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APPROACHING 80 FLOWERS

The music is in the flower,
Leaf around leaf ranged around the center;

* * *

This is my face
This is my form.
Faces and forms, I would write
you down

In a style of leaves growing.

"A"-2, 1928

Heart us invisibly thyme time
round rose bud fire downland
bird tread quagmire dry gill-over-the-ground
stem-square leaves-cordate earth race horsethyme
breath neighbors a mace nays
sorrow of harness pulses pent
thus fruit pod split four
one-fourth *ripens* unwithering gaping

80 Flowers, 1978

Fifty years, a lifetime, taken to make a lifework. The last completed branch of this work is a book called *80 Flowers*. Extending my work with "A" and *All*, I began to look closely at *80 Flowers* in 1981, three years after its completion, and I've continued to read it. Happily, this is what there is to do, since no one has yet written *about* the book -- there is no critical mass to contend with.

This, then, is a record of my approach -- notes on my reading of the text, of other Zukofsky texts, and a few bits & pieces, clues, that have appeared elsewhere. It is intended, most of all, to be an invitation into *80 Flowers*.

There is one more thing one can do -- one can look at flowers. "...against the erring brain."

Zukofsky knew flowers. Hugh Kenner, in his NYT Book Review appreciation, "Louis Zukofsky: All the Words," recalls:

They (the Zukofsky's) knew, to begin with, the name of simply everything, notably every sprig of vegetation, every flower. (Look this instant toward greenness; can you name the first thing you see?)

Beyond the name (and naturally the Linnaean binomial) they also knew, especially Louis knew, every remote shading the Oxford English Dictionary had recorded for 1,500 years' usage: likewise associated legends and private lore. And in "Eighty Flowers," which he'd meant for his 80th birthday (1984) but luckily finished before his death this year, you'll also have to remember that "flowers" can be a verb. That was one of his pleasures with English, anything could be any part of speech.¹

Botany: Etymology, an axis. Zukofsky's familiarity with the Unabridged is legendary, but the decision to place this new work inside a specialized language system, that of systematic botany, required a tremendous additional effort of scholarship.

80 Flowers. After he retired from Poly, he started that. And for that he spent, oh, hours, weeks, months just on research. And when Louie started on research there was no stopping him. Then he just went to the bitter end, every definition, every connotation, every annotation, it just went on and on.²

In Celia's Bibliography, we see that Zukofsky completed "A"-23 and began *80 Flowers* in 1974, but the seeds of the form were there in 1962, in *After I's*, when Zukofsky moved from counting sevens in "Atque in Perpetuum A.W.":

sedum has come up thru rock water
slate black twilight the sky's blue reins

¹ Hugh Kenner, The New York Times Book Review, June 18, 1978. Reprinted in the Zukofsky issue of *Paideuma* (Vol. 7, No. 3 Winter 1978).

² Celia Zukofsky, in the interview with Carroll F. Terrell published in the Zukofsky number of *Paideuma*.

white sweats in mist rains storms summer
clears stars and moon rounds. We have
not walked out of this place what
have we to collect. Each privet's ablossom
I am a son of the soil.

Counting sevens an ornament unto my wound.

(*All*, 233)³

to the durable 5-word count line in "Pretty:"

Look down out how pretty
the street's trees' evening green
with the day's with them
on globular lights no Hesperides
was his fruit more lemony
orangey cherryie honeydew melon white
like several white sports cars
turned the corner no peachier
headlights blaze in dark sides
of a row of cars
half-parked on the sidewalk
while for once nowhere here
fruits smell sing the mechanics

(*All*, 233-234)

The 5-count doesn't appear again until the beginning of "A"-21 in 1966, the first speech of Arturus. It moves in and out throughout "A"-21 and then takes over entirely in "A"-22 and "A"-23, right up into *80 Flowers*.

So we can watch the development of this measure over twelve years time.

