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INAUGURAL AND VALEDICTORY,
THE EARLY POETRY OF GEORGE OPPEN

Although Of Being Numerous (1968) and Primitive (1978) are arguably George Oppen's mature achievement, rightly attended to and admired as such by many of his readers, these late works are rooted in and a fulfillment of his early work, which they comment on and acknowledge. Yet reference to Oppen's "early" work incurs immediate uncertainty, since his career can be seen to possess two separate points of departure, first^{with} the poems written during the late Twenties and early Thirties assembled in Discrete Series (1934), and again in the poems of the late Fifties and early Sixties collected in The Materials (1962). To what extent these different beginnings, and the issues raised by the suspension of Oppen's poetic career, either derive from or affect the character of his writing are questions that ask to be explored. To assert peremptorily, with Hugh Kenner, that "In brief, it took twenty-five years to write the next poem" (although Oppen quotes this remark with approval and apparent relief) is to pre-empt several important questions.¹ To what extent is an Objectivist poetics carried over from Discrete Series into The Materials? If Oppen did not simply start again where he left off, to what extent is the poetics of The Materials responsive to his experience, in the intervening years, of political activism, skilled factory work, infantry combat, family life in post-war America, and political exile in Mexico? Kenner's impatient formula shrinks the issues to fit the case that the contours of Oppen's poetic career can be traced through an as-if uninterrupted series of poems, distorts the relationship between his life and his work and, above all, circumvents consideration of Oppen's politics.

In this essay I propose an account of Discrete Series that leads me to conclude that its connection with Oppen's subsequent writing is autobiographical. One way of formulating the difference of Discrete Series and The Materials, among others, is to point out that whereas in the former there is a recurrent focus on a woman as companion and sexual partner, and on women in general, the latter is pervasively informed by the presence of a child or daughter. Around this figure cluster new issues of age, memory, cultural transmission and temporal process, which both extend and subordinate preoccupations in Discrete Series with machinery, work, idleness, and the diverse present-day life of the modern city, all disposed in such a way that time implodes, so to speak, within the simultaneities of the poetic moment. Oppen's renewed poetic scrutiny of the world, after a prolonged lay-off, produced a more fluent, less cerebral account of what there is, in which value identifies itself more confidently in the things named than it did in the naming of things. As a corollary of this but, I would maintain, preconditionally, Discrete Series and The Materials confront us with different rhetorics.

This in itself might be taken as evidence of a fundamental discontinuity in Oppen's work. It is in terms of these rhetorics, totalities of the formal and discursive procedures of the writing, that any reading of Oppen, especially, must answer for itself, so much otherwise does his work seem incommensurate with writing with which we stand on more familiar terms. By and large existing discussions of Discrete Series have tended to describe its formal qualities as embodiments of some of the given features of modern poetic style, and given little attention to any specific discursive assumptions they might be bound up with. The Objectivist notion of a poem as a made thing, as a machine, has tended to confer on the reductive, almost (it might seem) arbitrary writing of Discrete Series a craftsmanlike authority and prestige that have gone largely unargued. The language strategies and decisions implicit in the writing, of which it is the outcome, have been readily taken for granted, neither analysed nor justified in relation to the interpretations they enable or forestall.

Discrete Series was an almost belated event within a briefly coherent literary milieu, the imprint of which it bore clearly but ambiguously. Oppen was associated with a grouping of young poets, convened initially in the pages of Ezra Pound's Exile (1927-8), where work by Carl Rakosi and Louis Zukofsky appeared, at a moment when Pound was anxious to consolidate and put on record the achievement of the previous fifteen years, and ~~in addition~~^{into the bargain} looking for American disciples. Rakosi and Zukofsky were put in touch with each other, and also with William Carlos Williams and other native survivors of Pound's generation. Pound wished this small force of younger poets to manifest itself as the new generation, and arranged for Zukofsky to edit the February, 1931 issue of Poetry for this purpose.² An "Objectivists" Anthology (1932), edited by Zukofsky and published by Oppen, established more explicitly, though with less publicity, the short-lived connection of the new generation and their predecessors. There are grounds for seeing Pound's Active Anthology (1933), which included Zukofsky and Oppen, though not Rakosi, as a late manifestation of Objectivism, although Pound's waning interest can be inferred from his comment that many of the young poets seem to have "lost contact with language as language . . . in particular Mr Zukofsky's Objectivists seem prone to this error."³ Nevertheless, when Discrete Series came out the following year it carried a Preface by Pound saluting "a serious craftsman, a sensibility which . . . has not been got out of any other man's books."⁴

Oppen was by no means a prominent member of this milieu. He sponsored To Publishers, later The Objectivist Press, and saw to the production side of things. Apart from An "Objectivists" Anthology the enterprise is best

known for having published books by Williams and Pound. Oppen published very little of his own work: two poems in the February, 1931 issue of Poetry that Zukofsky edited, and another four in January, 1932; one poem in An "Objectivists" Anthology; five in Active Anthology. Eight of the twelve were included in Discrete Series. His junior status was seized upon ⁱⁿ ~~by~~ reviews of his book. Not much good came to him either of Pound's Preface or an enthusiastic review by Williams in the July, 1934 issue of Poetry; if anything, such connections defined Oppen too narrowly, and comparisons were made at his expense by, for example, Geoffrey Grigson and H.R. Hays. Grigson objected to "simple brevity" ("a push-bike for the simple-minded"), and found that "when one attempts to permit these anti-poems to expand in one's mind . . . one discovers them to be elastic, not organic--fictions which can only be enlarged by pulling".⁵ For Hays, Oppen's "pretentiousness is not supported by any felicity of observation," and whereas "Williams is intent on capturing the object as a whole; Oppen is apparently trying to derive textures of objects."⁶

It could hardly have turned out otherwise, perhaps. What prestige had either Pound or Williams to confer at a time when they still published with such ~~hole~~ hole and corner operations as The Objectivist Press? As much as anything, they were convenient sticks with which to beat poets who attended to their outworn example. And Discrete Series cannot have seemed an ingratiating or rewarding book. It is tightly organised, even rigid, and gives very little away. It consists of thirty-one short poems, the first of which, with its pastiche of a Jamesian periodic sentence, is sufficiently anomalous in style to ask to be regarded as standing outside an even more tightly-knit group of thirty poems. The sense that this poem is in some way prefatory is reinforced both by its promulgation of large-scale thematic concerns in its concluding reference to "the world, weather swept, with which one shares the century", and by its implicit repudiation of the values and conventions of Oppen's wealthy middle-class background and also, I would argue, their attendant boredom.⁷ The narrow line trodden here ^{between} ~~separating~~ boredom as knowledge of the world ^{and} ~~from~~ boredom as a particular knowledge of the world is typical of the close shave Oppen's way with definitions and propositions administers. Neither the book's programme nor the terms in which it is proposed can put us at our ease. The book appears, if anything, almost too deliberately calculated, with an unconcealed ~~but~~ obscure polemic intention; it is decidedly self-possessed, and comments on its properties as it proceeds, as something both written and read, in a way that seems to attribute both graphic and three-dimensional qualities to its existence. It is so little like the majority of young poets' "first books", neither haphazard miscellany nor

an object of subsequent shame, that it might almost be taken for a valedictory rather than an inaugural statement. Indeed, it already bears traces of the diagnosis of social disaster that led Oppen quietly to abandon poetry (including the option of politically committed poetry) and take up the life of a full-time Communist Party worker in Brooklyn and subsequently in Utica.

The very title of Discrete Series is a sign of deliberate intent. Series are normally continuous, each term in succession deriving from its predecessors and determining those that follow. Oppen's later elucidation of his ^aintended meaning represents it in terms that do not appear to have occurred to his readers at the time. Grigson thought that the writing itself was discrete, and gave credit at least for the fact that it had "no pinned-on imagery".⁸ Williams, on the other hand, thought that the term was probably "meant merely to designate a series separate from other series."⁹ Oppen's account of what he had in view, however, might well put us in mind of the position taken by Samuel Johnson in his "Review of a Free Enquiry" (1757), namely that our partial knowledge of the creation, unbuttressed by theories of plenitude, ^{is} ~~was~~ not inconsistent with feelings of awe in the face of a transcendent origin of being. Oppen describes a discrete series as "a series of terms each of which is empirically derived, each of which is empirically true." This empiricism was to be made to yield a method, in an "attempt to construct meaning, to construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry--from the imagist intensity of vision", based on "a moment, an actual time, when you believe something to be true, and you construct a meaning from these moments of conviction."¹⁰ Elsewhere Oppen has remarked that the numbers 14, 28, 38, 42 comprise an exemplary discrete series: "the names of the stations on the east side subway."¹¹ Yet the intelligibility of such a series depends on a context of independent knowledge, some actual or theoretical reference. If, after catching the Tube at Victoria I find myself at Earl's Court I know that I am on the District Line, not the Circle, and that I am on the wrong train for ~~South~~ Kensington ^{High Street}.

Oppen's comments, thirty and more years in retrospect, need to be approached with due caution. The appeal to conviction, for example, seems more fully in keeping with his concerns of the 1960s. The evidence of the few poems Oppen published prior to Discrete Series is helpful in this respect. It is clear both that he initially thought of some of the poems in Discrete Series under a different ^{nubric}, and that "discrete series" was a generic term rather than a title designating a specific text. The two poems he published in the February, 1931 issue of Poetry were jointly titled "1930'S", as was his poem in An "Objectivists" Anthology.

These three poems, arranged in a different order, became the first three poems of Discrete Series: the prefatory poem, and a pair numbered 1 and 2 two denote their correlation. This pair of poems refers to skyscraper lobbies and lunch-bars, and on the basis of this rendering of the texture of contemporary life, and the topical connotations of the discarded title, it might be concluded that for a time Oppen contemplated a series of poems in a contemporary documentary vein, but subsequently revised this intention to produce a more rigorous conception of the composition of a serial work. The term "Discrete Series"^{first appeared} as the collective title for Oppen's group of four poems in the January, 1932 issue of Poetry, but of this group only one - the last - is to be found in Discrete Series. The first three poems refer to the confined orbit of the poet's room, the inadequacy to passionate life of ^{the} world of social refinement, and anticipations of the release of summer. They provide an antithetical version of city life, in which wished-for dialogue keeps giving way to fretful monologue. "Cat-Boat", the concluding poem, is different: it objectifies the tense intersections of mast, sail, wind, water, and sun as a single ^{single} event, and now the beleaguered couple implied in the previous poems ^{can} glide unscathed over the infinite peril of the "unrimmed holes" of the sea-bed. If in this series there is a sequence from alienation to fulfilment its preliminaries contribute little to the outcome: their role within the discursive framework is at best thematic. The complex stasis of "Cat-Boat" (for in fact the perils glide ^{ema} beneath us") is not subject to the recognition of directed feeling tone, but is the source of its own security. Even though the terms of this series are arguably discrete, in the sense that they are not derived successively from each other, there remains a definite sense of forward movement under schematic pressure (both in terms of seasonal progression and spiritual attainment), the initial stages of which, in relation to "Cat-Boat", are finally redundant. The boat has no need to negotiate terms with its situation since it is so completely borne by and one with it.

