Man Engendered: Effeminizing Louis Zukofsky

Louis Zukofsky Şiirleri ve Şiirin Cinsiyeti

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Abstract
This article considers the poetry of Louis Zukofsky, who writes from the margins of American society in the beginning of the twentieth century as he comes from a poor family of Jewish immigrants. The article applies a number of attributes that are associated with Women's Poetry to Zukofsky's work. The purpose of the article, however, is not to demonstrate that Zukofsky's poetry is feminine, but that literary characteristics that are labeled feminine are common to writers of different backgrounds that are forced to create from the margins. Such writers are forced to merge the public and the personal and to deconstruct poetic norms, creating new forms of self-expression that will contain their different identities.
Keywords: Zukofsky, Gender, Jewish Culture, Identity, Social Hierarchy.

Öz
Bu makalede, Yahudi göçmeni fakir bir aileden geldiği için yirminci yüzyılın başlarında Amerikan toplumundan dışlanmış bir yazar olan Louis Zukofsky'nin şiirleri ele alınmıştır. Zukofsky'nin eserleri, "kadın yazını" ile ilişkilendirilerek birçok açıdan incelenmiştir. Ancak makalenin yazılış amacı Zukofsky'nin şiirlerinin kadın şairlerin eserleriyle benzerliklerinin olduğunu göstermek değil, kadın şairlere özgü olarak nitelenen yazın özelliklerinin, aslında toplum dışına itilen tüm yazarlarda görüldüğünü açıklamaktır. Böyle yazarlar, toplumla kendi kişiliklerini harmanlayıp alışılmış şiir yapılarını yıkar, özgün kimliklerini yansıtıp kendilerini ifade edebilecekleri yeni yapılar oluşturur.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Zukofsky, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Yahudi Kültürü, Kimlik, Toplumsal Hiyerarşi.

> *To say that she just 'happened to be a woman' is to suggest that gender is irrelevant, that it is immaterial to the production and the reception of poetry. The present book proposes that gender is relevant, that it does have a bearing. Even the act of denying gender's importance is itself implicitly a way of confirming its stranglehold. It is, after all, only women who are required to address questions such as these and to distance themselves from, or to disavow, their sex. (Gill 19)*

Introduction

John F. Kennedy famously said in 1960: "I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president, who happens also to be a Catholic" (National Public Radio). But did his religious background truly

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have nothing to do with his ideology, his decisions, or the manner in which he was perceived by others? At the very least, one has to acknowledge that Kennedy was forced to address the issue of his religion. Identity can be presented and viewed in different manners, and through various cross- and inter- sections. One can be female, Jewish, Arab, Black, gay, middle-class, middle age, any, or none of the above. But can these identities be selected, discarded or reinvented? This article considers the poetry of Louis Zukofsky, a Jewish poet that, born in 1904, that had to contend with great odds in order to be recognized (or "reinvented") as an English speaking "real" American poet. Zukofsky, the founder of the objectivist movement, winner of several prestigious awards, and author of some 49 books and volumes of poetry, was the first American born son of a poor immigrant family. His first language was Yiddish, and he first encountered the works of Shakespeare in the Yiddish Theater. He was one of the first Jewish students in Columbia University, graduating with a Master's degree in 1924. He taught at the University of Wisconsin and later at the Polytechnic Institute in Brooklyn, and was admired by many other poets and critics. However, he also had to content with limited social and financial opportunities, as well as the anti-Semitic antics of his sometime mentor and supporter, Ezra Pound. These challenges, as well as Zukofsky's cultural and economic background, his life experience, and his social identity, are reflected, and often inspire the unique features of his poetry.

In this article, some of the attributes that are associated with Women's Poetry are applied to Zukofsky's poetry. These, largely taken from Jo Gill's book, *Women's Poetry*, are defined as: self-reflexivity, a private voice, local scenery, and experimentation in form and in language. In doing so, the article does not attempt to read Zukofsky "as a woman," but rather to suggest a brand new method for reading a complex work that combines scholarship and tradition, philosophy and politics, linguistic complexity and emotion, erudition and humor, and great intellectual authority with the vulnerability of an economic, social, and religious outcast. Moreover, what some erroneously refer to as "Women's Poetry," is the natural response of any writer who feels that they are coming from the margins. Recognizing this, this article suggests a new definition of gendered poetry.

1. Theoretical Discussion – Women's Poetry and Louis Zukofsky

i. Identity between overemphasis and disregard

A discussion of identity must negotiate two polarities: The need to judge people outside of biological, ethnic, political and cultural identity on the one hand – and the insistence that everyone is "the same," without regard to the social implication of one's identity. While Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*), Jacques Derrida (1981), Edward Said (1978) and others teach us that identity is a fiction (or construct), they also acknowledge that such fiction, or performance, is not easily abandoned; that if identity is a fiction, it is a very powerful fiction that is often requested, required and even forced by society. When it comes to gender identity, the significance of physical experiences, childbirth and various health factors should be taken into account. Similarly, the different social circumstances of men and women in society make for very different life experiences and different forms of expression. These require a careful consideration both of Showalter's discussion

of "organic or biological criticism" in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (336) and Juliet Mitchell's rejection of the assignment of the feminine to the "area of the Carnival" in "Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis" (428). Identity, a powerful fiction that can perhaps be deconstructed and even changed over time, is also a significant part of one's personal history and worldview. And while one's identity (or identities) should not be taken as a "totalization" of one's self (Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 15), disregarding one's identity can result in as much discrimination as placing an exaggerated emphasis on it.

