THE MORTARED STONE: KENNETH REXROTH'S "PROLEGOMENON TO A THEODICY" AND LOUIS ZUKOFSKY'S OBJECTIVIST POETICS

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In the winter of 1931 the young artist and poet Kenneth Rexroth published a poem entitled "Last Page of a Manuscript" in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. It was the final section of a long poem entitled "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy," which Rexroth completed in 1927. Also included in the issue of *Poetry* was a brief introductory essay by Louis Zukofsky—who had served as the guest editor for the issue—in which Zukofsky announced the arrival of the objectivist poets. Published in the early years of the Depression, the objectivist issue appeared at a crucial moment within American literary history. The set of problems that the first generation of modernist poets had faced—writing in the aftermath of World War I, when high modernism and the avant-garde were in their primacy—was decidedly different from the set of problems now faced by the second generation of modernist poets. The objectivist edition of *Poetry* augured a changing of the guard, the arrival of a new generation of modernist poets.

For this reason alone it is salient to consider Rexroth's "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy." The long poem offers not only a means to investigate Rexroth's poetics in the early stages of his literary career but also a lens through which to see the shift from the first generation of modernist poets to the second generation. Another reason to consider the poem is for its relation to Zukofsky's objectivist poetics. Anyone who has encountered the correspondence between Rexroth and Zukofsky—which began with Zukofsky's solicitation of material for the 1931 number—is struck by the harsh criticism each poet levies against the other, especially on issues of poetics. When introducing the objectivist poets, Zukofsky announced a poetics that looked to be "objectively perfect" ("A" 24); Rexroth, meanwhile, considered such an interpretation "hopelessly inadequate" because it refused to accept the fact that all art arrives through "channels opened by partitive meanings" ("To Louis Zukofsky" 35-36). Instead, Rexroth promoted a poetics that synthesized artistic description with philosophical, religious and critical discourses. "The greatest art," as Rexroth put it, "results from their perfect fusion" ("To Louis Zukofsky" 35). These aesthetic differences were born out in Zukofsky's edited version of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy," which Zukofsky published alongside Rexroth's original in the 1932 *An "Objectivist's" Anthology*. On account of its central role in the formation of the objectivist aesthetic as well as its critique of that aesthetic, "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" stands as a crucial text for not only Rexroth scholarship but also modernist studies.

It does not seem altogether unexpected that the second generation of modernist poets would differ in regard to the role of philosophical, religious and critical discourses in poetry. Following the highly-influential Imagist poets, the second generation of modernist poets positioned themselves—to varying degrees—in contradistinction to that movement. Zukofsky's promotion of an "objectively perfect" poem situated him clearly in agreement with the Imagists' emphasis on precise imagery; his critique of the Imagists instead lay in his emphasis on everyday life and language. He questioned the Imagist's reliance on symbolism and allusions, seeing that reliance as a failure to enact precise, sincere imagery. Rexroth on the other hand promoted a "perfect fusion" of imagery and critical

discourse; he saw the Imagist movement's emphasis on the image as morally bankrupt, a self-aggrandizing poetic that proclaimed the artist's vision to be omniscient. He therefore looked to include a variety of discourses and theories within his poetry to counterbalance and contextualize his images.

One way to understand this second generation of modernist poets then is to see them as bifurcating into two camps: on the one hand, a camp that emphasized everyday language and life, and on the other hand, a camp that synthesized critical discourse and precise imagery into its poetics. This is a way of situating the second generation of modernist poets within twentieth century American literary history because it illustrates not only the second generation's response to Imagism but also its influence on the following generations of poets.

