine operated at a loss of roughly \$10,000 annually—a sum that would be roughly equivalent to \$140,000-\$180,000 in 2017 terms. See Greenbaum's "[The Hound & Horn Archive](#)," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (January 1965), 145.

¹²³ *The Hound & Horn Letters*, xi-xii.

Following the discontinuation of his own magazine *The Exile* in 1928 and *The Dial* in 1929, Pound was in search of other outlets through which to exert his influence on American artistic and literary culture.¹²⁴ Responding to a letter from R.P. Blackmur soliciting a recent Canto for the magazine in 1929, Pound first asked about the magazine's willingness "to do what *The Dial* and *Criterion* won't" and then appears to have proposed forming an "overt alliance" with the magazine, offering to serve as the magazine's foreign editor.¹²⁵ Blackmur responded to Pound's overtures in October 1929 with a mixture of enthusiasm and qualified caution, declining his offer of an overt alliance but reemphasizing his interest in publishing new Cantos and suggesting that the magazine would "take everything you send us (especially poems and stories), do our best to agree with you, and publish so much as we can of it. . . . This would amount to your gracing us as Contributing Editor."¹²⁶

Shortly after receiving Blackmur's offer, Pound sent along three poems from Basil Bunting, urging the editors to "give this precedence in time over other mss. I have sent on" and publish all three poems together in the magazine. To Pound's annoyance, Blackmur and Kirstein declined to publish Bunting, though they did gratefully accept and publish three of Pound's Cantos (XXVIII–XXX) in their April-June 1930 issue, and included excerpts from Pound's correspondence in several subsequent issues. Following Blackmur's departure as managing editor, Pound began directing his recommendations and editorial judgment toward Kirstein, repeatedly urging Kirstein to publish several writers he felt enthusiastic about, including Bunting, McAlmon, and Zukofsky. While

¹²⁴ Pound had served as *The Dial's* "foreign advisor" and editor from 1920-1923 and had work published in four of the magazine's first six issues. After one his typical spats with the editor, he resumed more friendly relations when Marianne Moore assumed editorship of the magazine in 1925. Pound received the magazine's Dial Award (which included a \$2000 prize) in 1927, and published work in each of the magazine's final three issues.

¹²⁵ Quoted language appears in letters from Blackmur to Pound, dated 20 May and 2 October 1929, which appear to quote previous messages from Pound (*The Hound & Horn Letters*, 25-27).

¹²⁶ *The Hound & Horn Letters*, 27.

Kirstein and Bandler ignored most of Pound's recommendations, *Hound & Horn* did publish Zukofsky's lengthy critical essay on notable Harvard man Henry Adams, his poem "Aubade, 1925," and his review of William Carlos Williams' involvement with *Pagany* in the January–March 1931 issue.¹²⁷

Pound also suggested, in March 1931, that Kirstein form a personal acquaintance with both Williams and Zukofsky, though Kirstein does not appear to have followed up on this suggestion.¹²⁸

A short time later, Pound angrily terminated his relationship with *Hound & Horn*, ostensibly over Kirstein's failure to publish Olga Rudge's translation of Jean Cocteau's "Mystère Laïc," writing in July 1931:

It only remains for me to express sincere regret for the time wasted by me in correspondence with H & H and say that taken as a whole our relations have been thoroughly unsatisfactory to me. I wish I had never heard of yr / magazine and I think you a god damn fool not to have printed the M.L. both for its integral quality and for its value proportionally to what you do print.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Zukofsky's essay on Adams was serialized in three parts, the first of which appeared in the April–June 1930 issue. Pound was pleased with this, singling it out as worthy of note [in a review of "Small Magazines"](#) he published in the November 1930 issue of *English Journal*: "At the present moment there are a number of free reviews in activity. Of these *The Hound and Horn* appears to me the most solid. It has taken over the heritage of whatever was active in the *Dial*. It has got rid of nearly all the *Dial*'s dead wood and rubbish. This purgation may endanger its safety. The advance in critical writing which I have mentioned seems to me apparent in Zukofsky's essay on Henry Adams, serialized in *Hound and Horn*, and in Hyatt Mayor's criticism of painting" (792). Zukofsky had also submitted a review of Pound's Cantos to *Hound & Horn* sometime in 1930, but Bandler rejected it for publication as being "only a partial review," since, in his view, while Zukofsky had "elucidated Pound and interpreted him" he had "seen him completely from within" and had not "attempted to estimate him from without" (*The Hound & Horn Letters*, 144-145).

¹²⁸ "as to local scene / I shd/ advise you to dig out ole Bill Williams // not necessary to AGREE. I shd/ also advise you to put up with being irritated by Zuk" (*The Hound & Horn Letters*, 60).

¹²⁹ *The Hound & Horn Letters*, 63. Pound's relationship with *Hound & Horn* was probably doomed as soon as Blackmur left the magazine as an editor, since none of the subsequent editors seemed to value his editorial opinions very much. The relationship between Pound and *Hound & Horn* already seemed to be faltering by November 1930, when Bernard Bandler wrote to Pound rejecting his essay "Terra Italica," and continued to deteriorate over a series of letters exchanged through Pound's final angry outburst in July 1931. For more on the collapse of Pound's relationship with *Hound & Horn*, see Greenbaum's *Hound & Horn* 109-124, Michael Flaherty's "Hound & Horn (1927-1934)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* and *The Hound & Horn Letters*, 36-37, 43, 58-59, 62-64, 80.

After Pound's burning of his bridge to the magazine's publisher, *Hound & Horn* was an even less hospitable place for Zukofsky and others in Pound's circle to seek publication, particularly since Kirstein's associates and editorial advisors Dudley Fitts, A. Hyatt Mayor, and Yvor Winters already held strongly negative views of both Zukofsky and Bunting.¹³⁰ *The Hound and Horn* published Yvor Winters' negative review of *An 'Objectivists' Anthology* in the January-March 1933 issue in which he dismissed Zukofsky and his group as "sensory impressionists of the usual sort" who entirely lacked "rational intelligence," as well as a contentious exchange between Basil Bunting and Yvor Winters on the subject of Winters' review in the next issue, which ended with Winters challenging Bunting to fight him.¹³¹

In July 1931, Kirstein sent Zukofsky the manuscript of some Rakosi's poems, asking for Zukofsky's opinion regarding publication. Thanks largely to Zukofsky's positive recommendation and offer to provide detailed criticism of Rakosi's work, *The Hound & Horn* published Rakosi's sequence "A Journey Away" in their Winter 1931 issue, but they would never print Rakosi again and

¹³⁰ In April 1931, Fitts wrote to Kirstein that "I read Zuk. once, with extreme distaste ... I didn't get the Gug[genhiem Fellowship]. Ransom did; and that's grand—apparently he needed it. Glad somebody like Zuk. or Bunting didn't." (*The Hound & Horn Letters* 79). On October 25, 1931, Mayor wrote to Kirstein that "Pound refuses to do anything for H. J. number. He suggests that when we have finished commemorating the illustrious dead, we might make a memorial number for *him*. He does, however, suggest that we get Zukofsky to make extracts from Pound's long notes on H J in *Instigations*. A poor idea, I think, because Zukofsky is, to my thinking, rotten. However, what about Foster Damon's [a prominent Harvard graduate then teaching at Brown University] doing something about these notes of Pound's?" (*The Hound & Horn Letters* 96-97). Winters wrote to Kirstein in 1932 that "Our own generation, and the kids who are coming up, seem to be divided more or less clearly between those whose intellectual background is incomprehensible to the older men and who therefore remain largely meaningless to them, and those who imitate them feebly and flatter them in numerous ways (Zukofsky is the most shameless toady extant) and who are therefore praised by them" (*The Selected Letters of Yvor Winters*, 195).

¹³¹ See the correspondence section of the April-June 1933 issue of *Hound & Horn*. Winters' response: "Mr. Bunting appears to offer me some kind of challenge. I shall be glad to encounter him at his own weapons—any kind of prose or verse—or, if he will come to California, with or without gloves, Queensbury rules" (*The Hound & Horn* 6:3, 323). A letter from Zukofsky to Kirstein giving his side of the dispute with Winters can be found in *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 82-84.

ignored Zukofsky's suggestion to solicit work by Kenneth Rexroth.¹³² Zukofsky's relationship with Kirstein appears to have remained intact through early September, when he told Pound:

Mr. Kirstein will probably use the enclosed poem ["Her Soil's Birth"]. Doesn't know—probably—I stole it from [seventeenth century English poet Edmund] Waller, but thinks my Helen Kane-Jefferson poem ["Madison, Wis., remembering the bloom of Monticello (1931)"] takes off from Mauberly! Oyo!—and then he wants me to read half the poems of half a nation & advise him & will probably take my advice?!¹³³

Unsurprisingly, considering the level of misunderstanding apparent in exchanges like this, Zukofsky would soon have his own falling out with the editors. It appears that on at least two occasions, Kirstein accepted a manuscript of Zukofsky's for publication and then later withdrew the offer of publication after further consultation with other editors. The second time this occurred it was in relation to a heated exchange of letters between Yvor Winters and Zukofsky regarding René Taupin's *L'Influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie Américaine*. These letters, which had reached the proof stage, were ultimately pulled from publication in the magazine, along with poems which Zukofsky had submitted a few months previously. Zukofsky suspected that Winters may have had some hand in the letters being withdrawn from publication, and wrote Kirstein asking for an explanation and the return of his manuscripts, if the decision not to publish was in fact final.¹³⁴ Kirstein returned the manuscripts, effectively ending Zukofsky's relationship with the magazine; by December Zukofsky told Pound that his relations with *Hound and Horn* were "definitely broken."¹³⁵

Recalling his and his magazine's association with Pound, Kirstein would later write: "We printed nearly everything he sent us, but finally, in spite of his lovely poems and his marvelous

¹³² See *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 78-80.

¹³³ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 98-99.

¹³⁴ See *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 82-84.

¹³⁵ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 108.

letters, we couldn't face the attendant coterie of lame duck discoveries he was always capriciously harboring, and we were relieved to let him be obscene about us other 'little' magazines."¹³⁶ It's difficult to draw any other conclusion from a phrase like "lame duck discoveries" than that Kirstein and the other editors of *Hound & Horn* ultimately had little but contempt for writers like Zukofsky, Bunting, McAlmon, and Rakosi.

The only other writers affiliated with the "Objectivists" to have published in *The Hound & Horn* were William Carlos Williams, Norman Macleod and the Harvard-educated and prominent Bostonian John Brooks Wheelwright.¹³⁷

The Exile

Years in operation: 1927-1928

Editor: Ezra Pound

"Objectivists" published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Carl Rakosi, Robert McAlmon, Howard Weeks

Ezra Pound's short-lived magazine *The Exile*, which consisted of just four issues published in 1927 and 1928, might properly be considered the first proto-"Objectivist" publication.¹³⁸ A look at the writers published in the final three issues of Pound's magazine shows a significant overlap with Zukofsky's later editorial selections for his "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*, with Pound publishing

¹³⁶ Quoted in Greenbaum, *The Hound & Horn*, 104.

¹³⁷ Williams' poem "Rain" appeared in the October–December 1929 issue and whose "In a 'Sconset Bus," appeared in the July–September 1932 issue. Three brief items of correspondence between Williams and Kirstein are included in *The Hound & Horn Letters*, pp. 138-140. Macleod published a poem in the Winter 1931 issue. Wheelwright published regularly in *Hound & Horn*, beginning with its very first issue (which contained his prose work "North Atlantic Passage." He also published a number of poetry review, poems, and prose on both poetry and architecture in the magazine.

¹³⁸ Tom Sharp has argued not only that *The Exile* was the group's "first public meeting place," but that the publication of work by some many writers later identified as "Objectivists" in the magazine establishes the group firmly within the Poundian poetic tradition and "expresses many of the principles, especially about the importance of group activity, that Pound continued to impress upon them" (<http://sharpgiving.com/Objectivists/sections/01.history.html>).

work by Zukofsky, Rakosi, Williams, Robert McAlmon, and Howard Weeks.¹³⁹ *The Exile* represented Pound's first (and only) attempt to edit and publish his own magazine, and its failure demonstrated some of his limitations as an editor and publisher. While Pound was justly proud of his ability to identify significant voices early in their career and recommend them to more established publications, he also appears to have been temperamentally unsuited to the kinds of careful, patient, politic work needed to edit a longstanding, catholic literary journal, at which someone like Harriet Monroe, for example, excelled.¹⁴⁰

Publishing History

Pound issued the first issue of *The Exile* in the Spring of 1927, from Dijon, France, where it was printed by Maurice Darantière.¹⁴¹ Pound had hoped that the magazine might be readily imported into England and the United States and made arrangements for the first issue of the magazine to be sold by authorized agents in New York, Paris, and London. To his great exasperation, Pound found that importing a publication printed abroad to the United States met with all kinds of expensive bureaucratic difficulties. Consequently, beginning with the second issue, published in Autumn 1927, *The Exile* was published by the Chicago-based Pascal Covici.¹⁴² A longer explanation of this change

¹³⁹ Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning "The"" appeared in *The Exile* 3, the same issue in which Weeks poem "Stunt Piece" appeared. Pound published four poems by Rakosi and a McAlmon short story in *The Exile* 2, and Rakosi's "Extracts from A Private Life" in *The Exile* 4, which also contained Williams' "The Descent of Winter," several poems by Zukofsky, and an essay on Gertrude Stein by McAlmon.

¹⁴⁰ For a balanced appraisal of Monroe's considerable skills as an editor and publisher as against the self-serving accounts Pound and his acolytes have tended to promote, see John Timberman Newcomb's excellent "Poetry's Opening Door: Harriet Monroe and American Modernism" in *Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches*, 85-103.

¹⁴¹ Darantière had handled many of Robert McAlmon's Contact Editions books and was the printer Sylvia Beach turned to when she had been unable to find a printer in Britain or the United States willing to issue James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

¹⁴² Covici had published Pound's *Anthel and The Treatise on Harmony* in 1927, and was at that time closely connected with Samuel Putnam, a translator and poet then living in Paris who helped broker Covici's taking on publication of *The Exile*. Covici would later move to New York City and form a publishing firm with Donald Friede, who had been vice-president of Boni-Liveright. Covici-Friede were best known for limited editions of literary works, but they published some commercial fiction during the Depression. Covici formed a significant and long-lasting friendship and publishing

in site of publication would appear in the third issue, but the second issue did include the following acerbic single page “Note re 1st Number” from Pound:

Extract of Mr. Price’s account of the New York Customs House.

“An assistant customs appraiser grabbed my arm the other day and said, ‘Say, the fellow that wrote that stuff in your magazine must be a narcotic fiend! Nobody has thoughts like those except under the influence of drugs! We don’t want stuff like that here—we’re going to have to defend our women and children against the Bolsheviks pretty soon!’ ”

In fact, the behavior of a customs department plus the state of our copyright laws are such that but for Mr. Covici undertaking to print this second issue, the editors would have desisted.

Why the United States has a copyright law designed chiefly to encourage theft, I am unable to say.

As to Mr. Coolidge’s economic policy, I have one further suggestion—namely, that he can completely eliminate the cost of lunatic asylums by dressing the present inmates in customs uniforms and placing them in ports and along the frontiers. This will dispense with the present employees entirely and the public will be just as well served.¹⁴³

The second issue also featured a changed and reduced list of authorized agents, which now comprised just the Gotham Book Mart in New York City and Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co. in London (there was no Paris agent), giving some indication of Pound’s intended (Anglophone) audience. The issue itself contained editorial material by Pound as well as a long selection from John Rodker’s poem “Adolphe 1920,” poems by R.C. Dunning, and Carl Rakosi, a short prose selection from Joe Gould’s legendary Oral History, and longer prose pieces from Robert McAlmon and Stella Breen. Breen’s story, “My Five Husbands,” was the only piece of writing by a woman included in all four issues of Pound’s journal. Even by the standards of the time, this is stunningly poor representation, and reflects poorly on Pound’s catholicity of taste, though similar

relationship with John Steinbeck, and when Covici-Friede went bankrupt in 1938, Covici moved to Viking Press, and brought Steinbeck along with him. Covici died in 1964.

¹⁴³ “Note re 1st Number”, *The Exile*, 2 (Autumn 1927), 120.

accusations could also be leveled against Zukofsky: just three of the more than 30 writers he published as “Objectivists” were women (Mary Butts, Frances Fletcher, and Martha Champion).¹⁴⁴

The third issue of *The Exile* was published in Spring 1928, and contained the longest and most varied list of contributors. The issue began with poems by William Butler Yeats (four sections each from the poems “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Blood and the Moon”), Zukofsky’s “Poem Beginning ‘The,’” a portion of Pound’s own “Canto XXIII,” and the conclusion of Rodker’s “Adolphe 1920.” Pound also gave space in the issue to prose and poems by R. C. Dunning, poetry by Clifford Gessler, Howard Weeks, and Herman Spector, prose pieces from Payson Loomis and Morley Callaghan, and a smattering of Pound’s editorial pronouncements on various topics, most of which touch on his contempt and despair for the American cultural and political scene, with a few jabs at various European nations included for good measure. The issue also contained a single page “Desideria” from the editor:

Quite simply: I want a new civilization. We have the basis for a new poetry, and for a new music. The government of our country is hopelessly low-brow, there are certain crass stupidities in administration that it is up to the literate members of the public to eradicate [sic]. . . . I say “new” civilization, I don’t know that I care about its being so very different from the best that has been, but it must be as good as the best that has been.¹⁴⁵

Pound also gave greater context to the issues and difficulties he had encountered in trying to import the first issue and the reasoning behind his decision to move publication to Chicago and the delays in publication the magazine has suffered, writing:

¹⁴⁴ George Oppen’s judgement on gender matters as they relate to Pound seems particularly fitting; among the scraps of paper Oppen had pinned to the walls of his writing space in his last years was this “Note to Pound in Heaven”: “Only one mistake, Ezra! / You should have talked / to women” (*Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers*, 235).

¹⁴⁵ 108.

The first issue of *The Exile* printed in Dijon was strictly my own affair. Mr. [John] Price assured me that America cd. absorb 300 copies.¹⁴⁶ The Port of Noo York assured Mr. Price that magazines were not dutiable. On that understanding I had no need of anyone's cooperation.

The Port of New York saw *Exile*, found that it was dated "Spring 1927" instead of "April 1927" and proclaimed that *Exile* was not a magazine but a "book". Thereby illustrating the nature of the bureaucratic mindersatz.

The tax imposed on "books" at the American frontier as result of our governing powers, ever desirous of maintaining the present state of national stupidity, wd. effectively preclude the possibility of my printing *Exile* in my own front yard and shipping it to the scattered intelligentzia of Texas, Albany and the outlying gehennae. I mean save at greater expense than it is worth.

Hence the delays in the appearance of subsequent numbers. For any enjoyment the present issue affords the famished reader, the said reader may thank Mr. Covici.¹⁴⁷

Pound published a fourth and final issue of *The Exile* in Autumn 1928.¹⁴⁸ This issue included some 30 pages of assorted political and social commentary by Pound; William Carlos Williams' "The Descent of Winter," a lengthy mix of prose and poetry from Williams' private journals that Zukofsky had been instrumental in editing;¹⁴⁹ a brief review of Gertrude Stein's work by Robert McAlmon; more than a dozen pages of prose and poetry by Zukofsky; poetry by Carl Rakosi; excerpts from recent correspondence Pound had had with Samuel Putnam; short works by John Cournos, Falkoff (translated by Mark Klierin), and Benjamin Péret, and "Data," an article in which

¹⁴⁶ John Price was a New York newspaperman that Pound had partnered with in publishing and importing the magazine. See *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, 113-115.

¹⁴⁷ "Interaction," 109.

¹⁴⁸ Covici had informed Pound by September both that he was planning to form a partnership with Donald Friede and move their operations to New York City and that Pound's magazine had been too unprofitable for him to continue publishing it.

¹⁴⁹ Williams wrote to Pound on May 17, 1928: "Your spy Zukofsky has been going over my secret notes for you. At first I resented his wanting to penetrate- now listen! – but finally I sez to him, All right, go ahead. So he took my pile of stuff into the city and he works at it with remarkably clean and steady fingers (to your long distance credit be it said) and he ups and choses a batch of writin that yous is erbout ter git perty damn quick if it hits a quick ship – when it gets ready – which it aren't quite yit. What I have to send you will be in the form of a journal, each bit as perfect in itself as may be. I am however leaving everything just as selected by Zukofsky. It may be later that I shall use the stuff differently" (*Pound/Williams*, 82). Zukofsky and Williams had first met in April, which means that Williams had known Zukofsky for less than 2 months at the time that he sent Pound this remarkable indication his editorial trust.

Pound attempted to “set down a few dates, and give a list of the periodicals where the struggle took place. Sic: [places where] Contemporary americo-english non-commercial literature struggled into being,” provided a bibliography of his own work as well as that of Williams and McAlmon, and offered a rambling catalogue of various of his other enthusiasms, including the violin playing of his mistress, Olga Rudge.¹⁵⁰

Reflecting on *The Exile* in 1930, Pound summarized its accomplishment thusly: “In *Exile* I managed to publish [John Rodker’s] *Adolphe* and a little work by McAlmon, W. C. Williams, Louis Zukofsky, and one poem by Howard Weeks.”¹⁵¹

Blues

Years in operation: 1929-1930 [9 issues]

Editors: Charles Henri Ford [1929-1930], Kathleen Tankersley Young [1929], Parker Tyler [1930]

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Carl Rakosi, Kenneth Rexroth, Norman Macleod, Harry Roskolenko [Roskolenkier], Richard Johns, Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford

Shortly after *The Exile* printed its last issue in late 1928, the twenty-one year old Charles Henri Ford and the African-American poet Kathleen Tankersley Young published the first issue of their magazine *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms* from Ford’s apartment in Columbus, Mississippi. Ford and Young had first met at the Carnegie public library in San Antonio, Texas in early 1928 after Young had written Ford telling him that the legendary Greenwich Village publisher Lew Ney had recommended that she seek him out. Ford was an aspiring poet who had been stung by Harriet Monroe’s rejection of several of his submissions in 1927, and with direct support from Young, and

¹⁵⁰ 104. It really is a pity that Pound didn’t have access to a micro-blogging platform and a large social media marketing budget. He would have loved it.

¹⁵¹ “Small Magazines,” *The English Journal*, 19.9 (November 1930), 701.

encouragement from both Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, whom he had corresponded with for a few months, Ford he borrowed a small amount of money to launch a new magazine. Young disliked Ford's choice of name for the magazine, encouraging on several occasions to reconsider the title (she suggested calling it *The Modern Review*, *The Modernist*, or *Moderns* instead), but Ford stuck with *Blues*, publishing its first issue in February 1929.

Ford and Young launched *Blues* as a monthly publication dedicated almost exclusively to “new” poetry; individual copies sold for 35 cents and an annual subscription cost \$3.00. It appears that Pound initially saw the magazine as a potential continuation of his work with *The Exile*, telling his father Homer in January 1929: “C. H. Ford is starting a local show, with [Herman] Spector, Bill Wms. and Vogel, and printing Zuk. Let’s see what they can do,” and writing to Joseph Vogel, who Ford had recruited to serve as contributing editor, “I shd. be inclined not to make an effort to bring out another *Xile* until one has seen whether *Blues* can do the job. Or do you consider this excessive on my part? I don’t see that there is room or need for two mags doing experimental stuff ... at present moment. ... Seems to me a chance for the best thing since *The Little Review* and certainly the best thing done in America without European help.”¹⁵²

On February 1, 1928 Pound also sent Ford a lengthy letter of advice for the young editor, which echoed much of what he had written to Zukofsky and Vogel regarding the problems of American copyright law and the obstacles erected to the publication of literature, and emphasized the value of group action:

Every generation or group must write its own literary program. The way to do it is by circular letter to your ten chief allies. Find out the two or three points you agree on (if *any*) and issue them as program. ... As you don’t live in same town with yr. start contribs, you can not have fortnightly meeting and rag each other. Best substitute is to use circular letters.

¹⁵² The first quotation from *Ezra Pound to His Parents*, 618 and the second in *Selected Letters: 1907-1941*, 223.

For example write something (or use this note of mine), add your comments, send it on to Vogel, have him show it to Spector, and then send it to Bill Wms. each adding his blasts or blesses or comment of whatever-damn natr. Etc. When it has gone the rounds, you can send it back here.¹⁵³

In addition to Joseph Vogel, Ford and Young had also recruited William Carlos Williams to appear on the magazine's masthead as a contributing editor (along with Herman Spector, Oliver Jenkins, Jacques Le Clercq, and Eugene Jolas). Williams was similarly enthusiastic about the magazine's prospects, writing to Zukofsky in late 1928:

There is hope! A brand <new>, gritty clean magazine is about to see the light of day in Mississippi. I am to be a contributing editor. An outlet at last. I want your poem beginning "A" for it if The Dial isn't large enough. They are to pay (I think) well. I'll let you know more when I know more but it sounds hopeful – as I have said. It is to be called BLUES: An anthology of American writing. I want to guard myself concerning the pay part of it, however, since I am not too certain about that though it looks good.¹⁵⁴

Publication History and Connection to the "Objectivists"

Ford and Young placed an announcement for *Blues* in the famous "Revolution of the Word" double issue of *transition* describing their magazine thusly:

BLUES is a magazine of a more complete revolt against the cliché and commonplace welcoming poetry and prose radical in form subject or **treatment**.

BLUES is a haven for the unorthodox in america and for those writers living abroad who though writing in english have decided that america and american environment are not hospitable to creative work.

BLUES is a cooperative experiment and cannot at present pay for contributions but the magazine will be given wide distribution among critics writers and those interested in modern literature in europe and the states.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *Selected Letters: 1907-1941*, 223-224.

¹⁵⁴ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ *transition* 16-17 (1929), n.pag.

The inside cover of the first issue also listed a number of future contributors and indicated that forthcoming issues would also contain work by

others who are disgusted with literature as it is at present presented in these United States. By subscribing to *Blues* you will show your interest and willingness to help in the plan of the editors to revitalize and introduce new rhythms in creative writing. There is only one class of literature more intellectually depressing than the sentimental, the trite, the *expected*. The reference is made to that most deadening of mental incubuses—the strained, the forced, the far-fetched. *Blues*, by the exclusion of both classes from its pages, will wage a bitter war against them, and will provide an organ of experimentation for the generation *sans* illusions.

The first issue of *Blues* contained just under 30 pages of poetry from a dozen contributors, including Louis Zukofsky, Parker Tyler, and Norman Macleod. While the editors had announced that *Blues* was intended to serve as “a haven for the unorthodox in America and for those writers living abroad who, though writing in English, have decided that America and American environment are not hospitable to creative work,” all of the contributors to the first issue were then living in the United States, with eight of the twelve then living in New York City. The list of book stores where *Blues* could be obtained was more geographically diffuse, however, with over 30 shops listed in more 20 cities across the United States.¹⁵⁶

The second issue (March 1929) carried a brief “program” from Pound, a manifesto from Williams about the role and direction of a new little magazine devoted to poetry in America, and

¹⁵⁶ The list included 7 stores in New York City; 6 in Chicago; 2 in Detroit, and one each in in Aberdeen, Washington; Atlanta; Baltimore; Boston; Cleveland; Columbus, Mississippi; Denver; Hollywood, California; Los Angeles; Minneapolis; New Orleans; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; Portland, Oregon; Princeton, New Jersey; Salt Lake City; San Francisco; Santa Fe; and Washington, D. C.

three more poems by Zukofsky. At the end of the contributors note to the second issue, the editors also announced “An Expatriate Number of Blues is planned for the near future, containing poems and stories by those writers living abroad who, though writing in English, have decided that America and American environment are not hospitable to creative work.”¹⁵⁷ This expatriate issue would appear in July 1929.