ii. Identity in relations with women's poetry

Much of the criteria that is used in the following discussion is taken from Gill's book, *Women's Poetry*. Her study (among others) was chosen for this discussion, not only because it addresses Women's Poetry specifically (as opposed to other forms of writing or gender in general), and because it provides clearly defined criteria for Women's Poetry – but also because it encompasses a vast number of studies and anthologies about Women's Poetry, recognizing the conundrum of creating an inclusive definition for a vast field of Women Poets from many times, locations, ethnicities and other marks of identity:

> It has become something of a commonplace in critical surveys of poetry by women to announce the heterogeneity, complexity and richness of the field. […] If poetry by women is disparate and heterogeneous, on what ground do we study it as a distinct strand within the larger poetic genre? [...] In other words, if all that can be said about poetry by women is that it is various, why do students study it, publishers publish it and critics write about it as a coherent body of work? (Gill 1)

Gill argues, therefore, that while it might be reductive to try and contain the entire vast field of Women's Poetry, some common traits, definitions and shared traditions are necessary in order to legitimize Women's Poetry as a field of literary study.

Creating such a definition can be challenging. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, not only a concern about stereotyping and essentializing Women's Poetry, but also the growth and development of women's writing during the twentieth century, gives scholars pause before attempting to summarize it in any conclusive manner. In their introduction to the first of three volumes of *No Man's Land* (1988), a sequel to *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1978), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar confess that they initially underestimated the task of discussing women's writing in the twentieth century:

> What exactly is the canon of twentieth-century literature by women, given that increasing numbers of women have entered the literary marketplace in the last one hundred years and that so many reputations are still in flux? How can we disentangle ourselves from a history in which we ourselves are enmeshed? And finally, considering that at last it is, and has for some time been, evident that women do have a literary tradition, what have been the diverse effects of that tradition on both male and female talents?
>
> As we explored these issues, we saw with some alarm that our enterprise had significantly expanded. We had, now, to discuss not just literary

> history but social history; we had, also, to examine not just the writings of women in the twentieth century, but the texts and contexts associated with those men who have long been considered the most canonical modernists. In fact, we had to rethink everything we had ever been taught about twentieth-century literature. (Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land* xi)

Idientity is, therefore, neither easy to break from, nor clearly defined, and when it comes to many women poets at different places and in different times – it is just as difficult to find a comprehensive definition, as it is to walk away from defining Women's Poetry as a field.

iii. Gill's criteria of women's poetry

Gill responds to the conundrum that is presented by Gilbert and Gubar (and herself, among others) with a thoughtful discussion that considers both some of the characteristics of Women's Poetry, as well as the many ways in which not all women share the same characteristics. She presents seven chapters in which she discusses what she sees as characteristics of Women's Poetry: self-reflexivity, performance, private voices, embodied language, public speech, poetry and place, and experimentations in form and in language. These do not apply to all women poets, of course, and Gill also recognizes in a number of places (such as in "private voices" (79) that a reductive discussion of these traits can essentialize and stereotype Women's Poetry. In addition, the titles of some chapters, such as "performance," can give the reader an erroneous impression. It is in fact a chapter that discusses unease about performance as well as the performance of gender, as it is expressed by Butler (*Gender Trouble* 140). In addition, the chapter about performance shares with the first chapter, "self-reflexivity," the preoccupation with language, and the consciousness about finding one's voice and authority in a field and a language in which the poet might not see herself (or might not be seen by others) as naturally conversant. The same concern, of course, extends to the chapters on private voice and public speech, as the discussion in the entire book, including the experimentation with language and form, reverts to the need of women poets to find their authority and public voice in a traditionally male-dominated field, while expressing their unique voice and form of expression. Using the first person pronoun, discussing one's private and intimate sphere, and grounding oneself in one's physical and geographical location is a Descartes-ian method of asserting authority when it is not obvious. As often occurs in social situations, when one is unsure of either their status or their expertise, one's tendency is to revert to their most immediate experience: "This is what I see; think; feel". If not for any other reason, a testimonial statement cannot be refuted. Who can argue that "this is what I experience"? Similarly, new forms of expression and experimenting with form is an important step towards establishing one's own voice rather than attempting to excel within the style and format that were created by others to best accommodate their own sentiments and reflections. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these traits may not immediately appear to be feminine. But historically, the ability of modern women poets in the beginning and middle of the twentieth century to express a personal voice (such as in "Her Kind," by Anne Sexton (1981)) has freed men and women to do the same, particularly in the cases of those who, as Gill writes (19), cannot distance themselves from their identity, and whose poetry is likely to be read as a

reflection of 'their kind' regardless of the poet's intentions. And, of course, the self-reflexivity over one's status and position is not limited, but often inescapable for those whose acceptance and appreciation are not guaranteed.

iv. Applying the characteristics of women's poetry to Zukofsky's poetry[1]