A number of scholars have noted the important role played by the second generation of modernist poets as a link between the early modernists and the poets of the mid-twentieth century. Allan Johnston, for example, has argued that Rexroth represents one side of a dialectic that the Beat writers had to grapple with in the nineteen fifties—namely, the dialectic between a broadly secular culture on the one hand and an interest in spiritual, religious and moral truths on the other. He juxtaposes "an east-coast-centered, need-focused, secular vision of economic realities" with"a west-coast-centered, Buddhic-anarchic synthesis that perhaps receives its clearest philosophical expression in the writings of Kenneth Rexroth" (104). In particular, Johnston considers how the Beat writers dealt with these conflicting lineages. Similarly, Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, in *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a Modern American Poetics*, argues that Zukofsky stands as a historical link between the "Modernist revolution" and postmodern aesthetics. She writes:

> Zukofsky, with his search for what is 'objectively perfect,' anchors himself in a Modernist tradition; at the same time, in experimenting with the medium of language and subverting the conventions and ideologies of the dominant culture, he links himself with a decentered and indeterminate postmodernist sensibility (173).

Stanley is especially interested in Zukofsky's focus on the materiality of language, and she considers him a progenitor of the Language poets. Whether the second generation modernist poets are understood as successors to the Imagists or as predecessors to the Beats, such interpretations define these poets always in relation to other poetic traditions, as if this second generation were a cohesive, discernible whole. And yet, this generation of poets was far from close-knit or unified. Zukofsky himself balked at the idea of starting a literary movement; Rexroth consistently defied any and all classifications, especially that of "objectivist poet."Even George Oppen, one of the chief expounders of objectivism and co-founder of the Objectivist Press, insisted that objectivist poetics referred not to a movement but to the necessity of form in a poem.

With this in mind, it seems important to consider the discrepancies and contradictions within this group of writers not in relation to their predecessors and successors but between each other. One way to begin this investigation is to consider the extent to which Rexroth's poem does correlate with Zukofsky's objectivist poetics; such an approach offers a means for understanding why Zukofsky chose to include Rexroth's poem in the early objectivist publications. After all, not only did the final section of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" appear in the influential 1931 number, but the entire poem was printed in Zukofsky's 1932 *An "Objectivist's" Anthology*. In that anthology, Rexroth's poetry occupied more pages than any other poet's work except for Zukofsky's own. It seems interesting then to consider the extent to which "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" exemplified Zukofsky's objectivist poetic; such a comparison provides insight into the commonalities between Rexroth's and Zukofsky's poetics, as well as the foundation for an understanding of the differences between these poets' works.

Rexroth finished writing "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" in 1927, the same year Zukofsky sent "Poem Beginning 'The'" to Ezra Pound and began work on his book-length poem "A." Rexroth was only twenty-two years old at the time, and the previous year he had moved from Chicago to San

Francisco. Rexroth marked this move to San Francisco as the commencement of his mature artistic work, and so it seems an appropriate time to begin a critical study of his poetry as well. The opening line of the poem reads:

This the mortared stone ("Collected Longer Poems" 39)

In the context of contemporary American poetry, it is difficult to read this line without thinking of the Language poets and their attentiveness to the materiality of language. "This" has no referent; the speaker of the poem presents an object to the reader, but that object is absent. The implication is that language itself is "the mortared stone." The word "this" becomes the material with which the poem is constructed. In addition, the line implies that the poem itself is "the mortared stone." "This" can refer not only to the language of the poem but also to the poem itself as an object. From the outsetRexroth foregrounds both language as the substance of poetry and the poem as a physical object.

It is little wonder that the poem appealed to Zukofsky, looking as he was to promote "objectification and sincerity." As Zukofsky writes in his introductory essay to the 1931 number:

> Distinct from print which records action and existence and incites the mind to further suggestion, there exists…writing which is an object or affects the mind as such…Its character may be simply described as the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity—in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into structure (274).

Zukofsky does not want writing that "furthers suggestions" but writing that exists as "an object or affects the mind as such." Such writing will be organized "into one apprehended unit," and yet it will be composed of discrete words and phrases, "minor units of sincerity." The opening line of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy," with its simultaneous foregrounding of the materiality of language and promotion of the poem as an object, fits clearly into this objectivist poetic; it implies not only that words and phrases are objects "resolved into structure," but also that the poem itself is a highly-structured "arrangement," an object that is organized into "one apprehended unit."