Whereas the contradictions encountered in the first three poems are organised propositionally or interrogatively, their discourse articulated by means of an enacted central consciousness, in the final poem the contradiction between security and risk is sited without disrupting the sequence of indicative statements ("imagist statements") by anything more than a break in the line, the graphic/prosodic device indicating a shift in the weight the poem is carrying. The transition of feeling and evaluation between one reference and another has not been attributed to an imputed subject, and the poem's significance is thereby normative, in the absence of such personal witness, if the reader agrees. It is possible to

imagine a series of such poems, imposing their conviction of the way things are or might be on their own evidence. But any such gain is accompanied ~~by~~^{by} considerable risk, for the reader of Discrete Series is aware, as much as anything, of language operating under severe pressure, of a discourse loaded and compressed in order to test individual words. Far from being a dance of the intellect among words, Oppen's logopoeia implies considerable scepticism about available discourses and communal usage.

I allude to Pound's category deliberately, because Oppen's references to imagism, in particular his suggestion that it might provide a mode of thought, point beyond general notions of imagism as a technique of immediate presentation. In his Preface to Discrete Series Pound endeavoured to distinguish between Oppen's work and that of Williams, but this is misleading. Pound himself, if anyone, is the presiding influence in Discrete Series, even though Oppen's field of reference may remind us more of Williams than of Pound, and this influence is most discernible when we trace the basic strategies of Oppen's writing. At the same time, Pound's influence does not result in any very clear resemblance, for Oppen adopts Pound's method only to throw it into reverse. In Pound's typically imagist poems we find a discourse constructed through the juxtaposition of elements, normally drawn from different conceptual orders of reality, the spiritual and the mundane. These elements are not so much opposed or contrasted as shown in terms of their possible equivalence, the completion of this discourse lying in some further, unstated term. The advantage of this method for Pound, which we might epitomise as the reciprocity of image and ideogram, is that elements so used, by virtue of their difference, can be scaled up or down, either by setting them parallel to other series of elements, or by subdivision into new series. The disadvantage of this method is the monolithic unity of concept it entails: its inclusivity breaks down under the weight of its own inertia - as we find in the Cantos - when it is developed beyond certain limits. This is experienced either as incoherence or as vulnerability to counter-discourses.

The poems in Discrete Series have a binary structure similar to that of the Poundian image, but whereas in Pound the elements correlated are different but equivalent, in Oppen they are similar (ontologically identical in some cases) but opposed. It is out of the collision between different versions of similar events, the discovery of mendacity or misrepresentation where discourses compete, that the meanings of Discrete Series arise. One of the book's least startling poems can exemplify Oppen's general procedure.

The edge of the ocean,
The shore: here
Somebody's lawn,
By the water.

On the face of it this is a charming vignette, suggestive perhaps of nature tamed to serve as an amenity to civilised living. But to read the poem thus is an act of selective attention, hardly adequate to the already stripped-down syntax. In the absence of explicit grammatical co-ordinators (there is no main verb, for example, and the consequent power vacuum destabilizes the adverb "here") our reading is forced to rely more than usual on the interaction of semantic values, and indeed the poem immediately indicates that it is concerned with definitions. Surely in such extreme verbal economy there is no space for any surplus. If we give each word its due weight we see that the poem turns on the opposition of "shore" and "lawn", "ocean" and "water", names for the same things in this instance, for we still understand a reference outside the terms of the poem to some actual situation, of which the poem's two opposed discourses are minimal predications. We are not even permitted the interval of relief that might be afforded by a here/there contrast: the "here" of immediate location is shunted forward (a colon marks the point of impact) from a preliminary definition, if not to repossess "somebody's lawn" at least to show how private property diminishes the natural world. "Here" man's triumph over nature has been achieved at the public expense, if "shore" and "ocean" are the proper names for those things as they locate and define the conditions of human existence. But in the world this poem refers to the elemental conditions of our existence, on the edge of which we live, are seen to be hidden. They are obscured by such an innocent, domesticated little word as "lawn", which under testing pressure reveals the weight of ^{ethical} ~~moral~~ censure. We can hardly feel, however, that the judgment here proceeds from concern for popular rights, from some sense of exclusion: the perceptions deployed in this poem ~~have~~ are derived from somewhere beyond the social, beyond the edge of the inhabitable world and human history. If we want to look for ^{this place} ~~it~~ we should refer to the conclusion of Oppen's prefatory poem. If "By the water" could stand for "The edge of the ocean" the measure of the earth's waters would be taken on a scale that found them no bigger than a duck pond.

With this exemplary poem in mind, and seeing it in the light of Oppen's dismemberment of the original "Discrete Series", it becomes possible to generalise the assumptions and procedures directing the writing of Discrete Series. In the first place, the poems are written in a way that does not permit them to be read progressively, as though leading the reader forward to some conclusion to be enacted at the moment of textual

closure. (This can be understood to apply to the series as a whole.) The reader is required to bear in mind concurrently all the elements in a particular poem. But if the poems are non-narrative no more are they the random and simultaneous notations of a moment: their detail is neither additive, accumulative, nor typical. Detail is organised to establish lines of association and dissociation, the parameters of discourses local to the poem. Moreover, language itself is treated as an empirical datum, in which reference is inextricably combined with its terminology: language cannot, on such assumptions, mediate neutrally between the reader and some other matrix of empirical knowledge. (Oppen's work contains no gestures towards authenticity of speech such as we find in Williams, for example.) Hence verbs cannot be relied upon to correlate relationships between details, so that throughout Discrete Series we find that transitive functions are regularly displaced on to adverbs and prepositions, and that participles and intransitive verbs are favoured.

In the light of the implications of Oppen's methods Hays's strictures on Discrete Series are seen to have at least some descriptive accuracy, for one important outcome of Oppen's procedure, we might say its very purpose, is a general levelling of usual figure/ground gradients. Oppen can take objects very much for granted, both as cultural and perceptual products. Motor cars and yachts, whatever their different values, are empirically very simple. Similarly, Oppen has little time for the braveries of figurative rhetoric. Both types of figure/ground relationship, the perceptual gestalt and the rhetorical trope, divert attention from the system or ground in which the figure is produced. In poetry that addresses the reader in terms of an array of figures it is always possible to see how the figures are produced within the general terms of the discourse, but it is not really feasible to provide them also with the empirical substantiation we find in Discrete Series. This is a mainly negative observation, as regards Oppen, and need not stop anyone from thinking of the poems in Discrete Series as discrete tropes if it is thought useful to do so. The substantive issue, in Oppen's practice, has to do with the way our knowledge of productive systems or grounds tends to be conceptual and theoretical, subordinate to the configurations and entities they give rise to. "Texture" is an approximate but less than adequate term by which to denote the outcome of Oppen's over-riding interest in retrieving the commonplace background of everyday life - pavements and street-lighting, systems of communication and transfer - in an attempt to bring within the range of discourse conditions normally taken for granted or imperceptible. (it is in terms of such a project, entailing the textual absence of determinate entities, that Zukofsky's remark that Oppen's work deals with

the "void" makes best sense.)¹². By taking basal conditions as the contexts for discursive juxtapositions in Discrete Series Oppen is able in effect to figure one conceptual order of reality and its discourse against the ground of another.

Resistance of the solicitation of trope and gestalt leads to different kinds of engagement, but in each different case we can see that the outcome is compatible with the need to produce a textual effect of continuous groundwork. The fifth poem of Discrete Series, for example, starts with a series of attributive figures similar to those deployed by Williams at the beginning of "Portrait of a Lady".¹³

Her ankles are watches
(Her arm-pits are causeways for water)

But these appropriative figures are checked and replaced by a more literal incursive discourse as the woman in question continues her morning routine ("She walks on a sphere // Walks on the carpet") so that her everyday, insignificant gestures reappropriate her being.

Her movement accustomed, abstracted,
Declares this morning a woman's
"My hair, scalp---"

Here a continuous ground, between woman and morning, is established thematically and, to an extent, figuratively. The seventh poem, in contrast, specifies and comments on a setting for events that remain elusive.

The lights, paving--
This important device
Of a race

Remains till morning.

Burns
Against the wall.
He has chosen a ~~warm~~ place
With the usual considerations,
Without stating them.
Buildings.

Is this poem about the streets or the city authorities? What sort of race is referred to: the human race, or an athletic contest? Who is the referent of the abruptly intrusive pronoun? The poem provides no answers to such questions. What it does is dissociate the terms normally subsumed in such concepts as "city" or "environment" in order to divest such fictions of their contingency. However depopulated this urban night-scene appears, it is hardly mysterious; nor is it void of human purpose, however disavowed its social ideologies may be. The two discourse opposed in this poem interrupt one another, so that the reader is left in the dark about the precise character of each, but as they intersect their separate details combine in a different discourse, however fragmentary, which produces the base conditions of social forms and agencies. *The transition from "wall" to "place", between* ~~Repetition of "wall", first as~~

location ^{and} ~~then as~~ decision, mediates the two discourses while indicating their discrepancy; the referent for "he" can then be found, if anywhere, in "a race".

Throughout Discrete Series objects and configurations tend to be merged with temporal and spatial sequences, either by repetition or dispersal. In the eighteenth poem a bird - probably one of Williams's sparrows - is epistemologically complex within the terms of recurrent experience. In the twenty-sixth poem the Depression spectacle of a man selling postcards in the street is part and parcel of the urban scenery of traffic and ^{cinema} ~~movie~~ publicity. We might say that within the terms of Oppen's method the presentation of a determinate figure would be seen as a failure, since such an achievement would entail the subordination of one discourse to another by a too explicit inflection of the ground that the poems equally derive from and have as their formal aim. Oppen's suppression of significant figuration is perhaps most blatant, in terms of the available discourses of the Thirties, when the poems raise the issue of photography. Here we can gauge both the extent to which Oppen distanced himself from any documentary intention, and the degree of his difference from Williams. The "readers" of documentary photographs are presented, in familiar language, with information that is remote from their experience. Their empirical relationship with such images is not corroborative but guaranteed by notions of authenticity, although the assumed values of authenticity are effectively subordinate to confrontation. The last ^{people} ~~person~~ a documentary image is for ^{are} ~~is~~ the ^{people} ~~person~~ depicted in it. But where photographs are most clearly acknowledged as Oppen's sources in Discrete Series they are treated as snapshots, their subject matter grounded in familiarity. In the seventeenth poem, for instance, which refers to what is presumably one of Brady's civil war photographs, we find "The cannon of that day / In our parks." In ^{several} ~~A~~ other poems the reader can infer that reference is made to a photographic image.

This land:
The hills, round under straw;
A house

With rigid trees

And flaunts
A family laundry,
And the glass of windows

This reminds us, more than anything else, surely, of that 1930s photography of American landscape dominated by commercial signs, and we can see inscribed among the details of the poem a Walker Evans image ^{of} ~~with~~ a window bearing the legend "Family Laundry" ^{somewhere} ~~in~~ the middle of nowhere. If I am

to see this
right (and I could extend such speculations to deal with other instances, the tenth poem for example) it is because Oppen appeals to the inclusiveness of the photographic image, its inability to state preferences within its visual field. In this respect Oppen stands in marked contrast to Williams who, as Bram Dijkstra has shown, used Stieglitz's photographs to explore significant configurations of resistance between one object and another within the strict margins of the image. ^{14.}

In his Preface to An "Objectivists" Anthology Zukofsky designated "condensation" as the technique by which the necessary craftsmanship of contemporary verse was hidden in the poem-object. "Against obvious transitions, Pound, Williams, Rakosi, Bunting, Miss Moore, oppose condensation. The transitions cut are implicit in the work, 3 or 4 things occur at a time making the difference between Aristotelian expansive unities and the concentrated locus which is the mind acting creatively upon the facts." ^{15.} Zukofsky's polemic opposition of particulars to generalisation was not espoused by Oppen, but if we put Oppen ^{with} in this general stylistic context we might more precisely define his technique by saying that while in his work the notion of the mind operating directly among facts remained problematic ^{precisely} because ^{it showed} of the mediated nature of facts, he does indeed use condensation in order to effect transitions. We might go further and say that we recognise that a transition occurs while remaining in ignorance of the facts. The separate poems of Discrete Series are related by method as well as technique, but above all they are related by their collective reference to the presence of a continuum outside their series - the inferred continuum of the world accessible to empirical knowledge, however full of gaps that world might be. This reference occurs within the qualified and incomplete discourses the poems set in motion, and it is as an accompaniment of the friction generated by the inadequacy of specific discourses that a conviction of a totality beyond them arises. But there are neither large-scale axioms to provide a framework for an inclusive knowledge, nor the full discourse of a continuously knowing subject. We feel the presence of a consistent intelligence in the poems' method, of a certain sensibility in the range of empirical details responded to and acknowledged, but this intelligence and sensibility are not projected within the series as a point of view from which its various components are rendered intelligible as a whole. That is up to the reader. Above all, the reader is forced to resist any temptation to search for and identify with an authorial point of view, for the author can only occasionally be made out as another presence among the empirical data (a "me" rather than an "I") or heard

as one voice amongst others.