Gill is correct in writing that women cannot divorce their identity as they write. But it is not true that "it is, after all, only women who are required to address questions such as these" (19). The important issues that she raises, and their effect on a poet's work are shared by others who, for various reasons, write outside the comfort zone of authority and acceptability; those whose access to publication and public acceptance is not obvious; and who are read as hyphenated poets of various kinds. Zukofsky, whose work during the first half of the twentieth-century was the subject of limited acceptance, as were the professional and monetary opportunities that have been extended to him during his lifetime, is one such poet who could not divorce his identity as he wrote. To rush ahead with the briefest and most compelling of examples, Ezra Pound, his mentor and sometime supporter, writes to Zukofsky on May 28, 1935: "I suppose it comes of being a damn foreigner and not having bothered to learn English". Zukofsky replies on June 7: "Yr. English language (private property!)" (Ahearn, *Pound/Zukofsky* 168, 172). Of course, that is exactly the point: Even though Zukofsky was born in the United States and most likely spoke and wrote English better than any man or women on earth, he was regarded as a foreigner who appropriated and subverted the English (American) language. And, of course, he did subvert it, and could not have done otherwise. Perhaps Edith Wharton expresses this conundrum best in *The Age of Innocence* when she writes: "A woman's standard of truthfulness was tacitly held to be lower: she was the subject creature, and versed in the arts of the enslaved" (Wharton 308). As a "subject creature," Zukofsky could not simply 'play by the rules' to prove that he was worthy of consideration. He had to find an alternative and possibly adversarial voice, outside the rules of a game that was set against him in the first place. And being able to express oneself against these odds while still gaining literary acceptance is perhaps what Wharton refers to as "the arts of the enslaved".

Much like many men and women poets, who did not only need to demonstrate their linguistic ability, but also had to find a brand new form of expression, Zukofsky experimented greatly with language and poetic form while creating a professional network for himself out of thin air. One method of doing so included the creation of a poetic movement, Objectivism, which, although it was not labeled a movement of Jewish Poetry, consisted almost exclusively (with the notable exception of Lorine Niedecker) of Jewish men who found in it a vehicle to express their own voice as Jewish-American male poets who wrote in English.

Zukofsky, of course, does not share all the characteristics of Women's Poetry that Gill suggests, as not even all women poets share them. And, of course, he does not share certain essential characteristics, such as those that have to do with the female body and childbirth, while few Women Poets who write in English (though some) share his experience of immigration and Eastern European Jewish

[1] See the appendix at the end of this article about theoretical venues that are not followed in this discussion.

tradition. But there is enough common ground – not to claim Zukofsky as a female poet, or even to create a masculinity studies version of what 'male poetry' might look like – but to suggest a new definition of gendered poetry. What many scholars refer to as gender is a completely different category which, allowing for significant circumstances and life experiences of different poets, has more to do with power and social acceptance than with gender as most scholars see it. In the words of Raewyn Connell: "To understand gender, then, we must constantly go beyond gender" (Connell 76).

In exploring the possibilities of defining and applying marks of identity while avoiding stereotypes and essentialisms, perhaps what is common to all the studies that I mention in this article is that, at the end of the day, scholars of various disciplines seem to have enough decorum to keep men and women separate. My purpose is to breach such good manners, and claim that, to the extent that the phallus can be used as a symbol of power rather than an anatomical term, Zukofsky should be read as a poet without (literary) phallus, suggesting a method for reading gender as a matter that is (almost completely) separate from biological categories.

2. Self-Reflexivity and Local Scenery

Gill's discussion of "self-reflexivity" describes the challenge and the self-consciousness of the female poet about her place within a hegemonic canon and the work (or lack thereof) of female predecessors (Gill 50). One related phenomenon has to do with the lack of female ancestry in the poet's own life, as the maiden name of the mother (or the grandmother) is often lost along with a good deal of matriarchal family history. Gilbert and Gubar quote a passage from a poem by Ruth Stone that addresses this issue:

> My grandmother's name was Nora Swan.
> Old Aden Swan was her father. But who was her mother?
> I don't know my great-grandmother's name.
> I don't know how many children she bore.
> Like rings on the tree the years of woman's fertility.
> (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land* 238; Stone)

Zukofsky, much like other descendants of East European Jewish immigrants, was cut off from both his maternal and paternal history. As Sandra Kumamoto Stanley writes, the culture of the Lower-East Side encouraged a preoccupation with the present rather than with the past (Stanley 30-31). And, in *The Poem of a Life*, the most definitive biography of Louis Zukofsky to date, Mark Scroggins writes that "We know very little of the couple's lives [his parents] before they emigrated. Pinkhos and his father, Maishe Afroim Zukofsky, probably worked as farmhands" (14). In fact, Scroggins adds that there is some doubt about Zukofsky's own birthdate, and perhaps even the Latin spelling of his last name. In "A"-12, after his father's death in 1950, Zukofsky describes his father's life, supplementing few facts with myth and conjenctures, adding:

> Put 91 or 15
> On his tombstone.