In this way, the opening line of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" illustrates one similarity between Zukofsky's objectivist poetics and Rexroth's early poetry. The fact that the opening line is written in free verse foregrounds another commonality. It is important to remember that free verse in 1927 was far from a mature poetic form. T.S. Eliot had only begun experimenting with the form in 1911 and Ezra Pound in 1913. Marianne Moore did not attempt a free verse poem until 1914. As a twenty-two year old poet in 1927, Rexroth was also grappling with this nascent form:

> This is mortared stone Heated the green lying over the tinsel white that ascends The rocker ("Collected Longer Poems" 39)

Readers of Rexroth know that "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" stands in stark contrast to his other poetic works. Reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's "Lifting Belly," the poem is composed of largely unpunctuated lists of concrete objects and includes a variety of quotations, onomatopoeic phrases, and Latin sayings. It is written in a haphazard free-verse line, similar to Stein's and Amy Lowell's and distinct from the lineation of both Rexroth's earlier and later poetry. Zukofsky also was working with free verse in 1927, and all of the poems that appeared in the 1931 number of *Poetry* utilized the form. Zukofsky wrote, "In sincerity shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of (if there is continuance) completed sound or structure, melody or form"("Sincerity and Objectification" 273). For Zukofsky, the shape of a poem, the way it appears on the page, is "concomitant" with the meaning of the poem itself. Free verse provided a form that allowed poets to focus on both the shape and the sound of the poem, and so the free verse form fit easily into the objectivist poetic.

Shortly after the publication of *An "Objectivist's" Anthology*, Carl Rakosi—one of the core members of the Objectivist group who also later served as Rexroth's biographer—complained to Zukofsky that "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" was too long-winded and unstructured to be included in the objectivist text. Zukofsky defended the poem, asserting that "the appeal of the pattern" made the

poem significant (Hamalian, 73). Throughout "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy," Rexroth relies heavily on repetition of commonplace articles and pronouns. In the first five lines of the poem, for example, "the" appears four times and begins three of the five lines. In the section printed in the 1931 number, Rexroth similarly uses repetition to dictate his line breaks. The first five lines read:

> Light
> Light
> The sliver in the firmament
> The stirring horde
> The rocking wave ("Collected Longer Poetry" 60)

Other sections of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" rely even more heavily on patterns and repetitions to dictate line breaks. One section includes fifty consecutive lines that begin with "the;" another relies on the repetition of "some:"

> Some lay with their knees partly down
> Some lay on their sides
> Some lay stretched at full length
> Some lay on their backs
> Some were stooping
> Some held their heads bent down
> Some drew up their legs
> Some embraced ("Collected Longer Poems" 57)

Such repetitive use of commonplace, everyday language was important to Zukofsky. He considered words like "the" and "a" to be the "minor units of sincerity" that constituted an objectivist poem.As Zukofsky wrote in 1946:

> A case can be made for the poet giving some of his life to the use of the words *the* and *a*: both of which are weighted with as much epos and historical destiny as one man can perhaps resolve. Those who do not believe this are too sure that the little words mean nothing among so many other words (*Prepositions* 10).

For Zukofsky, words like "the" and "a," words that predominate in the English language, were weighted with more "epos and historical destiny" than conventional literary devices such as allusion or symbolism. Rexroth's use of rhythmic patterns and his repetition of monosyllabic words therefore "appealed" to Zukofsky, and it was this pattern—along with Rexroth's emphasis on the poem as an object and use of free verse—that inspired Zukofsky to include the complete poem in *An "Objectivist's" Anthology*.

And yet, certain portions of the poem did not appeal to Zukofsky. Alongside the original version of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy," Zukofsky included an edited version of the poem. In that version, Zukofsky removes a good deal of Rexroth's idiomatic phrasing and critical assertions. "The interest of poets," Zukofsky wrote, "is after all in particulars. Poems are only acts upon particulars…Only thru such activity do they become particulars themselves–i.e. poems" (*Prepositions* 18). Zukofsky's edits of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" accentuate the particulars within Rexroth's poem and excise Rexroth's philosophical and religious commentaries. For Zukofsky, such commentariesare unnecessary; theybetray a poet's inattentiveness to the image. A poem's language, for Zukofsky, must prioritize melody over assertion. The music of the language is foremost, and assertions that do not "appear concomitant" with that music should be excised.