The third issue (April 1929) included three short poems by Norman Macleod as well as Kenneth Rexroth’s first ever published poem and the fourth issue (May 1929) contained Williams’s prose statement “A Note on the Art of Poetry,” two additional Macleod poems, and four poems by Zukofsky. In place of the advertisements for other magazines that had previously been included on the back cover of the first three issues, the fourth issue included an advertisement for *Blues* itself, proclaiming

AT LAST IN AMERICA ...

A MAGAZINE THAT DARES ...

BLUES ...

has given a haven to the unorthodox in the states who are fighting to retain the hierarchy of pure spirit against the insane horde that is suffocating in mass-economics ...

BLUES ...

will continue to print the work of the most vital writers in this country and in europe, and will be a rallying-ground for the younger writers doing experimental work who are paralyzed by the presbyterian attitude of the current magazines which, with few exceptions, are out to make a success, to become “anthologized,” to do the right thing under safe conditions and to strangle whatever living force the real creator may have ...

The fifth issue (June 1929) included poetry by Parker Tyler, Kenneth Rexroth, and Harry Roskolenkier and announced the long awaited “expatriate number” to be printed on July 15 as “an important representation of the creative writing being done by americans living in europe.” The July

¹⁵⁷ “Notes,” 52.

expatriate number was the editors' most ambitious undertaking to date, with new work by a host of significant American modernist writers living in Europe: Gertrude Stein, H.D., Kay Boyle, Eugene Jolas, Walter Lowenfels, Harry Crosby, Leigh Hoffman, Harold Salemsen, and Laurence Vail.

The editors, who had been experiencing financial problems, also announced in the sixth issue that they would be switching to a quarterly publication schedule, and tried to put a defiant spin on this decision, proclaiming it as part of "a greater war against stupidity and standardization." The also announced that their next issue, "greatly enlarged in scope and content" would be issued in Fall 1929 with several new regular features and would sell for 75 cents a copy.

This change in format was accompanied by the magazine's first major aesthetic overhaul, complete with a new cover design by Andrée Dutcher Rexroth (Kenneth's wife) which reflected Ford's interest in internationalizing his audience following the publication of his "expatriate" issue, listing the sales price on the cover of the issue in three different currencies ("75 cents—20 francs—3 shillings") for the first time. The issue also featured the first change to the editorial masthead since the magazine was founded: Parker Tyler was listed as an associate editor and Joseph Vogel was dropped from the list of contributing editors.¹⁵⁸ The issue itself opened with a faux advertisement for the issue by William Carlos Williams in which Williams playfully subverted the invitation so often extended by expatriates in France to their compatriots remaining in the United States:

We live, gentle reader, in a world very much gone to pot, the thought of it tortured, the acts of it blind, the flight from it impossible.

What to do?

¹⁵⁸ In the October 1929 issue of *New Masses*, Vogel wrote a vicious takedown of *Blues*, claiming that the magazine "has persistently avoided life and human beings. The work in it has been metaphysical, treating with petty emotions, describing souls of lousy poets" and suggested that "it is time that young writers dissociate themselves from all these abstractions, as many have long ago done from Pound, the dean of corpses that promenade in graveyards" ("Literary Graveyards," 30).

Either retreat, swallowing whole, as complete as it is the *Summa Theologica*, the philosophy dependent therefrom and the poetry pinned thereto and go to rest with John Donne in that tight little island of dreams where all past wealth is garnered; or face the barren waves— ...

We now boldly assert that saving the retreat there is no other way for writing in the present state of the world than that which BLUES has fostered.

“You MUST come over.”¹⁵⁹

The issue also included poetry by Williams, Parker Tyler, Kenneth Rexroth, Norman Macleod, Charles Henri Ford, and new contributors Richard Johns and Forrest Anderson, whose appearance in *Blues* marked his first ever publication anywhere. The issue also included various letters from correspondents in Europe and across the United States, with Harold Salemsen (the editor of *Tambour* magazine) supplying a “Paris Letter,” Parker Tyler writing some New York Notes, “Augustus Tiberius” writing a letter from San Diego, and Kenneth Rexroth providing a “Letter from San Francisco.”

Shortly after this issue appeared, the stock market crashed, on October 24, 1929 (known popularly as “Black Thursday”), and the United States began to descend into what would come to be known as the Great Depression. In November, William Carlos Williams wrote to Ford:

under the economic pressure we all suffer, a quarterly is inescapable, forced on us, therefore better face to the facts, and so better all around.

Blues is after all you. You must bear it yourself and make it go, no help to that, though help you must have.

There are four or five new quarterlies and what not. Some good, some (probably) bad. Each will be at its best a person, as I see it.¹⁶⁰

Prior to the publication of the eighth issue in Spring 1930, Ford moved *Blues* from his home in rural Mississippi to an apartment at 11 Macdougall Street, near Washington Square Park in New

¹⁵⁹ “introduction to a collection of modern writings,” 3.

¹⁶⁰ *Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, 110.

York City's Greenwich Village. Greenwich Village was an attractive new home to Ford for several reasons. First, it was where Kathleen Tankersley Young and Parker Tyler, his closest editorial associates, had been based, and both writers had long encouraged him to join him in the city. Second, the bohemian reputation and sexual permissiveness of the village was a strong attractor for the openly gay Ford, who stifled under the provincial and inhibiting restraints of the American south.¹⁶¹ Finally, Young, Tyler, and Ford had already established a strong relationship with Lew Ney, a prominent local figure known colloquially as the "Mayor of Greenwich Village," who became the magazine's patron and publisher upon Ford's move to the city. Ney, born Luther Emanuel Widen, was already publishing the little magazines *Parnassus* ("A Wee Poetry Magazine") and *Bohemia* ("A Magazine of Good Fellowship") Ney and Ford operated *Blues* from an address at 12 E 15th Street, on the edge of Union Square Park, and less than half a mile from the Gramercy Park address to which Richard Johns would relocate *Pagany* later in 1930.

The eighth issue of *Blues* featured another reshuffling of the editorial board, with Tankersley Young being listed as a contributing instead of associate editor, Oliver Jenkins being dropped from the list of contributing editors, and Lew Ney being added to the masthead as the magazine's publisher. The issue itself featured four poems by Zukofsky, two by Williams, and one each by Parker Tyler, Forrest Anderson, and Charles Henri Ford. A ninth and final issue of *Blues* was published in Fall 1930. This issue makes no mention of Lew Ney and credited a greatly reduced editorial board, listing just Ford and Tyler as editor and associate editor, respectively, and William Carlos Williams and Eugene Jolas as "advisory editors." The ninth issue touted a cover article

¹⁶¹ The historian George Chauncey has written that during this period Greenwich Village "hosted the best-known gay enclave in both the city and the nation – and the first to take shape in a predominantly middle-class (albeit bohemian) milieu" (*Gay New York*, 227). For an intimate personal account of Ford's years in Greenwich Village, see Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler's 1933 novel *The Young and Evil*. For a more academic summary of this period in the history of *Blues*, see Alexander Howard's "Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms and the Belated Renovation of Modernism" in *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, Volume 5, Number 2, 2014, especially pp. 188-190.

entitled “Can the Poet Change the World?” by Gottfried Benn and Johannes R. Becker, as well as poetry by Williams, Zukofsky, Ford, Tyler, and Forrest Anderson, and Williams’ prose statement “Caviar and Bread Again: A Warning to the New Writer.” In this warning, Williams’ criticized *Blues* harshly, arguing that too much modern writing attended to experimental techniques but neglected substance:

There is one major phase of modern poetry on which both critics and their begetters have gone astray. That is substance. So riled have the former been over the modern radical changes in technique that as far as any substance can be distilled out of what they have had to say such substance is thoroughly negligible. . . .

It is he, the poet, whose function it is, when the race has gone astray, to lead it— to destruction perhaps, but in any case, to lead it.

This he will not do by mere blather but by a magnificent organization of those materials his age has placed before him for his employment.

At the same time he usually invents a technique. Or he seems to do so. But really it is that he has been the fortunate one who has gathered all the threads together that have been spun for many centuries before him and woven them into his design.

What I am driving at is some kind of an estimate of what is going on today, some kind of estimate of the worth of modern poetry before condemning it for the lack of substance which strikes one in such a magazine as *Blues*.

The older poetry is worn out for us along with all new work which follows the older line. No amount of re-inflation after Eliot’s sorry fashion can help it. At most we can admire Eliot’s distinguished use of sentences and words and the tenor of his mind, but as for substance— he is for us a cipher. We must invent, we must create out of the blankness about us, and we must do this by the use of new constructions.

And for this we cannot wait until—until—until Gabriel blow his horn. We must do it now— today. We must have the vessel ready when the gin is mixed. We’ve got to experiment with technique long before the final summative artist arrives and makes it necessary for men to begin inventing all over again.

On the poet devolves the most vital function of society: to recreate it— the collective world— in time of stress, in a new mode, fresh in every part, and so set the world working or dancing or murdering each other again, as it may be.

Instead of that— Lord, how serious it sounds!—let’s play tiddlywinks with the syllables. And why not? It doesn’t cost anything except the waste of a lot of otherwise no-good time. And

yet we moderns expect people actually to read us—even to buy our magazines and pay for them with money. . . .

Experiment we must have, but it seems to me that a number of the younger writers has forgotten that writing doesn't mean just inventing new ways to say "So's your Old Man." I swear I myself can't make out for the life of me what many of them are talking about, and I have a will to understand them that they will not find in many another.

If you like Gertrude Stein, study her for her substance; she has it, no matter what the idle may say. The same for Ezra Pound, for James Joyce. It is substance that makes their work important. Technique is a part of it— new technique; technique is itself substance, as all artists must know; but it is the substance under that, forming that, giving it its reason for existence which must be the final answer and source of reliance.

We must listen to no blank-minded critic, without understanding, when it comes to what we shall do and how we shall do it; but we must realize that it is a world to which we are definitely articulating— or to which we might be, were we all able enough.¹⁶²

This stunning attack on *Blues* and its contributors was caveated in the magazine's back matter with this from the editors: "*Blues* asked Dr. Williams for an interior criticism; the result is published on the part of the editors with the disregard for personal feelings which they have striven to make a principle."¹⁶³ If Benn and Becker's cover article was intended to open a conversation about the role of the artist, Williams' reflections seem like a more fitting conclusion to a conversation, a brutal and slightly cranky summation of the efforts of an experimental magazine which had given voice to a number of young modernist poets. Williams' critique of the magazine might also serve as a kind of last word for and on *Blues*, as well, since Ford and Ney could not make the magazine a viable concern, despite their best efforts, and *Blues* suspended publication of the magazine after this ninth issue appeared in Fall 1930. Ford and Tyler apparently planned to publish a tenth issue of the magazine in 1931 from Paris featuring work by Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, William Faulkner, and others, but this issue never appeared.¹⁶⁴ In the January 1931 issue of *The Sewanee Review*, Ford and

¹⁶² "Caviar and Bread Again," 46-47.

¹⁶³ "Notes on Contributors," 52.

¹⁶⁴ In 1989, however, Ford took over editorship of an issue of Michael Andre's magazine *Unmuzzled OX*, presenting it as the tenth and final issue of *Blues*.

Tyler published “What Happens to a Radical Literary Magazine,” a brief postmortem apologia of their magazine.

Even as their influence in *Blues* began to wane and the magazine folded, Williams and Zukofsky had already identified in Richard Johns’ *Pagany* another possible vehicle for spreading both their work and some of their ideas about the role and function of writing. A quick glance at the contributor list for both *Blues* and Zukofsky’s “Objectivists” issue of poetry is quite telling. Of the 23 individual contributors Zukofsky published in the February 1931 issue of *Poetry*, nearly half had been previously published in *Blues*. Furthermore, Ford and Tyler, the magazine’s editors, were chosen as Zukofsky’s interlocutors in the “symposium” section of his issue, signaling the magazine’s relative influence and importance in the nucleation of those writers Zukofsky chose to present as “Objectivists.”

Pagany

Years in operation: 1930-1933 [12 issues]

Editor: Richard Johns

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting, Robert McAlmon, Kenneth Rexroth, Norman Macleod, Charles Henri Ford, R B N Warriston, Parker Tyler, Richard Johns, Emanuel Carnevali, Forrest Anderson, Mary Butts, Frances Fletcher, Harry Roskolenko [Roskolenkier]

If *Blues* had been, in some form, a continuation of Pound’s *The Exile* and an important proto-“Objectivist” publication, *Pagany* was perhaps even more significant in the formation and consolidation of the group, with fourteen of the writers included in the “Objectivists” 1931 issue and all but George Oppen, T. S. Eliot, and Jerry Reisman of the poets included in *An “Objectivists” Anthology* appearing in *Pagany* during its three year, twelve-issue run.

In April 1929, just before *The Dial* suspended publication and not long after Charles Henri Ford had launched his *Blues*, Richard Johns, the 24 year old son of prominent Boston attorney Benjamin Newhall Johnson, wrote to William Carlos Williams declaring his intention to establish a new quarterly magazine. Johns' own literary credentials were meager: he had not graduated from either high school or college (though he had attended Classical High School in his hometown of Lynn and taken courses in poetry and literary theory at Columbia) and had at that time only published a very small number of his own poems, and those in little-known magazines. Johns was, however, the son of a wealthy man. He was also ambitious enough to attempt to recruit Williams' aid in launching his publishing venture.

In his introductory letter, Johns informed that his magazine would be published from Boston and dedicated to presenting the work of writers born in the United States, including those then living abroad. He also told Williams of his desire to name the magazine *Pagany*, in tribute to Williams' recently published novel *A Voyage to Pagany*, invited Williams to serve as its associate editor, and asked him to contribute both a manifesto and "a good bit of your work" for the magazine.¹⁶⁵ Williams responded on July 1, 1929 (the same month that Ford published his expatriate number of *Blues*), telling Johns

Nothing would please me more than a quarterly such as you suggest; there is no project more difficult. I have seen enough of magazines which fail after the first four or five numbers. Any new magazine with which I would be associated must be in a position to continued for at least two years, come what may. This costs time and a large sum of money I am afraid.

Such a magazine, being a quarterly, must needs be of a good size, say a hundred and eighty pages. It had better not be published in Boston but in New York. You see what I mean.

But nothing – to revert – would please me more. It is only that I doubt seriously anyone's ability to swing such a thing in the U.S. unless he be himself wealthy and abler minded and

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in *A Return to Pagany*, 3.

more literary minded and phenomenally generous and enlightened of spirit more than any one I have ever seen on earth – that I hesitate.

You may be this person. If so the millennium is at hand.

Yes, I have what may be walled ideals though they are curiously unlike anything that used to be called that. I have a vivid perception of something that might be done in the U.S. with literature as material. I should be instantly raised into heaven could I be sure that I would have a quarterly at my disposal that I could make the fulcrum by using which I would, in the course of the next ten years, pry things so loose here that we could breathe again in an enlightened air and not in this sink of stupidity and ignorance where we live now ‘saved’ by science and philosophy.

Thus you see I take you seriously but so much do I pant for what you offer that I am doubly dubious of anyone’s ability to make good. Yet what you envision IS the future – or rather the present if anyone could have the ability to put it across. I’d back it and it would be the center of every literary interest after a patient murderous ascent extending over several years of effort. I’d expect to give it my life – in short.¹⁶⁶

While Johns’ reply to this extraordinary missive does not appear to have survived, Williams’ next letter, dated July 12, extends his more qualified support:

Yes, I am with you but I’d like best not to have any official editorial status—unless you prefer otherwise. I can’t see that my name would help you. Besides, I am now american representative for a french quarterly and *Blues* has my name on its stationary – meaning nothing. Yet, if you want my name you may use it.

I think I begin to see what you are at, “A Native Quarterly” gives me the hint. ... You believe then that we must built up from what we have before we shall be able to do more. In this you are opposed to Blues which is in your mind, perhaps, just a loose end. In a measure I agree with you that this is so. You would perhaps begin low, fasten to the native shale or sandstone or what have you. Splendid, I say – but full of danger. Yet the work must be done. Perhaps things like Blues can never make headway until that underground work has first been done. ... The Dial, it strikes me is precisely what you do not want to imitate.

You want a basis for an advance, do you? And you accept the proposition that the basis is always that which is native. You want to consolidate your position and not fly of and think to reach an end before that end is defined. ...

My suggestion is that I write for each quarterly a few pages, five to twenty, in which I shall be permitted to develop a theme, slowly and steadily, the native theme and its implications. In addition you may occasionally accept a poem, or a prose bit now and again. But the pages

¹⁶⁶ Williams to Johns, July 1, 1929. *Pagany* Archives, University of Delaware Special Collections.

I write will be signed and published on my own responsibility, not that of the magazine. You could then attack me in the same issue as you may care to. Is that what you want? ...

Le's [sic] see more of your mind relative to the undertaking. Then I'll write the manifesto, yes I will, after which you may open the screen door and point to the exit if you wish to without in the least offending ...

[as a postscript] But I'm for you and I like your deliberation. I'll do everything I can to further your project which may be important if it can be organized on some basis of decency (not moral)

Write freely of yourself, please; I am still in the stage of trying to formulate exactly what you may have in mind.¹⁶⁷

Johns explained more of his intentions and sent Williams some manuscripts he had received and was reviewing for publication. Williams replied at the end of August that he had reviewed the manuscripts and felt that they “justif[y] you in your attempt. I wish you luck and I’ll do all I can to help.”¹⁶⁸ In October, after having reviewed another batch of manuscripts, Williams confessed to Johns: “I am beginning to grow enthusiastic about this venture of yours. I had no idea there was so much really new writing going on about me.”¹⁶⁹ In November, Williams also sent along a crude hand-drawn sketch of a possible cover for the magazine, which Johns adopted almost exactly as sketched by Williams for the magazine’s eventual design.

Publication History

Having secured both Williams’ approval and a fifteen hundred dollar loan from his father to subsidize the first year of publication, Johns pushed forward with his plans, printing a thousand copies of the first issue of *Pagany: A Native Quarterly* in January 1930. Like each of the subsequent issues, the first issue of the magazine was printed in black on a brightly colored cover stock (in this

¹⁶⁷ Williams to Johns, July 12, 1929. *Pagany* Archives, University of Delaware Special Collections.

¹⁶⁸ Williams to Johns, August 30, 1929. *Pagany* Archives, University of Delaware Special Collections.

¹⁶⁹ Williams to Johns, October 24, 1929. *Pagany* Archives, University of Delaware Special Collections.

case, orange), and prominently featured the magazine's visual mark (a stylized tree growing within a fenced enclosure) designed by Johns' friend Virginia Lee Burton, and a complete list of the magazine's contributors, with each contributor's name printed in the same size type.

In the announcement which inaugurated the magazine's first issue, Johns offered the following explanation of the title:

Pagus is a broad term, meaning any sort of collection of peoples from the smallest district or village to the country as an inclusive whole. Taking America as *pagus*, any one of us as the *paganus*, the inhabitant, and our conceptions, our agreements and disagreements, our ideas, ideals, whatever we have to articulate is *pagany*, our expression.¹⁷⁰

Throughout its twelve issue run, Johns made only a handful of exceptions to *Pagany's* "Americans only" publication policy.¹⁷¹ In gathering contributors to his new magazine, Johns was also aided and encouraged by a number of other avant-garde publishers and editors, most notably Johns' hometown friend Sherry Mangan, who had edited the recently defunct magazine *Larus*;¹⁷² *Blues* editor Charles Henri Ford;¹⁷³ Gorham Munson, who had edited the expatriate journal *Secession* from 1922-1924 and would later found the Social Credit journal *New Democracy*,¹⁷⁴ and Ezra

¹⁷⁰ *A Return to Pagany*, 50.

¹⁷¹ He printed the prominent English modernist Mary Butts, the French poet and graphic artist Georges Hugnet (through the intervention of Gertrude Stein), Olga Rudge's translation of Jean Cocteau's "Mystère Laïc" (after *Hound & Horn* had failed to publish it in a timely enough fashion for Pound), and Basil Bunting's loose translation of a Horatian ode, "A Cracked Record," though one could argue that this was not strictly an exception to his rule, as Bunting had submitted the poem while living in New York.

¹⁷² Both Mangan and Johns lived in Lynn, Massachusetts and both were the sons of prominent Boston-area professionals with Harvard pedigrees. Mangan's father, John Joseph Mangan, had earned an M.D. from Harvard Medical School and had established a children's clinic in Lynn, and was also an accomplished historian, having written a history of Lynn and a massive biography/psychological portrait of the Dutch humanist theologian Desiderius Erasmus. The younger Mangan had printed a poem by Johns in the final issue of *larus*, and the relationship between the two men was amicable enough that they arranged for *larus's* unfulfilled subscriptions to be absorbed by *Pagany*.

¹⁷³ Ford included advertisements announcing the founding of *Pagany* in several issue of *Blues* and should be credited with connecting Johns to several writers he had published, including Kenneth Rexroth, Erskine Caldwell, Noman Macleod, Parker Tyler, Kathleen Tankersley Young, and Forrest Anderson.

¹⁷⁴ In July 1929, Munson replied to Johns' query about his experiences with *Secession* by sending the names and addresses for eleven potential contributors to the magazine, including Kenneth Burke, Jean Toomer, and Hart Crane. See *A Return to Pagany*, 14-15.

Pound, each of whom encouraged their literary acquaintances and former contributors to consider sending their new work to *Pagany*.

Connection to the “Objectivists”

While neither Johns nor *Pagany* could ever said to have acted as the mouthpiece for a single group or movement, “Objectivist” writers had ready access to the magazine and appeared in nearly every issue. Though Williams had declined Johns’ offer to appear on the magazine’s masthead as an associate editor, the first page of the first issue of the magazine did include a brief manifesto he had written, and throughout the magazine’s run Williams solicited and reviewed contributions from many of his friends and acquaintances, offered occasional editorial suggestions and publishing advice, and regularly contributed his own writing (most notably, his novel *White Mule*, which was written for and serialized by *Pagany*). While Williams interests and editorial suggestions to Johns seemed largely concerned with the short fiction Johns was publishing (he had especial praise for Mary Butts), Williams also put Zukofsky and several others in touch with Johns early enough to have their work included in the first issue.¹⁷⁵

The editorial influence of Williams and Zukofsky can clearly be seen from the very first issue of *Pagany*; the January 1930 issue included poetry by Zukofsky, Rexroth and McAlmon, as well as Williams’ manifesto and a short critical essay on the work of Gertrude Stein. In Williams’ brief manifesto he suggested that “the scientific age is drawing to a close” and that amidst a proliferation of “bizarre derivations,” the mind needed a place to search “for that with which to rehabilitate our thought and our lives.” His proposal was greater fidelity “[t]o the word, a meaning hardly

¹⁷⁵ Zukofsky’s first letter to Johns, indicating that Williams “has suggested that I get in touch with you,” was dated November 7, 1929. University of Delaware Special Collections, MS 110, Box 10, Folder 260.

distinguishable from that of place, in whose great, virtuous and at present little realized potency we hereby manifest our belief,"¹⁷⁶ an idea which he further developed in his essay on the writing of Gertrude Stein published later in the same issue.¹⁷⁷

Immediately after reading the first issue of *Pagany*, Zukofsky wrote to Johns, sharing his praise for the format and subject matter of *Pagany* and submitting an additional seven poems for consideration for future issues, three of which were selected for the second issue of *Pagany*.¹⁷⁸ In addition to Zukofsky's poems, the second issue (April-June 1930) contained Williams' brief story

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in *A Return to Pagany*, 50.

¹⁷⁷ Here, Williams wrote: "How in a democracy, such as the United States, can writing, which has to compete with excellence elsewhere and in other times, remain in the field and be at once objective (true to fact) intellectually searching, subtle and instinct with powerful additions to our lives? It is impossible, without invention of some sort, for the very good reason that observation about us engenders the very opposite of what we seek: triviality, crassness, and intellectual bankruptcy. And yet what we do see can in no way be excluded. Satire and flight are two possibilities but Miss Stein has chosen otherwise. But if one remain in a place and reject satire, what then? To be democratic, local (in the sense of being attached with integrity to actual experience) Stein, or any other artist, must for subtlety ascend to a plane of almost abstract design to keep alive. To writing, then, as an art in itself. Yet what actually impinges on the senses must be rendered as it appears, by use of which, only, and under which, untouched, the significance has to be disclosed. It is one of the major problems of the artist. "Melanctha" is a thrilling clinical record of the life of a colored woman in the present day United States, told with directness and truth. It is without question one of the best bits of characterization produced in America. It is universally admired. This is where Stein began. But for Stein to tell a story of that sort, even with the utmost genius, was not enough under the conditions in which we live, since by the very nature of its composition such a story does violence to the larger scene which would be portrayed. ... The more carefully the drawing is made, the greater the genius involved and the greater the interest that attaches, therefore, to the character as an individual, the more exceptional that character becomes in the mind of the reader and the less typical of the scene. ... Truly, the world is full of emotion — more or less — but it is caught in bewilderment to a far more important degree. And the purpose of art, so far as it has any, is not at least to copy that, but lies in the resolution of difficulties to its own comprehensive organization of materials. And by so doing, in this case, rather than by copying, it takes its place as *most* human. To deal with Melanctha, with characters of whomever it may be, the modern Dickens, is *not* therefore human. To write like that is not, in the artist, to be human at all, since nothing is resolved, nothing is done to resolve the bewilderment which makes of emotion an inanity. That, is to overlook the gross instigation and with all subtlety to examine the object minutely for "the truth" — which if there is anything more commonly practised or more stupid, I have yet to come upon it. To be most useful to humanity, or to anything else for that matter, an art, writing, must stay art, not seeking to be science, philosophy, history, the humanities, or anything else it has been made to carry in the past." (Quoted in *A Return to Pagany*, 58-59.)

¹⁷⁸ In a letter dated January 8, 1930, Zukofsky wrote: "The format seems to me excellent: quite the proper thickness, and the matter being honest — to say the least — what else is there to say." (University of Delaware Special Collections, MS 110, Box 10, Folder 260).

“Four Bottles of Beer.” Williams, who wrote Johns with his private criticism of each of the early issues, wrote of this issue:

It’s awfully hard to know what to say to you. You’ve a hell of a hard row to hoe. People like Parker Tyler and the Blues people generally seem to have a legitimate kick when they see you presenting an unorganized front to the world. They would want you to be extreme-left or nothing. And they are right – from their viewpoint. Tyler wrote me a hot letter last week asking me if I was the one responsible for the acceptance of so much bad stuff by *Pagany*. I replied, in self defence, that I had nothing to do with the issue in question save that I had previously passed on a few of the things which were included. I agreed with him that several bits were especially poor, the Evelyn Scott poem for instance but that I could not agree with him that you are “a faker”.