When Oppen began to write again in 1958, shortly before his return to the USA from his Mexican exile, he did, in one sense, start again where he left off in 1934, for the poems in The Materials deal centrally with the relationship between the human, individual and social, and the non-human world. But Oppen's procedures had to be radically different, inasmuch as starting from this point he effectively claimed authorship of the meanings of his earlier work along with the experience and memory of the intervening years. The Materials is extensively organised, in a way that Discrete Series is not, through co-ordinated thematic centres, and authenticates itself by referring back to a reflective consciousness, however scrupulous and hesitant its voice may be ⁱⁿ stating and weighing the internal resistancies of its meanings. But what was perhaps crucial in enabling this different beginning was Oppen's recognition of the divergence of the chronologies of the individual organism and the world it lives in, ^{sharpened} ~~exacerbated~~ by the knowledge that under thermo-nuclear threat those chronologies might for once converge and close.

NOTES

1. George Oppen, interview with L.S. Dembo, Contemporary Literature X, 2 (1969) 174. See also Ironwood 5 (1975) 23.
2. For evidence of Pound's role in the "Objectivists" issue of Poetry see Barry Ahearn (ed.), "Ezra Pound & Louis Zukofsky: Letters 1928-1930", Montemora 8 (1981) 149-186.
3. Ezra Pound, Active Anthology, London 1933,
4. Pound's Preface can ^{now perhaps} be more easily found in Paideuma 10, 1 (Spring 1981) 13 than in the original issue of Discrete Series, NY 1934. (It was not included in the 1966 Cleveland reprint.)
5. Geoffrey Grigson, "Baby Mustn't Touch", New Verse 9 (June 1934) 22.
6. H.R. Hays, "Nothing But the Truth", Hound and Horn VII, 4 (July: September 1934) 738.
7. This and subsequent quotations from Discrete Series are taken from George Oppen, Collected Poems, NY 1975, where they may readily be found on pp. 3-14. No further references will be given.
8. Grigson, loc. cit. 22.
9. William Carlos Williams, "The New Poetical Economy", Poetry XLIV (July 1934) 221.
10. Oppen, interviewed by Dembo, loc. cit. 161.
11. George Oppen, letter to Rachel Blau, November 1965. Quoted in Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "George Oppen: 'What do we believe to live with?'"', Ironwood 5 (1975) 65.
12. Louis Zukofsky, letter to Ezra Pound, March 1930. Cited in Tom Sharp, "George Oppen, Discrete Series, 1929-1934", in Burton Hatlen (ed.), George Oppen: Man and Poet, Orono, Maine 1981, 271. Zukofsky's term should be treated with some caution since it is somewhat premature in relation to the eventual shape given to Oppen's writing of 1929-34.
13. Williams's poem was first published in The Dial (LXIX, 2) in 1920, but might have been brought to Oppen's attention on its republication in An "Objectivists" Anthology.
14. Bram Dijkstra, The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, Berkeley
15. Louis Zukofsky, "'Recencies' in Poetry", in Zukofsky (ed.), An "Objectivists" Anthology, Le Beausset, Var and New York, 1931, 22.

Andrew Crozier

CARL RAKOSI IN THE "OBJECTIVISTS" EPOCH

To insist briefly, and however pedantically, on literal respect for the plural noun and its inverted commas : is to signify appropriate regard for an historical emphasis already implicit, under the cover of contemporaneity, in the date annexed to the collective identification which appears above the roster of contributors' names on the cover of Louis Zukofsky's guest-edited number of Poetry: "Objectivists" 1931. Once historical perspective has been assured, however, it is both reasonable and convenient, despite Zukofsky's own scrupulous exclusion of any such usage, to cite Objectivism as a determinate historical category, without thereby requiring of the term that it endorse the notion of an essential Objectivist poetic. On this question we should agree with Zukofsky. Zukofsky's editorialising in his number of Poetry, and in the subsequent An "Objectivists" Anthology, has been taken to sanction, inevitably, attempts to formulate of Objectivism some theoretical essence, but interpreters should be forewarned by Zukofsky's preliminary statement of principles, in which his definition of "An Objective", when its use is extended to poetry, emphatically concludes of the "objectively perfect" that it is "inextricably the direction of historical and contemporary particulars."¹ Zukofsky may have dabbled in revolutionary teleology, but History, however its direction is written, even by Marxists, and especially when it deals in particulars, will not disclose an essence. One particular of Zukofsky's Objectivism was its activism: grounded in literary history, it was equally an attempt to influence its future direction. Equally part of the history of Objectivism is Zukofsky's subsequent withdrawal from such public engagement, in his case into a family-centred quietism.

By the position it occupies in both the "Objectivists" number of Poetry and An "Objectivists" Anthology Carl Rakosi's early poetry (by "early" I mean no more than to distinguish it from the poetry he has written since 1965) is historically situated in relation to Objectivism and is also, but more importantly, inextricably particular to its history. This account of Rakosi's poetry between the years 1924 and 1941 proposes, as its subsidiary motive, to contribute to the writing of that history, and will be appropriately schematic, since as a preliminary account its concerns must include narrative and chronology. The dates indicate a period which begins with Rakosi's first magazine publications, and ends with the publication of his Selected Poems, but they also bracket, approximately enough, Objectivism's historical epoch, which it is convenient to think of as spanning the decades on either side of the public announcement of the existence of "Objectivists" in 1931. 1931 and 1932 (the year of publication of the Anthology) effectively mark a watershed in the history of Objectivism, at which it divides into two distinct phases. In addition to defining a poetic "Objective" in terms of historical particulars (given greater emphasis in the Anthology by editorial concern with epic complexity), Zukofsky was insistent in

his role as guest editor of Poetry on locating a position within recent developments in American poetry. In "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" he drew attention to his essay "American Poetry, 1920-1930", from which he reprinted his list of "absolutely necessary" works by Pound, Williams, Moore, Eliot, Cummings, Stevens, McAlmon, Reznikoff, and (citing Exile numbers 3 and 4) Rakosi and himself. The older generation of poets, and the younger generation of "Objectivists", both write "in accordance with the principles" set out definitionally at the head of his "Program". The mandatory list is Poundian rhetorically and, in the way Zukofsky works through his list in "American Poetry, 1920-1930", so are the principles. "One proceeds with aesthetic principle (Ezra Pound's Pavannes and Divisions, or Instigations, or How to Read, or all three). 'Emotion is an organizer of forms' (Pound). The image is at the basis of poetic form. In the last ten years Pound has not concerned himself merely with isolation of the image--a cross-breeding between single words which are absolute symbols for things and textures--[...] but with the poetic locus produced by the passage from one image to another." This is less clear than we might like it to be, but despite the loose equation of emotion, form, and image, Zukofsky quickly gets down to details ("the passage from one image to another") and here, and in his subsequent analyses of the treatment of the image by other of the poets on his list, we might conclude that he assigns "principle" an instrumental value. It does not, in other words, provide a standard of judgment. We should understand that Zukofsky's editorial judgment was exercised after systematic exclusion of poets not sharing like principles. Within the field of common principle he is prepared to judge and differentiate: "one may study the progress of individual work rather than its use in an 'evolution' of poetry [...] literary mechanisms for expressing the movement of individual brains." ²

From within the historical perspective provided by Zukofsky it might appear that Objectivism was the continuation of Imagism under another name, indeed this has been suggested more than once, but this will not do. Although Zukofsky's essay was acknowledgedly "A Sequel to M. Taupin's Book, 1910-1920", there was tactical advantage to be gained from dating a relevant literary history no further back than 1920, and thus stopping short of Imagism's major epoch. ³ The legacy of Imagism was already in dispute when Zukofsky wrote, its principles the subject of conflicting concepts and interpretations. We might contrast Zukofsky's understanding of passage as locus with Allen Tate's limiting view of Imagism in his Preface to Hart Crane's White Buildings (1927). For Tate "single vision" and "central imagination" are signs of the superiority of Crane's poems to "the decorative and fragmentary world" of Imagism, whereas for Zukofsky Crane's poems are disabled by "indefinite language" and "verbal indecision". ⁴ Tate's analysis of Imagism, incidental as it was to quite

other concepts of poetic discourse, need not detain us for the time being. The historical situation of Objectivism towards Imagism was problematic, and it is unhelpful to see it in terms of an "evolution", to use Zukofsky's word; arguments along such lines are about legitimacy and not much else. The more usual sense of who the Objectivists were is of greater service, for Objectivism is then seen in terms of specific claims made about an historical generation--the young American poets to whom Pound persuaded Harriet Monroe to devote a special number of Poetry under a young poet's editorial hand--and what we then need to take into account is the character of a rising and successor generation. But since we are not dealing with a natural genealogy the figure, however suggestive it may be, needs to be understood in terms of relations of perception, appropriation, and convergence through which is constructed that sense of necessity asserted by Zukofsky, and no matter how inevitably that might be felt at the moment of juncture between one generation and the next, there remains an ineradicable generational difference, and this seems to me to go a long way towards defining what Objectivism was historically. What divided the poets on Zukofsky's "absolutely necessary" list and the younger contributors to the "Objectivists" number of Poetry was social identity and experience. The principal "Objectivists" of 1931 were Jewish, they were susceptible to left wing politics, and if they did not all join the Communist Party the influence of its politics made itself felt in what they wrote. Zukofsky would go so far as to describe "A" as "an epic of the class struggle".⁵ Their literary careers slowed down or came to a temporary halt by the 1940s. The sense that any development represented by Objectivism was precocious, even premature, contributes to our understanding of its history, and the later careers of its protagonists. What is suggested, then, is that historically Objectivism is situated in relation to a general literary situation and a moment at which poets of different generations could be identified in terms of shared principles, and that its history consists of the literary trajectories of a few poets, who are then the exemplary Objectivists, around that moment. In this light Rakosi's career is both particular to and typical of that history.