Rexroth wrote a reply to Zukofsky's edits entitled "Examen de Conscience," which he eventually adapted into a speech for the 1936 Congress of Western Writers. In that speech, Rexroth emphasized the moral role played by the artist. "Almost all schools of thought," he writes, "have agreed that the final criteria of the arts are in some sense moral" (*World Outside the Window* 4). For this reason, Rexroth promotes poetry that includes philosophical and critical assertions. In another of

his letters to Zukofsky, Rexroth is even more explicit about the need for discourse within poetry. He writes:

> The philosopher exhibits the working as exemplary procedure, the artist the work as exemplary fact. Ends exist for one as incentives for method, method for the other as the garment of achievement. Aestheticians, attributing unwarranted concreteness to the discoveries of analysis, have been prone to consider these activities as largely incompatible, if not in the same person, at least in the same work. This is a mistake provocative of the greatest confusion, and too much cannot be said against it. In the given work one or the other aspect may predominate, but the greatest art results from their perfect fusion ("To Louis Zukofsky" 35).

For Rexroth, the work of the philosopher and the work of the artist, while distinct, are in no way mutually exclusive. He claims that the philosopher's discourse informs the poet's creativity and vice versa. Rather than focusing exclusively on particular objects, Rexroth considers the "greatest poetry" to be that which "fuses" detailed images with trenchant philosophical or social commentary.

It is not exactly the distinction between image and commentary that I would like to draw attention to here. After all, it seems clear that Zukofsky understands the skillful arrangement of "minor units of sincerity" as itself trenchant social commentary. For him, there need be no overt proclamation of theory because the poetry itself, if well-wrought, provides that proclamation in its detailed, structured language. Instead, it is to the distinct notions of poetry's *telos* that these two poets—born only two years apart—are espousing that I would like to attend. For Zukofsky, the arrangement of "words and ideation into structure" constitutes writing that will resist the "degradation of the power of the individual word" and, as Sandra Kumamoto Stanley puts it, affect a "revolution of the word;"by promoting this notion of poetry as the arrangement of individual words, Zukofsky "refuses to reduce language to a commodity controlled by an authorial/authoritarian self" (Stanley, 3-4). In particular, he sees such arrangements as capable of providing a "rested totality," which is the *telos* of the poetic phrase. He writes, "The rested totality may be called objectification—the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object" ("Objectification and Sincerity" 274).For Rexroth, meanwhile, the poem does not exist as a"rested totality" so much as an object that affects the world around it.

My notion is that Rexroth's and Zukofsky's contrasting interpretations of the role of discourse within poetry are born fromthese distinct notions of the *telos* of poetry. For Zukofsky, a properly constructed poem is a poem that results in "total rest," while for Rexroth poetry exists to engender and promulgate social commentary. Their differing conceptions of the role of discourse in poetry therefore reiterate this difference in aesthetic teleology. In his essay "An Objective," originally published in *An "Objectivists"Anthology*, Zukofsky writes, "The order of all poetry is to approach a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently and are of no predatory intention" (*Prepositions* 18). Mark Scroggins, Zukofsky's biographer, has traced this conception of the text as a musical score back to Walter Pater's "condition of music." He writes:

> The Paterian ideal, one might argue, is the ultimate origin not only of the Objectivist conception of the poem as object…and of the New Critical paradigm of the poem as a self-contained, self-sufficient artistic construct not to be reduced by the heresy of paraphrase to a mere instrument of communication (323).

Zukofsky's assertion that poetry should avoid commentary, Scroggins argues, exists within the same paradigm as New Criticism's conception of the text as "self-contained." Zukofsky considers the ideal poem to be an aesthetic whole that refuses paraphrase and denounces both the intentional and affective fallacies. The poem, from this perspective, is analogous to a musical score, an aesthetic object that is self-contained and self-sufficient.