> He had forgotten birthright and birthday,
> Who can remember?
> (*1-12* 161)

The biography of Zukofsky's mother is neither less nor more elusive than his father's. But, as Scroggins writes, his mother plays a more dominant role both in his life and his poetry than his father: "Given the hours that Pinchos Zukofsky worked, Louis Zukofsky could have seen little of his father during his childhood, and if his poetry is any indication, he was emotionally far closer to Chana Zukofsky, his mother" (Scroggins 17). Stanley takes this further, speaking of Zukofsky's "Jewish matrilineal culture" (60),[2] highlighting what is referred to elsewhere as: "the matriarchial nature of Eastern European Jewry, as well as other historically poor communities […] where family structure often disintegrates as a result of a missing father figure" (Abend-David 4). Zukofsky's references to his mother begin most directly, and most famously, in "Poem Beginning 'The'," his first major work, written in 1926, a year before her death:

> 238 If horses could but sing Bach, Mother, –
> 239 Remember how I wished it once–
> 240 Now I Kiss you, who could never sing Bach, never read Shakespeare.
> (Zukofsky, *Anew* 17)

Less direct, but significant references to his mother are found later in "A"-5 and 6 from 1930 (Ahearn, *"A"* 66, 202), in "Death's encomium," and the veiled mention of "my mother" as "My other:" (Zukofsky, *"A"* 24, 30) – as well as in the character of the grieving son in the 1936 play, *Arise, Arise* (Scroggins 157). And while the references to his father are mostly tied with traditional and philosophical thought ("We had a Speech, our children have / evolved a jargon" (Zukofsky, *"A"* 18)), the references to Chana Pruss Zukofsky allow for domestic scenes, filled with a sense of time, places and sensations:

> What a great bubble comes up at the top of the water
> This is the wind – the bubble's the soul.
> All these dead years.
> My mother sat away from the stoop,
> the new bridge coming up,
> To catch her breath in the hottest summer.
> Some old landmarks down
> The bridge is aging
> Effaced their ties
> And their sorrow –
> History, all its cornices.
> (Zukofsky, *"A"* 153)

This short scene from "A-12," with Zukosfky's mother seating on the stoop, most likely in front of his first home of 97 Christie street in New York, in sight of the arch and ramp leading to the new Manhattan bridge, sets both a place and a time (between the completion of the Williamsburg Bridge in 1903 and the Manhattan

[2] On this, read also Martha A, Ravits' article, "The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture" in which she discusses the changing images and stereotypes of the Jewish mother throughout the twentieth century (2000).

Bridge in 1912), as well as Zukofsky's return, in the company of his son, Paul, to what he considers in *Autobiography* to be a mythical nativity scene. Using the visit of Henry James in the Lower East Side during the year of Zukosfky's birth, Zukosfky sets James as the magi who forecasts Zukofsky's "first-generation American infusion into twentieth century literature" (Zukofsky, *Autobiography* 13). And, indeed, the same scene, leading to further memories of the Lower East Side, quickly unearths Henry James Jr., whom Zukofsky claims to have run into on Rutgers Street, a street that crosses Henry Street on the Lower East side, exactly at the point which, as the poem mentions, one can still find "a frightening / Copy of a Norman church in red brick" (Zukofsky, *"A"* 154). And to recall the nativity myth of his birth, Zukofsky quickly adds: "Practically where I was born" (Zukofsky, *"A"* 154).

While this nativity myth might seem romantic and self-aggrandizing, it is important to understand the significance of each street corner; proximity to historical events; and other tangible landmarks in the absence of a detailed personal history, and much less, a personal connection to mainstream society. While Jewish tradition, symbolized by the elusive character of Zukofsky's father, seems to offer a great deal of religious scholarship and tradition, to the modern American poet of Zukofsky's time, it offered little help in terms of picturing oneself as part of an American Literary tradition that is largely Christian, and which offers few precedents of Jewish writers who publish in English. Writing in *Singing in a Strange Land*, Maeera Shreiber describes a situation that echoes this predicament, though discussing Jewish poetics rather than Jewish poetry: "Jewish American poetry has largely been overlooked. Until very recently, those who wanted to consider the subject found themselves, like the speaker in Virginia Woolf's classic 1929 essay, *A room of one's own*… 'looking about the shelves for books that were not there'" (Shreiber 3). Considering the reference to Woolf and a number of Shreiber's discussions that are related to gender (Shreiber 8, 46-97, 119, 120, 121, 123, 126), and in particular her comment that – "If we substitute a narrow definition of hysteria as a woman's disorder of Elaine Showalter's more generalized description of it as the 'disease of the powerless and silenced,' we understand Zukofsky as struggling under the sign of the racially marked other" (Shreiber 112) - it would have taken a relatively small step to compare the plight of Jewish American poets writing at the beginning of the twentieth-century to that of women poets at about the same time. However, Shreiber does not go as far as making this comparison.

Zukofsky's situation was not different than that of other men and women poets who are faced with this lack of both genealogical and literary ancestry. He had to rely both on his literary knowledge and imagination to respond to this situation. Like the protagonist of Karl Emil Franzos' 1905 German novel, *Der Pojaz*, who stumbles for the first time out of the Jewish Eastern-European town to face the legacy of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (2012), Zukofsky might have often seen himself as Shylock, who is made to face the gentile court on his own:

252 And once the Faith's askew
253 I might as well look *Shagetz* [non-Jew] just as much
as Jew.
254 I'll read their Donne as mine,

255 And leopard their spots
256 I'll do what says their Coleridge,
257 Twist red hot pokers into knots.
258 The villainy they teach me I will execute
259 And it shall go hard with them,
260 For I'll better the instruction,
261 Having learned, so to speak, in their
colleges.
(Zukofsky, *Anew* 17-18)