Rakosi's career before the "Objectivists" moment of 1931 needs to be read in terms of the literary situation as it presented itself to writers of his generation. What then becomes apparent is that although it was a generation with something of a common frame of reference--Imagism, for example--its cohesion was superficial, and concealed a potential for rupture which developed, in due course, along lines marked, as much as anything, by social difference. Rakosi belonged, that is to say, to a generation of American poets who, at the start of their careers in the 1920s, took initial direction from the expression of contemporary experience and sensibility made possible by the innovations of the

first generation of modernists. Tate made precisely this point about Crane: "From Pound and Eliot he got his first conception of what it is, in the complete sense, to be contemporary." Unlike some other members of his generation (Tate himself, for example, and more especially Yvor Winters) Rakosi did not ally his poetry to the formation and propagation of a new literary-critical canon, and thus make a theoretically entailed connection between writing in the present and the literature of the past on behalf of a stabilising cultural order of the sort Eliot seemed to adumbrate in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". His writing identifies him, instead, with poets more concerned to investigate the formal uses to which the data of contemporary life might lend themselves. Like Rakosi, these poets were mostly from immigrant families and, cut off from cultural traditions which American experience tended, in any case, to negate, their attention to formal compositions that could be understood as the specific, unprecedented resolution of their experience was expedient and necessary. It was also their special distinction. As members of immigrant families they were immune to nostalgia for the American past, and as Americans in the process of assimilation it is not surprising that they were less concerned with their perception of the immediacies of experience than with the discourses in which that experience was constituted. We need always to remind ourselves that America in the 1920s was not the London of 1913, and that the world of lived experience, as well as poetry, had been modernised, and continued to be modernised and rationalised at an accelerating rate.

These "Objectivists", as they became, are to be seen as initiators of the first revolt against institutionalised modernism by virtue of their rejection of the impersonal theories of discourse implicit in the notion of poetic values sustained by tradition. (It should be noted that Eliot used "tradition" as a stalking horse while in pursuit of other game. When Tate says that Crane's poetry is "in the grand manner" it is its traditionalism that wins his approval.) Their work may also be seen as an attempt, not altogether well timed, to incorporate and extend the innovations of the first generation of modernists at a moment when that generation was losing momentum and cohesion. Such a revolt, however, was inauspicious at the start of a decade in which the main opposition to the academic modernism of what became the "new criticism" came from left wing demands for a literature of solidarity and social commitment. Objectivism represents, then, a particular development of early modernism, rather than its straightforward evolution, still directly responsive to the instigations of the previous generation by virtue of an understanding of poetic form as a resolution of responses to contemporary experience and its characteristic discourses, rather than a conceptual order able to accommodate and so regulate an awkward and perhaps undesirable novelty. This development took

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place (perhaps only could have taken place: Rakosi and Zukofsky both were refugees from university teaching posts) outside the new establishment of literary power relations, brought into existence by the alliance with modernism of an increasingly professionalised literary criticism. This alliance, the main site of modernist affiliation for poets of Rakosi's generation, was built up around an analysis of modernism of the sort suggested by Tate's remarks about Hart Crane. Its concepts and related values are evident in Winters's review of An "Objectivists" Anthology, in which he reproached the Objectivists for their lack of "rational intelligence", and read them as "sensory impressionists of the usual sort".⁶ For Winters, as for Tate, the agency of form was conceptual; it represents (for Winters it could only do so by conventions of metre; for Tate it was signified by an intuited imaginative centre) the mind's rational control of disorderly sensation and feeling. Inevitably, therefore, they would find in Imagism and Objectivism no signs of unifying intelligence. Their realism precluded anything approaching Zukofsky's understanding of words as "absolute symbols", and its implication that form is actualised in the local and sequential relations between particular words. What is striking about Winters's theory of form, in particular, is that rational intelligence is represented symbolically, by metrical verse; its textual domain, that is to say, is the aesthetic, which acts as a corrective to the confused emotions and muddled thought of modern life. Despite the attention his criticism gives to the local vitality of poetic language, its denotation and connotation are for Winters cognitively weak. It is as though he recognised the place of modernism's energy and expression but can only assign such qualities affective status. What is outside the poet's mind, including the instrumentality of language, is a source of brute sensation and vagrant mood; it is without organisation or unity. One does not, however, have to be a phenomenologist not to suppose the mind capable of representing only its own coherence, nor idly complaisant in acknowledging the discourses that constitute the greater part of daily life. No doubt much of the 20th Century deserves our contempt, but contemptuous dismissal is a luxury as well as a cliché.

It is not that Rakosi and the other Objectivists stood outside the literary situation of their generation; Tate and Winters were, in their own way, outsider figures; indeed, the figure might apply to the whole of the generation "entre les deux guerres". The point is, rather, that the Objectivists were successfully outflanked; we can see this being done very neatly in the pages of Hound and Horn--at first friendly to Pound and his young men, its literary policy was eventually dominated by the opinions of Winters.⁷ None of this any longer matters, but it is against just this background of generational identity and rupture that the contour of Rakosi's career shows up most clearly.

As a student at the University of Wisconsin between 1921 and 1924 Rakosi

was one of a brilliant group of student writers: Kenneth Fearing, Leon Serabian Herald, and Margery Latimer.⁸ Their brilliance was to rebel against local standards of taste, represented by The Wisconsin Literary Magazine and the faculty poet, William Ellery Leonard, and to gravitate instead towards modernism. They felt the lure of New York, of The Dial and The Little Review. Their group was able to sustain its cohesion by mutual interest and encouragement throughout most of the decade, though in Rakosi's case this was a matter of letters and the occasional visit. We might expect the pattern of his life between 1924 and 1935, finding work in different regions and cities, settling for no more than a year or two, to have left its trace in his poetry, but just where it does so we cannot aim to know. But the pattern reveals, as well, some of the personal dynamics of Rakosi's situation: unlike the others of his group, Rakosi did not try to support himself by writing; he looked for a career that would provide financial support but in the process, since jobs were not hard to find, he was able to see the country; most of all, perhaps, the need for financial security equated with a need to distance himself from the family setting. Rakosi's adoption of a new name for legal purposes, quite typical of children of immigrant families, speaks not only of a social identity defined outside the relationship of family but also of a distinction between the citizen and the poet. To what extent, in Rakosi's case (as compared to Williams, say, or Stevens), the demands of work and writing were in conflict is an idle speculation, but the knowledge that Rakosi's writing was the site of a genuine personal conflict--that he sought financial security in order to write, but that professional involvement was a distraction--will help to clarify its history. It provides the context, for example, for Latimer's constant encouragement to publish; her suggestions about where to send work correspond to his list of publications: The Little Review, New Masses, Exile, The American Caravan. The break in their correspondence between 1928 and 1931 correlates with a period in which Rakosi did not publish; when he resumed publication in 1931, at Zukofsky's instigation, he told Zukofsky that he had not been writing. Indeed, in a letter to Pound at this time Rakosi claimed to have written nothing between 1925 and 1931. This is hard to believe. In any case, the chronology of publication is not a secure guide to the chronology of the writing. The second group of poems Rakosi published in Poetry (November, 1931) he described as early work, and there are grounds for supposing that among the poems published in Pagany in 1931 and 1932 are some that dated from the period in which he was submitting work to Exile. My own conclusion is that Rakosi's writing between 1924 and 1941 falls into three phases: the first up to 1927 or 1928; another from perhaps late 1930 to 1932 or 1933; and a third, with a moment of intensity around the time of the Munich agreement in 1938, represented by the previously

unpublished poems in Selected Poems. It seems of significance, in relation to the personal dynamics of Rakosi's situation as a writer, that he was anxious to collect his work in book form (in 1932, and again--successfully--in 1940) at moments in his professional life when he thought its pressures would make it difficult for him to continue writing. He may also, of course, have reckoned that a book might provide the impetus to continue.⁹

An aspect of Rakosi's precocious brilliance was the rapid development of his writing away from an aestheticism which in the 1920s could still seem advanced, which in England, in particular, exerted a blighting effect throughout the decade. In this respect Rakosi compares favourably with, say, his near contemporary Fitzgerald. In Rakosi's case this development was achieved by projecting on to the motifs of aestheticism a sardonic self consciousness, signified less by an antithetical persona than by a confident verbalism, flamboyant rather than grotesque, through which grotesquely appear various contemporary scenes and personages. Rakosi's earliest published work already bears traces of this as social wit projected on to personal feeling, with excursions into a lurid and subversive diction. They allude to aestheticism's conventional refinements of sensitivity, but for all the symptomatic references to Whistler, or the highlights glimpsed on a woman's hair, and genuflection to the intensities of the sonnet form, these poems neither depend on such stock devices and effects, nor re-enact the decadent poet's anxious celebration of the crises of sacred and profane love. In one sense Rakosi was no more than working over ground on which Eliot had preceded him, but whereas Prufrock was given to reveal the absurdity of the modern courtly lover, guiltily aware of his fleshly bachelor existence, the equivalent figures in Rakosi's poems are unequivocally youthful and jauntily resistant rather than absurd. The difference is telling, but of no more than incidental significance; these poems don't command the ability of Eliot's rhetoric to represent two positions simultaneously. But although in Rakosi's version the female may have the propensity to immobilise the male, to bore him to sleep, he retains the prerogative of action, if only of aesthetic action, to "compose the shifting forms to beauty."¹⁰ Such last-ditch refinements of a late-Victorian problematic could be, at the most, no more than a starting point. "Beauty" was already a flawed touchstone, and the spectacle of a young poet digging himself out of the sexual politics of a situation in which the female could only be imagined in terms of an outdated and literary convention (as Fitzgerald imagined his female characters), however compensatingly grotesque she might then appear, reveals not much more than his ambiguous commitment to a literary discourse the main attraction of which, we might suppose, was its continuing challenge to the celebratory populism represented by Sandburg and (at Wisconsin) Leonard. The energy of these very early poems

is found not in their negotiations with aestheticsⁱ but in the way its formal proprieties are pulled indecorously out of shape by the solids with which Rakosi's agile invention furnished settings for personages who themselves remain no more than symbolist enigmas.

In these poem sex and courtship are not associated with desire. They are figured on the scale of world or cosmos, which on the human scale are projected, aesthetically enough, in terms of music. Part of Rakosi's development is the discovery of his proper subject in his figures (for which Imagism provided some precedent), and we can understand this as the composition of forms as purposive in itself. The solids of Rakosi's invention ("the lean of sagging flesh", "a sleep guitar on sober braids") approach the intelligible quality of forms which brought together can represent the copresence of the compositional intelligence. We can see the development worked out in "Sitting Room by Patinka" in which, although the female figure has obvious poetic antecedents, the concern is not with her portrait but the interior she inhabits.¹¹ The distinction is crucial: the lady is figured inside a discourse in which, as a conspicuous consumer, her furnishings take on the salient role. I quote the first of the poem's four stanzas.

I found Miss Levi in a plush repose,
counting the curves pitched in her portly mirrors
by seven bored and pygmy globes. Her floors
were tourmaline supporting topaz standards.
Moist for the mouthing of mild platitudes,
here evenings passed Venetian glasses and
oak planes through green transitions. Walnut backs
diffused her satin cases. She seemed faint,
ecstatic in her parlor sunsets, stamping
her wronged head on an old medallion.

The visual imagination is still, surely, not far from Beardsley, with a glance at Pound, perhaps, in the last two lines. But Rakosi has been listening to the cadences of Stevens, and there are other poems in which his influence is thematised to the point of homage. Rakosi is not quite shaping his lines around the movement and cadence of the phrase, but in abandoning rhyme for a modified blank verse he shows an assurance of touch by which those lines that are not end stopped do not butt against their metrical confinement but turn on a grammatical figure of unfolding statement. Sexual drama is directed into its setting, description of which uses active verbs in such a way that its details figure as more than grammatical subjects and take on a quasi-erotic life of their own. The rhetorical self-possession of the language, and the busy decor, merge in a series of deliquescent twilights. With Tate in mind we might find it helpful to revive the question of manner in order to distinguish it from style: style in this poem has aplomb rather than grandeur and is integral to

the poem's theme since it is the figure of the composing intelligence, which is concerned less with the human sexual drama than its inflection within its particular cultural setting. Sex and courtship are dissevered by consumption. The writing wilfully tends away from any representation of a self which is able to maintain a moral distance from what the language supposedly attributed to it denotes. Point of view and its associated antitheses are situated within the poetic discourse rather than as its implied origin.