Rexroth, meanwhile, sees this emphasis on self-sufficiency as "hopelessly inadequate." In his letter to Zukofsky, he writes:

> The attempt to create self-sufficient microcosms, framed out of the world, leads to a denial of all that can be called specifically human, to the disappearance of values from the world altogether. So man, incapable of the oblivion of the mollusk in life, can satisfy his ambitions for absolute creation only in suicide (35-36).

Instead of aligning with New Criticism or the Paterian ideal, Rexroth's aesthetics are more in line with Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism. Rexroth began reading Alfred North Whitehead's work as a young man. In his *Autobiographical Novel*, he remembers:

> I brought home from the library Alfred North Whitehead's textbook on the subject [of projective geometry]. I must be one of the few people of my generation who came to Whitehead through this side door. I was entranced. Even the vocabulary thrilled me and harmonic pencils crept into my poetry for years afterwards (329).

In 1927, meanwhile, Whitehead gave the Gifford lectures, which eventually developed into his seminal *Process and Reality* in which he outlined his "philosophy of organism."Whitehead's philosophy of organism holds that change is the cornerstone of both physical and metaphysical reality;thus, while the classical model of the metaphysical realm is that it is timeless,Whitehead asserts that the metaphysical realm is itself necessarily mutable. Whitehead writes:

> That 'all things flow' is the first vague generalization which the unsystematized, barely analysed, intuition of men has produced…Without doubt, if we are to go back to that ultimate, integral experience, unwarped by the sophistications of theory, that experience whose elucidation is the final aim of philosophy, the flux of things is one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system (208).

Such a philosophy implies that organisms are always in flux; the notion of a self-sufficient, self-contained entity, therefore, is an impossibility, since all objects are necessarily protean, always adapting to their environments.

Whitehead himself did not publish a book or article on aesthetics, but Rexroth recognized the implications of Whitehead's philosophy for aesthetics. Writing about the Chinese poet Tu Fu, Rexroth writes, "Poetry has ceased to be a public art and has become, as Whitehead said of religion, 'What man does with his aloneness'" (*Classics Revisited* 127). For Rexroth, poetry's social role is to connect human beings with not only each other but also their environments. Later on in his considerations of Tu Fu, he writes that Tu Fu "has made me a better man, a more sensitive perceiving organism…His poetry answers out of hand the question that worries aestheticians and critics, 'What is poetry for?'" (*Classics Revisited* 131). Tu Fu's poetry makes his readers into better human beings, "more sensitive perceiving organisms."Rexroth sees each individual poemnot as a self-sufficient whole but as a mutable organism, an object that is inexorably intertwined with its environment.For Rexroth, the purpose of the poem is not to be an impenetrable, self-contained object. He writes, "Tu Fu brings to each poetic situation, each experienced complex of sensations and values, a completely open nervous system" (*Classics Revisited* 128).The poet's responsibility is to be "completely open," able to be a "more sensitive perceiving organism."

Such an emphasis on openness stands in stark contrast to Zukofsky's emphasis on the poem as a closed, self-sufficient whole. In other words, a fundamental difference begins to emerge between these two poets. Rexroth looks to promote a poetics that is open to a variety of experiences. He wants poetry to include precise images alongside philosophical, religious and social proclamations and theories; he wants the poet to have a "completely open nervous system." For Zukofsky, meanwhile, poetry needs to be closed and self-contained, a "self-sufficient" object that requires no external referent or purpose.Such a fundamental disagreement about the nature of poetry is alluded to in Rexroth's letter to Zukofsky. Rexroth writes:

> Perhaps in the most fundamental notions I am in radical disagreement with you, but I am not sure. Your manifesto is not exactly written on your shirt front where all who run may read. You may simply have been led to emphasize aspects which I would have touched in passing, and to have relegated to a second position items which I consider primarily important. On the whole I suspect that our disagreement goes much deeper than this ("To Louis Zukofsky" 27-28).

By the end of the letter, Rexroth is convinced that their disagreement is in fact "fundamental." "As defined, your criteria, sincerity and objectification, are from my stand point hopelessly inadequate. By reducing the poetic utterance to a complex of Gestalten you confound the mind with a camera, or at the most suffer meaning only in the mind and purpose, intention, only in memory" (35-36). Rexroth sees Zukofsky's notion of the poem as a "self-contained microcosm" to be necessarily at odds with his own notion of the poem as a socially-relevant artifact. He concludes, "Thus it becomes apparent how radical is my disagreement with your essays" (36).