What further I said to him is what I say to you now: that *Pagany* is and must be a miscellany, a true, even a realistic picture of the rather shabby spectacle America still makes from the writers viewpoint. ... It’s a time just now – as you know – of Symposiums, of Hound & Horn meticulousness and of a searching generally for an intelligent viewpoint in those things which concern us. The successes in this quest have been slight. *Pagany* seems not to be taking any stand at all. Well, it is better than some of the stands that have been taken.

... Norman Macleod, not so good. Vogel, only moderately good this time, but always interesting. As you know I highly prize whatever Louis Zukofsky does. I think his poem the best in the issue if not the best – oh well.¹⁷⁹

In subsequent letters Williams promoted the work of his friends McAlmon and Carnevali and told Johns in early June that “Louis Zukofsky has a swell essay on the American phase of the modernists in poetry, what they have said and done. It is rather prejudiced in my favor but it is good. Why not write asking him to let you see it?”¹⁸⁰ Although Zukofsky sent Johns some of his critical writing, *Pagany* never included any of Zukofsky’s prose.

After the second issue of *Pagany* appeared, Zukofsky also began sending more of his work as well as that of other friends and acquaintances. On April 15, 1930, Zukofsky informed Johns shortly thereafter that he had recently seen Charles Reznikoff and hoped to have some of his work to share

¹⁷⁹ Williams to Johns, May 1, 1930. University of Delaware Special Collections.

¹⁸⁰ Williams to Johns, June 5, 1930. University of Delaware Special Collections.

with Johns soon; by mid-July 1930, Johns had reviewed and accepted these submissions.¹⁸¹ In October 1930, Zukofsky asked Johns to write a letter in support of his Guggenheim Fellowship application, and in early November, Zukofsky informed Johns that he would be editing an issue of *Poetry* magazine and asked to see any of Johns' own work he wanted considered for inclusion therein. Johns duly complied and Zukofsky replied on November 17, indicating his interest in Johns' poem "The Sphinx" and asking for his assent to some editorial pruning. Johns and Zukofsky exchanged several additional letters before a final version of "The Sphinx" satisfied both the author and its editor, with this poem eventually being included in the February 1931 issue of *Poetry*. "The Sphinx" was dedicated to Williams and depicts the older poet happily building and destroying sand sculptures on a beach vacation with his family.¹⁸²

Johns was also instrumental in encouraging Williams to work in earnest on *White Mule*, his first attempt at pure fiction. The first chapter of the novel appeared in the third issue of *Pagany* (July-September 1930), and Johns printed future chapters of the book in serial form as quickly as Williams was able to produce them, ceasing only when the magazine folded. Apart from the first chapter of *White Mule* and a short story by McAlmon, the third issue also included poems published by Williams' friend Emanuel Carnevali. The fourth issue of the magazine (October-December 1930) included another poem from Carnevali; two short Williams poems: "Flowers by the Sea" and "Sea-

¹⁸¹ Zukofsky wrote to Johns on July 19, 1930, telling him "I am glad you are keeping the Reznikoff poems," sharing Reznikoff's Bronx address and encouraging him Johns to get in touch with him directly.

¹⁸² The events described in Johns' poem took place at Good Harbor Beach during an eight day vacation the Williams family had taken with Johns and his girlfriend Eleanor to East Gloucester, Massachusetts in late summer 1930. Williams describes the trip briefly in a September 9, 1930 letter to Zukofsky included in *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 70, and Johns also described the episode in a brief prose story, "Figure," which he published in the April-June 1931 issue of *Pagany*.

Trout and Butterfish”; Zukofsky’s “For a Thing By Bach”; and Charles Reznikoff’s poem “The English in Virginia, April 1607.”

Late in 1930, Johns decided to relocate *Pagany* from the one-room apartment he had occupied in Boston to a new apartment/office at 9 Gramercy Park in Manhattan; he had completed this move by December 1930. Johns’ relocation to New York City gave him access to an expanded circle of writers and literary figures, including both Williams and (following his return to New York City after his brief stint at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) Zukofsky. Sometime late in 1930, Zukofsky also forwarded some of Rakosi’s work to Johns, just as he had done with Reznikoff, and Zukofsky and Johns met for the first time in person when Zukofsky returned to New York City from Madison during the winter break.¹⁸³ In a letter dated December 31, 1930, Zukofsky expressed his pleasure at Johns’ accepting some of Rakosi’s work and gave Johns postal addresses for both Rakosi (Callman Rawley) and Kenneth Rexroth.¹⁸⁴ Sometime early in 1931 Johns had hosted a dinner party for Basil Bunting at Lou and Bill Chapman’s home in Bethel, Connecticut, which Williams and possibly Zukofsky attended.

After learning from Zukofsky that Johns had accepted some of his poems for publication, Rakosi wrote Johns almost immediately, offering newer revisions and asking to see a copy of the magazine. In his very next letter, undated but almost certainly written in early 1931, Rakosi asked Johns about the magazine’s price and expressed a desire to see back numbers of the magazine, in particular any previous “numbers in which the work of Pound, Williams, Reznikoff, and Zukofsky

¹⁸³ Zukofsky references their meeting in a February 1931 letter to Pound, stating that Johns was “very quiet when I saw him in N.Y. this Xmas—said he wd. do at least a second year of *Pagany*” (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 92).

¹⁸⁴ Rexroth was apparently a regular visitor to Johns’ office at Gramercy Park during the short time Rexroth was in New York City, where Rexroth frequently helped Johns arrange type and otherwise assist in production and pre-publication work (*A Return to Pagany*, 275-278).

have appeared.”¹⁸⁵ Rakosi’s request here is particularly interesting since it gives a very clear indication that Rakosi at least had some sense of his involvement with something like a group *prior* to the appearance of the “OBJECTIVISTS” 1931 issue of *Poetry*, and had formed this affinity despite being located in Texas, hundreds of miles from the other writers listed.

The first issue of the second volume (published in January 1931) included another installment of Williams’ *White Mule*, a poem by McAlmon and four from Zukofsky, and a rambling review and critique of *Pagany*’s first year by Ezra Pound. Rakosi made his first appearance in *Pagany* in the April-June 1931 number, which included three of his poems along with Reznikoff’s “A Group of Verse,” Zukofsky’s “Blue Light,” a poem by Howard Weeks, and another installment of Williams’ *White Mule*. In addition to sending Johns his own work, Zukofsky continued sending Johns manuscripts by others of his acquaintances, forwarding work by R. B. N. Warriston to Johns in March and Frances Fletcher in September. In June 1931, Zukofsky returned to New York City following a year in Madison, Wisconsin and expressed his eagerness to meet again with Johns in person and in September 1931 he asked Johns to send along any of his own work and any work by previously unpublished authors he wished to have considered for inclusion in the “Objectivists” anthology Zukofsky was then preparing.

The July-September 1931 issue of *Pagany* included three of Pound’s Cantos, four poems by Norman Macleod, Basil Bunting’s “A Cracked Record,” Rakosi’s “The Founding of New Hampshire,” and a further chapter of *White Mule*. *Pagany*’s fourth and final 1931 issue continued to display heavy “Objectivist” sympathies, as it contained a new chapter from Williams’ *White Mule*, a story by McAlmon, two poems by Norman MacLeod, single poems by Zukofsky and Carnevali, and

¹⁸⁵ Undated letter to Richard Johns. Archive of *Pagany*, 1925-1970 (Box 8, Folder 188), University of Delaware Library Special Collections.

three new poems by Carl Rakosi. The January-March 1932 issue of *Pagany* featured six poems by Norman Macleod, three from Carl Rakosi, another *White Mule* chapter, and a new story from McAlmon. By the end of the year, however, Williams and Zukofsky had once again found another venue that they felt would be even more hospitable for their work, as Williams had begun to plan the resumption of his own magazine, called *Contact*.

By late 1931, Johns appears to have gotten wind of Williams plans, as Williams wrote to him on November 24, admitting:

Who in hell told you I was editing a quarterly? I am. No competition with you tho' but a more or less special case. I'm at your service as long as you shall want me. ... You talked as tho' you felt that I had been holding something out on you. S a lot of crap to talk that way. You you [sic] self told me you didn't want a thing of mine other than *White Mule* so long as that was issuing. Hell, I can't close myself down that way. Not that I have any original work in the first issue of this new bleat; I haven't. But it gives me paper. What a damn fool I am to have taken it up. We'll see how you like it.¹⁸⁶

Williams' sensitivity to what likely felt to Johns like a potentially competitive move can also be seen in another letter he sent in early January, 1932:

I wish I could sit down and finish *White Mule*. I have never enjoyed writing anything more. But since you are willing to go on taking the bits as they come I'm not going to rush it. It is a real pleasure to me that you are pleased because I am writing it for you.

The last *Pagany* shows the results of your experience in publication during the last two years, it is uniformly excellent reading from beginning to end. I have read the last issue particularly carefully inasmuch as I want all the help I can get in making up *Contact*. The only result of my cogitations so far has been an appreciation of your work. But *C.* will not have the general reading appeal that you have sought. In the first place I will not be able to use so much material and in the second I want to bear down more than you have cared on the significance of the word, as material. One feature of *C.* will be my own Comments. Perhaps this is sheer vanity. I dunno. But it is my purpose for all that and the thing that has made me want to take the trouble to go on – and to give up the time. I want to speak of *Pagany* (sooner or later) as the result of effective good taste in selecting material the hide bound minds of present day publishers have muffed. But *Contact*, rightly or wrongly, is more

¹⁸⁶ Williams to Johns, November 24, 1931. University of Delaware Special Collections.

narrowly aimed. Perhaps that will be what's the matter with it. Anyhow it is half printed and will be out by the end of the month – as it looks now.¹⁸⁷

Whatever his reassurances meant to Johns, the reemergence of a Williams-edited *Contact* and the emergence of their collaborative book publishing ventures combined to siphon off most of Johns' "Objectivist" contributors. Apart from regular installments of Williams' *White Mule*, the only work from "Objectivist" writers to appear in the final three 1932 issues of *Pagany* was the first section of Zukofsky's "A," which Johns included in the July-September issue, a handful of poems by Norman Macleod and a single poem by Harry Roskolenko.¹⁸⁸

Williams' withdrawal from offering active editorial advice on poetry submissions also coincided with the death of Johns' father (and benefactor) Benjamin Johnson in February 1932. The disposition of his father's estate dramatically reduced Johns' source of financial support and contributed significantly to the demise of *Pagany*. While Johns' magazine did publish fiction and poetry by an extraordinary array of significant American writers, like many of the little mags of its era, *Pagany* had never been a commercial success. In part, Johns was hampered by poor timing. Black Tuesday (October 29, 1929) took place just as Johns was finalizing his first issue, and resulted in the immediate loss of all his major advertisers (more than half a dozen prominent Boston businesses had taken out paying ads in the first issue). Johns paid contributors fairly generous sums: \$3 / page for prose and a minimum of \$3 for a half-page poem, but the loss of advertising revenue when combined with the usual lack of subscribers and dwindling sales from bookshops meant that Johns was never able to make *Pagany* a profitable enterprise, no matter its literary quality. In the face of increasing debts and diminished prospects of continued subsidy from family funds, Johns ceased

¹⁸⁷ Williams to Johns, January 6, 1932. University of Delaware Special Collections.

¹⁸⁸ Zukofsky had been discussing the possibility of publishing selections from "A" as early as October 1930, when he first mentioned the project to Johns in a letter.

publication of *Pagany* following the belated appearance of the magazine's twelfth issue in February 1933.

In 1934, Johns married Veronica Parker, with whom he collaborated on a series of mystery novels. Johns later moved to Cuttingsville, Vermont and devoted himself to photography and horticulture. In 1969, Johns collaborated with Stephen Halpert to produce [*A Return to Pagany*](#), which includes a wealth of documentary information related to the magazine. The full archives for the magazine, including extensive correspondence between Johns, Williams, and Zukofsky are held in the [University of Delaware's Special Collections](#).

Pagany provided an important and congenial outlet for the work of Zukofsky and other "Objectivists." When it came to the poetry he published in *Pagany* from 1930 through early 1932, Johns' editorial decisions were clearly influenced by the views of Williams and Zukofsky, and the community fostered by *Pagany* may have also had some influence on the editorial choices Zukofsky made when selecting the contributors he included in his issue of *Poetry*; no other little magazine had a greater overlap of contributors as did *Pagany*.

This relationship, however, has been largely neglected and poorly described in the scholarly literature to date. For example, in her "Barbed-Wire Entanglements: The "New American Poetry," 1930-1932," Marjorie Perloff sought to explore what she called Zukofsky's "'Objectivist' experiment" through a closer examination of Johns' magazine. While Perloff's effort is notable in the degree of attention it pays to understanding Zukofsky and the other "Objectivists" in relation to a little magazine of the era, she gets a number of important facts wrong, claiming for example that "In his capacity as informal poetry advisor, moreover, Zukofsky evidently persuaded Johns to publish poems by his "Objectivist" friends Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, and Basil

Bunting, by Kenneth Rexroth and Yvor Winters, Mary Butts and Mina Loy.”¹⁸⁹ Firstly, Johns never printed any work by Oppen; nor did Zukofsky (or anyone else) ever publish or describe Loy as an “Objectivist.” More glaringly, it is strange indeed to imagine as plausible the suggestion that Mary Butts and Yvor Winters’ appearance in *Pagany* might be attributable to Zukofsky’s editorial persuasion; in the first place, both Butts and Winters had work included in the inaugural issue of *Pagany*, well before Zukofsky’s editorial influence on Johns had been established, and in the second place, Winters and Zukofsky were not on friendly terms, with the two men engaging in a vicious public spat in the pages of *The Hound & Horn* just a few years later.¹⁹⁰

Apart from questions of editorial influence, there is no disputing that Johns was a significant figure both personally and creatively for Williams in the early 1930s. Johns’ encouragement and the outlet provided by *Pagany* were largely responsible for Williams trying his hand at fiction, and Johns’ magazine provided the initial platform for Williams’ novel *White Mule*, and can thus be seen as indirectly responsible for the novel’s two sequels: *In the Money* (1940) and *The Build-Up* (1952).

Williams admitted as much himself in a gracious letter he wrote to Johns in June 1937 just after New Directions had published *White Mule* in full:

These are orders for you not to buy *White Mule*. As you may know it was released by Laughlin June 10 and has received a very good break from the reviewers, so much so that it looks like a winner. If it turns out to be a big success I want you to realize that I realize the important part you have played in the matter from the first. Without your early appreciation and most generous backing it might never have been written. Your critical acumen in suggesting that I leave out another complicating element in the story is also appreciated by

¹⁸⁹ “Barbed-Wire Entanglements: The ‘New American Poetry,’ 1930-1932,” *Modernism/Modernity* 2:1 (January 1995), 148. This essay was also included in Perloff’s 2004 book, *Poetry On and Off the Page*.

¹⁹⁰ Johns’ letters to Zukofsky do not appear to have survived, but the correspondence from Zukofsky to Johns contained in the *Pagany* archive, which Perloff concedes in a footnote that she did not herself consult, includes only a single, brief handwritten note from Zukofsky to Johns written prior to the publication of the first issue of *Pagany*. Furthermore, Zukofsky wrote to Johns in September 1931 asking Johns for Mary Butts and Mina Loy’s addresses, hardly something he would have done had he been sending their work on to Johns.

me. Therefore, Mr. Richard Johns, it will give me the greatest pleasure in the world to send to you (as soon as I get it) the first presentation copy of the book outside of my immediate family—and good luck to you. In just a few days you'll have the book. It's well made. I wish I could present it in person.¹⁹¹

Contact

Years in operation: 1920-1921, 1923 [first run, 5 issues]; 1932 [second run, 3 issues]

Editors: William Carlos Williams, Robert McAlmon [1920-1921], Monroe Wheeler [1923], Nathanael West [1932]

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Robert McAlmon, Parker Tyler

In 1920, shortly after the then 25 year old Robert McAlmon had arrived in New York City, he met the then 37 year old William Carlos Williams at a party hosted by the anarchist poet Lola Ridge. The two men quickly became friends, and before long, joint publishers of a little magazine, which they called *Contact*. Between December 1920 and the summer of 1921, when McAlmon left for Paris, McAlmon and Williams published four issues of *Contact*, and in June 1923, Williams published the fifth and final issue of *Contact*'s first run with assistance from Monroe Wheeler.¹⁹² For most of its first run, *Contact* was a homely, homespun affair with a quite limited range. While its circulation never rose above 200 copies, *Contact* did provide an early outlet for Williams to develop and air his idiosyncratic views about the possibilities for a modern American literature rooted both in vernacular speech and a distinctly American locality.

In February 1921, McAlmon entered into a marriage of convenience with Bryher (Annie Winifred Glover), the daughter of Sir John Ellerman, one of the wealthiest men in Britain.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Quoted in *A Return to Paganry*, 512.

¹⁹² The initial run of *Contact* can be read here: ([pdf](#)).

¹⁹³ Bryher proposed to McAlmon on Valentine's Day (during tea at a New York City hotel), and they married later the same day at the New York City Hall. McAlmon described their marriage in a letter to Williams as “legal only, unromantic, and strictly an agreement. Bryher could not travel and be away from home, unmarried. It was difficult being in Greece and other wilder places without a man. She thought I understood her mind, as I do somewhat and faced me

Following their marriage, McAlmon and Bryher moved to London (which McAlmon hated) and then to Paris, where McAlmon used his father-in-law's wealth to found the Contact Publishing Company and the Contact Editions imprint, publishing work by a range of significant modernist writers, including his wife Bryher (Annie Ellerman), Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Williams and himself.¹⁹⁴

Following closely on the heels of Zukofsky's "Objectivists" issue of *Poetry*, Williams was persuaded, late in 1931, to resurrect *Contact* as a quarterly magazine (subtitled "An American Quarterly Review"). The impetus (and funding) for the magazine's revival was provided by Sally and Martin Kamin and David Moss, ambitious but inexperienced publishers who earlier in the year had also resuscitated McAlmon's Contact Editions imprint to publish Nathanael ["Pep"] West's novel *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* in New York City. Williams was listed as the magazine's editor, and while both Robert McAlmon and Nathanael West were listed as "associate editors" on the masthead, McAlmon was not involved in the actual editing and publishing of the second run of the magazine, though he did contribute writing.

Though Williams' involvement with the magazine had been accompanied by a surge of excitement, he began to express doubts about his involvement almost immediately, confessing to Zukofsky just a week after he had relayed details about the planned contents of the magazine's first issue in November 1931 that "Were it not for Reznikoff's thing [The prose piece published in the

with the proposition. Some other things I shan't mention I knew without realizing" (*The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, 219). This last sentence appears to be an allusion to Bryher's lesbianism; she had been involved for some time in a romantic relationship with H.D. Involving herself in a traditional heterosexual marriage, Bryher felt, would protect both her and H.D. from unwanted accusations of impropriety or worse.

¹⁹⁴ For a good description of Bryher/Ellerman's and McAlmon's relationship, see Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, especially pp. 357-362.

first two issues as “My Country ‘Tis of Thee”] I’d quit the Kamin quarterly at once, as is I’m holding on only long enough to see if I can put over the first issue. Maybe I won’t even last as long as that. The more I think of it the more certain I become that it’s the wrong lead for me.”¹⁹⁵ Williams’ ambivalence is made even more plain in another letter written a few days later in which he equivocated: “And perhaps after all I am going on with Contact – I dunno for sure yet. It’s like the weather,” before ultimately writing “yes, I’m going on with it.” by hand between the two sentences.¹⁹⁶

By December 1931, Williams was once again working on preparing the final set of manuscripts, ultimately cutting Reznikoff’s original “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” manuscript in half, within a plan to print the second part in a subsequent issue. After several printing delays, the first issue of *Contact*’s second run appeared in February 1932.

Like *Pagany*, *Contact* carried very little criticism and primarily printed poetry and short stories, announcing on the editorial page of the first issue its intention to “attempt to cut a trail through the American jungle without the use of a European compass.” Of the work included in this issue, Williams was most enthusiastic about Charles Reznikoff’s “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” a long prose account derived from old legal records which Zukofsky had recommended to him,¹⁹⁷ but the issue also featured McAlmon’s story “It’s All Very Complicated,” and two poems by Zukofsky (“Ferry” and “Madison, Wis. Remembering the Bloom of Monticello”), and Parker Tyler’s “Idiot of Love.” In addition to this work by his “Objectivist” peers, Williams also published three of his own prose pieces in the issue: an editorial (“Comment”), a remembrance of African-American women he had

¹⁹⁵ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 111.

¹⁹⁶ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 113.

¹⁹⁷ See his letters to Zukofsky in *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 105-111.

known (“The Colored Girls of Passenack — Old and New”) and a brief account of small magazines (“The Advance Guard Magazine”).

Williams’ “Comment,” which led off the magazine, offered a pugnacious and misanthropic defense of non-instrumental writing, anticipating his later, more famous declaration in “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower” that “It is difficult / to get the news from poems/ yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there,” by first asking “what in the world is writing good for anyway?” and then asserting that “the underlying significance of all writing which is the writing itself”.¹⁹⁸

Put to its full use writing has nothing to convey, either pungently or crassly; it is neither stream-of-consciousness or bare-bitter-truth, has nothing to do with truth but is true or not as the case may be, a pleasure of the imagination. But the moment we are cheated by an impost, “literature” among the rest, we sense it and our pleasure falls.

You might say: People are in distress the world over, writing will not relieve them (or make them worse’ off). Why not take the money there is for a magazine like this and give it away—as food—to the bums, for instance living in packing cases over near the East River these winter nights?

But what makes you think money has any value? there’s food enough rotting now in the world, even within sight of the place where these men’ are hanging out, to feed them every day in the year. Money has nothing to do with it. Bad writing has though: it’s the same sort of stupidity.

What in the world good are we any of us anyhow—except hypothetically, a pure question of the imagination? What difference would it make if any or all of us die tomorrow? It would be a blessed relief if most of us did, promptly, and left the rest room—There’s no sense in slobbering at the mouth over humanity and writing that way: We die every day, cheated—and with written promises of great good in our hands. To plead, a social cause, to split a theory, to cry out at the evil which we all partake of—gladly; that’s not writing.

The words themselves must stand and fall as men. A writer has no use for theories or propaganda, he has use for but one thing; the word that is possessing him at the moment he writes. Into that focus he must pour all he feels and has to say, as a writer, regardless of

¹⁹⁸ “Comment,” 7.

anything that may come of it. By word after word his meaning will then have been made clear.

A magazine without opinions or criteria other than words moulded by the impacts of experience (not for the depths of experience they speak of but the fulfillment of experience which they are) such a magazine would be timely to a period such as this. It can never be a question of its being read by a million or by anybody, in fact. Value for value our minds are justified when we can place over against those who are enjoying or failing beside us, words—that cannot be eaten or made into cloth or built into a roof to shelter them, but which have-been nevertheless subject to the same rigors which they suffer and the same joys which they were born out of their mothers' bellies 'to share.

Good writing stands by humanity in its joys and sorrows because under all it is—and just because it is—so many words.¹⁹⁹

It's a curious way to start a new magazine in the depths of the Great Depression, and Williams' defiant unwillingness to encourage ideological propaganda is heightened by the opening lines of the poem which immediately followed his "Comment," e. e. cummings': "let's start a magazine / to hell with literature / we want something redblooded // lousy with pure / reeking with stark / and fearlessly obscene // but really clean / get what I mean / let's not spoil it / let's make it serious // something authentic and delirious / you know something genuine like a mark / in a toilet."²⁰⁰

Williams' essay on "The Advance Guard Magazine" is also of particular interest, both because it immediately preceded the first installment of David Moss' very detailed bibliography of little magazines published in American since 1900 and because gave a brief account of Williams' perception of the history of little magazines over the past two decades. After summarizing the rise and fall of several magazines, Williams concluded:

In all, the "small magazine" must, in its many phases, be taken as one expression. It represents the originality of our generation thoroughly free of an economic burden.

¹⁹⁹ "Comment," 8-9.

²⁰⁰ "Four Poems," 10.

Technically many excellent services to writing have been accomplished. Nothing could be more useful to the present day writer, the alert critic than to read and re-read the actual work produced by those who have made the “small magazine” during the past thirty years.²⁰¹

Williams had been displeased at several points with printing delays leading up to the magazine’s appearance, and was unhappy with the final product once the magazine was printed, writing to Zukofsky in mid-March 1932: “Yes Contact is out – down and out in so far as I am concerned: the first issue is the cheapest sort of a subterfuge for good faith in carrying out an agreement.” Zukofsky’s response to the issue echoed this disappointment: “Lowenthal brought his copy of Contact around the other day to show me. Moskowitz & Kaminsky’s job sure looks poor. They space my first poem wrong, & there are misprints in both,” but tempers his concern somewhat by continuing to enquire about the possibility of publication in future issues: “What about the second issue? All made up? Or could you use the preface to *An “Objectivists” Anthology* I once read to you in Grey’s restaurant? Or Movements 1, 5, and 6, or any one of em, of “A”? Or is Number 2 not coming out?” In response to Zukofsky’s query about whether there would even be a second issue, Williams replied “I don’t think I’ll use anything of yours in the next issue – if there is one. But if the second, or next, issue shows any kind of improvement over number 1 then– I’ll use your new Cantos of A in the third // At present I am holding back the material for no 2 until I have some assurance that I shall not be disgraced again.”²⁰²

Williams continued to express ambivalence about his editorial involvement in letters to Zukofsky, but told him in early June 1932 that while he “var[ied] from disgust to confidence ... the damned thing seems to have a root.”²⁰³ The root had taken strong enough hold in Williams that a

²⁰¹ “The Advance Guard Magazine,” *Contact* 2.1 (February 1932), 89-90.

²⁰² To read the full exchange in context, see *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 124-126.

²⁰³ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 129.

second issue of *Contact* (dated May 1932 on its title page) was published in late June. This issue featured another McAlmon story, entitled “Mexican Interval,” two poems and an editorial comment from Williams, and the second part of Reznikoff’s “My Country ‘Tis Of Thee,” complete with set of nineteenth century illustrations featuring depictions of “Oratorical and Poetical Gestures” and “Simple Bodily Pain,” “Love,” “Gratitude,” and “Simple Laughter” which Williams had inserted into the text.²⁰⁴ Williams’ editorial comment was brief but direct, calling for an approach to poetry that bore a number of similarities to what Zukofsky had called for in his “Objectivist” prose statements in *Poetry*:

In only one thing have we grounds for belief: the multiple object of our life itself.

When we are forced by a fact (a Boston, a Chicago even—provided we avoid sentimentality) it can save us from insanity, even though we do no more than photograph.

Eye to eye with some of the figure of our country and epoch, truthfully—avoiding science and philosophy—relying on our well-schooled sense, we can at least begin to pick up the essentials of a meaning.

This primitive and actual America—must sober us. From it revealing aspects of what might be an understanding may be seized for the building of our projects.

There is nothing to help us but ourselves. If we cannot find virtue in the object of our lives, then for us there is none anywhere. We won’t solve or discover by using “profound” (and borrowed) symbolism. Reveal the object. By that we touch authentically the profundity of its attachments—if we are able. But able or otherwise there is no other way for us.

But always, at this point, some black idiot cries out, “Regionalism”! Good God, is there no intelligence left on earth. Shall we never differentiate the regional in letters from the objective immediacy of our hand to mouth, eye to brain existence?