It is in the same part of "Poem beginning 'The'," that Zukofsky summons Heinrich Heine and his experience as a solitary Jewish author who is cast off into Gentile society ("Keine Kadish wird man sagen [one will not say the prayer for the dead]") as a possible historical mentor. But his objective is to become the follower of Henry James and Walt Whitman. And he achieves this objective through his connections to the Lower East-Side and Brooklyn Heights (Zukofsky, *Autobiography* 13). In addition, it is through his vivid memories of his mother, and her daily routine on the Lower East Side, that Zukosfky is able to claim his birthright as a "first generation American" poet, albeit one who dwells on the very margins of American society:

241 In Manhattan here the Chinamen are yellow
in the face, mother,
242 Up and down, up and down our streets they
go yellow in the face,
243 And why is it the representative of yours,
my, race are always hankering for food, mother?
(Zukofsky, *Anew* 17)

Self-reflexivity, referred to by Gill as "A range of perspectives on [poetry by women's] relationship to the dominant canon and to the work of female predecessors" (50), is mirrored in Zukofsky's work, not only by the reference to possible literary predecessors, but by his closest female ancestor who, much like the grandmother in Stone's poem, is the best mark of authenticity that he can summon, with a past that is disappearing quickly in a haze of immigration and assimilation, and a future in which he must situate himself as "a literary orphan in the [Anglophone] storm" (Showalter 331, rephrased).

3. Experimentation in Form and in Language

"A horse is a horse, of course…" but not always (*Mister Ed* 1958-1966). At times, one needs an additional source of insight in order to understand certain poetic idiosyncrasies. These, even when they defy one's conventions and expectations, are not only meaningful, but often the point in which poets reveal their personal relationship to their own poetry and to poetry in general. As Gill writes:

> There has been a long history of experimentation in women's poetry… To take up the pen at all has been, as this book has shown, a radical and transgressive gesture. From Sappho to… Dorothy Parker… women have

> unsettled and disrupted poetic conventions and readerly expectations. (Gill 201)

One of Zukofsky's disruptions of poetic conventions is his repeated and seemingly obsessive reference to horses throughout his poetry. As quoted above, Zukofsky compares the ability of his mother, and perhaps himself, to either sing Bach or read Shakespeare, to that of a singing horse. The metaphor becomes even more convoluted when one realizes that there is a world of difference between the western image of exalted horses, such as that of Pegasus, or Richard III's missing horse that, in Shakespeare's play, is valued over an entire kingdom, and the images of horses that are repeated through Zukofsky's poetry. These, as other images, structures and references throughout Zukofsky's work, require a deep understanding of his global and encyclopedic knowledge, as well as his Jewish cultural and linguistic background. The latter is often used to Judaize and subvert modern American poetry in a manner that allows Zukofsky to find his own unique voice within a system that might have regarded him as unconventional as a talking horse. And, as not all horses and their images are the same, it is important to read Zukofsky's work, particularly in relation to some of his apparent idiosyncrasies and obsessions, with an eye to glossing some unique cultural and personal experiments with both poetic language and structure.

Scroggins devotes an entire "interchapter" to two recurring motifs that appear throughout Zukofsky's work (190-198): Numeric structures and horse imagery. Scroggins provides detailed accounts of both motifs, but despite his best efforts, he finally dismisses them as "private obsessions:" "A number of motifs recur throughout his [Zukofsky's] writing that are far less highbrow—that seem less intellectually or artistically motivating themes than mere private obsessions" (190). Nevertheless, Scroggins compiles diligently the occurrences of Zukofky's "obsessions" and their apparent meanings.

Scroggins offers a long list of occurrences on which horses are either mentioned or implied in Zukofsky's poetry: He begins with a description of wild horses in lines 224-237 of "poem beginning 'The,'" and goes on to describe some of the references to horses that occur in every single movement in *A*. These include "hinny / by / stallion" in "A-16;" the animation of wooden sawhorses on the street in "A-7;" an image of a horse as a reference to the poet in "A-12;" and the decaying horses in "A-22" and "A-23." Finally, Scroggins refers to what he sees as an optimistic image of a horse in the epigraph to *80 Flowers*, where the horse "tenaciously retains his passion to gallop free" (Scroggins 195-198). Scroggins refers to these references as "an eccentric hobby" as well as a "psychological fixation, some Freudian 'complex'" (194). Accordingly, Scroggins searches for an explanation to the repeated references to horses in Zukofsky's childhood, and the horses that he might have seen either on the Lower East Side or in Central Park. Elsewhere, he explores the relationship between horses and the name of thirteenth century philosopher and poet, Guido Cavalcanti, who was the subject of great admiration by both Zukofsky and Pound. He also notices that in Zukofsky's erudite reading of Shakespeare's work, *Bottom: On Shakespeare*, it is actually the symbol of a donkey, "the lowest form of 'horse'" (Scroggins 197), that is credited with insight into the bard's work. This occurs through the character of Nick Bottom, whose name is featured in the title of the work, and who is awarded with

insight to love and reason through the transformation of his head to that of a donkey. Here, perhaps, the image of the horse is most conspicuous in its absence.