Such a fundamental disagreement is in line with Gerald Bruns's description of the difference between orphic poetry and hermetic poetry. "There exist," writes Bruns in *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*:

> two broadly antithetical conceptions of poetic or literary language: the idea of 'pure expressiveness' of literary speech, in which a writer's use of language deviates sufficiently from the structures of ordinary discourse to displace or arrest the function of signification; and the idea of poetic speech as the ground of all signification—as an expressive movement which 'objectifies' a world for man (according to the Kantian model) or which establishes the world within the horizon of human knowing and so makes signification possible (1).

The first conception of literary speech Bruns calls "hermetic," in that it looks to create a "self-contained linguistic structure," while the second conception of literary speech he calls "orphic," after the Greek god Orpheus, the singer "whose power extends beyond the formation of a work toward the creation of the world" (1).Zukofsky's and Rexroth's differing understandings of the *telos* of poetry align each poet with a hermetic and orphic conception of poetic speech respectively. While Zukofsky looks to create hermetic, self-contained linguistic structures, Rexroth looks to create orphic poems that attend to and affect the world around them.

Bruns's dialectic is born from a distinction between "classical" and "romantic" conceptions of poetic speech. For Bruns, contemporary poetry is dictated by the interplay between these distinct understandings of language. The "classical" conception, he argues, is the understanding of language as substance, which was promulgated by "ancient, medieval and Renaissance rhetoricians and grammarians" (4). It interprets language always as "objects of parts and extensions" and utilizes spatial and visual metaphors to describe literary style (4). When Zukofsky says, "In sincerity shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of completed sound or structure, melody or form," he is following this "classical" conception of poetic speech. The implication is that the poem is a "self-contained linguistic structure," a hermetically-sealed whole.

The "romantic" conception of poetic speech, meanwhile, is the understanding of language in relation to dynamism and process. Bruns argues that eighteenth and nineteenth century poets and writers began to interpret language not as substance but in relation to functionality. For these orphic poets, language was not substance as much as a conduit through which meaning, emotion, and thought were conveyed. Rexroth, writing of his dissatisfaction with Zukofsky's objectivist poetics, stated:

> It is a difference of emphasis, but it is the difference between Williams's "localism"—"thank God we have got rid of the great subject,"*id est*, poetry without "theme"—and purposive, conscious writing. In the long run pure "nominalism" leads straight to

> nonsense vocables. Physical order, what you call "counterpoint" etc., can never make a work rational. Chaos is not the antithesis of "order," it is the antithesis of purpose ("To Louis Zukofsky" 34).

Rexroth's defense of "purposive, conscious writing" amounts to a defense of the romantic conception of language. After all, this conception of language as essentially functional leads directly to a conception of poetry as prophetic. Such a conception does not look to create a self-contained poem, but rather to create an object that affects the world around it.

Thus while Rexroth and Zukofsky shared a number of similar tendencies, their differing conceptions of the purpose of poetry led to a decisive break. Rexroth's understanding of the poem as an object, his use of free verse and his appreciation of commonplace language were largely in line with Zukofsky's objectivist poetics and prompted Zukofsky to include Rexroth's work in the objectivist publications. However, Rexroth's promotion of "purposive, conscious writing" that integrated a variety of discourses with precise imagery set the two apart.