²⁰⁴ Williams wrote to Zukofsky on July 4, 1932: “You’ll see that we’ve taken liberties with Reznikoff’s contribution. If you should hear from him I’d like to know what he says. And I’d appreciate your own reaction. The cuts are from a book of about the time the incidents in his collect occurred and do set off his findings rather nicely – in my opinion. If he wants to use the cuts in his book as it will later appear I’ll be glad to let him have them. I hope at least that he will not take exception to what I have done.” A few weeks later Zukofsky replied indicating that while he hadn’t seen Reznikoff, he “seemed pleased in a letter” (*The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 131-132).

Take verse: Certainly by inversion and cliché, bad observation and pig-headedness, we can somehow make verse look something “like” the classic. Without violence to our language, we cannot imitate those models and have what we do, anything but imitation.

But clinging first to the vernacular, we simply cannot turn out slick, clipped verses today and have them include anything of the breadth, depth, scope that we feel and know to be our lives. It is impossible; no mold has as yet been made to receive that much.

We can only, holding firm to the vernacular, seek that difficult form which cannot be an imitation, but is the new of our imperative requisites.

Writing is our craft calling for unending exertions. It needs an eye, a mind, the clean drive of inspiration—but work, work, work. Language is our concern. In revealing the character of an object, it must adapt itself to the truth of our senses. Cliches must disappear; the simple, profound difficulties of our art then become clear to us. It is to represent what is before us that dead stylisms disappear. Hard down on it—laboring to catch the structure of the thing, language must be moulded.

By this we are able to learn from the thing itself the ways of its own most profound implications, as all artists, everywhere, must be doing.²⁰⁵

Though Williams was more pleased with the printing of this second issue, he recognized that the magazine’s production costs exceeded what it could realistically hope to recoup in sales, and remained frustrated with the editorial duties, writing to Zukofsky in late July that he was “next to hopeless about *Contact*. a dull chore – not enough good work or too much. I can’t tell which: a quarterly can’t be just amusing, must be weighted – if to be excused.” Williams confided in his next letter to Zukofsky that “I have gently told Kamin that after this year there will be no *Contact* (in all probability) for little Willie.”²⁰⁶

Williams was serious about his discontent, and contributed to just one more issue of the magazine, resigning as an editor late in 1932. The third and final issue (October 1932) contained McAlmon’s poem “Farewell to Alamos,” two poems each by Carl Rakosi (published under the joint title “African Theme, Needlework, Etc.”) and Louis Zukofsky (“Song 9” and “Song 10”), Williams’

²⁰⁵ “Comment,” 109-110.

²⁰⁶ *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 133, 135.

story “For Bill Bird,” and a brief editorial comment by Williams responding to T. S. Eliot’s recent appointment at Harvard:

There is a heresy, regarding the general character of poetry, which has become widely prevalent today and may shortly become more so through academic fostering: it is, that poetry increases in virtue as it is removed from contact with a vulgar world.

I cannot swallow the half-alive poetry which knows nothing of totality.

It is one of the reasons to welcome communism. Never may it be said, has there ever been great poetry that was not born out of a communist intelligence. ... It is also one with the imagination. It will not down nor speak its piece to please, not even to please “communism”.

Nothing is beyond poetry. It is the one solid element on which our lives can rely, the “word” of so many disguises, including as it does man’s full consciousness, high and low, in living objectivity.

It is, in its rare major form, a world in fact come to an arrest of self realization: that eternity of the present which most stumble over in seeking ...

Before anything else it is the denial of postponement. If poetry fails it fails at the moment since it has not been able enough to grasp the full significance of its day. And every school which seeks to seclude itself and build up a glamour of scholarship or whatever it may be, a mist, that is, behind which to hide, does so in order to impose itself rather shabbily on whatever intelligence it seeks most to please.²⁰⁷

It appears from Williams’ and Zukofsky’s correspondence that there were initially plans to bring out a fourth issue of *Contact* (to complete the series) under the editorship of a “group” – proletarian in feeling,” for which Zukofsky had submitted two poems each by himself and by Oppen.²⁰⁸ The mooted fourth issue never appeared, however, and *Contact* folded following the

²⁰⁷ “Comment,” 131-132.

²⁰⁸ Williams’ wrote to Zukofsky on December 15, 1932: “Nope! I’m out, completely out – so am returning the poems herewith. The one about the sink is the best to my taste and an excellent composition, perhaps you’d care to send it to “Contact #4” directly,” and returned Oppen’s submission courtesy of Zukofsky in February 1933. In the same letter, he told Zukofsky that he had declined James Leippert’s offer to serve as associate editor of his planned magazine *The Lion and Crown*, telling Zukofsky: “No sir, not twice in the same trap.” See *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky*, 145-146.

resignation of Williams and West, its other principal editor, who left New York to pursue a screenwriting career in Los Angeles.²⁰⁹

The New Review

Years in operation: 1931-1932 [6 issues]

Editor: Samuel Putnam

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert McAlmon, Norman Macleod, Parker Tyler, Forrest Anderson, Emanuel Carnevali

Samuel Putnam was a journalist and literary translator who had moved to Paris from Chicago with his wife and young son in 1927 and established himself in the literary and artistic scene among the many expatriates then gathered in Montparnasse on Paris’ famed left bank. While reviewing art and literature for Chicago’s *Evening Post* earlier in the decade Putnam had begun a correspondence with Ezra Pound, and the two men met and continued their correspondence following Putnam’s move to Paris.²¹⁰ It was Putnam, in fact, who helped Pound find an American publisher, in the form of Putnam’s employer Pascal Covici, for Pound’s magazine *The Exile* after the

²⁰⁹ Scans of much of the second run of *Contact* can be viewed here: ([pdf](#)). For more on McAlmon and Williams’ involvement with *Contact*, see Paul Mariani’s *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*, 174-186 (the first run), and 319-339 (the second run).

²¹⁰ In his memoirs, written while Pound was preparing to stand trial for treason, Putnam wrote “my most vivid personal impression of Ezra will perhaps remain that of his broad-seeming shoulders filling the doorway of my Montparnasse apartment, his Byronic shirt, his fawn-colored beard,” and noted that “upon meeting Ezra in person, I was rather agreeably surprised. He was not at all the contentious individual I was prepared to encounter, but gentle-mannered, pleasant, not in the least snobbish, and seemingly always eager to oblige, to render any service that he could. . . . His bellicosity, so far as I could observe, showed rather in his correspondence than in personal contact. He impressed me as being extremely democratic as far as social position went; if he was in any way an aristocrat or a snob, it was with respect to artistic ability and achievement; all he asked of anyone, writer, editor, bookseller, or whoever it might be, was intelligence, competence, integrity, a sincere devotion to the arts (*Paris Was Our Mistress*, 141, 149).

first issue had proven exceptionally difficult to import to the United States, and Pound included a brief letter from Putnam in the fourth and final issue of *The Exile* in 1928.²¹¹

In January 1931, shortly after leaving an editorial position with Edward T'itus' magazine *This Quarter*, Putnam established his own bi-monthly magazine, *The New Review*. In its inaugural issue, Putnam announced the magazine as "An international notebook for the arts, published from Paris," and included an editorial statement on the inside of its front cover announcing that the magazine would be

the organ of no school or movement. It has, however, a very definite program, and a trend which will become apparent as the successive numbers appear. Its purpose is an international *reportage* for the arts, the higher journalism of ideas. Its character will, therefore, be largely critical, but in something more than the book-reviewer's sense of the term. The editors believe that there is a need for such a magazine at the present moment; they believe it may prove of value to the creator.

THE NEW REVIEW will devote particular attention to the modern arts, such as photography, the cinema, sound and talking films, phonograph records, radio, etc.

The first issue listed Ezra Pound, Maxwell Bodenheim, and Richard Thoma as associate editors and named two contributing editors: George Antheil, for music, and George Reavey, for Russia. It was likely Pound's affiliation with this new publication that empowered him to decisively cut off relations with Kirstein and *The Hound & Horn* as and when he did, since he appears to have

²¹¹ In Putnam's memoirs, he writes: "Our acquaintance had begun by correspondence some years before, while I was still in Chicago. Like Mencken, Aldington, and others, Pound had been attracted by my battles in print with the local intelligentsia. When the late Keith Preston had attacked Aldington's poems, for example, I had come to the defense of the British Imagist, who had written me a letter of appreciation; and it was some of the things I had said about Miss Monroe's Poetry that led Pound to start sending me his "Harriet bitched me" letters. He had launched his magazine, the *Exile*, from Rapallo, but was having a hard time making a go of it; and so I suggested to him and to Pascal Covici that the latter take over the publication and put it out from Chicago, which was done. From Pound's study in Rapallo to that loft in South Wabash Avenue was quite a span, but this was typical of the kind of thing that was taking place in the Anglo-American literary world of that period" (*Paris Was Our Mistress*, 140-141).

believed that Putnam and *The New Review* would prove more a tractable outlet for his editorial judgment. Although the first issue included “After Election,” an assortment of Pound’s thoughts on a variety of critical and political questions, Pound’s influence on Putnam’s magazine was more readily apparent in the magazine’s second issue. The second issue (May-June-July 1931) added a Latin subtitle to the magazine “Semper Africa Nova Aliquid Apportat” (*Africa always brings some fresh news or Africa always produces something novel*)²¹² and listed three new contributing editors: Hilaire Hiler (for painting), Alfred Perles (for Germany and Austria), and Harold J. Salemsen, a fellow expatriate who had recently discontinued his own little magazine entitled *Tambour*. The issue itself was titled “The New Objectivism” and included poetry and prose by Zukofsky, a poem by Donal McKenzie, criticism by Pound, brief prose by Hilaire Hiler and George Antheil, and an intriguing essay in which Putnam surveyed recent trends in European literature and argued that

What is needed, what is being sought, is DIRECTION. ... But we are in for it; it has been forced upon us: that after-War breakup and breakdown, that dissociation of the personality which has been so widely remarked. There are certain escapes. There is the escape through the body ... which at least affords the illusion of unity: athletics, *Plaisir des sports*. There are the mystic and the Christian escapes. ...

But man still wants reality; it is his deepest instinct. ... Man, however, is never absolutely free of his age; he never can absolutely go against it. He therefore turns to the external *object* to seek reality there. This is what has been happening in Germany, although it is pretty well over now. For the *neue Sachlichkeit* ... is really a carryover from the nineteenth-century machine and the slavery it inflicted upon the world ...

The *object*, nevertheless, is not so easily to be got around. ... The future is an alternative one, and there is still the possibility of choice. There are those who are beginning to choose.²¹³

²¹² For the history of this phrase see <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0021853701008118>.

²¹³ “Black Arrow,” 75-77.

Putnam proceeded immediately from this observation to a discussion of Zukofsky, who he called “the best, the most important critic that I am able to think of in America,” and Zukofsky’s “Program” in the “Objectivists” issue of *Poetry*, before concluding:

We are entering upon a new Moyen Age. Our present period corresponds roughly to the last days of the Roman Empire, immediately preceding the barbaric invasions. Our art very much resembles the art of that period ... [George Reavey] believes the trend of the next decade is to be in the direction of Black Magic. Something of the sort does seem to be coming out of the Surréaliste mêlée in France. ...

Black magic consists essentially in dabbling in illusion and so is a childish pastime. The Word is a symbol, at bottom an arbitrary illusion (no one has ever denied it), and is, accordingly, adapted to this species of magic. White Magic, on the other hand, far more terrifying to the mature mind, consists in drawing aside the veil of Reality, in revealing what the Greeks called the *sacra* of life, it consists in conferring a sacramental significance upon *the object*, which is more satanic than any Word, revolutionized or not, could ever be. ...

We, some of us, are hereby choosing the Magic of the Object.²¹⁴

Putnam’s suggestion that “some of us” are choosing the “Magic of the Object” was immediately followed by two movements (“A”-3 and “A”-4) from Zukofsky’s ongoing long poem, which seems to indicate that he intended to include Zukofsky’s poetry in his characterization. In addition to work from others of Putnam’s literary acquaintances across Europe, this issue also included “Imagism,” Zukofsky’s review of René Taupin’s *L’Influence du Symbolisme Français sur le Poésie Américain (de 1910 à 1920)*, which had been the occasion of Zukofsky’s heated war of words with Yvor Winters, and which featured his approving quotation of Taupin’s characterization of the Imagists:

It is more accurate not to consider Imagism a doctrine, or even a school of poetry, but the gathering of certain poets who, for several weeks rather than several months, found themselves in accord on a few important points, and wished to prescribe their ideas on how

²¹⁴ Ibid, 81-82.

to rescue poetry from the germs of decadence which for long a period had been enervating it.²¹⁵

The editorial influence of Pound (and perhaps even Zukofsky) is further made evident by what the back matter of the second issue announced for future publication. Works listed included: “An Evening in Greenwich Village,” a short story by Charles Reznikoff, poems by Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford, two stories by Robert McAlmon, prose by William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, and “poems and prose” by Basil Bunting. Not all of what was promised would appear in subsequent issues, but this list does help to establish a certain editorial disposition at a particular moment in time.

The third issue (published as August-September-October 1931) contained further changes to the editorial masthead, listing three more contributing editors: Maurice Weir (for theatre), Emanuel Carnevali (for Italy), and Peter Neagoe. This issue had a rather smaller “Objectivist” presence, containing poems by Forrest Anderson and Putnam, a review by Emanuel Carnevali and further editorial remarks by Pound published under the title “Fungus, Twilight or Dry Rot.” In his memoirs, Putnam recounted a story that may explain some part of this issue’s divergence from previous trends:

[T]here was that summer of 1931 when, having to return to New York on a flying trip to see my publishers, I trustingly left the *New Review* in the hands of Henry Miller and Alfred Perles. This was a perilous thing to do in Montparnasse. Possessed of a deep grudge against a number of persons whose work I was publishing and who were associated with the magazine, and against Pound and Farrell in particular, Perles and Miller at once began plotting to steal the forthcoming issue (No. 3) and fill it with obscenities composed by themselves. This, they figured, would put an end to the thing once and for all. Fortunately, my wife discovered the mess just as it was about to go to the printer and, salvaging what she could, managed to get out some kind of number. That issue was a rather sorry jubilee, but in

²¹⁵ “Imagisme,” 160.

spite of everything, it contained a number of noteworthy items ... When I came back to Paris there were no hard feelings over the matter. It was all “*pour le sport*.”²¹⁶

The third issue repeated several of the announcements for future publication that had appeared in previous issues, including two short stories (“The Sailor’s Son” and “The Knife of the Times”) by Williams, poems and prose by Norman Macleod, Bunting’s “Some Limitations of English,” McAlmon’s story “The Highly Prized Pajamas,” Reznikoff’s “An Evening in Greenwich Village,” Pound’s “Terra Italica,” and poems by Tyler and Ford. Perhaps as a way of explaining why the issue had not contained much of what had been announced in the previous publication, this was followed by the admission “The editors of THE NEW REVIEW have found by experience that it is impossible to be precise as to the number in which a contribution will appear. A magazine, if it is to be an organic thing, must be permitted a certain freedom in shaping its own growth.” The issue also included notices for several books to be published by New Review Editions, including *Americans Abroad: 1918-1931* an anthology of post-war writing by Americans living in Europe which Peter Neagoe had edited and which was to be published in the Fall 1931.²¹⁷ Neagoe’s anthology did eventually appear, but not until 1932, when it was published by Carolus Verhulst’s Servire Press in the Hague. There was also a notice for the two planned volumes of a pan-European anthology of recent literature which Putnam had edited, to be called *The European Caravan: The New Spirit in European Literature* and which were loosely modeled on the popular annual *The American Caravan* anthologies of the late 1920s.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 232.

²¹⁷ The first volume, treating France, England, Ireland, and Spain, was published in the last half of 1931 by Brewer, Warren, and Putnam, a publishing firm based in New York City. The second volume, which was to include Germany, Austria, Russian, and Italy, was planned for the winter of 1932, but did not appear.

The fourth issue of *The New Review* had been billed as a “special machine number” to include “16 full-page reproductions of photographs of machines with letter-press by Ezra Pound” and articles by Putnam, Walter Lowenfels, Hilaire Hiler, John Xceron, and the Italian futurist Filippo Marinetti. That issue appeared on November 1, 1931 and did in fact include much of what had been promised, though Lowenfels and Putnam’s prose did not appear in the issue. The price of a single issue had increased from 60 cents to one dollar, but changes to the editorial page in this issue were minor: Neagoe was elevated to the status of co-editor and Bodenheim, Weir, and Perles were dropped altogether. Regarding work by “Objectivists,” the issue included McAlmon’s story “The Highly Prized Pajamas,” poetry by Forrest Anderson (“More Hominem”) and Basil Bunting (“A Cracked Record”), and Pound’s “Terra Italica,” an extended review of recent Italian pamphlets that presented some of Pound’s views on ancient pagan mystery cults. The back matter included an announcement for the next issue, to be called “Young America: An Examination of Conscience” and indicated that it would include a series of letters exchanged between Rexroth and Zukofsky (“This is a thorough-going *examen de conscience*, of a sort that seldom if ever happens in America; throwing light upon many of the problems of the Young, in poetry (“Objectivism”, etc.) life and art. A document for the literary historian.”; Robert McAlmon’s “The American Critic”; Forrest Anderson’s “American Letter”; Williams’ “The Knife of the Times”; Norman Macleod’s “Communication for C.S.” and poetry by Carl Rakosi. It also announced for future publication extracts from Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Totius Theologiae* and Rexroth’s long poem “Prolegomena To a Theodicy” and a planned “Italian Critical Number” (which was to be the sixth and final issue of *The New Review* published). The back cover also included a list of forthcoming “paper-backs at a price the cultured reader can afford” from The New Review Editions, the first of which was Zukofsky’s *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, announced for publication in Spring 1932.

The fifth issue of *The New Review* was not published until April 1932. It featured a significantly changed cover design and an even more reduced editorial page, with Pound as the sole “advisory editor” and the contributing editors comprising just Antheil, Hiler, Reavey, and the newly added Thomas McGreevy. The magazine listed an editorial representative in New York for the first time: Miss Fanya Foss. The issue also featured an “Editorial Statement for the Second Year,” which stated

THE NEW REVIEW has had, from the start, *a very definite program*. . . .

THE NEW REVIEW has been criticized in the past, upon more than one occasion, for not being this thing or that which it never had any intention or desire of being, its critics having forgotten or chosen to ignore its professed purpose, namely, that of functioning:

1. as a *notebook* of the arts;
2. as an *international* notebook.

We quote from our original ‘Editorial Statement’: ‘Its purpose is an international reportage for the arts, the higher journalism of ideas’; and we found it necessary further to clarify this with: ‘Its character will, therefore, be largely reportorial and critical, *such creative work as is published being chiefly for the exemplification of various tendencies*’.

... [W]e shall continue to give the picture, but it will no longer be quite the same picture; there will be, henceforth, more of *arrangement and composition*. If our first four numbers are, as we hope, a document for the state of literature in 1931, we believe that our Numbers 5 to 8 will be a document, likewise, for 1932,—but a document of a different sort.

In the meantime, we reaffirm our adherence to the contemporary and documentary arts, especially photography and the cinema.

The issue did include extracts, translated by Putnam, from Aquinas on “Scripture and Metaphor” and “God and the Physical Eye”; lengthy extracts from a December 30, 1930 letter from Kenneth Rexroth to Zukofsky (with a note that they were to be continued); Ford’s poem “It is Begun”; and Macleod’s prose poem “Communication for C. S.”; and lengthy reviews of Pound’s recently published *How To Read* by Ford Madox Ford and Thomas McGreevy. The issue was also notable for its violation of sexual taboos: it published Kay Boyle’s poem “In Defense of

Homosexuality” along with a letter by Ezra Pound in 1928 and Nancy Cunard’s exploration of interracial relationships “Black Man and White Ladyship.” After this issue was published, Pound wrote to Putnam to sever his relationship with the magazine.²¹⁸

With Pound having left the magazine, and with the magazine having failed to establish itself commercially, Putnam published a sixth and final issue of *The New Review* in June 15. This issue the “Italy: Critical and Creative” number promised earlier, and included stories and poetry by a number of Italian contributors along with Putnam’s own “Italian Notes and Portraits.” While Putnam’s magazine had published an impressive array of international modernists and aimed for genuine catholicity, it does not appear that the market was interested or prepared to support his efforts, either with the magazine or New Review editions, and the magazine folded without having published several of the works announced for future publication, including work by Rakosi and Reznikoff, as well as Zukofsky’s *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, which was published instead by To, Publishers in August 1932.

While Putnam had begun on fairly good terms with Pound, like most of the editors who had interacted with the opinionated poet, he ended up with a negative overall impression of the man. In his memoirs, Putnam described Pound as a “cracker-barrel philosopher” who, whatever his considerable skills as an original poet, had

retained, in his attitude toward society and the affairs of the world, a provincial small-town outlook. ...As we grew better acquainted, particularly in connection with the editing of the magazine, I began to discover how much of the American small-towner there was in him:

²¹⁸ Putnam recalled in his memoir: “Upon the appearance of the number, I received a brief note from him which read: ‘Dear Sam, April issue received. I presume it is time you removed my name from your list of editorial supports. At any rate please do so.’ ... I saw little of him after this, but we did have a final lunch together in Paris just before I returned to the States, in 1933. (*Paris Was Our Mistress*, 157). In May 1932, Pound wrote to Zukofsky: “Sam Puttenham is drunk half the time/ over works the other two thirds ... His last issue New Rev. inexcusable on any other base/ass. Sorry!//he’za sympathetic kuss/ Have said faretheewell to his orgum” (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 126).

there was the same stubbornness or ‘contrariness,’ the same ‘cantankerousness,’ the same ‘bossiness,’ the same ‘touchiness’ that are to be met with in literally millions of his back-country compatriots.²¹⁹

Putnam also complained:

For Pound there were whole vast sectors of world literature that simply did not exist. ... In the field of contemporary literature his taste was equally limited. All he could see, practically, was Ezra Pound and a handful of old friends and disciples: among Americans, Zukofsky, McAlmon, William Carlos Williams. ... At Ezra’s instigation, a literary journal known as *L’Indice* was founded in the vicinity of Rapallo, and in its columns (in Italian, of course) he would hold forth at great length on such writers as Robert McAlmon, Louis Zukofsky, Carl Rakosi and the American “Objectives” (long forgotten now), John Rodker, and one or two others; the impression conveyed was, as usual, that these were the worth-while representatives of contemporary literature in English, the only ones in fact that were worth bothering about. At one time he inserted a notice in *Il Mare* of Genoa inviting Italian writers to submit work for translation into English, “provided they think they can stand the acid test of such criticism as that of Zukofsky, Eliot, and W. C. Williams.” It was a strange kind of shadow-boxing in which he indulged during this last phase of migrations; for the Italians, it is safe to say, simply did not know what he was driving at, as he himself would have put it, and if they had depended upon his orientations they would have formed a bizarre conception indeed of our modern American writing scene.

From all this it should be evident that Ezra had taken what was for him the easiest way out. He had in a manner of speaking walled himself off from the world while preserving all his rancors and continuing his long-distance sparring.²²⁰

Whatever the initial enthusiasm Putnam may have had for Pound, Zukofsky and the other “Objectives,” his later recollections clearly indicated that his interest in these writers did not survive the deterioration of his relationship with Pound. In this he appears to be similar to Lincoln Kirstein, the editor of *Hound & Horn*.

²¹⁹ *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 141, 150. In his memoirs, Putnam further wrote: “Since Ezra had already moved on to Italy, I did not meet him in person until some while after my arrival in Paris; but I had had a chance to form all sorts of impressions of him from the comments of his friends and acquaintances. Among those who knew him well I do not believe there was one who was not fully and amusedly aware of his foibles, his vulnerable points, and even his more serious faults; but this did not interfere in the slightest with their appreciation of Pound the poet, whom they respected a good deal more highly than they did Pound the prose writer or Pound the critic—for the critic, frequently, they had no respect at all, especially as regarded his choices of protégés.” (*Paris Was Our Mistress*, 141).

²²⁰ *Paris Was Our Mistress*, 143-144, 147.

Little Magazines of the Radical Left

Between 1929 and 1934, Zukofsky and other “Objectivists” also published together in an array of short-lived radical magazines, many of which were edited from college towns across the United States by young, leftist college students. These magazines included *Jackass*, *Palo Verde*, *The Morada*, and *Front* (all edited by Norman Macleod); *Nativity* (edited from Columbus, Ohio by Boris J. Israel); *The Left* (published in Davenport, Iowa by a small group of young radicals); and *Contempo* (published from Chapel Hill, North Carolina by Milton Abernethy and Anthony Buttitta). Other prominent leftist magazines in the era included Jack Conroy’s *The Rebel Poet* (1931-1932) and *The Anvil* (1933-1935), *Dynamo* (1934-1935), edited by a group of writers that included Herman Spector, Joseph Vogel, and Sol Funaroff, and the longer lived and better known *New Masses* and *The Partisan Review*. Except for *New Masses*, these latter publications did not have as strong connections to Zukofsky and the other “Objectivists.”

New Masses

Years in operation: 1926-1948 [as a monthly publication through September 1933; as a weekly publication from January 1934 thereafter]

Editors: Several. As a monthly magazine, its most prominent editors were Joseph Freeman, Hugo Gellert, Michael Gold and Walt Carmon. Whittaker Chambers served on the editorial board from May 1932 through September 1933.

“Objectivists” published: Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Carl Rakosi, Norman Macleod, Whittaker Chambers, Charles Henri Ford, Emanuel Carnevali, Parker Tyler

Because *New Masses* already has an excellent publicly available online reference home on the [Marxists Internet Archive](https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/new-masses/), I will not devote much attention to its editorial and publication history here.²²¹ Although the list of “Objectivists” who published in *New Masses* appears extensive, the

²²¹ Readers interested in *New Masses* can refer to the index, scans, and introductory material published at <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/new-masses/>.

connection between the publication and members of this group was not as strong as it appears on first glance. Norman Macleod and Whittaker Chambers both served on the magazine's editorial staff during the early 1930s and both published regularly in the magazine as a result, but none of the other "Objectivists" enjoyed warm relationships with the magazine's editors. Of the remaining seven writers to publish work in *New Masses*, only Williams and Pound appeared in more than a single issue, and neither of them did so on particularly good terms.

Williams was the first to appear in the magazine, with his story "The Five Dollar Guy" (the titular reference to a local oil company executive who had become notorious for propositioning working-class housewives) appearing in the magazine's first issue in May 1926. Unfortunately for Williams, he had forgotten to change the name of the oil company in his story, and was promptly served with an expensive libel suit which he settled at considerable personal expense.²²² Angered that the story had appeared without the editors' having noticed or given him an opportunity to fix what proved to be a very expensive mistake, Williams' next publication in the magazine didn't occur until January 1929, when Gold published his two line poem "Question and Answer." Following the magazine's publication of an exchange of letters between Mike Gold and Ezra Pound in October 1930, Williams dashed off a brief letter of support to Gold which also expressed his own ambivalence about communism.²²³ Gold subsequently printed the letter in December 1930 under the

²²² Williams' out-of-pocket costs were partially defrayed by his receipt of *The Dial's* annual award for 1926, worth \$2000, awarded to him by Marianne Moore, the magazine's then editor.