The explanation, however, is that in a Jewish Eastern European tradition, it is not the donkey who suffers the libel of being either stupid or stubborn, but rather the horse. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, it is Balaam's ass (Numbers, 22:20-30) that is endowed with divine speech. It is therefore the horse who is "the lowest form of 'donkey.'" The Yiddish saying, *מע ווייזט ניט א פערד קיין ה' אין סידור* [one does not show a horse the letter *hey* in the prayer book], is a play on the name of the fifth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, *hey*, and the inability of the horse to tell *hey* from hay.[3] Similarly, an uneducated person should not be offered an intellectual task beyond their ability. Scroggins is correct that Zukofsky often likens himself to a horse, as well as poets and artists in general, to invoke "the sheer drudgery involved in the pursuit of art" (197-198). Given the context of the image of the horse in a Jewish-European tradition, this must be seen as a self-deprecating comment, and perhaps an ironic statement about the role of genius and artistic inspiration. Moreover, Zukofsky, who sees himself sometime as Shylock, sometime as a praying mantis, and sometime as a talking horse, retains this humbling image throughout his work to insist that, even after he had received professional recognition, he remains a working-class poet: neither a stallion, nor war horse, nor racing horse, nor a flying Pegasus – but a work horse, one who can expect little glory or compensation. In "The Old Poet Moves to a New Apartment 14 Times," the reference is to "toy translucent / plastic horses / with Greek bangs / (Xanthus and Balius)" (Zukofsky, "The Old Poet Moves" 376). The two mythological horses, demoted to plastic toys, must serve Achilles. And, like the poet, they are given only a brief opportunity to function as talking horses, bearing important testimony before they are silenced forever.

Scroggins also documents Zukofsky's other "obsession," his use of numeric symbols and structures. Out of a long list of numeric structures within Zukofsky's poetry, one can notice his epic poem, *A*, which is divided into 24 movements, much like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, but also the original number of books in the Old Testament. Scroggins adds that some numeric significance within *A* includes the division of "A-7" into seven sonnets, and of "A-8" into eight themes. "A-20," published in 1963, is written during the year of Paul Zukofsky's twentieth birthday; and in "A-23," the numbers "21-2-3" contain the birthdates of Zukofsky's nuclear family: Celia (January 21), Paul (October 22) and Louis (January 23). Likewise, his volume, *80 Flowers* (which is also included in *Anew* (Zukofsky, *Anew* 321-353)), was planned as a volume of eighty poems, containing precisely forty words each. Scroggins adds that *80 Flowers* was planned as a decade-long project, with eight poems written annually, totaling sixty-four lines per year. These, in turn, would yield the number 40, which is repeated in various dramatic contexts throughout the Old Testament, and 4, "the Pythagorean number of justice," and, assumingly, 6, the Pythagorean number of creation. Adding an epigraph to *80 Flowers,* Zukofsky draws the number 9, "the number of the Muses and the Pythagorean universal" (Scroggins 192-193). While Scroggins' explanations of these enumerations are well argued, and refer to other scholarly readings of Zukofsky's poetry, he does not seem fully convinced. He writes: "I doubt that

[3] The Hebrew letter *hey* is also one of the many Hebrew names of god.

Zukofsky took Pythagorean number symbolism entirely literally" (Scroggins 192-193). Scroggins does, however, recognize that Zukofsky uses numeric structures to create "a model of self-sufficient, self-enclosed system of thought" (Scroggins 192-193). And Scroggins comes even closer to the source of this practice when he writes: "Zukosfky's obsession with numbers seems at first merely superstition" (190). While Zukofsky was likely not superstitious, numeric values and their mythic and textual meaning are very much a matter of tradition. Anyone who is intimately familiar with Jewish Orthodox culture is aware of the extent to which the number of units, lines, and characters (and, in Hebrew, the numeric value of each character) within the text are as much a part of the meaning of the text as its contents.[4] The structure of the text, as well as numeric values that are written into the text (such as sums, dates and occurrences) are an integral part of Jewish interpretation, as well as Jewish writing. This tendency did not only inspire Zukofsky's textual approach – which was reflected in the principles of his Objectivist movement, and which was one main point of contention with Pound[5] – it enabled Zukofsky, as Scroggins writes, to create his own "self-sufficient" system of poetry, and an original approach to language and literature that informs both his echomimetic translation of Catullus' poetry, and his *midrashic* exegesis of Shakespeare's work in *Bottom: On Shakespeare*. Most importantly, this approach enables Zukofsky to use his cultural heritage to create a unique voice, offering a quality that no other English writer could offer, and yet doing so in response and as commentary on existing western traditions. In this, very much in the manner that Gill writes about the history of experimentation in Women's Poetry, Zukofsky has certainly "unsettled and disrupted poetic conventions and readerly expectations" (201).

4. Private Voice

Gill devotes an entire chapter to the complex subject of "private voices" in Women's Poetry. She argues convincingly that while the expectation of reference in Women's Poetry to home, family, relationship, and the poet's immediate surrounding might seem limiting and stereotypical – it is the ability to erode the binary relationship between the tentative position of the personal and the authoritative status of the public that results in a new form of poetry:

> The private voices of women's poetry might be read as resisting both relegation to the realm of the private and more broadly the system of thought (phallogocentrism) which would see these binaries as functional, necessary and explanatory. In exposing and complicating the set of binaries (in this case private vs. public, personal vs. social, quiet and intimate vs. rhetorical and authoritative), women's poetry also critiques the problematic and essentialist binary of male vs. female. (Gill 106)

[4] Of course, most scholars are aware of the significance of numeric structures in religious Jewish texts, but perhaps not of the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in Jewish Orthodox society, sometime outside of religious context. At any rate, Scroggins does not consider this venue of interpretation in relation with Zukofsky's numeric structures.
[5] See Abend-David (11-12).