Both the poets' similarities and differences are born out when the opening lines of Rexroth's original edition of "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" are compared to the opening lines of Zukofsky's edited version. The first lines of Rexroth's original read:

> This the mortared stone Heated The green lying over The tinsel white that ascends The rocker Aboard aboard It rustles rustles Should he acquiesce to forever flow No one shall ever enervate this structure Where the worm walks The fatigued worm The countless green multiple umbrellas And the red vestments The toy balloons Slowly it shifts all the lions grey Shall you. Lion. ("Collected Longer Poems" 39)

> The opening lines of Zukofsky's edited version,meanwhile,read:This the mortared stone Heated The green lying over The tinsel white that ascends The rocker The countless green multiple umbrellas And the red vestments The toy balloons Slowly it shifts all the lions grey (*An "Objectivist's" Anthology* 53)

Zukofsky keeps the first five lines intact. These lines contain descriptions of specific objects, and they illustrate Rexroth's understanding that language is the material of poetry as well as his repetitive use of commonplace, everyday language. These lines, in other words, are consonant with Zukofsky's objectivist principles. Zukofsky, however, deletes the sixth through the eleventh lines of Rexroth's original, as well as the sixteenth line, "Shall you. Lion." These seven excised lines demonstrate several ways in which "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy" resists Zukofsky's objectivist principles.

The first two lines that Zukofsky deletes are "Aboard, aboard/It rustles, rustles." Both of these lines make use of repetition, and yet the words repeated are not commonplace, monosyllabic words like "the" or "some." Instead, "Aboard, aboard" functions as a kind of invitation to the reader. Such a direct summons relies on Bruns's romantic conception of poetic speech. The speaker of the poem communicates directly to the reader. It functions as an orphic line, "extending beyond the formation of the work toward the creation of the world." The following line, "It rustles, rustles," also functions to subvert Zukofsky's notion of the poem as "one apprehended unit." In this line, the speaker of the poem seems to describe the poem itself as "rustling." Theline implies that the poet is standing outside the poem, offering commentary on the poem. Again, the implication is not that the poem is a self-contained whole, but that the speaker of the poem resides outside that poem and speaks to a reader who is also beyond the confines of the poem. Zukofsky's deletion of these lines looks to remove such references. In order to make the poem into "one apprehended unit," Zukofsky excises lines that refer directly to either the speaker or the reader of the poem.

The following two lines that Zukofsky deletes are "Should he acquiesce to forever flow/No one shall ever enervate this structure." Theselines provide the most explicit example of Rexroth's use of commentary in the opening sixteen lines of the poem. Again, both lines demonstrate a romantic

conception of poetic speech. The question posed, "Should he acquiesce to forever flow," as well as the ensuing dictum, implies an audience. The language functions as a conduit for thespeaker to address the reader. It is also interesting to recognize the Whiteheadian undertone of the question. The speaker wonders if he should "acquiesce" to a continual process of change. It is a line written by a twenty-two year old poet dealing with the existential necessity of change. Moreover,the question contradicts Zukofsky's emphasis on "writing which is an object or affects the mind as such." Even rhetorical questions imply an audience; they do not look to create a self-contained structure but to affect the listener or reader. In this way, Rexroth's rhetorical question and his statement, "No one shall ever enervate this structure," resist Zukofsky's objectivist principles.

Zukofsky also deletes the lines "Where the worm walks/the fatigued worm," as well as "Shall you. Lion." These deletions accentuate the repetition of "the" at the beginning of Rexroth's lines. By deleting lines six through eleven, Zukofsky highlights the litany of objects that the poem offers, and while "the fatigued worm" presents yet another object, it relies heavily on the previous line "where the worm walks." Thus, Zukofsky elects to move directly from "The rocker" to "The countless multiple umbrellas" to maintain the rhythm of the litany. The sixteenth line of Rexroth's original, meanwhile, poses another rhetorical question. The implication is that the poet is speaking directly to the reader. By removing such references to the reader, Zukofsky adapts the poem to fit his objectivist principles.

By including philosophical, religious and social commentaries, posing specific questions to the reader and using idiomatic phrases like "Aboard, aboard," "Prolegomenon to a Theodicy"contravenes a number of objectivist principles. In particular, Rexroth's use of philosophical and critical discourse within the poem reverses both the Imagist's emphasis on precise imagery and Zukofsky's attention to particular objects. Other poems in the 1931 number of *Poetry* and *An "Objectivist's" Anthology* might benefit from a similar reading. After all, the ways in which these poems differ or contradict Zukofsky's objectivist principles do not demonstrate flaws in the poems but rather illustrate the diversity of poetry being written by this second generation of modernist poets.

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