²²³ Williams' letter, as printed in *New Masses*, read: "I like the John Reed number. Here's money, send me more. The only thing is, what the hell? I feel in a false position. How can I be a Communist, being what I am. Poetry is the thing which has the hardest hold on me in my daily experiences. But I cannot, without an impossible wrench of my understanding, turn it into a force directed toward one end, Vote the Communist Ticket, or work for the world revolution. There are too many difficulties, unresolved difficulties in my way. I can however see the monumental blockwit of social injustices surrounding me on every side. But why they arise, God only knows. But in any case they are there and I would give my life freely if I could right them. But who the hell wants my life? Nobody as far as I can see. They don't even want my verse, which is of more importance. I'm for you. I'll help as I can. I'd like to see you live. And here's to the light, from wherever it may come."

mocking heading “Poor Doc, Nobody Wants his Life or His Verses,” which decisively ended Williams’ relationship to the magazine.

Pound’s relationship with the magazine began positively enough, with a letter to the editors appearing in December 1926 indicating that Pound had read several early issues of the magazine “with great care” and that “for the first time in years I have even gone so far as to think of making a trip to America,” but deteriorated rather predictably thereafter. Letters from Pound were published in the March 1927, June 1928, and October 1930 issues, at which time Gold challenged Pound to set forward his views on the virtues of fascism clearly so that he might win converts in the United States. Pound’s made no further appearances in *New Masses*, though he published a short prose piece “mike and other phenomena,” in the December 1930 issue of Norman Macleod’s magazine *The Morada* that partially responded to The N.

Like Williams and Pound, Zukofsky's relationship with *New Masses* was a fraught one. Despite his political sympathies, He appears to have begun with something resembling contempt for their aesthetic narrowness (apart from his friend Whittaker Chambers), writing to Pound in April 1931:

Naturally, to them, even to the blank [Abraham] Magill [editor of *The Daily Worker*], I'm the sediment of the bourgeoisie—tho I don't think they've ever read me. I shall, however, have the satisfaction of setting several proletarians on their writing asses—Roskolenkier—etc if they profit by my lessons. But I'm afraid they need continual tutoring.—I suppose I ed. drop in on Macleod & the rest of the New Asses—when I'm in N.Y. but they'll probably fire me out because my name has occasionally been associated with E.P. & W.C.W. and that lump Kewmangs (comme dit my German-translator-friend-Chambers). ... Whitt—I should say—wd. be a better man to have at the plenum of the Int Bur. of Rev. Lit than Micky Gold. O well—²²⁴

²²⁴ Pound/Zukofsky, 96.

Zukofsky was aware that his friendship with anticommunists made him suspect to the magazine and he affected, at least in his letters to Pound, a tone of disinterestedness, though in later public defenses of his ideas from attacks by the Communist left, he was careful to insist upon his Marxist bona fides, going so far as to tell Morton Zabel in regard to Morris Schappes negative review of *An "Objectivists" Anthology* in *Poetry* that "this controversy already started has very serious implications ... Another misprint like "Kaufsky's" for Kautsky's, in your May number, and the argument will involve considerable risk for [me]."²²⁵ Zukofsky's lone appearance in *New Masses* didn't occur until October 8, 1935, when the weekly magazine carried his brief review of Lewis Carroll's *The Russian Journal*, though Zukofsky's biographer Mark Scroggins indicates that Zukofsky was working as an unpaid poetry editor for *New Masses* by the end of 1935, after the Objectivist Press had broken up.²²⁶

Of the remaining "Objectivist" writers, Carl Rakosi's poem "Vitagraph" appeared in the August 1926 issue, and the December 1926 issue contained Emanuel Carnevali's "Serenade." The October 1929 issue featured a splenetic letter from Joseph Vogel denouncing Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofsky, *transition*, and *Blues*, where he had formerly served as a contributing editor.²²⁷ The

²²⁵ Letter from Louis Zukofsky to Morton Zabel, April 27, 1933. University of Chicago Special Collections.

²²⁶ Scroggins does not indicate how long Zukofsky remained in this capacity, but suggests that his only "discovery" was the poetry of Robert Allison Evans, an unemployed mining engineer from Pennsylvania (*Poem of a Life*, 148).

²²⁷ In his letter, Vogel wrote "Ezra, it seems, is as incapable of good influence as the Church. Recently he tried to organize a group of writers in this country, but the only success—or harm—he achieved was the taking of a smaller Pound under his wings, namely Louis Zukofsky. Others of the group, including Spector, Moore, Gould, myself, somehow didn't grab the rope. ... Soon after a young writer experiences a setback from standard magazines ... the next step is to try the smaller magazines. To get his work published, let us say in *Blues*, he must drop commas, sense, and adopt freakishness. Therein lies the harm, because *Blues*, for instance, has persistently avoided life and human beings. The work in it has been metaphysical, treating with petty emotions, describing souls of lousy poets, including Jolas with his Oh, my soul! and Ah, America! There is a use for experimental writing when it serves experimental purpose. Experimental writing by Americans saw its full development years ago, and yet *transition* and *Blues* continue with experimentalism that is old, that repeats, that becomes weaker and weaker, that serves little purpose ... Since these magazines have already become unmanageable in the hands of metaphysicians who run away from any form of life that may threaten a boot in the rear, it is time that young writers disassociate themselves from all these abstractions, as many have long ago done from Pound, the dean of corpses that promenade in graveyards" ("Literary Graveyards," 30).

November 1929 issue included a brief letter from Parker Tyler responding to Vogel's letter, marking his only appearance in *New Masses*, and Charles Henri Ford, *Blues'* other principal editor, made his lone appearance in the magazine in February 1930 with the publication of his short poem "Mississippi Farmer."

The Morada and Front: Norman Macleod's Magazines

While an undergraduate at the University of New Mexico, the poet Norman Macleod founded *Jackass*, a monthly "magazine of the Southwest," which published its first issue in January 1928. After a second issue appeared in February, Macleod, who was working at this time as a custodian in the Petrified Forest National Monument in Holbrook, Arizona, changed the name and format of the magazine, releasing the next issue in May 1928 as a quarterly entitled *Palo Verde*. Advertisements for *Palo Verde* appeared in the first three issues of Charles Henri Ford's *Blues*, where it was described as "radical Southwestern poetry magazine" and solicited "radical contributions from preference and a desire to foster all revolutionary esthetic tecnicis." Macleod published four issues of *Palo Verde*, and was assisted by the New York-based radical poet Herman Spector, who served as a contributing editor on the magazine. Macleod would later credit Spector (and Parker Tyler) for helping him develop his own poetic sensibilities, stating later that "I was writing very conventional, rather poor, imitative verse at the time. It was Herman Spector and also Parker Tyler who wrote me advising me to climb out of that rut and so it was they who first influenced me in the direction of experiment and in trying to find my own voice and new forms—or at least to say what I was trying to say in language that was not distorted by restrictive English metrical patterns."²²⁸

²²⁸ Quoted in *Bastard in the Ragged Suit*, 9.

Palo Verde did not survive 1929, but Macleod, who had received special acknowledgement from Charles Henri Ford for his role in forming an “invaluable advisory board in the launching of *Blues*,” already had plans to found a third magazine. The “Expatriate” number of *Blues* (February-July 1929) carried an advertisement announcing the launch of a new magazine edited by Macleod that Autumn to be entitled *Brogan*. According to the ad in *Blues*, *Brogan* would be “an attempt to develop a literature of affirmation,” which was to be “experimental and radical in content and technic” and would feature Harold Salemsen and Charles Henri Ford as contributing editors.²²⁹ By the time that Autumn had rolled around, Macleod did in fact have a new magazine, though it appeared under the title *The Morada* instead of *Brogan*.

The Morada

Years in operation: 1929-1930 [5 issues]

Editor: Norman Macleod, Donal McKenzie [European editor, issue 5]

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofsky, Robert McAlmon, Kenneth Rexroth, Richard Johns, Norman Macleod, Forrest Anderson, Charles Henri Ford

In Autumn 1929, Macleod launched *The Morada*, a quarterly magazine published by the Ward Anderson Printing Company in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where Macleod was attending school at the University of New Mexico. The first issue listed William Flynn, C. V. Wicker and Donal McKenzie as members of the magazine’s editorial board; Sydney Hunt (London), Harold Salemsen (Paris), Ralph Cheyney (Chicago), and Walter Barber (New York) as correspondents; and Benjamin Musser, Joseph Vogel, Joseph Kalar, Harry Crosby, Herman Spector, Catherine Stuart, George W. St. Clair, Charles Henri Ford, and Dean B. Lyman Jr. as contributing editors. The inaugural issue

²²⁹ Salemsen was also a contributor to that issue of *Blues*. His contributor note read: “Harold J. Salemsen, born in Chicago in 1910 and educated in France and America, now lives in Paris where he edits *Tambour*, a French-English review. He has contributed in English to *transition*, *Poetry* and *The Modern Quarterly*; in French to *La Revue Européenne*, *Europe*, *Monde*, *Le Mercure de France* and *Anthologie*.”

included work from 23 contributors, including Ezra Pound and a handful of writers, such as Ford, Rexroth, Salemsen, and Harry Crosby, who had also been recently published in *Blues*; the majority of its other contributors were writers who also contributed to *New Masses*, the radical magazine for whom Macleod worked as a contributing editor. The second issue of *Morada* (Winter 1929) was designated as a “Harry Crosby Number,” and appeared just a few weeks after Crosby’s sensational murder-suicide in New York City. Crosby was dropped from the list of contributing editors and Charles Yale Harrison was added. This issue included work from roughly two dozen contributors, including poetry by Macleod, Ford, and Richard Johns, whose own magazine *Pagany* would soon be publishing its first issue with poems by Ford, Tyler, Macleod and others included therein. The third issue of *The Morada* (Spring 1930) included poems by Johns and Macleod, and excerpts from a letter by Pound.

After printing four issues of *The Morada*, Macleod became involved in the founding of the multi-lingual and politically radical literary magazine *Front*. Macleod’s work on *Front* and increasing involvement in international revolutionary politics contributed to a dramatic overhaul of *Morada* at this time as well. The fifth and final issue of *Morada*, published in December 1930 (the same month that the first issue of *Front* appeared) was significantly changed: now announcing itself as *The Tri-lingual Morada*, the magazine contained work in English, German, and French, and solicited future submissions at an editorial address near Lago di Garda, Italy. The magazine’s editorial board had also been substantially reorganized: Donal McKenzie was now listed the magazine’s “european & expatriate” editor (the Italian address was his); Norman Macleod as its American editor, and Joseph Kalar, Georges Linze, Fernand Jonan, Eugene Jolas, Frantisek Halas, Richard Johns, Sonja Prins, Ralph Cheyney, and Solon R. Barber as contributing editors. The issue included McAlmon’s short

story “New York Harbour,” commentary by Ezra Pound, and poems by Macleod (in both English and German), Zukofsky, Johns, Forrest Anderson, and Samuel Putnam.²³⁰

While the Spring 1931 issue of *The Left* included an announcement for a sixth issue of *Morada* to include poetry, prose and art by ten named contributors, no further issues of the magazine were printed. Macleod had moved to New York City in January 1931 to take a position working as an editorial assistant for Walt Carmon, then the managing editor of *New Masses*, the best known Marxist journal of its era. Carmon left on vacation soon after Macleod’s arrival, leaving Macleod to select most of the material included in the March 1931 issue; among his selections were Whittaker Chambers’ famous short story “Can You Hear Their Voices?” In addition to his work for *New Masses*, Macleod had begun to funnel much of his editorial energy into *Front*.

Front

Years in operation: 1930-1931 [4 issues]

Editors: Norman Macleod, Sonja Prins, FOSP, Xavier Abril, Masaki Ikeda

“Objectivists” published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, Robert McAlmon, Richard Johns, Norman Macleod, Charles Henri Ford

Front was published in December 1930, shortly before Macleod’s move to New York City. *Front* was an ambitious, multilingual magazine funded by the Soviet organization FOSP (*Federatsiya organizatsiy sovetskikh pisateley* or the Federation of Organizations of Soviet Writers) which printed work by a wide range of Communist or communist-sympathizing writers.²³¹ The magazine itself was published on a bi-monthly schedule from The Hague in the Netherlands, and had editors listed for the United States (Macleod), Europe ([Sonja Prins](#)), and the U.S.S.R. (FOSP) in its first

²³⁰ A PDF scan of the first three and fifth issue of *The Morada* can be viewed [here](#).

²³¹ For more on FOSP, see Amanda Metcalf’s “[The Founding of the Federation of Soviet Writers: The Forgotten Factor in Soviet Literature of the Late Twenties](#)” in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 65.4 (October 1987), 609-616.

issue, and additional editors for “Hispano-America” (Xavier Abril) and Japan (Masaki Ikeda) by the time the fourth issue was published in June 1931. Despite its brief run, it printed work by Paul Bowles, Kay Boyle, Basil Bunting, Jon Dos Passos, Dudley Fitts, Charles Henri Ford, Richard Johns, Eugene Jolas, Robert McAlmon, Sherry Mangan, Ezra Pound, Harold Salemsen, Herman Spector, Joseph Vogel, William Carlos Williams, and Louis Zukofsky.

The first issue contained a short credo from Ezra Pound, poetry and prose by Macleod, and poems by Ford and Zukofsky. The second issue (published in February 1931) contained an open letter from Ezra Pound to the Russian playwright Sergei Tretyakov, McAlmon’s story “Green Grow the Grasses,” and poetry by Ford, Macleod and Williams. The third issue (published in April 1931) included a Basil Bunting’s “Directory of Current English Authors,” a translation of an article he had recently published in Italian in *L’Indice*; and the fourth issue (published in June 1931) contained Zukofsky’s review of Pound’s *XXX Cantos*, part of Pound’s “Canto XVII,” and more poetry by Macleod.

Nativity

Years in operation: 1930-1931

Editor: Boris J. Israel

“Objectivists” published: Louis Zukofsky, Norman Macleod, Harry Roskolenko, Charles Henri Ford

Late in 1930, Boris J. Israel, then an undergraduate at Ohio State University, published the first issue of his little magazine *Nativity: An American Quarterly*. *Nativity* appears to owe much to *Pagany*, which had begun publishing earlier that year, William Carlos Williams’ calls for the development of a vernacular American literature, and Ezra Pound (the magazine’s editorial content were published as a series of what Israel called “Prose Cantos”). In its first issue, which claimed to present “vital literature of the new america,” Israel announced

Hope is no longer needed. Hope, we mean, for America. America needs action. America is. America needs work. America is great. America needs advance and advance is inevitable.

America has never had an american literature. There have been literary productions but literary productions are seldom literature. Major literature, we mean. There have even been literary creations. And destructions. But these have been isolated.

... But there are others. An american literature there surely is. Most of it hasn't yet been written. Most of the writers have not been born. But the literature is there and is more than waiting. It is pounding on the bottom of the sod, crying to break thru, like a young volcano. ... It is pounding factory windows until they shake, roaring down elevated speedways, backfiring from airplane exhausts, starving in backalleys ready to tighten the hunger belt and fight on, it is everywhere about you. It is everywhere where America is, which, of course, excludes penthouse apartments, glasstop desks, golf courses, and other expressions of the sickly bourgeois imitation of a dead aristocracy.

Not it is nineteen thirty. We are at the beginning.

... This is the expression of the belief that the extended pregnancy is approaching a consummation.²³²

In addition to this high-flown, proletarian-sympathizing rhetoric, the first issue included poetry by Macleod, Harry Roskolenkier, and Charles Henri Ford; and an announcement for Johns' magazine *Pagany*.²³³

Israel published a second issue of *Nativity* in the Spring of 1931, noting that this issue was to be considered a single issue even though it was "inclusive of two quarters (spring and summer 1931)." The second issue included a small editorial note indicating the magazine was edited by Israel "with the assistance of a group of Associates, including Alexander Godin, Harry Roskolenkier, Norman Macleod, A[lbert]. E[dward]. Clements, Mary Hadley Lewis." The second issue included several more of Israel's "Prose Cantos" in which he exhibited his decidedly leftward political drift; two brief book reviews of recently published books by Leonara Speyer and Kathleen Tankersley

²³² "Prose Cantos," 1-2.

²³³ "Historical Reconsideration"; "The Scorpion of Majesty"; and "Cut off the Gas," respectively.

Young by Zukofsky (printed as Prose Cantos XX and XXI); and poems by Macleod, Roskolenkier, and Zukofsky.²³⁴ The back matter included announcements for five other little magazines: *Hesperian* (published from San Francisco by James Hart), *Pogany*, *Front*, *New Masses*, and a newly launched magazine to be entitled *The Left*. While a third issue of *Nativity* had been promised to appear for the Fall of 1931, it was never produced. Israel would leave school shortly after *Nativity* ceased publication, joining the Communist Party and working as a party organizer and journalist for *New Masses*.

The Left

Years in operation: 1931

Editors: Jay Du Von, Marvin Klein, George Redfield

“Objectivists” published: Louis Zukofsky, Norman Macleod, Harry Roskolenko, Charles Henri Ford

Although *Nativity* printed only two issues, it included an ad in the second issue announcing the forthcoming appearance, on March 1, of the first issue of *The Left: A Quarterly Review*, a new magazine out of Davenport, Iowa. The announcement stated that the magazine would publish “revolutionary & experimental criticism, poetry, cinema, prose, and art” and listed among its contributors several writers associated who had been associated with Zukofsky and his “Objectivist” group including Boris Israel, Norman Macleod, Harry Roskolenkier, Harold Salemsen, and Joseph Vogel. The first issue of *The Left* featured a striking cover including stills from the Ukrainian director Alexander Dovzhenko’s 1930 film *Zemlya* (translated as *Soil* or *Earth*) and described itself on its title page as “a quarterly review of radical & experimental art.” This issue was edited by a group of five young Marxists led by George Redfield, Marvin Klein and Jay Du Von, and listed an additional

²³⁴ These were, respectively: “Oil”; “Effigy”; and “N. Y. 1927.”

seven associate editors, including Norman Macleod and Donal McKenzie.²³⁵ The front matter also included an announcement of the next issue and a notice that “The LEFT calls on the literary, artistic and political LEFT front for support and material. We want and need your subscription, your suggestions and criticisms.”

The issue itself included a critical department, a cinema department, and poems from several contributors, including two short poems by Zukofsky published as “Poems (1927),” Norman Macleod’s “Not Steel Alone,” “Winter in Chicago,” and “Imperialistic Creed,” Roskolenkier’s “In a Hospital,” and short prose with radical political messages by Roskolenkier and Israel. The back matter for the issue included announcements for a number of other little magazines, including *Nativity*, *The Front*, a never published sixth issue of *The Morada*, *The New Review*, and *New Masses*.

The second issue of *The Left* was published later in 1931 as a combined Summer & Autumn issue, with Howard D. Lester’s photograph “Manpower” printed as a wrap-around cover.²³⁶ The editorial page indicated a few minor changes, but the principals remained consistent from the first issue.²³⁷ The front matter also included an “IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT” indicating that while the first number had been “met with enthusiastic recognition” and orders from all over the world, the magazine had faced a number of financial difficulties that negatively impacted their plans for the second issue and imperiled its future existence. The editors suggested the “THE LEFT is the

²³⁵ Du Von would later go on to direct the Federal Writers’ Project in Iowa and Illinois during the mid-1930s. In addition to Redfield, Klein, and Du Von, the other two editors were R. C. Lorenz, and W. K. Jordan. The magazine’s other associate editors were V. F. Calverton, John Herrmann, Joseph Kalar, Herbert Klein, and Seymour Stein.

²³⁶ Lester was a member of the executive board of the [Workers’ Film and Photo League](#).

²³⁷ In the place of associate editors, the magazine listed several “contributing editors.” V. F. Calverton was dropped from the list that had appeared in the first issue, R. C. Lorenz and Herbert Klein were listed as contributing editors rather than full editors for this issue, and Bob Brown, Jack Conroy, and Jan Wittenber (the secretary of Chicago’s John Reed Club) were added. Katherine Parker was also listed as the magazine’s business manager.

only quarterly review in America publishing the work of those young writers who are creating an American proletarian literature” and suggested a number of ways that readers and sympathizers could help financially. The issue included Norman Macleod’s “Cotton Pickers in Alabama” and “Design in Cotton Fabric,” Horace Gregory’s poem “New York, Cassandra,” and Donal McKenzie’s essay “T(h)inker Pound and Other Italian Legends,” which responded to a recent article criticizing Pound by Mike Gold in *New Masses* and Pound’s subsequent reply in *The Morada*.²³⁸ In addition, the correspondence section included several opinionated responses from writers as diverse as Arthur Davison Ficke, Paul Bowles, Charles Henri Ford, Murray Godwin, and Samuel Putnam.²³⁹ The issue also contained announcements for a handful of other little magazines, including *Hound & Horn*, *Pagany*, *Contempo*, *New Masses*, and Jack Conroy’s *The Rebel Poet*.

²³⁸ McKenzie praised Pound’s poetic accomplishment and criticized his economic and political intelligence: “As a student of language and its complex synthesis with idea, his work ranks with that of James Joyce. What he wishes to give to poetry is the ‘ability (comparatively lost since the time of Dante) of saying several things at once.’ This is important, and, incidentally, parallels the thought processes demanded of a good scientist . . . This kind of thinking is scarce and certainly more modern than the innovations of Miss Stein who is the exemplary victim of une idée fixée [sic]. . . . In his Thirty Cantos he has given us a pragmatic explanation of the means and function of poetry since Homer. These accomplishments however should not authorize Pound’s ratiocinations on an America which he has not been able to study at first hand in a decade—nor should it excuse his lax perception of crass tyranny in Italy. . . . Pound is an incurable Romantic Liberal, toasting his toes at the better Fascisti fires, and trying to rationalize about a system of which he really enjoys the fruits. He is just one of God’s sensitive noblemen enthralled by the brute strength of a mad idol. He is in love with the rotten splendor of the middle ages. He is a troubadour singing the glory of a new feudal system” (48, 52).

²³⁹ Ficke, Bowles, and Ford all wrote in opposition to the editorial policies of *The Left*, with Ford claiming that “the next number of blues will, in more than one way, announce its separation from any writer or group of writers now living in america. the prospect of the prairies blossoming with any number of identical wheat heads does not appeal to us at all. we have no quarrel with the way bread is grown and made but literature is another matter. so blues may move out politely before you have time to call in the landlady with her smell and her broom and her numerical whine, and her fondness for rolling art out of dough” (92). As this letter indicates, Ford had planned to bring out a tenth issue of Blues from Paris, even as late as 1931 when this letter was written, but the issue was never published. The letter from Putnam, who had just begun publishing his *The New Review* from Paris in January of that year, is far more encouraging: “*The Left* sounds like something. I am particularly interested in your war on “melodramatic despair.” The trend of young France, and to a great extent of young Europe, since the War has been toward a juvenile and callow defeatism. Witness the Surrealists, who pretend to be Revolutionists. . . . You have no idea how shallow and superficial it all is unless you are close up to the scene over here. . . . My best to you. Let’s fight for something, try to evolve something out of the environing Chaos” (92).

The editors planned a third issue which was to include Louis Aragon's "The Red Front," but no further issues of the magazine appeared, and its unpaid editors eventually moved on to other literary and political pursuits. Aragon's propaganda poem was not printed in the United States until February 1933, when E.E. Cummings' translation was published in *Contempo*.²⁴⁰

Contempo

Years in operation: 1931-1934

Editors: Milton Abernethy [1931-1934], Anthony Buttitta [1931-1932], Mina Abernethy [1932-1934]

"Objectivists" published: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting, Robert McAlmon, Frances Fletcher, Forrest Anderson

In January 1931, Milton Abernethy met Anthony Buttitta in an English course at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill taught by the playwright Paul Eliot Green. Abernethy, then a 20 year old undergraduate and member of the Communist party, was at UNC largely because he had been too radical and outspoken for his peers at North Carolina State College.²⁴¹ Buttitta, born in Monroe, Louisiana to Sicilian immigrant parents, was seeking a master's degree in English literature and had previously published plays and stories while an undergraduate at Louisiana State Normal College and the University of Texas. Within a few months, the two literary-minded young men had recruited three of their classmates, Shirley Carter, Phil Liskin, and Vincent Garoffolo, and founded both a little magazine which they called *Contempo: A Review of Books and Personalities*, and The

²⁴⁰ Cummings' translation of his friend's "Le Front Rouge" first appeared in 1931 in the inaugural issue of *Literature of the World Revolution* (an English language periodical published in Moscow by the International Union of Revolutionary Writers which changed its name to *Soviet Literature* in 1946). After its appearance in *Contempo* magazine, the editors published Cummings' translation as a separate pamphlet in an edition of 200.

²⁴¹ While at NCSC, Abernethy contributed several articles to *Wantagan*, a student journal, which were critical of school practices and policies. In the last of these, "The Game of Cheating at North Carolina State College is Not Equal to Any Other Sport," Abernethy accused his fellow students of endemic academic dishonesty, which led to the student council voting to expel him for "disservice to the school." Abernethy appealed his expulsion and won the case, but transferred shortly thereafter to UNC-Chapel Hill. See Jim Vickers' "A Week or Three Days in Chapel Hill: Faulkner, *Contempo*, and Their Contemporaries," in *The North Carolina Literary Review* 1:1 (Summer 1992), 17-29.

Intimate Bookshop, a book store which they briefly operated out of Abernethy's dorm room before moving to a storefront in Chapel Hill.²⁴² By August 1931, all three of Abernethy and Buttitta's classmates had left the magazine, leaving Abernethy and Buttitta as the magazine's sole editors.

The first issue of *Contempo* was published in May 1931 and featured an editorial describing the publication as a review of "ideas and personalities of some significance that demand immediate comment." *Contempo* was issued 18 times a year (roughly every three weeks) and cost ten cents per issue, with annual subscriptions available for \$1. As a publication, *Contempo* had the appearance of a newspaper, with issues typically eight pages long and some mixture of poetry, editorial comment, reviews, and other prose. For the early part of its run, *Contempo* was edited by Abernethy and Buttitta with six others credited as contributing editors: Louis Adamic, Kay Boyle, Barrett Clark, Ezra Pound, Samuel Putnam, and Bob Brown.

The editors frequently published special-topic issues with guest editors and quickly gained a reputation for the journal's willingness to publish avant-garde poetry as well as engage with progressive political issues. *Contempo* devoted two issues, for example, to the Scottsboro Boys case, famously publishing Langston Hughes' "Christ in Alabama" on the cover of their December 1, 1931 issue, in between editorials by Hughes and Lincoln Steffens, the well-known socialist muckraking journalist. In July 1932, Buttitta and Abernethy quarreled and parted ways, but Buttitta remained on

²⁴² In an early issue of *Contempo*, Abernethy wrote an advertisement for the store: "Not many people know of the existence of such an agency as The Intimate Bookshop. [It is] a place where one can read without cost and buy with regular discount any book from *The Death of the Gods* to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a place one goes for a quiet hour or so to browse about books that seem to stick his imagination, feel the intimate and personal touch of writers that lived to live, literature move before him as a vital and dynamic force rather than as a support for the dust of the ages." The Intimate Bookshop long outlasted *Contempo*, and was operated by Milton and Minna Abernethy at 205-207 Franklin Street in Chapel Hill from 1933 until 1950, when anti-communist sentiment community induced the Abernethys to sell the store to Paul and Isabel Smith and move to New York City, where Milton eventually became a successful stockbroker (oh the irony!). In 1955, the Smiths moved the bookshop to a building which had previously housed the Berman Department Store at 119 Franklin Street, and sold the business in 1964 or 1965 to Walter and Brenda Kuralt, who opened an additional eight franchises throughout North Carolina. The last surviving Intimate Bookshop, on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill, closed in the late 1990s. See <https://perma.cc/7CPD-8S7E>.

the magazine's editorial masthead until the start of the third volume in October 1932. For a short time, each editor continued publishing their own separate magazine using the *Contempo* title; the January 10, 1933 issue of the Abernethy's version of the magazine contained a notice from that the

last five issues of CONTEMPO (since July) have been financed and published by the editors listed above without the aid of one of the former editors, Mr. A. J. Buttitta.