Much as I can admire this poem I draw attention to it in order to indicate the route by which Rakosi arrived at his more characteristic writing, which is not defined by the consciousness of sex which the young Rakosi recognised in himself. In "Scriptural Program" the sexual problematic is again resited, using a parodic version of scriptural cadence and imagery to provide a fictive context for an encounter which is this time more conventionally erotic.¹² The male protagonist is here more explicitly dramatised, and "Miss Levi" metamorphosed, perhaps, as "my Jewess" who "brings me the Holy Land". Structural correspondence between lines and phrases gives the poem an open ended range of particular allusion, but its rhetoric is simplified accordingly to a series of binary oppositions. But Rakosi's poems had already, by their juxtaposition with aestheticism of their own subversive rhetoric, been required to compress much within a narrow compass. Despite its explicit Hebraism, therefore, this poem seems less a development than the exhaustion of Rakosi's initial situation as a poet. In the next poems to be published he abolishes the aesthetic dilemma by resiting it so radically, in the vulgar certainties, that is to say, of contemporary existence, that carefully negotiated discursive transitions are no longer required as a means of purchase on debased literary convention. To borrow an apposite phrase from Pound, Rakosi now addressed the "drear horror of American life" in a variety of its public forms: cinema, advertising, success, and--on the margin of public and private life--vaudeville.¹³ In "Vitagraph", "Characters", "Wanted", "Superproduction", and "Revue" the personages are not enigmas but the stereotypes of a grotesque national identity parade. With the exception of "Vitagraph", in which deadpan narrative is matched closely to its subject like the captions of a silent Western, these poems do not feed directly on the language of their originals, so that our attention is eventually drawn to their originals' actuality rather than (as in Cummings, for example) their mere vulgarity.¹⁴

CHARACTERS

One of our brassy beefeaters
in grandstand on the continent
bares biceps to the gaping millions,
sinks shaft in market, pockets wheat

holds cornucopia of cash.
Cheers heard before his private front
as he lands place with notables.
We call this tribute in a nutshell,
a miracle of entertainment.

Speaking of beaus sartorial,
perplexed young girl hands laugh to lovewise.
I am a lovely, irresistible girl
of seventeen, with wondrous witching orbs.
Why do I blaze in my intangibles
like any mandolin romantic,
you, stable as the sterling?

Character and plot are presented in language at once more summary and more agile than is natural to them, indeed it is this language which provides the critical gaze by which they are exposed to our fascinated recognition. But although the poem's language has the function of making strange things that are already all too familiar, point of view is attributed to the stereotypes of grotesque normality. Satiric intelligence is here invested in style, which is perceived as an increasingly fine margin of difference around a text in which character, action, and setting are closely adjusted. If the writing seems deliberately to assist the gaudiness of its own style it does so to sustain a necessary consistency, for gaudiness is an effect of opacity and density produced by a method of off-centre denotation. Our recognition of what is given as unfamiliar is an outcome not of decoding a set of metonymic exchanges but of sudden adjustment to an unwonted orientation of the things represented, a reorientation towards the discourse within which such things are normally inscribed. In addition to this, the consistency sustained by style provides cover for denotations that are not so much off-centre as camouflaged, which brought into the open disclose a subversive sub-text. We might consider the precise inflection of "stable as the sterling", for instance, in a poem published the year after Churchill put sterling back on the gold standard.

With these poems Rakosi established himself as a modern poet. There are two aspects to what I mean by this. First, his language observes no necessary distinction in writing between literal and figurative construction; it is consistently figural, even when its grammar is declarative. (Certain formal qualities in his writing are incidentally a consequence of this, notably textual integration rhythmically and rhetorically, which are primary to the aesthetics of modernism.) Second, meaning is continually negotiated across the figural composition, given in it but also to be interpreted; no position is represented from which it is supposed authoritatively to derive. If we also identify Rakosi as a stylist we might feel inclined to trace this back to the finely ironic sensibility of aestheticism, and we might not be entirely

wrong, but the derivation will no longer provide any useful purchase. His adeptness of phrase, and confident management of tone and cadence, are skills of a high order, and they are indeed characteristic, but their contribution to style does not define it. We recognise in Rakosi's style a various figure, sensuous and intelligent, which contributes to meaning; as a figure of language its theoretical antecedents are in Pound's logopoeia. For a writer to use style in this way is, necessarily, attended by risk, notably of that verbal gusto, an excess of skill, which makes style its own derivative, but some of Rakosi's revisions, substantially of whole lines and stanzas, show him alert to this. But, as a primary locus of Rakosi's writing, style in the sense I use here seems to have provided productive impetus. Pound's selection of poems for Rakosi's first appearance in Exile endorsed those in which style takes on structures of cultural discourse embedded deeply (indeed, still embedded) in modern America, but these need to be set beside others in which Rakosi calls into play discourses from early American history, the culture of Europe, as well as those of courtship and sex, now freed from the sexual politics of aestheticism. Such discourses were all, in one way or another, personal to Rakosi as immigrant, European born, and attracted to women. In addition we can see emerging a set of topics more local still to his individual existence, in which multiform life is seen in relation to the absolutes of a void metaphysics; his writing becomes both speculative and learned, possessed of a vocabulary, amenable to the turnings of his style, which implies knowledge not only of the contemporary scene but of mineralogy, chemistry, marine biology, music, photography, and ancient history.

It was at the point this represents in his development, more or less, that Rakosi received significant public recognition when Zukofsky recruited him as an "Objectivist". When Zukofsky approached him late in 1930 Rakosi had lived in Texas some two years, working as a University English Instructor, teaching High School, and involved in settlement work. From the ardently admiring tone of Margery Latimer's first letter to him after their correspondence was resumed in 1931 it appears that the account Rakosi gave of his life since 1928 was of unstinted effort to put his life on a secure professional footing; but at the same time we should recognise that Rakosi was still playing the field, and was undecided, or simply not economically in a position to decide, between social work, education, medicine, or the law. Zukofsky's schedule for the February, 1931 number of Poetry was tight, but Rakosi was in a position to send enough poems to allow Zukofsky to make his own selection and offer to place others with magazines such as Pagany. Zukofsky's response to Rakosi's poems was too fulsome to bear repeating, but he was as well a fastidious editor, and Rakosi's contributions to both the "Objectivists" number of Poetry,

an equivalence which speaks of the mind's capacity to invent materially from the physical properties of nature. Rakosi's ship and sailors behave like any others, whereas Stevens's singer must remain sui generis.

The mind's engagement with the intelligible qualities of nature, from which transaction comes material and intellectual culture, might serve as the privileged figure in Rakosi's poetics. It is also thematically diverse, to be encountered in an account of building carpentry, in references to exact machine processes, and to scientific measurement of different sorts. Specifically under the aspect of craftsmanship we might like to trace it back to the hours Rakosi spent watching his father, a skilled watchmaker, at work in his shop. But beside this must be set the mind's contemplation of itself in isolation, when its action sets nature at a distance, and its affinity is with nature conceived in terms of its furthest reaches into time and space. The relation is then inverse, away from home and sex; the mind in nature is abstract, polar, a voyage without destination. "Unswerving Marine" is the third in the group of four poems by Rakosi in the "Objectivists" number of Poetry, and within the group as a whole there is a sequence of feeling which starts in withdrawn self-sufficiency ("And I, my lover, / skirt the cottages, / the eternal hearths and gloom, / to animate the ideal / with internal passion.") and ends at a figure of metaphysical solitude ("Tumblers in the nebula, / is not every man / his own host?")

The extent to which, when he began to publish again in 1931, Rakosi was drawing on capital is uncertain, but publication, and correspondence with Zukofsky, were a spur to writing. "A Journey Away", Rakosi's main contribution to An "Objectivists" Anthology, appears to have been produced under Zukofsky's exacting tutelage and hortation--or, to see matters in less kind a light, it received the impression of Zukofsky's faith in his ability as a rewrite artist.¹⁵ Zukofsky informed Rakosi that in the Anthology he wished to display the essential Rakosi, not his variousness, but that he proposed to do so in relation to its major category of "epic", "a chain of facts which exists".¹⁶ To this end he assembled the poems he had chosen in the order in which they were to appear, assigning them numbers rather than titles, so that in sequence they would represent a contemporary journey. If Rakosi were to demur Zukofsky thought that the resultant composition might be equally suited to the third, collaborative section of the Anthology, in which he printed his rewrite of Rexroth's "Prolegomena to a Theodicy", which Rexroth declined to acknowledge as his own. It's hard not to think of the version of "A Journey Away" published in Hound and Horn, shorter by two sections, and the sections differently ordered, as Rakosi's recovery of his own text. It's hard also not to believe that the interest Zukofsky took in Rakosi's writing

was not altogether benign in its effect. Around this time there are references in Rakosi's correspondence to a poem several pages in length on which he was making gradual progress, and I assume that this refers to "The Beasts" and the poems eventually derived from it. If I am right to take these poems as the fragments of an abandoned work--abandoned for whatever reason--it would then seem that the account I am advancing of Rakosi's writing and its situation will need to recognise two quite different issues. The first is that the "Objectivists" quickly lost whatever advantages were to be gained by announcing their group identity. Whatever the individual benefits of collectivity, as a group they were unable to consolidate their position; indeed the Anthology already looks like a retrenchment, and we might suppose that the historic status of Objectivism has been achieved only by the subsequent careers of its protagonists. It is against this background that we should see Rakosi having to compete for space and accept substantial abridgement in order to publish "The Beasts" in Poetry. The second is that the work Rakosi abandoned was a poem of far-reaching and complex ambition, in which were drawn together an apprehension of the role of the mind within evolutionary time, the dilemmas of personality, and the variety of forms within the social and economic structures of the modern city.

Contested between two responsibilities
like a gizzard thrown to two dogs,
judging between two faiths,
I saw the city

In this figure of bitter division we might discover the site of the integration the poem first sought.

The absence of this poem, as it originally existed, from the available canon of Rakosi's work can only be matter for regret, as is the non-appearance of the book which Rakosi intended to publish at this time. But despite such regrets we cannot avoid noticing that by the time Rakosi was negotiating with Poetry about how much of "The Beasts" might be retained he had begun writing poems in a new manner which could not sustain the same level of ambition. Zukofsky thought that "The Beasts" was too tender in its account of a world in crisis, and bearing in mind his phrase about "the direction of historic and contemporary particulars" we might take him perhaps to mean that Rakosi's account of the crisis of capitalism was not ideological enough to become objectively perfect. On the other hand, the poems in Rakosi's new manner, "Good Prose", for example, and "Sappho", are written in accordance with Zukofsky's exposition of the relation between quantity and clarity of image

in the lyric as practised by Williams. ^{17.} These poems are elegant and witty vignettes, but I can't help feeling that their elegance is stylish in a way that Rakosi's previous writing was not.