Merging the binaries of the private and the public is naturally the topic of Zukofsky's *Autobiography.* However, this passionate love poem to his wife and son ("daughter of music and the sweet son" (Zukofsky, *Autobiography* 45)), could not respond more perfectly to Gill's description. The entire poem is built on a metaphor of merging binaries, as chill and warmth are consolidated: "winter spring," "winter is spring," "snowsleet barberries," "snow's berries," "water hot and cold," "cold and warm" (15, 17, 55, 63). Moreover, the merging of hot and cold in this song is a merger of the intimate and the abstract, as it combines a discussion of the poet's home life with a complicated philosophical principal.

The *Autobiography* is a joint project of Zukofsky and his wife, Celia Thaew Zukofsky, who provides musical notes to most of Zukofsky's text. On most pages (other than a number of separate notes that are not composed), the poet's and his wife's initials are printed on top, each followed by the date on which the text was either written or set to music. Zukofsky adds two notes in which he both thanks his wife for her musical composition (Zukofsky, *Autobiography* 7), and highlights the extent to which the love and support of his wife and son are an inseparable part of his work:

> My wife Celia and son Paul have been the only reason for the poet's persistence. She has collaborated with me in my work on Shakespeare and Catullus. Paul is a violinist and composer. I trust, considering his gifts, that his art will be welcomed sooner than mine. (45)

Zukofsky and his wife, represented by the opposing forces of text and music, lend themselves to the prevailing metaphor in the poem of chill and warmth, which culminates in "Song 22:" The poet invites the reader into the intimacy of his washbasin, where the mixing of hot and cold water results in song, the offspring of harmony between antithetical forms of energy:

> To my
> washstand whose square is marble and inscribes two smaller
> ovals to left and right for soap Comes a song of water
> from the right faucet and to the left my
> left and my right hand mixing hot and cold
> Comes a flow which if I have called a song is a
> song entirely in my head a
> frieze of stone completing what no longer is my
> washstand since its marble has completed my
> getting up each morning my washing before going to bed.
> (Zukofsky, *Autobiography* 25)

It is not difficult to see that Zukofsky invites the reader into the intimacy of his washing room and his bed to describe a process of creation that is simultaneously intellectual and biological, and, in fact, implying that his poetry is as much a product of his relationship as his son, Paul. Family, love, and artistic creation are described as a triangle of water running hot and cold to achieve a perfect union of body and mind.

This, however, in no way means that the *Autobiography* is either naïve or lacking in intellectual rigour. As Zukofsky is careful to mention in "Song 22," his reference is "to my washstand whose base is / Greek" (*Autobiography* 25). This point

becomes clearer when the metaphor of chill and warmth, "Water… Fire in winter" is extended to the short song, "Xenophanes" (55). Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570–c. 475 BC), quoted by Eusebius Pamphili (ad 260/265–339/340), sees all of existence as the amalgamation of antithetical forces that "give birth" to the physical world as we know it:

> One says that existences are three, and some of them are sometimes warring in a manner with one another, and then becoming friends again they exhibit marriages, and births, and rearing of offspring: another says that they are two, moist and dry, or hot and cold, and he makes them dwell together and marries them. (qtd. in Pamphili 124d)

Like John Donne in his poem, "The Flea," Zukofsky uses Xenophanes' idea to describe a conceit of "three lives in one" (1993). Unlike Donne's poem, however, Zukofsky's conceit in *Autobiography* is by far more personal and sentimental. More importantly, Zukofsky is able to convince the reader of the strong tie between his family life and his poetic creation. In doing so, he is "exposing and complicating the set of binaries" (Gill 106) that include romantic love vs. intellectual creation, family life vs. professional occupation, and private life vs. publication. Here, as elsewhere in his poetry (as in his description of his mother on the house stoop in the Lower East Side, above), Zukofsky merges private memories, classical literature, political thought, and personal emotions to create a new form of poetry that legitimizes, and even necessitates the merging of public and private experiences.

Conclusion

Zukofsky's life circumstances provide insight to the significance of his domestic relationship, the support, and even the creative collaboration that he received at home. Unlike the stormy romantic life of other modernists of his generation, Zukofsky's stable home life seems abnormally sane. But as he has always worked in the margins of the American Modern mainstream, having to prove that he was worthy of writing poetry in English, and suspected of never quite being a "real American," he relied heavily on any form of professional support that was available to him. Such support came from his colleagues in the Objectivist movement and occasional successes, as well as his unstable relationship with Ezra Pound – but the home provided him with a constant, unfailing source of emotional strength that other poets, who might have been better connected, more easily accepted, and both professionally and financially more successful – might have found elsewhere. With time, his wife might have become his peer to compensate for a relatively small number of writers and artists that he was in constant touch with. It is human nature, therefore, that home and family become significant when one is unsure about their public status and their ability to establish a strong professional support group. And it is possible that under different circumstances, Zukofsky's inclusion of the personal in his own poetry might have been less prevalent. As he writes: "My wife Celia and son Paul have been the only reason for the poet's persistence" (see above), one can hear in his words the traditional authoritative voice of "the poet" in the third person, as well as the first person

("my") and the content of his statement: that his wife and child are both his emotional and professional support group.