Any paper which Mr. Buttitta might publish, whether it bear the name of CONTEMPO or not, will in no way be connected with the original and authentic CONTEMPO, will not have access to the editorial material sent to the original CONTEMPO on the strength of the reputation it has built for itself in the past two years, nor will it reach the regular subscribers of CONTEMPO.²⁴³

Buttitta's *Contempo* sold for 15 cents a copy and \$1.50 for an annual subscription. The first issue of its fourth volume was printed on April 5, 1933 and the second appeared in May, but it does not appear to have survived much long. The Abernethy's version of *Contempo* continued a bit longer, publishing regularly through the Fall of 1932. After the October 12, 1933 issue, however, several months passed before the magazine's final issue, a James Joyce number, was published, in February 1934.

Connection to the "Objectivists"

Contempo published poetry or criticism by Pound, Rakosi, Reznikoff, Williams, Zukofsky, Bunting, and McAlmon. The Oppens admired the magazine, with George describing it in a letter to Ezra Pound as "a magazine concerned with liberal or radical political theses" and noting that a

²⁴³ The March 15, 1933 issue of the Abernethy's version of the magazine included "Statements of Fact" which gave Milton Abernethy's version of the split with Buttitta and his subsequent claim on the copyright and title of the magazine.

recent issue had been devoted to the Scottsboro case and had featured poetry by Countee Cullen and “other negro writers.”²⁴⁴

James G. Leippert's Magazines

James G. Leippert, also known as J. Ronald Lane Latimer and a host of other pseudonyms during his brief but significant publishing career, was an eccentric character who published a series of ephemeral little magazines in the early 1930s before founding The Alcestis Press, which published handsome limited editions of poetry by Wallace Stevens, Williams Carlos Williams, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and others between 1935 and 1937.²⁴⁵

Leippert's first attempt at publishing poetry came with his founding of the monthly magazine *The new broom and Morningside*, which he launched in January 1932 while still an undergraduate at Columbia University. Leippert described the magazine to potential contributors as a successor to both *Broom*, an international quarterly magazine which had been published from Italy and edited by Harold Loeb and a rotating cast of associate editors and *Morningside*, the longtime undergraduate literary journal at Columbia University. Leippert was an enormous enthusiast of T. S. Eliot's and wrote to him soliciting work for publication in his new magazine, though Eliot politely declined his overtures. *The new broom and Morningside* failed after its fourth issue (published in April 1932), and was quickly succeeded by *The Lion and Crown*.

The Lion and Crown

Years in operation: 1932-1933 [2 issues]

²⁴⁴ “Publications in English,” Undated letter from George Oppen to Ezra Pound. Ezra Pound Papers, Beinecke (Yale), Box 38, Folder 1613.

²⁴⁵ Eccentric is perhaps too charitable. Allen Tate recalled him as a “fly-by-night opportunist” and one of his closest friends and longtime collaborator Willard Maas described him privately as a “psychopathic worm” (qtd. in Al Filreis' *Modernism from Right to Left*, 115). For a brief biographic account of Leippert's life, see Ruth Graham's “[Mystery Man](#)” article for the Poetry Foundation, which draws heavily on Al Filreis' research.

Editor: James Leippert

“Objectivists” published: Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, Basil Bunting, George Oppen, Forrest Anderson, Jesse Loewenthal, Frances Fletcher, Norman Macleod, Jerry Reisman

Early in 1932, as he was planning the launch of *The Lion and Crown*, Leippert wrote to William Carlos Williams, inviting him to serve as associate editor. Williams quickly declined Leippert’s offer, no doubt thinking of his recent experiences with *Pogany* and *Contact*. He did, however, recommend that Leippert contact his friend Louis Zukofsky, and Zukofsky greatly assisted Leippert with assembling the first issue of this new magazine. Zukofsky’s assistance was so great that it warranted his being the subject of a special acknowledgement printed inside the first issue: “The editors of The Lion & Crown wish to thank Mr. Louis Zukofsky for his interest, and to dedicate to him whatever of the publication is theirs to dedicate.”²⁴⁶

The inaugural issue of *The Lion & Crown*, published in Fall 1932, shows clear evidence of Zukofsky’s editorial influence, as it featured writing by Reznikoff, Rakosi, and Bunting, contributions from peripheral “Objectivists” Frances Fletcher, Forrest Anderson, and Jesse Loewenthal, and a review of Williams’ *A Novelette and Other Prose* (which had been published by To, Publishers) by Zukofsky’s friend Jerry Reisman. The contents page also included a list of contributors which would appear in future issues, a list of 13 authors which contained a healthy number of “Objectivists,” including Williams, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Oppen, and Frances Fletcher.

Leippert only managed to publish one additional issue of the magazine (printed in early 1933), though it did include two poems each by Oppen and Norman Macleod.²²⁹ Other notable contributors to the issue included Gertrude Stein (“Basket”), Erskine Caldwell (“Crown-Fire”), and

²⁴⁶ Quoted in *Pound/Zukofsky*, 135.

Jose Garcia Villa. Leippert also appears to have been planning an entire special issue devoted solely to William Carlos Williams and possibly another issue dedicated to Zukofsky, but neither issue ever materialized.²⁴⁷ Pound and Zukofsky discussed Leippert's seeming interest in publishing work by Zukofsky and other "Objectivists" in a series of letters exchanged between August 1932 and early 1933,²⁴⁸ but by May 1933, Zukofsky seems to have lost any confidence he may have had in Leippert, telling Pound:

Will write Leippert again, & if he doesn't answer to hell with him. I don't think he has an asset. Think, in fact, he's a quack & quacks are quickly uncovered these days ... He's off on a magazine proposition now—wants to get the [James Branch] Cabells, [Robert] Nathans, etc. to join him. They won't if we're goin' to be anywhere near 'em. They won't anyway.²⁴⁹

Alcestis

The magazine proposition Zukofsky described Leippert as being "off on" was a poetry quarterly for which Leippert first began soliciting contributions in November 1933. Initially planned to appear under the name *Flambeau*, and later, *Tendency: A Magazine of Integral Form*, the first issue of Leippert's third little magazine in as many years was eventually published in October 1934 as *Alcestis*. *Alcestis* survived a bit longer than Leippert's previous efforts, publishing work by William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, e. e. cummings, and a host of other then-prominent poets, but it too suspended operations within a year of its founding, with the fourth and final issue, a "revolutionary number" edited by the poet Willard Maas, appearing in July 1935.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ See vague references to a special critical number of Leippert's magazine in *Pound/Zukofsky* pp. 145, 147 and Basil Bunting to Leippert, September 26, 1932 in the [Ronald Lane Latimer papers](#) at the University of Chicago Library.

²⁴⁸ See *Pound/Zukofsky*, pp. 134-135, 145, 147.

²⁴⁹ *The Selected Letters of Louis Zukofsky*, 102.

²⁵⁰ See Al Filreis' *Modernism from Right to Left*, 118-128.

The failure of the magazine *Alcestis* was followed by Leippert's establishment of a publishing press, also called Alcestis. Between 1935 and 1937, Leippert's Alcestis Press issued nine very attractive volumes of modern poetry, fine printed on rag paper, including Wallace Stevens' *Ideas of Order* and *Owl's Clover*, and William Carlos Williams' *An Early Martyr* and *Adam & Eve & the City*, and it is conceivable that Leippert may have become Williams' regular publisher had not James Laughlin emerged when he did.²⁵¹

The Long Silence and Gradual Return to Poetry

After spending most of the 1940s and 1950s in near total silence, both intentional and due to an inability to find regular publishers for their work, many of the "Objectivists" saw a surge of publishing activity in the 1960s. Williams, the only member of the group to have published his writing continuously through the 1940s and 1950s, died in March of 1963, preventing him from seeing this upsurge in publication during the later part of the decade, but his *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* was published in 1962 and the five finished sections of *Paterson* first appeared as a single volume in 1963. The decade also saw major works published by Oppen, Reznikoff, Zukofsky, Bunting, Rakosi, and Niedecker.

Oppen published *The Materials* in 1962, *This in Which* in 1965, and *Of Being Numerous* in 1968, all with New Directions. *Of Being Numerous* won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1969. Reznikoff published *By the Waters of Manhattan: Selected Verse* in 1962 and *Testimony, the United States, 1885-1890*, the first volume of his long series of documentary poetry taken from the American legal record, in

²⁵¹ The full list of books published under The Alcestis Press imprimatur also included Allen Tate's *The Mediterranean and Other Poems*, Robert Penn Warren's first volume of poetry, *Thirty-Six Poems*, John Peale Bishop's *Minute Particulars*, Willard Maas' *Fire Testament* and Ruch Lechlitner's *Tomorrow's Phoenix*. According to Al Filreis, Leippert had also sought to publish what would have been Elizabeth Bishop's first book of poems, made a serious offer to publish new cantos and a collected poems by Ezra Pound which Pound ultimately refused, and nearly published a book by H.D. See *Modernism from Right to Left*, 121.

1965, both with New Directions. After *Testimony* failed to sell well, New Directions dropped Reznikoff, and he returned to printing his work privately, self-publishing *By the Well of Living and Seeing, and the Fifth Book of the Maccabees* in 1969 before John Martin's Black Sparrow Press began publishing his work in 1974. Zukofsky published four books with small presses between 1962 and 1964; editions containing the two halves of *All*, his collected short poems, were published in the United States and England between 1965 and 1967; his "A" 1-12 was published in London in 1966 and by Doubleday in New York in 1967; and both "A" 13-21 and his and Celia's translations of *Catullus* were published in both London and New York in 1969. Bunting published *Loquitur* and his *First Book of Odes* with Stuart and Deidre Montgomery's London-based Fulcrum Press in 1965, and his autobiographical long poem "Briggflatts" appeared to great acclaim, first in *Poetry* magazine in January 1966, and later that year in book form from Fulcrum. Fulcrum also published the first edition of his *Collected Poems* in 1968. Rakosi published *Amulet*, his first book in more than 25 years, with New Directions in 1967. Niedecker published *My Friend Tree* in 1961, but this was a small book with very limited distribution. In 1968, however, Niedecker published both her collection *North Central* with Stuart and Deidre Montgomery's Fulcrum Press and her *T & G: The Collected Poems (1936-1966)* through Jonathan Williams's Jargon Society.

This "return" to publication can be traced back as early as 1956, when Jonathan Williams published Zukofsky's collection *Some Time*, though it probably owes as much if not more to the Oppens' return to the United States from Mexico in 1959 and George's resumption of writing and publishing poems in the late 1950s-early 1960s. Oppen published his first post-silence poems, fittingly, in *Poetry* magazine (the January 1960 issue contained five poems, his first publications in more than 25 years) and in 1962 large editions of both his collection *The Materials* and Charles Reznikoff's *By the Waters of Manhattan* were published by New Directions in partnership with

George's sister June Degnan Oppen, the publisher of *The San Francisco Review*. Following their various returns to print in the 1960s, each of the core "Objectivists" continued to write and publish poetry until their deaths. Their individual publication histories are treated in greater detail on the site on child pages for each writer.

Lorine Niedecker's Publishing History

Pre-'Objectivist' Poetry

A diligent and attentive student, Lorine Niedecker was remembered by her Fort Atkinson classmates as shy and somewhat aloof, though she did sing with the glee club and was an active member of a high school debate team. While a sophomore in high school, Niedecker's English teacher Daisy Lieberman began to kindle her interest in poetry, beginning with her reading of the British Romantics, and William Wordsworth in particular. Niedecker would later recall that her serious interest in writing poetry began as an eighteen year old in the summer just before her senior year of high school, and her first published poems appeared later that year in *The Tchogerrah*, her high school yearbook. Following her graduation from Fort Atkinson High School in 1922, Niedecker enrolled in Beloit College, a small coeducational liberal arts school about 35 miles south of her family's home on Blackhawk Island. Here, she continued her involvement in music and debate, attended a lecture given by Harriet Monroe, the founding editor of *Poetry* magazine, and was invited by a college poetry society to give a reading of two of her poems, though no poetry written from this period of her life survives.¹

Forced by her father's financial misadventures to leave school after two years, Niedecker returned to her parent's home on Blackhawk Island in the summer of 1924, where she remained until taking a job as an assistant librarian at the Fort Atkinson Public library in May 1928. 1928 was also the year that she published her first two poems as an adult: "Transition," which appeared in *The Will-o-the-Wisp*, a small magazine of verse edited by Elkanah East Taylor, a poet from Norfolk,

¹ For more details on this time in Niedecker's life, see *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life*, 19-25. For further details of her interest in poetry while at Beloit College, see Fred Burwell's brief notes at <https://perma.cc/W6QP-7UX4>.

Virginia, and “Mourning Dove,” which appeared in the November 15 issue of the ‘wee’ magazine *Parnassus*, published from Greenwich Village by Lew Ney (Luther Niden).

‘Objectivist’ Attraction and Zukofsky’s Influence

Niedecker married Frank Hartwig in November 1928, and while the union was short-lived, she continued her position at the public library and added a job writing a column called “Library Notes” for the local paper, the *Jefferson County Union*. These jobs both lasted until late in 1930, when professional replacements were found for both jobs and Niedecker was laid off (in the midst of the nation’s worsening economic depression). Following these disappointments, Niedecker returned to her parents’ home on Blackhawk Island. She was without work, separated from her husband and living with her parents when she encountered the Zukofsky-edited ‘Objectivists’ issue of *Poetry* magazine at the Fort Atkinson Public Library sometime after its publication in February 1931.

Niedecker had published no new poetry since 1928, but her recently changed circumstances gave her both the time and freedom to pursue this old love again. The contents of the February 1931 issue of *Poetry* made a powerful impression on Niedecker and she wrote Zukofsky soon after encountering the issue, commencing lifelong epistolary friendship. Niedecker was just about the only member of the general public to respond favorably to the “Objectivists,” and Zukofsky was likely pleased to have had any interested response whatsoever.² Given that Niedecker later dated her first letter to Zukofsky as being sent in August or September of that year, its timing was probably most welcome to the somewhat deflated erstwhile ‘Objectivist’ impresario.

² Zukofsky would famously complain in the “Recencies’ in Poetry” address which prefaced *An ‘Objectivists’ Anthology*: “The “objectivists” number of Poetry appeared in February. Since then there have been March, April, May, June, July and we are now past the middle of August. Don’t write, telegraph.” (22)

Little Magazines Publications in the 1930s

Poetry Magazine Under Harriet Monroe

Almost immediately after beginning her correspondence with Zukofsky, Niedecker began sharing her work with editors known to be sympathetic to him. On November 5, 1931, Niedecker wrote to Harriet Monroe for the first time, stating simply that “Mr. Zukofsky encourages me to send some of my poems to you.” While the enclosure is missing, we know that Niedecker at least included her poem “When Ecstasy is Inconvenient,” because Monroe notified her that she was accepting it for publication in January 1932.³ Although Niedecker’s poem had been accepted for publication, it had not yet appeared in *Poetry* when she wrote Monroe again on January 31, 1933, submitting an additional three poems, including “Progression,” for consideration.

The letter Niedecker sent Monroe with these poems was nearly identical to one she had sent the day previous to Richard Johns, the editor of *Pagany*, who had published Williams, Zukofsky, and several other of the “Objectivists” in his magazine over the previous three years. Niedecker’s January 30, 1933 letter to Johns is the earliest surviving communication from Niedecker to Johns, it appears that they had already corresponded previously, as she wrote:

A few lines of the enclosed material you have seen before; the cat comes back, but a little changed. I am enclosing three poems tending toward illogical expression, “Progression” was written six months before Mr. Zukofsky referred me to the surrealists for correlation. I had explained the poem in this way: 1st section – simple knowing and concern for externals; 2nd section – one world farther in; 3rd section – the will to disorder, approach to dream, individual talking to himself, the supreme circumstance.

I had sketched my theory thus: 1. Poetry to have greatest reason for existing must be illogical, 2. An idea, a rumination such as more or less constantly roams the mind, meets external object or situation with quite illogical association, 3. Memory, if made up of objects at all, retains those objects which were at the time of first perception and still are the most

³ This date of acceptance is established by later letter, but Niedecker’s reply, dated July 5, 1932, instructed Monroe to keep whatever money would normally be due to her for the publication of the poem and merely send her two copies of the issue in which the poem would appear.

strikingly unrecognizable, 4. In my own experience, sentences have appeared full-blown, in the first moments of waking from sleep, 5. Writing is a system of thought replacements, the most remote the most significant or irrational; a thousand variations of the basic tension; an attempt at not hard clear images but absorption of these. 6. Intelligibility or reader's recognition of sincerity and force lies in a sense of 'basic color, sound, rhythm.

I do not know if the direction of "Progression" is surrealism, and it may not matter, only that it's a little disconcerting to be six months ahead of a movement and twenty years behind it.

I should be glad if there is a place for the poems in PAGANY but in any case your opinion would be valuable to me.⁴

While neither Monroe nor Johns accepted "Progression," Monroe did accept "Promise of a Brilliant Funeral," another of the three poems Niedecker had enclosed with this batch of submissions.⁵ Following Monroe's acceptance of "Promise," Niedecker wrote to Johns on March 21, 1933, withdrawing it from consideration and telling him:

The other two poems, however, especially "Progression" I should like to leave with you for further consideration, I am enclosing herewith lines to add as stanza 4 "Progression." This stanza continues the movement, I hope, from the traditional to the I tongue. It emphasizes memory and dream united, and season and mood united according to the following beliefs: 1. the passing of time is necessary above all else to development of concepts and attitudes (imagination we know is incomplete, but whether or not absolutely independent of time and place I do not know yet), and 2, landscape and season are not only states of mind but genuine states of the body's entire nervous system. As the poem goes on it may become nothing but the form of the unconscious, and if not actually new language, the effect of that. It will lack unity in the ordinary sense, but the apparent, consistent discontinuity will lie in references to nature.

If only the first three stanzas of "Progression" are accepted, they may be printed just as they stand, alone, but with stanza 4 or alone, they ought to be designated, if you will please, by number as they come – 1, 2, 3.⁶

⁴ Archive of *Pagany*, University of Delaware Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 174.

⁵ "Progression" was able to be included in Jenny Penberthy's *Collected Works* only because Burton Hatlen found a separate draft of the poem sent to Ezra Pound in January 1934 while searching among the Ezra Pound papers in 1995. See *Collected Works*, 25-32, 369-370.

⁶ Archive of *Pagany*, University of Delaware Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 174.

While we have no record of Johns' specific response to Niedecker's poem, Johns had already decided to suspend the publication of *Pagany*, and had just printed its final issue after some delay the month before Niedecker sent her letter. Although *Pagany* was no longer a possible venue for her work, in March 1933 it appeared that appearance in *Poetry* would be an imminent possibility for Niedecker.

On March 30, 1933, Niedecker wrote to Monroe's associate editor Geraldine Udell resupplying the manuscript draft of "When Ecstasy is Inconvenient," the poem which Monroe had accepted for publication in early 1932 but which had apparently been misplaced by the editors in the intervening months.⁷ By early August, Niedecker had received and approved prepublication drafts of "When Ecstasy is Inconvenient" and "Promise of a Brilliant Funeral," and these two poems appeared under the heading "Spirals" in the September 1933 issue of *Poetry*.⁸ This issue of *Poetry* also featured poems by Basil Bunting, Louis Zukofsky, Harry Roskolenko and Parker Tyler and prose by Ezra Pound, indicating that Monroe may have viewed Niedecker as part of an 'Objectivist' cluster (particularly since Zukofsky had facilitated their initial introduction in November 1931).⁹ While this would have been an accurate enough view of her social relations at the time, the truth is that when Niedecker first encountered Zukofsky and the other 'Objectivists,' the poetry she had been writing bore very few similarities to theirs in either temperament or approach. The two Niedecker poems Monroe published in the September 1933 issue of *Poetry*, for example, were concerned with dream

⁷ Niedecker's letter reads, in full: "Enclosed is "When Ecstasy is Inconvenient" accepted by Miss Monroe in January '32 and since mislaid. May I mention again, though I think Miss Monroe knows, I should like the poem, this one and the one just lately accepted printed under the name Lorine Niedecker, rather than Lorine Hartwig or Mrs. Frank Hartwig." (*Poetry*, A Magazine of Verse Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections, Box 18, Folder 2).

⁸ Niedecker had apparently rejected Monroe's suggestion of the heading "SOMNAMBULISTIC JOURNEY" (*Collected Works*, 369).

⁹ The full September 1933 issue of *Poetry* can be read online at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/issue/70569/september-1933>.

states and stream-of-consciousness techniques and, by Niedecker's own admission, might be more properly located in something of a surrealist vein. In fact, the changes in Niedecker's poetics, verbal style, and even economic concerns as she came increasingly under the editorial influence of Zukofsky can be traced in part through her subsequent submissions to *Poetry*.

Following her publication in the September 1933 issue, Niedecker submitted additional work to Monroe on a number of occasions. She wrote Monroe a fascinating letter on February 12, 1934 to accompany her enclosure of at least two works: "Communism or Capitalism" and "CANVAS." In that letter she told Monroe that her "Communism or Capitalism" was written as a direct response to "Storm Warning," a poem by James Daly that had recently appeared in *The New Masses* and claimed:

The effect of propaganda in poetic (?) form has the effect on me of swearing that I as a writer will portray my epoch and truthfully evoke life in its totalities only as I am able to make magic, magic of dream and deep subconscious and waking isolation thick unto impenetrability. One's fear is people – going social – but now I have another fear: it has been hard to sell magic – will the time come when it can't be given away?

I hope I do not impose upon you by asking for a word about CANVAS, form for planes of consciousness, which I am also enclosing. An experiment in three planes: left row is deep subconscious, middle row beginning of monologue, and right row surface consciousness, social-banal; experiment in vertical simultaneity (symphonic rather than traditional long line melodic form), and the whole written with the idea of readers finding sequence for themselves, finding their own meaning whatever that may be, as spectators before abstract painting. Left vertical row honest recording of constrictions appearing before falling off to sleep at night. I should like a poem to be seen as well as read. Colors and textures of certain words appearing simultaneously with the sound of words and printed directly above or below each other. All this means break-up of sentence which I deplore though I try to retain the great conceit of capitals and periods, of something to say. It means that for me at least, certain words of a sentence, – prepositions, connectives, pronouns – belong up toward full consciousness, while strange and unused words appear only in subconscious. (It also means that for me at least this procedure is directly opposite to that of the consistent and prolonged dream – in dream the simple and familiar words like prepositions, connectives etc ... are not absent, in fact, noticeably present to show illogical absurdity, discontinuity, parody of sanity.) I am aware this form is rather difficult to print – I mean it might have to stretch across two pages though perhaps small type could keep it to one page. Thank you for listening.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Poetry*, A Magazine of Verse Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections, Box 18, Folder 2.

Monroe's reply to Niedecker's intelligently expressed though deeply avant-garde sentiments does not survive, but handwritten notation on the letter indicates that Monroe replied on April 2, 1934 returning the submissions and expressing her "utter mystification." Niedecker replied to this rejection almost immediately, writing on April 7, 1934: "Would the enclosed "Eleven Month Stare" and "Almanac Maker" be "utter mystification"? I should very much like to place these in POETRY MAGAZINE, especially the former. If it would not be hurrying you too much I should appreciate hearing by April 21st so I may know whether to take them with me to New York." Monroe's handwritten notation indicates that she returned these submissions to Niedecker on April 20, describing them as "too witty—or not enough."¹¹

On May 31, 1934, Niedecker made another attempt to place her formally and conceptually adventurous work in *Poetry*, sending Monroe an additional set of poems "to preface my coming to Chicago and my calling upon you if I may take your time (a few moments) one day next week." The enclosure included "Three Poems," which Niedecker described as "another experiment in planes of consciousness [which] will probably disturb you even more than it does me" and "Year Before Last," which she jokes might be revised to set up a "'Year After Next' to discredit all journal method everywhere."¹² Monroe's specific response to these poems and Niedecker's proposed visit is unclear, but none of these poems appeared in *Poetry*, and Niedecker did not submit any more work in this vein to Monroe.

Nearly two years later, in a letter dated February 25, 1936 (just a few months before Monroe's death), Niedecker made one final submission of her work to Monroe, writing: "Looking around in America, working I hope with a more direct consciousness than in the past, the enclosed

¹¹ *Poetry*, A Magazine of Verse Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections, Box 18, Folder 2.

¹² *Poetry*, A Magazine of Verse Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections, Box 18, Folder 2.

Mother Goose (this title as you may know not copyright). As always, my best wishes to yourself and Poetry Magazine.” Niedecker’s reference to working “with a more direct consciousness” seems both a reference to Niedecker’s response to political and economic conditions as well as an acknowledgement of changes in poetic style (encouraged by Zukofsky) that she may have hoped would make her work more attractive to Monroe. A stamp on this final letter indicates that Niedecker’s Mother Goose submissions were returned on March 12, 1936 with a handwritten note indicating simply “Nay nay.”¹³ After her initial appearance in September 1933, Niedecker would not publish again in *Poetry* magazine until Henry Rago’s tenure as editor in the 1960s.

Bozart-Westminster, New Directions, and Furioso

Though she struggled to place additional work in *Poetry*, Niedecker enjoyed a brief flurry of publications in little magazines during the mid-to-late 1930s. Six poems that Harriet Monroe had declined to publish were published in *Bozart-Westminster* in 1935.¹⁴ Niedecker’s connection to this publication was somewhat circuitous, but offers further evidence of her increasing imbrication in the “Objectivist” nexus and her growing relationship with Zukofsky. Zukofsky had forwarded Niedecker’s work to Ezra Pound with commendations. Pound, who had some editorial control of *Bozart-Westminster* at this time, agreed to publish Niedecker’s poems in the magazine, though he and Zukofsky quarreled with some nastiness over this, with Pound seeming to take out some of his

¹³ *Poetry*, A Magazine of Verse Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections, Box 18, Folder 2.

¹⁴ This magazine, published out of Atlanta’s Oglethorpe University, was formed in 1935 with the merger of *Bozart and Contemporary Verse* (the title punning on the term ‘beaux arts’) and *The Westminster Magazine* and continued publication under the combined title until 1938, when it reverted to the simpler *Westminster* title.

anger with Zukofsky vicariously through his disparagement of someone he perceived to be Zukofsky's friend and protégé.¹⁵

Niedecker also placed nineteen poems in the first of James Laughlin's *New Directions in Poetry and Prose* annual anthologies in 1936, and published "Uncle," a loosely autobiographical short story in the *New Directions* anthology the following year.¹⁶ Two poems from *New Goose* in the inaugural issue of Reed Whittemore and James Angleton's *Furioso* (published in Summer 1939) comprised the remainder of her magazine publications for the decade.