At this point I should insert a word or two of caution, lest the account I am attempting of Rakosi's career and development mislead readers. Between 1931 and 1934 Rakosi published about twice the number of poems that he published between 1924 and 1928. They are all, I believe, work of genuine distinction, and confirm the many-sidedness of Rakosi's talent that was acknowledged by Zukofsky, but in this essay I have not attempted to give a complete account of that many-sidedness, neither have I ventured to assess the actual weight of what Rakosi achieved. I will, however, state the opinion that it is an achievement in which we may recognise a poet of major stature, and that this is a judgment that can stand without any account taken of Objectivism, although it is, of course, one which materially affects our sense of what Objectivism amounted to.

There is not much left to chronicle. The magazines in which Rakosi published, with the exception of Poetry, were short-lived and peripheral: The Lion and Crown, The New Act, The Windsor Quarterly. They do not have a place in the roster of seminal little magazines, but they deserve to be studied, and not only as signs of the dispersal of Objectivism. Two poems were published in a series of brochures issued by the Modern Editions Press. ^{18.} By 1933 Rakosi had aligned himself with the Communists; his involvement in social work was career oriented, and under his legal name he began to publish papers--still of interest--in this field. ^{19.} He married, became a father, published a book, and wrote no more poetry for a quarter of a century. But such a summary is too rapid to convey the time scale over which this development took place. We should think of Rakosi throughout the second half of the 1930s as a writer on the left, and we should remember that during these years, when he was living in New York, Rakosi was, for the first time since his years as a student at Madison, situated physically in a literary milieu, of a sort. He was a signatory to the manifesto of support for the Spanish Republic issued by the League of American Writers in 1938, and heard W.H. Auden ("like a young Byron") address its Congress. ^{20.} He wrote poems of political protest, addressed to the average American citizen. In his papers at the University of Wisconsin are drafts of poems of profound personal anguish and political outrage prompted by the German occupation of the Sudetenland and the Munich agreement, but the phrases in which he expresses his anguish are too fraught with emotion to connect with those which express contempt and defiance. In the Selected Poems too much is sacrificed for the sake of local clarity and didactic content, with one telling exception, in which Rakosi joined together two of his poems about ships. ^{21.}

SHIPS

One o'clock. A rainy night.
The sea air darkens on the wheelhouse.
The binnacle glows.

"Ho there, ho!"

The whole hull of The Frisco Cross,
a twin-screw tanker, lights up.

"Who are you?"

A dry face. The chronometer tilts.
"All lights burning brightly, sir."

A little river steamer from the tariff frontiers,
twelve cabins and a white light on the masthead,
with its house flag and a freeboard of 6", boys
running with mates' receipts and bills of lading,
carries kilderkin imperial kegs and stingo firkins.

But the great turbo-electric ocean liner, fire-insured,
has circulating ice water swift for the belly,
and anchor hooks and foreign mail.

What tells here results from the decision to prefix to a poem which somewhat didactically contrasts two classes of shipping another which evokes the romance of navigation on the open sea; the telling difference is surely something like tenderness of regard even for the luxury liner. Such tenderness, it seems to me, reaches forward to the poems that Rakosi would come back to write.

NOTES

1. Louis Zukofsky, "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931", Poetry XXXVII, v (February, 1931).
2. Louis Zukofsky, "American Poetry, 1920-1930", Symposium 2 (1931).
3. i.e. Rene Taupin, L'influence du Symbolisme francais sur la Poésie americaine, Paris 1929.
4. Allen Tate, "Foreword", White Buildings: Poems by Hart Crane, New York 1926 [1927]; Zukofsky, "American Poetry 1920-1930".
5. Notes on contributors, New Directions in Prose and Poetry, Norfolk, Conn. 1938.
6. Yvor Winters, "An 'Objectivists' Anthology" (book review), Hound and Horn VI, 1 (October-December) 1932.
7. For a detailed account of Yvor Winters's association with Lincoln Kirstein and Hound and Horn, see Leonard Greenbaum, The Hound and Horn: The History of a Literary Quarterly, The Hague 1966.
8. Leonard Serabian Herald published a book of poems, The Waking Hour, NY 1925; his "Autobiography" was serialised in The Dial. Kenneth Fearing is deservedly well known to devotees of detective fiction; his satiric verse, more mordant and sarcastic than Rakosi's, is still read. Margery Latimer, who died in 1932, is being rediscovered--rightly--by feminist literary historians. One of her novels, This is My Body, NY 1930, is based on the personalities of the group. Rakosi appears in it as Schevel Pukalski.
9. Various statements and conjectures in this paragraph and elsewhere are based on conversation and correspondence with Rakosi, and on unpublished material in his papers in the University Libraries, University of Wisconsin--Madison, letters from Margery Latimer in the Jean Toomer Archive, and Rakosi's correspondence with Pound in the Ezra Pound Archive, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.
10. Carl Rakosi, "Creation", Palms 2, 4 (1924).
11. Carl Rakosi, "Sitting Room by Patinka", The Little Review (Spring 1925).
12. Carl Rakosi, "Scriptural Program", Two Worlds (June 1926).
13. Ezra Pound, "Prolegomena", The Exile 2 (Autumn 1927).
14. Carl Rakosi, "Vitagraph", The New Masses 4 (August 1926); "Characters", etc., The Exile 2.
15. Zukofsky's habit of rewriting other poets' work was not without its theoretical justification: "rehabilitating the good to its rightful structure is always possible with writing in which something was seen, a quantity heard, an emotion apprehended, to begin with." "American Poetry, 1920-1930".
16. René Taupin's definition of "epic" is prefixed to the first section of An "Objectivists" Anthology, ed. Louis Zukofsky, Le Beausset, Var, and New York 1932.
17. Zukofsky's remarks on quantity will be found (again) in "American Poetry, 1920-1930". Carl Rakosi, "Good Prose", The New Act (June 1933); "Sappho",

The Windsor Quarterly (Summer 1933).

18. Carl Rakosi, Two Poems, NY [1933]. Other brochures in the series were by Horace Gregory, Paul Bowles, and Laurence Vail.

19. See, for instance, Callman Rawley, "A Glimpse of the Unattached Woman Transient in New Orleans", The Family XV, 3 (May 1934). The paper juxtaposes the writer's sympathetically excited imagination of his subject ("large hordes of very young girls [...] overrunning transient centers throughout the country") and the "much less dramatic" facts.

20. Writers Take Sides: Letters about the war in Spain from 418 American writers, New York 1938. (I am indebted to Eric Homberger for drawing my attention to this document.)

21. Carl Rakosi, Selected Poems, Norfolk, Conn.[1941]. The poems joined together were the final section of "A Journey Away" (both versions), and "Happy New Year", The Windsor Quarterly (Spring 1933).

REMEMBERING CARL RAKOSI:

A CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF "THE BEASTS"

Andrew Crozier

In the face of the social and institutional pressures that shape the culture we are given memory counts for little if it is not made public. I wouldn't deny the heroism of starting from scratch, but we cannot forever be beginning again--as we learn while our lives become historical and we feel history envelop us; better, then, to recognise the little we have than tacitly accept a totality we mystify as the tabula rasa of our freedom of action. We should own a true debt, therefore, to anyone who, like Kenneth Rexroth, made his memory public, kept faith with his history, and redeemed a portion of cultural memory from the inertia and unconsciousness which are its normal state. Left to itself memory will play us false, as mine does here, for it was certain that the essay by Rexroth in which I first came across the name of Carl Rakosi was "Disengagement: The Art of the Beat Generation", published in England in a mass market paperback given the catch-all title Protest: The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men. I remember all of this so well: the time and the place, the beatniks depicted on the cover: Cambridge, 1961, figures of demure dissidence from an epoch before youth culture was dreamed of. But this is sheer fabrication, the form of some devious association, for when I recently consulted David Chaloner to check the bibliographical detail Rakosi's name failed to appear. We found it, instead, in "The Influence of French Poetry on American" in Rexroth's Assays. No recollection of reading that book then! However that may be, I had a name, an enigma ("Carl Rakosi, who published one small book and then fell silent"), and had chanced upon one poem, "A Journey Away", in a stray copy of Hound & Horn in the English Faculty library. Rakosi belonged to a history, which also felt pressingly immediate, I wanted to make my own. In 1964 and 1965, at the University of Buffalo, I read Rakosi's two small books in the Poetry Collection--that remarkable memory bank--of the Lockwood Memorial Library. I looked up the poems he had published in magazines and anthologies in the 1920s and 1930s and made handwritten copies (this was before the general availability of the photocopier as a machine to depress reading) which I typed out, making carbon copies, in the evenings. Over the course of the year I accumulated a thick file of Rakosi's poems, a substantial oeuvre, to which the little book of Selected Poems published in 1941 by New Directions in the Poet of the Month series bore little relation: hardly any of the 1920s poems, and of the later ones barely the pared-down and divided remnants. What had happened?

What, for that matter, had happened to Rakosi? In retrospect it will seem obvious that his time was about to come: Oppen and Reznikoff had just been published by New Directions; Norton were bringing out Zukofsky's shorter poems. Where, meanwhile, was Rakosi? At the time I saw the question only in terms of location, and was too young to be sensible that memory belongs to the present as

an index of value. Instead I assumed that personal feelings might be involved. Enquiries at first got nowhere: faces like blank walls. Memories of stone. Indeed I was told, but this was rumour, that Rakosi had been a Comintern agent and disappeared behind the Iron Curtain after the war. When I showed the file of Rakosi's poems to Charles Olson his reaction confirmed the tacit opinion that I had turned off into one of history's blind alleys. Such premature judgment was not quite universal. Rexroth recalled a reading in the 1950s, somewhere in the Middle West, at which a man had afterwards introduced himself saying he was Carl Rakosi. Past tense? It was Charles Reznikoff who in the end found an old employment address through which, he hoped, although the lapse of time made it unlikely, I might be able to locate (under his legal name of Callman Rawley) the poet Carl Rakosi. A long shot that came off.

Rakosi has given his own account of what ensued. The rest is almost, as they say, history. But if it is history the rest has become a term of blunt approximation, not even a good rule of thumb. Seniority does not mean, after all, that someone does not live in the present, which is precisely where Rakosi has been writing all along. What Rakosi wrote in the 1920s and 1930s remains hidden still in the files of old magazines, rarely consulted, I suppose, and certainly never seen all together in one place. For anyone interested in the history of which Rakosi is an integral part, or who wishes to consider him, in other than the most abstract of terms, as an Objectivist poet, this must prove, surely, a serious obstruction. Early in our correspondence Rakosi mentioned that he had copies of only a few poems, and I sent him the carbons I had made. Some time later I received a typescript of Amulet, which New Directions were to publish, where new poems are juxtaposed with old ones revamped: recast, rewritten and, in subtle ways, given a new history. The old poems took up an appropriate place beside the new as imaginary versions of the poet's earlier life. As such they seem to constitute a special case of Rakosi's continual practice of revision of which, I will be the first to acknowledge, his Collected Poems is the beautiful and triumphant vindication. Yet the book's conventional title has the character of a fiction: this is not a collected edition in the usual sense, the gathered evidence by which a career presents itself to be weighed and judged. It is, rather, a culminating act, representing for us a career at the moment that it gathers into itself a lifetime of experience and acquired wisdom. I can think of no other book quite like it: it is as if Rakosi has realised a work of the grandeur and inclusiveness that younger poets have imagined for themselves, but by which career and reputation are then haunted as by failure, and as such it belongs authentically to the Romantic tradition of poetry as a high calling.