It is therefore because Zukofksy wrote from the margins that he was forced to incorporate his unique personal experience both as an inspiration and a justification for his poetry. And it is because he writes from the margins, that, as Gill writes, his experience renders his poetry unique, highly personal and yet sophisticated, densely referenced, and at time opaque and intricate. Whether or not one is inclined to label such poetry as "feminine," the result is a deconstruction of binaries that subverts established notions about appropriate subject matter, structure and imagery, and a poetry that offers a new form of self-expression.

Appendix: Theoretical Venues that are not followed in this article

i. Masculinity studies

Because I believe that a theoretical discussion of gender has more to do with power relations than with biological gender, I am choosing not to ground my argument in masculinity studies. As Rachel Adams and David Savran concede: "Masculinity studies analyzes a dominant and oppressive class that has, arguably, always been the primary focus of scholarly attention" (Adams and Savran 7). It is precisely because Zukofsky is not coming from the position of patriarchy that I am placing my argument elsewhere. Admittedly, a masculinity studies approach would have been useful in works such as Chris Blazina's *The Cultural Myth of Masculinity* (2003), which presents masculinity as a distinctly western ideology – and which would be helpful in discussing the maternal, Jewish Eastern European tradition in Zukofsky's poetry. And, certainly, works by scholars such as Daniel Boyarin (1997) and Michael Gluzman (2002), who discuss the history and cultural position of Jewish masculinity, could be extremely helpful in reading certain parts of his poetry. These and other sources already discuss in detail the emasculation of minority male writers (and other men). However, these discussions still refer to masculinity as a constant. Zukofsky's "masculinity" was certainly neither constant nor comparable with those of other male American poets of his generation, despite the fact that some critics make the mistake of conflating them (Rifkin 8).

ii. Cultural studies of Zukofsky's poetry

It is important to mention two major studies of Zukofsky's work: *Not One of Them in Place* by Norman Finkelstein (2001), and *A Menorah for Athena* by Stephen Fredman (2001). While both authors do a great deal to consider Zukofsky's cultural and personal background, they also assimilate him within a palatable version of either "American" or "Jewish American" poetics. As Finkelstein employs the device of placing Jewish American poets as belonging either to the tradition of Stevens or of Pound (Finkelstein 5), or Wordsworth or Keats (Finkelstein 11), or even Blake (Finkelstein 5), he "naturalizes" them within the respected body of American-English, or even British poetry. Of course, the reference to Blake is even more useful in the creation of a poetic dichotomy that is echoed by several scholars, between a Biblical, "Hebraic," tradition and a Western Classical or Hellenistic tradition (Fredman 8). Similar claims are repeated by Maeera Shreiber in *Singing in a Strange Land* (Shreiber 119) and by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *Purple*

Passages (DuPlessis 79). This is a useful device since it ties Jewish American Poetry both to an entrenched Classical tradition, and a Biblical tradition that is just as much a part of Western Culture as Hellenism. To be fair, both Finkelstein and Fredman pay attention to Yiddish as well as Hebrew elements in Zukofsky's poetry (Finkelstein 38; Fredman 127, 130-132, 141) – but these references are often devoid of social, economic and political context. And, by situating Zukofsky within the traditions of 'Wordsworth or Keats', Finkelstein and Fredman (and others) assimilate Zukofsky within an Anglophone tradition – with the hope of raising the poet's (and his researchers') literary status.

ii. Gender-based studies of Zukofsky's poetry

Three books that are dedicated to the discussion of Zukofsky and Gender are *Career Moves*, by Libbie Rifkin (2000), *Uncloseting Drama* by Nick Salvato (2010), and *Purple Passages* by Rachel Blau DuPlessis (2012). The claims in these studies are that Zukofsky was either a typical "aggressive" male poet (DuPlessis 66, 72), a closeted gay poet (DuPlessis 66), or, paradoxically, both (Rifkin 8, 88-89). The "queering" of Zukofsky is invaluable in taking him out to the paradigm of mainstream "straight" identity and enabling the reader, in principle, to benefit from the recognition that he is "queer," or rather different in a significant and positive manner that some have labored to disguise. Salvato is at his best when he suggests that the "prerequisite for love" can be applied equally on "page, stage or bedroom" (Salvato 67-8), rendering either the erotic or homoerotic part of the discussion less significant than the question of identity in general. Whether Rifkin and Salvato are successful in outing Zukofsky sexually is less important than what is suggested by their discussion that can be taken out of the biological definition of sexual functions: The notion that Zukofsky is "queer;" that he does not fit neatly into definitions of either sexual identity, culture, class, religion, race, nationality, language or tradition. He is a "queer" poet who cannot be easily assimilated as he fits neither his contemporary molds of English-Poetry nor of Jewish nationalism – and must find ways to expand and modify such molds to fit in. However, all three scholars keep falling into the same essentializing, biological and stereotypical discussion of "aggressive core statements concerning maleness" (DuPlessis 66), "White, generally middle-class [man]" (Rifkin 8), and "perennial bottom" (Salvato 98), that prevents them from taking an important additional step.

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