New Goose

Beginning in 1935, and with encouragement from Zukofsky, Niedecker had begun work on a series of short, folk-speech inspired poems. Over the next decade she produced more than 80 of these poems, which she referred to as "Mother Geese/Goose" or "New Goose" poems, in homage to the folk tales and nursery rhymes associated with Mother Goose, an archetypal source of female folk wisdom. A great number of these were taken directly from conversations and historical records encountered while working in Madison for the Wisconsin Writers' Project and other Works Project Administration programs between 1938 and April 1942. Although Niedecker first began seeking publication for these poems in 1936, when she unsuccessfully submitted a dozen "Mother

¹⁵ Zukofsky wrote Pound on February 17, 1935: "Glad you agreed with me as to the value of Lorine Niedecker's work and are printing it in Westminster." Pound replied on March 6: "I don't think yr/ Niedecker is so hot/ thought he was a lady ANYhow. . . Lorine . . . ?? [Pound was confused as to Niedecker's gender by his misreading of a reference Zukofsky had made in a previous letter] It got by, because I printed one tadpole on each recommendation of qualified critics/ (ie; more or less. . . qualified.) I can't hold the boat FOR you." Zukofsky's reply, dated March 15, replies: "There's no use wasting yr. time calling me down about surrealisme—if you had read Mantis, An Interpretation, you'd have found I think pretty much as you do about surrealisme—but you haven't read it. Nor have I swallowed Miss Niedecker's mental stubbornness [sic]. However, her output has some validity, some spark of energy, which the solipsistic daze=maze of Mr. Kummings hath not" (*Pound/Zukofsky*, 161-165).

¹⁶ The poems published in 1936 were "The President of the Holding Company", "Fancy Another Day Gone", and seventeen short poems published under the heading "Mother Geese." These poems would remain uncollected in book form until their appearance in the Jenny Penberthy-edited *Collected Works* in 2002.

Goose” poems to *Poetry* magazine in February, they would not be published in book form until March 1946, when the James A. Decker Press published *New Goose*, her first collection.¹⁷ The James A. Decker Press was a small poetry-only press based in Prairie City, Illinois which had previously published books by well-known midwestern writers like Edgar Lee Masters and August Derleth, as well as books or anthologies by Zukofsky and his fellow “Objectivists” Norman Macleod, Harry Roskolenko, Charles Henri Ford.¹⁸ The book itself, like many of the Decker poetry titles, was physically small (4 1/2 by 6 inches) but attractively printed, and contained 41 poems, nearly all of which were very short (the only poem longer than 16 lines was “Pioneers”).¹⁹ Zukofsky had encouraged Niedecker to submit her manuscript to the press and via correspondence had also helped Niedecker prepare and edit the poems which she ultimately included in the final edition of the text.

“For Paul” Poems and the 1950s

In May 1944, Niedecker took a job as a stenographer and proofreader for Hoard’s, the printing company responsible for publishing *Hoard’s Dairyman*, an important regional agricultural trade publication. Following the publication of *New Goose* in 1946, Niedecker’s poetic output

¹⁷ By the time the book was published, nearly 15 years had elapsed since Niedecker first read the ‘Objectivists’ in *Poetry* magazine and initiated her correspondence with Louis Zukofsky; she also had to wait eighteen months after submitting a corrected typescript of the book manuscript to the press before the book was printed. This would have offered Niedecker another painful lesson in patience and helps highlight the difficulty that nearly all of the “Objectivists” had in publishing their work, especially in their early careers.

¹⁸ Decker had collaborated with Exile’s Press to publish *The Exiles’ Anthology*, edited by Helen Neville and Harry Roskolenko, in 1940. The press printed Ford’s *ABC’s* in 1940, Zukofsky’s *55 Poems* in 1941, and had published three annual anthologies edited by Macleod under the title *Calendar* between 1940 and 1942 as well as Macleod’s collection *We Thank You All the Time* in 1941. In 1941, Decker published Edgar Lee Masters’ *Illinois Poems* and printed his *Selected Poems* (edited by August Derleth) in 1944. Derleth’s own collections *Rind of Earth* and *The Edge of Night*, were published in 1942 and 1945, respectively. Zukofsky’s second collection, *Anew*, was also issued by the press shortly before Niedecker’s *New Goose* in 1946.

¹⁹ Five of the poems had been previously published in *New Directions* and one had appeared in *Furioso*.

declined considerably for a few years. She moved out of her parents' home into her own cabin on Blackhawk Island in 1946 and visited the Zukofskys in New York City in June 1947. It was on this trip that she first met Louis and Celia's young son Paul, who had been born on October 22, 1943. In 1949, Niedecker began work on a numbered series of "For Paul" poems, and devoted herself to this sequence with greater energy following her resignation from Hoard's (due to her deteriorating eyesight) in 1950. Niedecker and Zukofsky corresponded actively throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and by the end of 1956, she had shared a new book manuscript with Zukofsky and discussed the possibility of calling it *For Paul*.²⁰

Zukofsky suggested several omissions and revisions, and Niedecker sent a revised manuscript made up of 41 poems to Jonathan Williams, Zukofsky's contact at the Black Mountain Press on December 12, 1956. In a letter to Zukofsky written on the same day, Niedecker indicated that she was considering several alternate titles: *Other Poems and For Paul*, *Forms for Paul*, or even *Fellow Matter*, with the book being dedicated to Paul.²¹ Williams expressed interest in publishing Niedecker's manuscript, but the financial burden that publishing the book would impose upon her and Zukofsky's unwillingness to provide a forward eventually caused her to tell Williams she felt she "shouldn't go ahead with the printing."²² While she had offered \$200-\$300 towards publishing costs, she eventually shied away from the heavy expense that Williams was asking her to bear, confessing in a letter to Williams that "Poetry is the most important thing in my life but if sometime someone would print it without asking me for any money I'd feel it would be important to someone else also.

²⁰ In the letter she sent to Zukofsky in December 1956 accompanying the manuscript, she wrote: "Should the title be FOR PAUL?? Yes, I guess so. Nice if whenever it's printed, Paul's handwriting: AND I ACCEPT – PAUL. Suzz? If he does accept! !" (*Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky*, 230).

²¹ *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky*, 231.

²² Quoted in *Truck* 16 (Summer 1975).

... I think I spoke to you about printing a little too soon. I'm sorry. ... P.S.: If you can print the poetry of Louis Zukofsky and the prose of Edward Dahlberg I'll be content."²³ In the end, Niedecker never did publish the "For Paul" manuscript as a book, though she sporadically published small batches of poems, some of which had been part of this manuscript, in little magazines during the 1950s.

In July 1951, Niedecker's mother Daisy died. In 1951 and 1952, Niedecker wrote a series of unpublished prose and radio pieces. Her interest in the form appears to have begun with the composition of "Switchboard Girl," a largely autobiographical short story about her struggle to find employment as a thoughtful, introverted single female with poor eyesight in a small Midwestern town. This piece was published in the *New Directions* anthology in 1951, though no other prose from this period appeared in print. Penberthy has collected pieces from three other projects, however: "The evening's automobiles," a brief and loosely autobiographical prose reflection about her life in Fort Atkinson shortly after leaving Hoard's in which Niedecker adopts a male persona; "As I Lay Dying," a 17-page radio adaptation of William Faulkner's novel (never produced); and one surviving scene from "Taste and Tenderness," a two-act radio script about the James family [Henry, William, Alice] that Niedecker sent to Zukofsky in 1952.

Niedecker visited the Zukofsky's in New York City again for Christmas in 1953, and following her father Henry's death in June 1954, Louis, Celia, and Paul visited her on Black Hawk Island that summer. Upon her father's death, Niedecker inherited some property which provided her with both welcome rental income as well as the burden of ownership and the unwelcomed troubles of being a landlord. In January 1957, Niedecker wrote to Jonathan Williams of the burdens

²³ Quoted in *Truck* 16 (Summer 1975), 44.

of property ownership and her search for employment: “Then too at the moment I’m involved in hot water heaters for my cottages, in drilling for a flowing well and in job hunting, the last named the greatest nightmare of all even when I find the job.”²⁴

On February 1, 1957, Niedecker began a new position as a cleaning person in the Dietary Unit at the Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital. Her janitorial work at the hospital made considerable demands on her time and energy leaving her only the weekends for reading and writing. Her heavy work schedule dramatically curtailed her poetic production, particularly during her first few years in the job, though she had not exactly been prolific in the decade previous.²⁵

When Robert Creeley accepted four poems for inclusion in the Spring 1956 issue of the *Black Mountain Review*, for instance, she wrote excitedly to Edward Dahlberg: “Creeley has now accepted 4. I’m almost overcome, this would make my 6th publication in 10 years!”²⁶ The five previous publications she referred to in this letter were appearances in *New Directions*’ annual anthologies (she published poems in both the 1949 and 1950 anthologies, and published “Switchboard Girl,” a prose piece, in the 1951 anthology); poems published in the Summer 1950 and Spring 1951 issues of the *New Mexico Quarterly*, where Edwin Honig was the poetry editor;²⁷ “Woman with Umbrella,” a short poem published in the Spring 1953 issue of *Accent*, a quarterly magazine published out of the University of Illinois and edited by Kerker Quinn and Charles

²⁴ Quoted in *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky*, 131.

²⁵ Margot Peters, her biographer, suggests that a typical workday schedule would have been rising at 5 am, leaving home by 6:15 am and returning from work around 5 pm. See *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet’s Life*, 126.

²⁶ Quoted in https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_7_200/current/readings/penberthy.htm.

²⁷ These can now be read online at <http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3087&context=nmq> and <http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3198&context=nmq>.

Shattuck; and the publication of a cluster of “For Paul” poems in the *Quarterly Review of Literature* in 1955.²⁸ Even this small trickle slowed considerably after she began working as a cleaning woman, however. Following her appearance in *Black Mountain Review* in 1956, Niedecker’s only other publication for the next five years was the publication of a few poems in a 1959 issue of the Gilbert Sorrentino’s little magazine *Neon*.

The 1960s

1960, however, marked the beginning of the most significant decade of Niedecker’s poetic career, made notable especially by her introduction to publishers and champions as far afield as rural North Carolina (Jonathan Williams), Scotland (Ian Hamilton Finlay) and Japan (Cid Corman). Two events near the beginning of the decade played particularly important roles in her late-career flourishing. In September 1960, Niedecker wrote to Cid Corman for the first time, beginning a publishing relationship and epistolary friendship that would have a significant impact on both Niedecker’s late years and her posthumous reception. The second was her ‘discovery’ and publication by the poet, artist, and publisher Ian Hamilton Finlay, then working from Edinburgh, Scotland.

My Friend Tree

In 1961, the Scottish artist Ian Hamilton Finlay published Niedecker’s second book, *My Friend Tree*, through his Wild Hawthorn Press in Edinburgh, Scotland. *My Friend Tree* interspersed 16

²⁸ Of these poems, Niedecker wrote to Zukofsky on September 29, 1955: “I’m not too pleased with the looks of the mag For Paul is in. The poets in it seem too “educated” and sophisticated. It used to be a large periodical with prose and book reviews.’ Will have him send you one – or should I send it to Paul – well, both of you and all of you and those are my best in many years because they’re about something real and good and human. I’ve lost something since then, need subjects now to focus on. Now Zu, the last poem’ in this group [“They Live a Cool Distance,” which can be found in *Collected Works*, 160-161.] you may frown on but I was only trying to be honest. Remember that when you read it. Very difficult problem to state – I feel I haven’t yet got it all, left out maybe: their love of this thing. The stoic enters in but is only one aspect. I hope the poem doesn’t get over just the one idea that it’s a principle. It’s a compulsion to express thru difficulties, a love of the thing. At any rate, don’t set it up between us” (*Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky*, 224).

of Niedecker's poems (more than half of which had previously appeared in *New Goose*) with a series of abstract linocuts made by the English artist Walter Miller, who also designed the book's layout. As for paratext, the book included only a loose sheet one-page introduction by the poet Ed Dorn, who began by stating that "These sounds mark the placements of an inner world," and concluded by observing that "I like these poems because first they attach an undistractable clarity to the word, and then because they are unabashed enough to weld that word to a freely sought, beautifully random instance ... the catch in the seine." Though *My Friend Tree* was a very small book with a limited print run, its publication and Niedecker's inclusion in four of the first thirteen issues of [Poor.Old.Tired.Horse](#), Hamilton Finlay's influential magazine of visual poetry, did much to establish Niedecker as a poet of interest among sympathetic readers in the United Kingdom. Most importantly for her later career, her publication by Finlay brought her to the attention of Stuart and Deirdre Montgomery, proprietors of Fulcrum Press, who would go on to publish two of her collections later in the decade.²⁹

Cid Corman and Origin Magazine

Equally important for Niedecker's publication history was her epistolary friendship with Cid Corman, which led to her regular publication in Corman's little magazine *Origin* and Corman's tireless championing of Niedecker's work until his death in 2004.³⁰ Niedecker initiated the relationship, as she had nearly 30 years earlier with Zukofsky, writing to Corman on September 6, 1960, telling him that Zukofsky had encouraged her to send Corman her own work, offering a set of

²⁹ Niedecker had poems included in issues [1](#), [4](#), [2](#), and [13](#) of *POTH* (links lead to PDF files hosted at UBU web).

³⁰ More than 100 letters from Niedecker to Corman survive, meaning that Niedecker averaged almost a letter a month to Corman over the decade of their correspondence.

seven short poems, and indicating that she was eager to see the forthcoming publication of Zukofsky's "A"-13 in Corman's newly-resumed *Origin*.

Corman accepted Niedecker's poems for publication, and Niedecker wrote Corman an additional seven letters before the end of 1961, enclosing money to support Corman's publishing efforts in several of these letters. Corman included work by Niedecker in ten different issues of *Origin*, and listed her on the cover as the featured author of the issue on two occasions.³¹ In November 1970, just two weeks before Niedecker sustained the sudden cerebral hemorrhage which eventually claimed her life, Corman and his wife Shizumi visited Niedecker and her husband Al Millen at their home on Blackhawk Island, at which time Corman made [the only known recording of Niedecker reading her poetry](#).

Other Magazine Publications in the 1960s

In addition to her budding relationship with new publishers, the other major change that impacted Niedecker's poetic output was domestic. On May 24, 1963, Niedecker married Al Millen, a one-armed industrial painter from Milwaukee she met a few months previously when he had purchased one of her Blackhawk Island properties as a retirement cabin. In November, Lorine retired from her cleaning position at Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital and moved to Al's apartment in Milwaukee in December of 1963. Freed from the burdens of property management and full-time employment by her marriage to Al, Niedecker devoted much of her new-found time and leisure to poetry. In addition to her publications with Corman (in *Origin*) and Finlay (in *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse*),

³¹ A full list of Niedecker's *Origin* appearances is as follows: 2.2, July 1961 (Nine poems); 2.6, July 1962 ("The men leave" and "The wild and wavy event"); 2.8, January 1963 (Five poems); 3.2, July 1966 (She appeared as the featured poet and the issue included 38 poems and excerpts from 5 letters); 3.7, October 1967 (HEAR & SEE [11 poems]); 3.9, April 1968 (eleven poems); 3.12, January 1969 ("L.Z."); 3.19, October 1970 (9 poems, including "His Carpets Flowered" and "Thomas Jefferson") 4.1, October 1977 ("Darwin"); and 4.16, July 1981 (Her second appearance as the featured poet, this issue featured 48 pages of Niedecker-related material, including a biography by Jane Knox, 9 poems and some excerpts from notes and letters).

Niedecker also found wider circulation for her work as the “Objectivists” began to emerge to greater public notice, publishing poems in the well-known magazines *Poetry*, *Granta*, and the *Paris Review* as well as a range of small magazines being published by a generation of admiring younger American poets. Niedecker published three poems in the [August 1963 issue](#) of *Poetry* (nearly 30 years after her first appearance in the magazine!), two poems in the [Summer/Fall 1964 issue of the *Paris Review*](#), three poems in the 1964/1965 issue of the old *Granta* magazine, five poems in the [August 1965 issue of *Poetry*](#), a single poem, “Who Was Mary Shelley,” [in the Winter 1966 issue of the *Paris Review*](#), and four poems in the [December 1967 issue of *Poetry*](#). She also published work in the inaugural issue of Clark Coolidge and Michael Palmer’s *Joglers* (which appeared in Spring 1964); in *Arts in Society* (published at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and edited by Morgan Gibson) in 1965 and 1967; had 8 poems in the first issue of Thomas Merton’s *Monk’s Pond* (Spring 1968); published her long poem “Wintergreen Ridge” in the April-July 1968 issue of Clayton Eshleman’s *Caterpillar*; published “Paeon to Place” and a handful of shorter poems appeared in George Quasha and Roger Guedella’s large “America: A Prophecy” *Stony Brook* anthology in 1969; and two short poems in the June 1970 issue of Mike Doyle’s *Tuatara*. Eliot Weinberger also published a few Niedecker poems posthumously in the Summer 1976 issue of *Montemora*.

Late-Career Niedecker

While Lorine’s marriage to Al enabled a late-career florescence of poetic production, reliable publication continued to be elusive. In 1968, when L.S. Dembo arranged for the interviews and campus readings by Zukofsky, Oppen, Reznikoff, and Rakosi that eventually marked the ‘rediscovery’ of the ‘Objectivists’ by the academy, Niedecker still had published just two slim volumes, one of which had appeared more than 20 years previously, and the other an obscure artist’s book printed by an eccentric Scotsman. All told, the total output she had published in books bearing

her name comprised fewer than 75 pages, and was mostly comprised of tiny poems generally no longer than 8-10 lines each. The remainder of her publications had been confined to little magazines, with the exception of about twenty poems that had been published in *Poetry* and *The Paris Review*. While we might lament Dembo's lost opportunity and perhaps even suspect him of gender bias, based on Niedecker's then extant publications it's difficult to see how Dembo could have properly considered Niedecker to be the significant poet we now know her to be absent significant prompting from Zukofsky, the only person Dembo had contact with that had a fair sense of her poetic talents and the full range of her (then largely unpublished) oeuvre. Unfortunately for Niedecker, Zukofsky's relationship to his former "Objectivist" peers was quite cold at this point. Still smarting from the hurt of his own long-standing neglect, he had little interest in publicly promoting the work of others. Despite Dembo's "oversight," 1968 was still an auspicious year for both the "Objectivists" generally and for Niedecker in particular, marking the beginning of a flurry of significant publishing activity for her.³²

North Central

This intense burst of publication began with *North Central*, published in London by Stuart and Deirdre Montgomery's Fulcrum Press. Immediately upon its publication, it was clear that *North Central* was (and remains) the most significant of Niedecker's poetry collections. For one, it was by far the longest and most ambitious collection she had published, as well as having by far the largest print run (with over 5000 copies printed). While the book enjoyed some success in England, it

³² In addition to being the year that Dembo began the process reconstructing the Objectivist nexus as a formation of interest for the study of 20th century American poetry, 1968 was also the year that Oppen published *Of Being Numerous*, which was a surprise winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.

wouldn't be until the publication of her *T & G: Collected Poems 1936-1966* that Niedecker's work from two decades following the publication of *New Goose* became available in her native country.

T & G: The Collected Poems (1936-1966)

T & G was published from Penland, North Carolina by Jonathan Williams in an original edition of 2000. The book bore the imprimatur of Williams' Jargon Society (which he maintained by subscription) and was sent to his subscribers as *Jargon 48*. The book was handsomely composed and printed and was decorated with several plant prints made by [A. Doyle Moore](#), an accomplished artist who taught graphic design at the University of Illinois for many years. For all the book's beauty, however, its journey to publication had been neither easy nor placid, as the perpetually nomadic and underfunded Williams had delayed publication for several years, worrying and exasperating Niedecker a great deal and causing her to seriously doubt whether the book would ever appear at all.

My Life by Water: Collected Poems 1936-1968

In 1970, Fulcrum Press published their own collected Niedecker in England. Their collection, *My Life by Water: Collected Poems 1936-1968*, comprised most of Niedecker's poetic output from the years circumscribed, and was the last book published during Niedecker's lifetime, as she died unexpectedly on December 31, 1970, aged 67.

Posthumous Publications

In the two decades immediately following her death, three new books appeared, thanks to the continued efforts and advocacy of Cid Corman and Jonathan Williams.

Blue Chicory

The first posthumous Niedecker collection was the Corman-edited *Blue Chickory*, published by James Weil's Elizabeth Press in 1976. *Blue Chickory* included several poems which were uncollected or in manuscript form at the time of Niedecker's death.

From this Condensery

In 1985, two collections appeared which attempted to take a broad, comprehensive view of Niedecker's career output. Williams' Jargon Society printed *From this Condensery*, a collected edited by Robert J. Bertholf which he sent to subscribers as Jargon 100. This collection purported to be "The Complete Writings of Lorine Niedecker," and while extensive (at over 330 pages), the book suffered from major editorial flaws, necessitating its replacement as the definitive record of Niedecker's career output by Jenny Penberthy's *Collected Works* (published in 2002). In addition to the hardcover edition, Williams also produced a special leather-bound "Patrons Edition" comprised by 100 copies signed by Williams and Bertholf.

The Granite Pail: The Selected Poems of Lorine Niedecker

The same year, Corman published a selection of Niedecker's poems under the title *The Granite Pail: The Selected Poems of Lorine Niedecker* with Jack Shoemaker's North Point Press. The book was the first posthumous attempt at a selected poems, and contained work from each of Niedecker's previously published books, with more extensive selections made from work Corman had previously selected for publication. The North Point Press ceased publishing books in 1991, but Corman published out a revised edition of *The Granite Pail* with Jonathan Greene's Gnomon Press in 1996.

Jenny Penberthy's Editorial Care

While Williams and Corman were invaluable in bringing Niedecker's work to wider attention, the most important event for Niedecker's current standing and reputation was her discovery by Jenny Penberthy in the early 1980s. Penberthy became interested in Niedecker after reading Basil Bunting's praise for her as "one of the finest American poets of all, besides being easily the finest female American poet."³³ Penberthy subsequently became the world's leading authority on Niedecker's poetry, carefully editing and publishing *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970* in 1993; *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, a collection of essays, letters, and biographical remembrances published in 1996 by the National Poetry Foundation; and three collections of poetry, including *Collected Works*, the definitive collection of Niedecker's writing, published in 2002 by the University of California Press.

Harpsichord & Salt Fish

Penberthy's superlative contribution to Niedecker textual scholarship began in 1991 with the appearance of *Harpsichord & Salt Fish*. This book was based on a manuscript that Niedecker had completed and sent to James Laughlin's New Directions Press in 1970, but which New Directions had declined to publish. Penberthy recovered the manuscript through her archival research, however, and printed the collection with Ric and Anne Caddel's Pig Press in Durham, England.

Penberthy followed this initial foray with *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970*, a carefully edited and thoroughly documented account of the Niedecker-Zukofsky relationship which includes nearly three-quarters of the surviving letters from Niedecker to Zukofsky, published by Cambridge University Press in 1993. This book was a remarkable scholarly accomplishment

³³ See Penberthy's "Acknowledgements" in *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky*, xiii.

which had been made particularly difficult by large gaps in their surviving correspondence and the notorious [reluctance of Paul Zukofsky to allow republication of his father's words](#).

In 2002, Penberthy published two Niedecker-related books: a reordered edition of Niedecker's *New Goose* poems, many of which had been previously unpublished, with the Berkeley, California based imprint Listening Chamber, and the monumental *Collected Works* published by the University of California Press.

New Goose (2002)

Penberthy's 2002 edition of *New Goose* includes all 86 of the known poems which survive from the decade during which Niedecker was writing her Mother Goose poems (1935-1945).

Collected Works

Penberthy's *Collected Works* is a meticulously edited, authoritative record of Niedecker's career literary output. Rooted in deep archival research, it corrected a number of egregious errors perpetuated by Bertholf's *From This Condensery*, including a far more accurate title (*Collected Works* rather than *The Complete Writing*). Penberthy published a [small collection of errata](#) to the edition on *Jacket2* in 2013.

Autograph Editions of Niedecker's Handmade Works

In the years following Niedecker's death, a handful of publications have reprinted various portions of Niedecker's total output with various contextual paratext. The first of these, *A Cooking Book*, was published by Bob Arnold's Longhouse Press in 1992, and consists of facsimile reproductions of a handmade, lighthearted cookbook Niedecker made as a Christmas gift for her

friend Maude Hartel in 1964.³⁴ To celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Niedecker's birthday in 2003, the Woodland Pattern bookshop and Karl Young's Light & Dust collaborated to print *Paean to Place*, an autograph edition of a handmade book Niedecker made in August 1969 for her friend Florence Dollase. In 2012, John Harkey edited *Homemade Poems*, an autograph reproduction of one of the three handmade gift books Niedecker made in late 1964 for Cid Corman, Jonathan Williams, and Louis Zukofsky published as part of the Center for the Humanities at CUNY's "Lost and Found" series.

Lake Superior

In 2013, Wave Books published *Lake Superior*, which was comprised of the original poem, some 20+ pages of notes from Niedecker's journal surrounding the circle tour she and her husband Al Millen made to see Lake Superior in 1966, and 60+ pages of additional contextual material relevant to the poem.

³⁴ A digitized scan of the copy that Niedecker gave to Maude has been digitized by the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections and can be viewed [online](#).

Carl Rakosi's Publishing History

Pre-'Objectivist' Poetry

While he first became interested in reading literature during his youth in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Carl Rakosi first began to write poetry as a sixteen-year-old freshman at the University of Chicago. During the winter quarter of his first and only year at Chicago, Rakosi took an Introduction to English literature course taught by Robert Morss Lovett. In this course, Rakosi befriended two fellow students who inspired and encouraged Rakosi in writing his own verse: George Schuyler, a young African-American man and aspiring writer, and an older Japanese man who wrote short, haiku-like poems. He would later recall, "One day I was a reader of literature and the next day, there was the knowledge, as if it had always been there, that I wanted to be a writer and that I could best express myself in poetry, not prose."¹

Following his transfer to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1921, Rakosi continued to develop his own sense of identity as a poet, majoring in English, reading a number of radical modernist literary magazines, and participating actively in literary societies on campus. Rakosi's early work was heavily influenced by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats and the American writer Wallace Stevens. Rakosi later admitted "at first I was seduced by the elegance of language, the imaginative association of words; I was involved in a language world — a little like the world of Wallace Stevens, who was an idol of mine during a certain period."²

Rakosi was nineteen years old when he published his first poems in the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine*, a student publication for which he served as an editor along with his close friend Kenneth

¹ "Autobiography," 202.

² "Carl Rakosi," *Contemporary Literature* 10.2 (Spring 1969), 182.