If we recognise that systematic revision of accomplished work has been inherent to Rakosi's method and contributes to this culminating achievement, where its basis is textual in a way that assists our grasp of the singularity of the Collected Poems, a work which, despite its Romantic affiliation, is not so much sui generis as the imitation of such a work, we must admit a necessary corollary. We require his writing in all its previous forms in order to sustain such a view. Those other poems, in their initial, perhaps more immediate and concrete, and in their intermediate forms, notwithstanding their transformation and incorporation in the Collected Poems, are implied in it as the ground of the figure it makes, neither provisional nor stagal but necessarily standing away and different. Here is a supplementary motive for going back to the poems of the 1920s and 1930s which may convince those who were not to be persuaded by appeals to history or theory. However such a suggestion might be taken up, more is involved, as the following note will suggest, than the simple gathering I formerly undertook.

2.

A Conjectural Restoration of "The Beasts"

Although Rakosi has consistently revised his poems for book publication it cannot be assumed that he did so to the same extent before the radical dismemberment of his work in Selected Poems. If the structural connection of section to sequence is not immediately apparent in, for example, "Extracts from a Private Life" (Exile 4, Autumn 1928) or "A Journey Away" (An "Objectivists" Anthology, 1932), there is no obvious textual uncertainty or ambiguity on Rakosi's part before 1933. Uncertainty is evident in the different versions of a poem published variously as "The Men Fled Military Service", "Men on Yachts", and "Ennui", but this arose, it will become apparent, from the already fragmentary status of the verses in question. At about the same time, moreover, Rakosi was developing a new manner, more laconic and formally lucid, employing two and three line stanzas. Some earlier work was revised accordingly: "The January of a Gnat" (Little Review, Spring 1925), for example, was turned into "The Gnat" (The New Act, 1933). This new manner would, in due course, underwrite Rakosi's revisions in Selected Poems. He soon regretted these revisions, and later attributed them to a mistaken opinion of the narrow range over which he could achieve coherence in poetry. It seems correct to associate the formal character of these revisions, and the judgment of his work they imply, with Rakosi's decision to abandon poetry, and thus to connect them with the motives for that decision: politically inspired scepticism about the value of poetry,

and commitments to professional and family life. By thus introducing a third factor into the equation it might be suggested that Rakosi's scepticism was not programmatic merely, but symptomatic as well, reinforced by his assumption of an attenuated poetic which, on the grounds of its formal lucidity, might have been seen as the instrument of a poetry of more accessible sentiment. Were this the case then what provided the evidence for Rakosi's scepticism might well have been his own shortcomings as a writer of politically committed poetry. Whatever the case, the material presented below is evidence, surely, of both textual and vocational anxiety focused by, if not actually arising from, editorial treatment of a poem Rakosi thought was important. "The Beasts" represents, in fact, the first instance of subsequent revision in Rakosi's work. (Ordinary compositional revision--the author's working drafts--is not, needless to say, what concerns us here.) Editorial practice was once, no doubt, more interventionist than it is today, but the extent of editorial zeal on behalf of its own interests in this case is startling nevertheless. It is clear that revision, in the shape of extensive cutting and compression, were required as a condition of publication, and went further than Rakosi was happy to accept. When he read a draft of this note he commented "I was always only my own editor." And then added "P.S. Apparently something else was going on with Zabel that I don't remember."

Rakosi's typescript of "The Beasts" in the Poetry archive bears the editorial annotation that it is the "author's shortened and final version". This typescript bears evidence of further editorial intervention in the form of directions to the compositor to change details of punctuation, capitalisation, and layout. These alterations, carried out in the version of the poem published in Poetry 43.2 (November 1933), show how easily an aggressively conventional mind can produce incoherence in place of clarity: a scattering of rhetorical dashes leads to the insertion of a dash where not even a hyphen was called for--Rakosi's typescript is, indeed, scrupulous in its use of the hyphen.

There is, in addition, a letter dated December 19, 1932, from Rakosi to Morton Dauwen Zabel, Associate Editor of Poetry, indicating where cuts might be made in an earlier, and evidently much longer, version of the poem. There are no copies of Zabel's letters to Rakosi in the archive, but the inference is surely clear that Rakosi was responding to the suggestion that the poem was too long to be published as it stood, and that he should indicate where it could be cut down to size. The inference seems equally valid that the typescript of the "final and shortened version" was made after Zabel had accepted these cuts. The typescript of the original version was presumably still in Zabel's hands when this letter was written, and no doubt was returned to Rakosi with a request for a clean copy of the shortened version.

I think The Bests [sic] will lend itself to a few deletions. I suggest the following: omit all of 3 (beginning "After the bath she touched"); omit the beginning of 1 from line 1 to line beginning "Fresh mollusk morning puts a foot" (which then starts off the poem). Also, section beginning with line "Immigrants from Lodz" should be numbered 2, and what was section 2 should be numbered 3. I hate to cut out any more, but if there's no other way, let's take out the stanza between the lines "This private enterprise" and [cancelled: "and batik lamp shade"] "stopper & a monogram shield." But see if you can't keep it in.

Let me know which parts you yourself like best.

The new poems, as you will see, are in a different manner. Of course you are free to use them, but I should prefer that you take the abbreviated form of The Beasts.

In addition to showing where, and with what reluctance ("see if you can't keep it in") cuts were made, the letter enables many of the passages cut to be identified, since Rakosi published some of them, at least, as separate poems in other magazines. Up to a point, therefore, it is possible to make a conjectural reconstruction of the poem as Rakosi first submitted it to Poetry. The reference to "new poems in a different manner" is helpful, as well, if it permits us, when scrutinising other poems published by Rakosi in the aftermath of this episode, to assume that those which have no stylistic affinity with "The Beasts" need not be taken into our reckoning.

The conjectured reconstruction of an original version of "The Beasts" offered below is established on the following series of inferences, which are entirely based on the letter to Zabel and Rakosi's published poems. No other usable archive material has been located.

1. omit all of 3 (beginning "After the bath she touched")

Section 3 of the original version is identified with virtual certainty as this is most of the first line of the poem published in Westminster Magazine (Autumn 1933) as "The Men Fled Military Service", and republished (with, in both cases, significant minor alterations) as "Men on Yachts" (Rakosi, Two Poems, NY [n.d.]), and "Ennui" (August Derleth & Raymond E.F. Larsson, eds., Poetry out of Wisconsin, NY 1937).

2. omit the beginning of 1 from line 1

There is no evidence to identify the opening lines of the poem. Other poems not identifiable as belonging to the original version of the poem might be tried. For example, the imagery of the opening lines of the abbreviated version might seem to follow directly from the final lines of "The Lobster", which was also published in Westminster Magazine and Two Poems.

3. section beginning with the line "Immigrants from Lodz" should be numbered 2, and what was section 2 should be numbered 3

Section 2 of the original version is identified. About "section beginning" there is a slight ambiguity: either "section" is here used to mean "passage"

as opposed to "division", or the lines beginning "Immigrants from Lodz" constituted a fourth section in the original version. It seems simplest to assume that this "section" was part of the first section of the original, which Rakosi has simply divided.

4. take out the stanza between the lines "This private enterprise" and "stopper & a monogram shield"

The second of these lines concludes the first part of "The Wedding", published in Windsor Quarterly (Summer 1933) and Modern Things (Parker Tyler, ed., NY 1933). The first line does not appear here or elsewhere, but it has a figural relation to the line "Under this Luxemburg of Heaven" with which "The Weddings" begins, and which appears in an even closer relation to "The Beasts" material in "The Classes" (Selected Poems). While it is not clear how much of "The Wedding" retains elements of the "stanza" taken out, Rakosi's second thoughts about this deletion enable us to identify where it was made. The cancellation of "and batik lamp shade" shows that he finally conceded less than he was initially minded to forego: the omitted "stanza" must, then, immediately precede the passage to which this line belongs.

In the reconstructed text that follows I have tried to avoid speculative inclusions. I have made Rakosi's typescript a copy text, as the Poetry version has obvious blemishes; for section 3 I have followed the version in Two Poems. (The Westminster Magazine version seems less reliable because Rakosi appears to have hit upon a compromise solution in this first reworking of a cut fragment as an independent poem; he appears, that is, to have used the last line--with the exception of "in the Empire"--as title. "Empire" as the last line in this version is not formally convincing. In Two Poems he appears, with greater confidence, to have given the integral fragment a new title. In Poetry out of Wisconsin, more drastically, he cut the last line altogether.) Most conjectural is the "stanza" Rakosi finally conceded, which goes before the passage beginning "Lamp / with goddess". With the equivalent passage in "The Classes" in mind I have ~~have~~ taken the passage in "The Wedding" which concludes with "stopper & a monogram shield" back as far as the line "orangerie and game room". In addition, in the light of the figural relation of "This private enterprise" and "Under this Luxemburg of heaven" I have introduced the former line before the otherwise apparently integral passage beginning "orangerie and game room". I have not tried to be any more ingenious. Readers might care to see, nevertheless, how "The Lobster" strikes them as a possible set of opening lines, and I include it in an appendix. Also included in the appendix are "The Wedding", because the lines not included in the reconstructed text have a possible affinity, and "The Classes", in order to clarify my conjectures about the conceded "stanza".

THE BEASTS (reconstructed text)

1.

Missing lines: "omit the
beginning of 1 from line 1"

Fresh mollusk morning puts a foot
out from its bivalve.
Behind us skeleton of sea
cucumber, microscopic
buttons, tables, plates, wheels
and anchors in its skin.

A hydroid, wrasse in hundreds,
the anchovy, the horse mussel,
blue sturgeon, spiny cockle,
underwater fairy palm expanding.

Before us land,
the goat in open field.
The milk is marketed.
Attend our table.

For the evening is the city's
like a shell forced open
and the foreign matter
shining sea-forced pearl.

The great names like the sand,
the fluorspar and the soda ash
make a blue
 aventurine glass
for this city

that as you enter, Weep
it says at either panel
of the door and rises
from the base in one piece,
one of two stone figures
with her head bowed.
And above, a lion rampant
on his hind feet, royally
clawing, tail whipped up.

This way the little banjo
music enters the hotel.

This way the channeled ceiling
luminaires

[continues without line break]

of the National
Bank of Commerce
metal finish crystal ground floor
and small grilled windows,
the banking hours.

This private enterprise

From letter to Zabel

orangerie and game room,
Old English tall twisted
stem engraved goblets

Royal Copenhagen porcelain,
mutton fat jade Chien Lung
bowl

From "The Wedding"

a toilet bottle
amethyst
stopper & a monogram shield

Lamp
with goddess
holding
twin fish,
ivory-carved Japanese lady,
hands crossed over breast,
holding on her head
the electric bulbs
and batik lamp shade.

Immigrants from Lodz
in a furnished room
close to the stores.
Porcelain pitcher,
bath and hand towels
on the bed rails.

A new sign goes
into the window Smocking
Hemstitching, Rhinestone
Setting.

Come, great city

petroleum oil,
domestic sulphite, Old Paper,
Newsroll Contract, short wool,
kip, Ohio & Pa. fleeces,
fine up-river rubber,
tank plates, wire nails,
China wood-oil, mason's lime,
pine roofers, spruce lath,
basket-fired Japan tea,
the white Singapore pepper,
burlap, Newfoundland cod.

At least we'll have a snack.
This city has full powers of
attorney to protect its friends.

One hour from here
 a loggia
above the pepper trees,
a tiny cascade and vines
above the bath house,
men and women driving
on the fairway, laughing,
surrounded by Galloway
pottery, garden furniture
and white daisies.

2.

When the light sprang from the sea, blowing,
the window sintered and blew like Venus
on my younger brother.

Tenderness and the idea
caught one like an animal
in night photography.