Fearing.³Fearing was the editor-in-chief of the magazine until he was forced to resign in March 1924 by a panel of faculty unhappy with his editorial tone. Rakosi published a total of seven poems here in 1923, with work appearing in the March, April, October, November, and December issues of the magazine. In May 1923, his poem “Gigantic Walker” appeared in *The Liberator*, a socialist magazine (and organ of the Communist Party of America), then edited by Robert Minor. In 1924, Rakosi published a poem in *The Daily Cardinal*, a University of Wisconsin-Madison newspaper, as well as two poems in *Palms*, a literary magazine being published from Guadalajara, Mexico by 22 year-old UC-Berkeley graduate Idella Purnell.

Rakosi’s first major literary success came in 1925, shortly after moving to New York City. The novelist Margery Latimer, Rakosi’s friend at the University of Wisconsin, had encouraged Rakosi to visit Jane Heap, the well-known editor of *The Little Review*, at the magazine’s Greenwich Village offices. Rakosi did so, and when with great trepidation he presented her with a manuscript of his poems, she agreed on first sight to publish his work. True to her word, three of Rakosi’s poems: “Sittingroom by Patinka,” “The January of a Gnat,” and “Flora and the Ogre,” appeared in the Spring 1925 issue of *The Little Review*, marking Rakosi’s first publication in a national literary magazine. Rakosi, then twenty-one years old, was elated. Later that year, after returning to Madison for graduate school, he published “The Bonds of Love,” a cynical poem about marriage, in *The Nation*, a well-known progressive weekly magazine. He also founded *The Issue*, a short-lived satirical magazine with Alexander Schindler, a Swiss medical student, publishing one of his own poems in the first issue and his translation of a poem by French surrealist poet and Communist fellow traveler Louis Aragon in the second (and final) issue of the magazine.

In 1926, Rakosi published poems in *The Echo*, *The Nation*, *Two Worlds* (a magazine edited by Samuel Roth), and Mike Gold’s newly founded Marxist magazine *The New Masses*. In 1927, Ezra

Pound included four of Rakosi's poems in the second issue of *The Exile* (though Rakosi did not know Pound had printed him until Louis Zukofsky wrote him a few years later), and a poem was chosen for inclusion in the first *The American Caravan* anthology, edited by Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Kreymborg, Lewis Mumford, and Paul Rosenfeld. In 1928, Rakosi published two poems in Eugene Jolas and Maria McDonald's Paris-based literary journal *transition* (the issue Rakosi appeared in was the final issue edited by Elliot Paul), and had a poem printed in the final issue of Pound's *The Exile*.

“Objectivists” 1931 and the Immediate Aftermath

By the time that Zukofsky wrote to Rakosi late in 1930 with an introduction from Ezra Pound and a request for any unpublished poetry he might have for an issue of *Poetry* that Zukofsky was editing, it had been almost five years since Rakosi had published poetry in an American magazine of any kind, and more than two years since his last poems had appeared in print. Rakosi was then living in Houston, teaching high school English and mostly hating it, wondering how much longer he could hang on to writing poems and wondering what to do with his life.

For Zukofsky, however, Rakosi would have been one of the biggest names available to him, since he had previously appeared in some of the leading experimental and avant-garde publications of the day. Zukofsky's letters and encouragement buoyed Rakosi considerably, and Zukofsky printed four of Rakosi's poems, “Orphean Lost,” “Fluteplayers from Finmarken,” “Unswerving Marine,” and “Before You,” for the February 1931 “Objectivists” issue. No other poet had as many poems published in the issue, and Zukofsky further demonstrated his esteem for Rakosi's work by giving it pride of place, publishing his four poems as the magazine's opening content, gathered under a heading of “Before You.”

Rakosi's appearance in *Poetry* and correspondence with Zukofsky spurred a burst of poetic productivity, and he published several additional poems in the remainder of the year, with work in three separate issues of Richard Johns' magazine *Pagany*, an additional five poems selected by Harriet Monroe for the November 1931 issue of *Poetry*, and his sequence "A Journey Away" appearing in the Winter 1931 issue of *Hound & Horn*. In 1932, the Oppens published the Zukofsky-edited *An "Objectivists" Anthology* from Le Beausset, France, which included two new poems from Rakosi, and he published in the final issue of William Carlos Williams and Nathanael West's revival of *Contact* and the first issue of *The Lion and the Crown*, a periodical edited by James G. Leippert at Columbia University. In 1933 and the first part of 1934, Rakosi continued actively publishing, with five poems appearing in the first two issues of *The Windsor Quarterly*, a poem in both the April and November issues of *Poetry*, and three poems in two issues of *The New Act*, an experimental literary review edited by Harold Rosenberg. Following his publication of two poems in the Spring 1934 issue of the *The New Act*, however, Rakosi stopped publishing poems in literary magazines, and returned to New York City the following year, devoting himself to a career as a professional social worker.

Selected Poems

Though he had not published any new poems in literary magazines or journals for several years, Rakosi wrote to James Laughlin in October 1940, to inquire about the possibility of publishing a book with New Directions. Laughlin indicated that the press was just beginning a "Poet of the Month" series of chapbooks on a subscription model and offered him a place in that series. Rakosi accepted the offer, and after additional correspondence between the two men, a slim paperback of Rakosi's poetry, entitled *Selected Poems*, was published in December 1941 as a poet of the month selection.

Selected Poems contained thirty four poems, twenty-five of which had already been published in various literary magazines or anthologies in the early 1930s, though often with different titles and considerable textual variation, as well as nine previously unpublished poems. The book was designed by Alvin Lustig and featured one of the first cover designs he made for *New Directions*. The jacket copy asserted:

Though he has been writing for some years, Rakosi has far too modestly allowed his light to be hidden under a bushel. An occasional magazine publication and some association with the "Objectivist" group in the early Thirties have been his only concessions to his admirers. But at last we have persuaded him to issue a selection of his work and this booklet is the happy result.

When its publication passed with little notice and Rakosi failed to obtain a Guggenheim grant in support of his proposed study of the psychology of the poet, Rakosi abandoned reading and writing poetry entirely. This break was more final than earlier equivocations, and following this break with writing, Rakosi devoted himself wholly to family life (he was married with two young children) and a career as a social worker and family therapist conducted under his legal name Callman Rawley, which he had assumed in 1925. The poet Carl Rakosi was, for all intents and purposes, dead.

Andrew Crozier and Rakosi's Return to Poetry

In 1965, shortly before his planned retirement from as the long-time director of the Jewish Family and Children's Service in Minneapolis, Callman Rawley received a wholly unexpected letter from Andrew Crozier, a young English poet studying on a Fulbright scholarship with Charles Olson at the State University of New York-Buffalo. Crozier's letter read:

Please excuse me if I make any intrusion upon your privacy but I would like to write to you about the poems you published under the name Carl Rakosi. I have your address from the Hennepin County Welfare Department, to which I wrote at the suggestion of Charles Reznikoff in New York.

I have been interested in your poems since I saw your name mentioned by Kenneth Rexroth some three years ago [probably in Rexroth's book, *Assays*, where he compares Rakosi to the French poet Pierre Reverdy], but until I came here last autumn was only able to turn up "A Journey Away" printed in *Hound and Horn*. I have now been able to find about eighty poems of yours, published between 1924 and 1934, and what immediately strikes me is the discrepancy between that body of work and your *Selected Poems*. And the way, say, long poems like "The Beasts" and "A Journey Away" are chopped up into smaller units in that volume.

I wonder, too, why you have stopped publishing since 1941 and whether you have been writing since then or not.

Again, please excuse me if this letter is an impertinence, but I like and admire your poems very much and feel impelled to write to you now, my interest is so engaged with them.

Rakosi recalled that upon reading Crozier's letter:

My heart gave a leap. Something was moving in my distant young past. I began to feel slightly nervous. . . . This not at all unusual letter knocked the wind out of me. I sat there, I don't know how long, not thinking anything, yet sensing that something big had just happened, something had changed. Was it possible I could write again? This time it was possible. I would be free in two years, and with great joy I started. The first poem I wrote was "Lying in Bed on a Summer Morning." The old ticker was still there.³

After a nearly twenty-five year hiatus, the poet Carl Rakosi had been revived.

Publications with New Directions

Following this startling reawakening, Rakosi spent much of the next two years re-immersing himself in poetry, as both a reader and as a maker. He told George Evans and August Kleinzahler in 1988 that

Crozier's letter had opened the door to my past and a kind of delirious excitement took hold of me at the realization that for the first time in my adult life I would shortly be altogether free of obstructions and distractions...no job, children all grown, no financial problems to worry about. But how to begin? There was no poetic impulse yet, and when it did begin to come, bit by bit, and I began to put words to paper, I felt an enormous uncertainty as to whether there was any poetry in me, and what would it be, and would it be good enough, that is, as good as my past work. In fact, when I sent Laughlin the manuscript of *Amulet*, that was what I said to him, I didn't know whether I had all my old marbles. When it came down

³ "An Interview with Carl Rakosi," *Conjunctions* 11 (1988), 236.

to the actual doing, the only hard problem I had, and that was discouraging, was getting back my old language. I was afraid that was gone for good after years of talking and writing nothing but the abominable language of sociology, the language of generalities and the impersonal, and of psychology. I had to undo a lifetime of linguistic habit and expunge it word by word out of my system.⁴

After a few months of active writing, Rakosi began to send out feelers regarding publication, writing first to James Laughlin, whose New Directions publishing company had published his *Selected Poems* and who was then contributing to the recovery of the Objectivists by publishing books by George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff. On October 18, 1965 Laughlin wrote to Rakosi: "I can't publish, but will show it June Degnan, our co-publisher, who does books under the joint San Francisco Review-New Directions imprint." Laughlin wrote Rakosi again in November 1965 and February 1966, declining to publish his book but encouraging Rakosi to seek out Degnan, referencing Charles Reznikoff and Kenneth Rexroth, and suggesting that the poet Denise Levertov might be a good choice for an introduction (she did in fact end up writing the book's back jacket blurb). Laughlin ultimately changed his mind, however, and New Directions published *Amulet* in 1967.

Amulet

Amulet was designed by David Ford and featured a close up detail from a Union Carbide Corporation photograph printed in brilliant blue and red tones on the hardcover dust jacket and in gray scale on the paperback. The book was dedicated "To Andrew Crozier, who wrote the letter / which started me writing again, / And to my family. / L'hayim! Each of them came along just in time" and featured a back cover blurb from Denise Levertov which identified the book as a "selection from his poems, old and new," briefly told the story of his abandonment and return to writing poetry, and identified Rakosi as a writer who "was well known in the Thirties, a leading

⁴ Ibid, 239-240.

member of the Objectivist Group, which also included William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, and George Oppen.”⁵

In the volume’s acknowledgements, Rakosi noted that

The poems in this volume written prior to 1939, in somewhat different form usually, made their appearance first in exciting little magazines of that day [followed by a list of magazine and anthology titles].

Recently *The Paris Review* reprinted “The Founding of New Hampshire” and “The Lobster.” I hope this means that the second generation finds those years a good vintage.

I did not write again until April 1965. Some of this new work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *The Quarterly Review of Literature*.⁶

Apart from this notice, however, the material was not arranged in any chronological order and there was no additional distinction made for the reader between old and newer work. Among the most notable of the new poems were the first five of Rakosi’s “Americana” poems, a sequence of typically short, ironic lyrics that often employed found language or vernacular speech and which illuminated some aspect of the peculiarly American character which Rakosi would continue to add to for decades to come.

Following the publication of *Amulet*, Rakosi was invited by L.S. Dembo to visit the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the spring of 1968, where he gave a reading and was interviewed for an issue of *Contemporary Literature* that Dembo was preparing on the Objectivist poets.⁷ In December 1968, he retired from social work and psychotherapy, marking the end of Callman Rawley’s professional career. Upon his retirement, he essentially reverted to being Carl

⁵ *Amulet*, viii, n.p.

⁶ *Amulet*, iv.

⁷ That [interview](#) was printed as part of the “The ‘Objectivist’ Poet: Four Interviews:” *Contemporary Literature* 10.2 (Spring 1969), 155-219, and has been reproduced courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Press.

Rakosi, as his identity as a poet and writer became his most important public role for the remainder of his life (though his book's copyright notices continued to be registered by Callman Rawley, which remained his legal name until his death). Following the publication of his interview with Dembo in the Spring 1969 edition of *Contemporary Literature*, Rakosi spent the 1969-1970 academic year as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Ere-Voice

Rakosi's next book, *Ere-Voice*, was published by New Directions in 1971, with a Jean-Philippe Blaise photograph of a drawing by Argentinian painter and architect Miguel Ocampo as its cover. In the acknowledgments to the book Rakosi notes a special debt to Yaddo, the summer artist's retreat in Saratoga Springs, "where most of these poems were written. I wish there were a catwalk from them to my dear family and friends." Rakosi had first attended Yaddo in the summer of 1968, just after publishing *Amulet*, and went each summer from 1968-1975. The unsigned jacket copy claims that in this collection, Rakosi "again probes the minutiae of everyday experience ... [but] now addresses itself with greater frequency to public issues," and positioned Rakosi as "a leading member of the Objectivist Group." The jacket also included Rakosi's claim that his primary poetic intention is "to present objects in their most essential reality and to make of each poem an object ... the opposite, in other words, of all forms of personal vagueness; of loose bowels and streaming, sometimes screaming, consciousness."

Ere-Voice featured work which had previously been published in a dozen small magazines or anthologies in the United States and England, including *The Nation*, Clayton Eshleman's *Caterpillar*, Sonia Raiziss' *Chelsea*, the Zionist literary journal *Midstream* (where Charles Reznikoff's wife Marie Syrkin served on the editorial board), Tim Longville and John Riley's *Grosseteste Review*, and Dan Gerber and Jim Harrison's *Sumac*. After *Ere-Voice* and *Amulet* sold poorly, New Directions dropped

Rakosi from their list of authors (as they had done with Reznikoff), leaving Rakosi to find another publisher for any future manuscripts.

Black Sparrow and Small Press Publications

Casting about in search of a new publisher, Rakosi turned to John Martin's Black Sparrow Press, which had published a large collection of his friend and fellow "Objectivist" Charles Reznikoff's work in 1974 under the title *By the Well of Living & Seeing: New and Selected Poems*.

Ex Cranium, Night

In 1975, Black Sparrow published Rakosi's *Ex Cranium, Night*, a longer book that combined several poetic sequences ("Xanadu," "Night," "Americana" 22-34, "The Poet") with a smattering of prose (largely aphoristic selections or statements of poetics under the section titles "Day Book," "Ex Cranium, the Poet," and "Observations," as well as "The Artist," which was structured as one side of an epistolary exchange from a fictional female painter based on an artist friend from Yaddo). Individual pieces collected in the book had appeared in two dozen literary magazines or journals, including a half-dozen in England or Australia. The book was dedicated "With love / to Leah / George Leanna Barbara / Jennifer Julie Joanna Miriam" and was produced in a typically attractive Black Sparrow fashion, featuring a two-toned letter-press cover and design by Barbara Martin. Two-hundred numbered and signed copies of the hardcover edition were produced, along with 26 handbound copies each containing an original holograph poem by Rakosi. A single-page biography at the conclusion of the volume gave a detailed and accurate account of his life, stating simply that "In the early 1930s he was associated briefly with the Objectivists."⁸

⁸ *Ex Cranium, Night*, 177.

History: A Sequence of Poems

In 1981, Rakosi published two small chapbooks: *History: A Sequence of Poems* and *Droles de Journal*. *History*, published in London by Ian Robinson's Oasis Books, contained a brief foreword by Rakosi, which read:

Over the years I have written poems having to do with the sense of the times in the 1920s and 1930s, but I didn't realize until much later that they belonged together and that, with some later poems, what I had been writing about was history. Hence the title.

This new entity has six sections: a meditation, The Third Decade, The Fourth Decade, The Seventh Decade, The Eighth Decade, and an epilogue. In the third and fourth decades I was reporting on an "American character." After that I could not find it. This bears out my experience in trying to teach John Berryman's seminar, The American Character, at the University of Minnesota after his suicide. I found that until World War II there did seem to be an American character at work. After that we became more like the rest of the world . . . split into fragments, diffuse, varied, a state on which the media feeds and constantly sounds the alarm, thereby inflaming the symptom and confirming the disintegration. The poet however will not go along.

I wonder myself now why HISTORY contains so few metaphors. I don't think it was only because the content was sufficient without them, that it could speak for itself. I think it was also that I refrained from using the transforming power of the metaphor and the imagination because of my respect for the singular gravity and trauma of what was happening in the world.⁹

Droles de Journal

Droles de Journal was published by Allan and Cinda Kornblum's The Toothpaste Press in West Branch, Iowa. The book was designed and printed by Allan Kornblum, handset by Ellen Weis, and bound by Rebecca Henderson in February 1981. The text itself was comprised of twenty numbered poems (most of which were brief and very witty) printed in an artist's edition of 150 numbered and signed hardcover copies and 1500 paperback copies. Apart from excerpts from a

⁹ *History*, 6.

glowing review of Rakosi's work in *Bookletter* by the novelist Paul Auster printed on the back cover, the book contained no additional prefatory or biographical material.

Spiritus, I

In 1983, Ric and Ann Caddel's Pig Press (operated out of Durham, England) published *Spiritus, I*, a slim (54 pages), handsome volume whose cover features a reproduction of a Ch'ing Dynasty rubbing of the Chinese calligraphic form of the character 壽 [*shòu*, long-life]. The book was divided into four numbered sections, beginning with a series of nine poems Rakosi called 'meditations'; a second section which included both new work and reworkings of poems published in previous books: "Lying in Bed on a Summer Morning" (the first poem he wrote after receiving Andrew Crozier's letter) and "Yaddo" (a composite of poems published in *Ere-voice* and *Ex Cranium, Nighb*); a third section with poems about urban life; and a short concluding section which contained two brief, witty poems. Poems in the book had previously appeared in nine different magazines, including Bradford Morrow's *Conjunctions*, Eliot Weinberger's *Montemora*, Cid Corman's *Origin*, and Clayton Eshleman's *Sulfur*. Rakosi dedicated the book to "Margery Latimer / Dearest of My Old Friends" and the back cover contained an excerpt from a 1942 letter from Wallace Stevens claiming that Rakosi's excitement for "real things" meant that he possessed "exactly the kind of mind that appears to be required in contemporary poetry."¹⁰

Collected Poems and Prose

The next Rakosi books to appear were collections of prose and of poetry that Rakosi had initially hoped would be significant events in establishing and developing his reputation, but which

¹⁰ Stevens had written Rakosi this letter in connection to his aborted application for a Guggenheim grant to study the psychology of the poet.

he ended up feeling mainly exasperated and very disappointed by. The National Poetry Foundation, an organization centered at the University of Maine, Orono and dedicated to convening conferences and publishing scholarship about poetry written in the Poundian tradition, agreed to publish two Rakosi volumes, one of collected prose, and the other of collected poems. Unfortunately for Rakosi, while Carroll Terrell was a well-liked academic, he was not a particularly effective publisher or marketer, and Rakosi found himself increasingly frustrated by his communications with Terrell regarding his forthcoming books. The first of the books to appear was *The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi*, published in 1983, followed three years later by *The Collected Poems of Carl Rakosi*.

The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi

Rakosi's *Collected Prose*, a slim book of less than 150 pages, bore a similar dedication as the one which had appeared in *Spiritus, I*: "To Margery Latimer / Dearest Friend of My Youth." The book contained an illuminating twenty-page critical postscript by Burton Hatlen as well as a very brief foreword in which Rakosi explained:

Ordinarily, therefore, I avoid prose, for there is nothing I like better than to escape into a metaphor. But I am also ironic and like to romp, and occasionally, therefore, write prose, which I strive, against my nature, to make atomic and as hard and tight and natural as a hickory nut.¹¹

The *Collected Prose* itself consists of seven pieces of varying lengths: "Day Book," a revised and extended version of the prose passage of the same name which had appeared in *Ex Cranium, Night*; "My Experiences in Parnassus," a short, satirical account of how to achieve fame as a poet; "The Artist," a fictional epistolary story which had previously appeared in *Ex Cranium, Night*; "The Ordeal of Moses," a brief satire about the nature of 'Jewish' art; "Observations," a collection of aphorisms and meditations on life, art and identity; "Scenes from My Life," a collection of nine

¹¹ *The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi*, 11.

autobiographical vignettes addressing his relationships with his parents, his college friendships with Margery Latimer, Kenneth Fearing, and Leon Serabian, Louis Zukofsky and the “Objectivist” label, Eugene McCarthy, Marya Zaturenska, Jorge Luis Borges, George Oppen, and Robert Duncan; and “Little Meditations,” another collection of meditative aphorisms.

The Collected Poems of Carl Rakosi

Despite its title, *The Collected Poems of Carl Rakosi* was not a scholarly edited collection of Rakosi’s complete poetic output, but rather, a substantial selection (the book ran to nearly 500 pages) of Rakosi’s life work to that point, selected, revised, and arranged by Rakosi himself. Apart from the poems, a dedication: “To Leah / Dear Wife / Cantus Firmus” and an index of first lines, the book includes only a very succinct foreword in which Rakosi informed the reader that:

This book has not been put together with the poems in chronological sequence. That would have been useful to scholars interested in tracing my development as a poet, but I have no such interest, and even if I had, I did not have the time and the energy to research all the publication dates (I kept no dates of composition), although my perceptive and painstaking friend, Andrew Crozier, assures me that he has them for my early poems, along with the changes I made in them over the years from one published version to another. Had I had more inclination, I suspect that even with this in hand I might still have been reluctant because the presumption underlying chronological sequence is that a literary development and some kind of psychological progression or evolving take place in this way. They may or may not. To the extent that they do, they can only be partial because a poet in the course of his life makes repeated leaps ahead and unwanted reversions, the reasons for which can only be speculated on at great risk, even by him, since he does not make them on purpose or for a purpose (that he is aware of). In any case, a chronological variorum is still possible at another time and by another person.

I have, as I said, chosen a different course. It seemed to me more creative and interesting to organize the poems as if I were making up a book for the first time, with the parts before me, the individual poems. And I followed the logic of that. A gamble, I know, because they are not, after all, a book in the sense of composition. On the other hand, neither are they just an aggregation. What I think they are, the larger and perhaps different meaning they have when viewed in this way, is to be found, when it is there, in the arrangement. What will not be found is the coherence of a composition, but coherence these days has larger parameters and tolerances, and perhaps the gamble will pay off. In other words, the reader gets not a file of my previous volumes, AMULET plus ERE-VOICE plus EX CRANIUM, NIGHT plus HISTORY plus SPIRITUS, I, but an as-if-book, with no obvious connection between the

AMERICANA and the DROLES DE JOURNAL and the other parts. The reader who is bothered by this can view them as separate books. Even as such, they seem to me to be better integrated and more coherent than the original volumes. At least they are different.¹²

These collected volumes were not received very well, either by critics or by reviewers (a large part of Rakosi's frustration with Terrell as his publisher was his inability to get the books distributed properly or sent in a timely fashion to the list of willing reviewers he had prepared for Terrell), and Rakosi ended up feeling angry about the publishing experience he had with NPF. It would be nearly a decade before Rakosi's next book appeared in print, and eleven years before he would publish new work in book form.

Poems 1923-1941

The careful reader will notice that Rakosi's foreword to the *Collected Poems* both allowed for the possibility of a "chronological variorum ... at another time and by another person" and referenced the "perceptive and painstaking" work that had already been done at that time on Rakosi's earliest poems by Andrew Crozier. In 1995, Douglas Messerli's Sun & Moon Press published precisely the kind of book Rakosi had suggested might be undertaken by some future scholar in the form of *Poems 1923-1941*, Crozier's superbly edited collection of Rakosi's early writing.

Poems 1923-1941 included two pieces of introductory prose. The first of these is "A Cautionary Note to the Reader from the Author," in which Rakosi reflected on the atmosphere of literary posturing endemic to the era in which the earliest poems were produced, discussed his ideas of poetic sincerity, asked for the reader's forbearance with his earliest work, noting with dismay the heavy Christological references in his earliest poems, and concluded with his belief that once published, poems "stand there as givens," since publication severs the relationship between an

¹² *The Collected Poems of Carl Rakosi*, 17-18.

author and his poem such that each poem “can be said to speak for itself and the matter is strictly between it and the reader.”¹³ The second is Crozier’s editorial introduction, the main section of which is titled “Found: A Modern Masterpiece.” Here, Crozier’s stated his belief that this text “will significantly extend our knowledge of the repertoire of modernism and our historical understanding of the ‘Objectivists’” and made plain his intention to allow readers to both “attach Rakosi to the real historical past of modernism, and to reread the later Rakosi who has ... been able to keep his text freely at his disposal as its own creative resource.”¹⁴

The collection itself included all of the poems Rakosi published from 1923-1941 that Crozier succeeded in locating (presented in chronological order and with textual variants and publication details given in the notes), as well as more than 30 pages of unpublished, never completed, and revised poems from this period of Rakosi’s career.

Last Books

Though Rakosi continued writing and publishing poems in literary magazines across the English-speaking world following the appearance of his *Collected Poems* in 1986, his next book of new material did not appear for more than a decade, when his collection *The Earth Suite* was published by Nicholas Johnson’s etruscan books out of South Devonshire, England in 1997.

The Earth Suite

The Earth Suite was dedicated “For Marilyn Kane / dear companion / and much more” and included roughly fifty pages of new poems, as well as a cover image and ten drawings by Basil King, an English artist and poet who has lived in Brooklyn since 1968. The poems were preceded by two

¹³ *Poems 1923-1941*, 8-9.

¹⁴ *Poems 1923-1941*, 13.

short prose pieces: a short foreword from Robert Creeley praising Rakosi's honesty, clarity, and quality, and an introduction by Andrew Crozier. *The Earth Suite* was printed in both paper and cloth editions, of which twenty copies were signed by both Rakosi and Basil King, and an additional fifteen copies contained additional holograph material by Rakosi.

The Old Poet's Tale

With Andrew Crozier's *Poems 1923-1941* having established a carefully annotated, critically edited, chronologically presented collection of Rakosi's early work, there remained the task of collecting and presenting his post-1965 output, particularly since *The Collected Poems* did not match the traditional scholarly definition of the term. It appears that Nicholas Johnson and Andrew Crozier intended to remedy that situation by printing a series of Rakosi's collected works. The first of these, announced on the back jacket as "Collected Works Volume 1" was *The Old Poet's Tale*, published in 1999 in an edition of 700 paperbound and 100 casebound copies, of which the first 26 were lettered with additional holograph material by Rakosi. *The Old Poet's Tale* was dedicated "For Andrew Crozier" and featured more than 250 pages of new poetry, divided into six sections: "In the Constellation"; "The Old Poet's Tale" (named for a poem of the same title, a twenty page elegy for George Oppen); "Meditations"; "Satyricon"; "Droles de Journal (1924 – "; and "Poet's Corner," which concluded with "Reflections on My Medium," a six-page prose reflection touching on music, form, and abstraction.

The book's back matter also contained a small notice inviting anyone who "would like to further assist the project for Carl Rakosi's *Collected Works*" to "please contact the publishers." While Johnson and Andrew Crozier intended to oversee further volumes in the series, Rakosi was unable, despite several drafts, to arrange a completed manuscript order for the second volume before his

death in 2004. Andrew Crozier, perhaps Rakosi's greatest champion, died in 2008, and the work of producing a collected Rakosi spanning the last four decades of his career remains unaccomplished.

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