Contested between two responsibilities
like a gizzard thrown to two dogs,
judging between two faiths
I saw the city

changed, set up like laboratory
glassware for amines of herring brine,
the malic acid of the sea buckthorn
glass-enclosed prescription balance
steel and agate Fabrik Koln

a physics clear as alcohol,
La Vita Nuova, I hardly knew.

Creditors dined at the Cliquot Club.
They read the papers, trade changed.
Their horses died, the big-bellied.
Their dogs slept in the steam heat.

In an ambulance with modest
glass doors and a silver cross

a surgeon, delicate nickel-plate
instruments are laid on trays

illuminated on the operating table

 naked glassblowers,
gunsmiths, barbers, clerks, importers,
old men from hotels, pink and tailored,
naphthasmelling Irish priests.
Cravat-and-boy face of the movie usher.
Frankel, Shmulik, Old Country watchmakers.

Then a white horse in the park.
Cigars and politics.
The city wrapped in cellophane.

3.

After the bath she touched her hair
with Orange Leaf and smiled.

Henry is gone. Who are you?

Fumous ashwood stationary violins
all night made bright da capo
constant as specific gravity.
So the umbrellas were put away.

We were together on yachts and beaches,
breakfasts on the ocean,
taxis through the Brandenburger Tor.

Along the Danube
 onion stew and cart hack,
sheep under the Carpathians,
the cheese upon the rack.
The heifers licked their noses.

 Along the Boston limited
commercial service.

The table in the boarding house
was cleared, the cloth folded.
The rooms contained a few flowers,
chocolate boxes, women,
a laundry bag,
the lipstick on the dresser.

The men fled military service in the Empire.

"Men on Yachts"

Clearly, what is offered here is not the original poem but an attempted restoration. Like any broken or damaged object, some of the pieces are identifiable and can be put back in place; other pieces to hand might appear to belong without it being clear where they fit; other pieces, yet again, may go unrecognised or be simply lost. Two poems, "The Wedding" and "The Lobster", have been mentioned which might, insofar as their imagery and syntax proclaim an affinity with the writing of "The Beasts", contain passages from the original version of the poem for which identifying evidence is lacking.

It might be objected against this attempted restoration that Rakosi did not take advantage of any later occasion that might have allowed him to publish the unshortened version of "The Beasts", even though in both Modern Things and Poetry out of Wisconsin a dismembered section appears alongside the revised version, and the point is a good one that cannot directly be rebutted. Against it the point should be made that to have done so would have meant contesting the very considerable prestige and authority of Poetry. Rakosi had, in any case, already made the best of the situation by publishing the material cut in other forms, and would have had to retract that material; indeed,

despite his initial reluctance to cut quite as much as seemed to be asked of him, the whole experience may have proved convincing. As has already been suggested, after 1933 Rakosi's expectations of poetry were reduced, on both political and formal grounds.

What I don't mean to suggest is that Zabel's editorial handling of "The Beasts" prepared the ground for Rakosi's subsequent abandonment of poetry. That is, in any case, no longer the issue it seemed in 1965 because Rakosi's later writing makes of it no more than an incident in his career. But I would wish to insist, nevertheless, on the combination, in this episode and in the following years, of formal and political motives (though these need to be distinguished as reactions to pressures with different, though not therefore incommensurate, motivations represented by Zabel and Communism) as a way of understanding the both thin and doctrinaire qualities of the few poems Rakosi wrote during the remainder of the Thirties. (See, for example, "To the Non-Political Citizen", and "Declaration", in Selected Poems.)

To conclude briefly, then, what is proposed is an aesthetic and moral presumption in favour of an actual (here only partially and conjecturally restored) original version of "The Beasts", based on a determinable complexity of form and intention, on the hard evidence of a poetic ambition that required a long poem for its fulfilment. What is quite clear, if only by the collocation of fragments of the original, is that something much more exacting was intended than the version shortened for publication can deliver. It addressed the autobiographical in terms of both the immigrant's recollection of the old country and experience of urban America. I stress that the theme of migration was here also autobiographical because this is an instance of a complexity lost in revision, and restored with the association of reference to the younger brother (revised section 3, here section 2) and reference to the Holy Roman Empire (of which Rakosi's native Hungary, from which he emigrated in 1910 with his old brother Lester, was once part) in the restored section 3. Rakosi's poems had previously contained references and scenes which might be taken to be personal; in "The Beasts" the personal is less disguised (it is still objectified but treated without irony or grotesque caricature) and is, it might seem, more painfully felt. At the same time whatever is personal, including the use of first person address, is correlated with the collective life of the great American city: its spectacles of wealth and power, commerce and manufacture, work and leisure. Amongst these a circuit of feeling discharges its energy across the various divisions of the poem's world: old and new, the private and public self, the protected enclosures of capital and the transient rooms of the poor. Were we also to take into account "The Lobster" and "The Wedding", which at the very least belong to the same set as "The Beasts",

the range of Rakosi's imagination at this moment is formidable, for it travels between figures of evolutionary birth and personal extinction, in a way that suggests an aim to situate the self, and human history, within a natural history of living forms. In addition, I will do no more than mention now the diversity and particularity of Rakosi's diction. A discourse of such resourcefulness and complexity, it must be feared, exceeded the conceptions of both Poetry and the American Writers' Congress.

Appendix

1. "The Lobster", Two Poems, NY [n.d.]
2. "The Wedding", Modern Things, NY 1933. (Also in Windsor Quarterly 1,2 (Summer 1933).) In both cases the two parts of the poem appear quite formally distinct; the connection between them has always seemed obscure.
3. "The Classes", Selected Poems, NY [1941]

THE LOBSTER

to W, Carlos Williams

Eastern Sea, 100 fathoms,
green sand, pebbles,
broken shells.

Off Suno Saki, 60 fathoms,
gray sand, pebbles,
bubbles rising

plasma-bearer
and slow-
motion benthos!

The fishery vessel Ion drops
anchor here collecting
plankton smears and fauna.

Plasma-bearer, visible sea
purge, sponge and kelp leaf,
Halicystus, the Sea Bottle

resembles emeralds
and is the largest
cell in the world.

Young sea-horse
Hippocampus twenty
minutes old--

nobody has ever
seen this marine
freak blink.

It radiates on
terminal vertebra
a comb of twenty

upright spines
and curls
its rocky tail.

Saltflush lobster
bull encrusted swims
backwards from the rock.

THE WEDDING

Under this Luxemburg of heaven
"upright capstan

small eagles--
port of N.Y."

gilders, stampers, pen makers, goldbeaters,

fear of thunder

speed
the whore
indifference
son
glioma
water

Tammany, McCoy,
the bronze doors of the Guarantee Trust,
the copper spandrels

orangerie and game room,
Old English tall twisted
stem engraved goblets

Royal Copenhagen porcelain,
mutton fat jade Chien Lung
bowl

a toilet bottle
amethyst
stopper & a monogram shield.

Peeled from its mesentary
the heart was extracted
on a board washing and beating

between the two gold
vases of Bermuda lilies

an actborn egg shape
twisted like Ugolino

broken Sunday memories
a multiplication of pianos
touch ideal and invitation

St. Chrysostom's carillon
carillonneur--between
the organ and the white gown

One sea water, one circulatory system
of man observing his magnificent urea,

and the red hair--
walks in bride's fear.

THE CLASSES

1.

One hour from here a loggia
above the pepper trees,
a tiny cascade, and vines
above the bath house,
men and women driving
on the fairway, laughing,
surrounded by Galloway
pottery, garden furniture
and white daisies.

Under this Luxemburg of heaven

orangerie and game room,
Old English tall twisted
stem-engraved goblets

Royal Copenhagen porcelain,
mutton-fat jade Chien Lung bowl

a toilet bottle
 amethyst
stopper & a monogram shield.

2.

Immigrants from Lodz
in a furnished room
close to the stores.

Porcelain pitcher,
bath and hand towels
on the bed rails.

A new sign goes into the window:
Smocking, Hemstitching, Rhinestone Setting.

To Ced Command
Jan. 2 '70
Printed Oct '70 Origin

Lorine Niederster

THOMAS JEFFERSON

1

My wife is ill!
And I sit
 waiting
for a quorum

2

Fast ride
his horse collapsed
Now he saddled walked
Borrowed a farmer's
unbroken colt
To Richmond
Richmond How stop -
Arnold's redcoats
there

3

Elk Hill destroyed -
Cornwallis
carried off 30 slaves
Jefferson:
Were it to give them freedom
he'd have done right

4

Latin and Greek
my tools
to understand
humanity

I rode horse
away from a monarch
to an enchanting
philosophy

5

South of France *The*

Roman temple
'simple and sublime'

Maria Cosway
~~L~~harpist
on his mind

white column
and arch

6

To daughter Patsy: Read -
read Livy

No person full of work
was ever hysterical

Know music, history
dancing

(I calculate 14 to 1
in marriage

she will draw
a blockhead)

Science also
Patsy

7

Caput

~~Abend~~ with Adams:
send spermaceti oil to Portugal
for their church candles

(light enough to banish mysteries?:
three are one and one is three
and yet the one not three
and the three not one)

and send salt fish
U.S. salt fish preferred
above all other

8

Jefferson of Patrick Henry
backwoods fiddler statesman:

'He spoke as Homer wrote'
Henry eyed our minister at Paris -
the Bill of Rights hassle -
'he remembers . . .

in splendor and dissipation
he thinks yet of bills of rights'

9

True, French frills and lace
for Jefferson, sword and belt
but follow the Court to Fontainebleau^e
he could not -

house rent would have left him
nothing to eat

. . .

He bowed to everyone he met
and talked with arms folded

He could be trimmed
by a two-month migraine

and yet

stand up

10

Dear Polly:
I said No - no frost
in Virginia - the strawberries
were safe
I'd have heard - I'm in that kind
of correspondence
with a young daughter -
if they were not
Now I must retract
I shrink from it

11

Political honors
'splendid torments'
'If one could establish
an absolute power
of silence over oneself' ↑
When I set out for Monticello
(my grandchildren
will they know me?)
How are my young
chestnut trees -

no space
less space
i.e. 5 lines
to each stanza

12

Hamilton and the bankers
would make my country Carthage
I am abandoning the rich -
their dinner parties -
I shall eat my simlins
with the class of science
or not at all
Next year the last of labors

space

*Cont'd following
page*

among conflicting parties
Then my family
we shall sow our cabbages
together

13

Delicious flower
of the acacia
or rather
Mimosa Nilotica
from Mr. Lomax

14

Polly Jefferson, 8, had crossed
to father and sister in Paris
by way of ^{London} ~~Abigail~~ - Abigail
embraced her - Adams said
'in all my life I never saw
more charming child'
Death of Polly, 25,
Monticello

15

My harpsichord
my alabaster vase
and bridle bit
bound for Alexandria
Virginia

The good sea weather
of retirement
The drift and suck
and die-down of life
but there is loss

16

These were my passions:
Monticello and the villa-temples
I passed on to carpenters
bricklayers what I knew
and to an Italian sculptor
how to turn a volute
on a pillar
You may approach the campus rotunda
from lower to upper terrace
Cicero had levels

17

John Adams' eyes
 dimming
Tom Jefferson's rheumatism
 cantering

18

Ah soon must Monticello be lost
 to debts
 and Jefferson himself
 to death

19

Mind leaving, let body leave
Let dome live, spherical dome
and colonnade
Martha (Patsy) stay
'The Committee of Safety
must be warned'
Stay youth - Anne and Ellen
all my books, the bantams
and the seeds of the senega root

Need not return this.