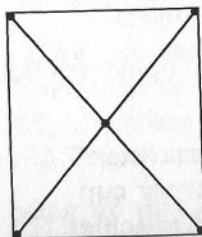
come at last into
ample fields sip every cup
a great book great mischief
perched dwarf on a giant
may see horse race or
hidebound calves out to pasture:

³All quotations are from Louis Zukofsky, *All The Collected Short Poems 1923-1964* (New York: N.W. Norton & Co., 197

poet living tomb of his
 games -- a quiet life for
 an ocean: the emphatical decussation
 quincunx chiasma of 5-leafed, 5-
 blossom, and of olive orchards
 5 fingers of a hand
 crossed X of bird merrythought:
 conjugal or wedding number: all
 things began in Order to
 end in Ordainer, yet always
 few genera rule without exception,
 make their worst use of
 time's shortness conceding the fletcher's
 mark -- our ballads care little
 who makes the laws: the
 higher geometry dividing a circle
 by 5 radii which concur
 not to make diameters: not
 necessary that the things a
 sceptic proposes be consonant,
 only that the abler speak
 plainer, solid as the illiterate
 seeing water boiling, hissing at
 the ends of burning logs:

("A"-22, 531)⁴

"The emphatical decussation quincunx chiasma":



is one blueprint for the
 construction of *80 Flowers*.

The 5-word line, 5-line stanza pattern begins near the end
 of "A"-22:

⁴ All quotations are from Louis Zukofsky, "A" (Berkeley, Ca: Univ. of California Press, 1978).

sun burns thru the roars
 dear eyes, *all eyes*, pageant
 bay inlet, garden casuarina, spittle-spawn
 (not laurel) nameless we name
 it, and sorrows dissolve -- human:

behind terrace boat plant under
 back wall pear tree hugged,
 its twigs paired axile thorns
 crossways opposite leaves thought quincunx
 urged all day in town

("A"-22, 533)

and continues into "A"-23, where the title appears*:

her logic's unanswerable refurnishing from
 nothing: unstopping motion whose smallest
 note further divided would serve
 nothing -- destined actual infinitely initial,
 how dire his honor who'll
 peddle nothing: rendered his requiem

alive (white gold-autumn-leafed mat cut
 down to 1-foot circle and
 tasseled) would praise when 80
 flowers the new lives' descant
 thought's rarer air, act, story

words earth -- the saving history
 not to deny the gifts
 of time where those who
 never met together may hear
 this other time sound one

("A"-23, 538-539)

Then he retells *Gilgamesh*, the ubiquitous Liveforever
 ("won't know All sedum no") is invoked, and the words shift
 and turn, towards *80 Flowers*:

* This 5x5 construction was to reappear in *Gamut: 90 Trees*,
 the book Zukofsky was working on when he died.

Hue

gait a day -- by new
 sell a rose pause seen --
 nape -- horse whose tizzied head
 o my -- lip own anatomy
 the oak I. Trivial uttered
 hard to stand under, crave
 touch gently gray springtime allotted
 all ways, zones know eager
 echo argue less daimon in
 ere thigh rote tone eroded --
 and deem a phase shine,
 died corona come as may.

("A"-23,544)

.....

Let

Bee-sting hold back, the flowers
 arrive she nurtures them -- waggery,
 gravity (patience upon approbation) can
 creep for the flower-of-a-leaf --
 man and earth suffer together:
 two centuries touching cold-ridged inventoried
 abreast of '10 years - - 80 flowers!

The development is not an accumulation, not a building up, but rather a paring down -- to *word*. Punctuation drops away, sequential syntax, in favor of word *chords*, or tone clusters. Prepositions, if they remain, are given the same weight as any other word. This balancing of the count, so every word occurs with equal intensity, equal weight in sense, set apart and particularized, not robbed to feed fore and aft, strips to the *movement of sounds*.

...it is possible in imagination to divorce speech of all graphic elements, to let it become a movement of sounds. It is this musical horizon of poetry (which incidentally poems perhaps never reach) that permits anyone who does not know Greek to listen and get something out of the poetry of Homer: to 'tune in' to

the human tradition, to its voice which has developed among the sounds of time and place, as one hardly ever escapes them in studying Homer's grammar.

("A Statement for Poetry", 1950)⁵

One matrix used to cut *80 Flowers* is the highly specialized language of systematic botany. The following is the entry for *Impatiens* in *Hortus Third*. This is the kind of material Zukofsky was reading those "hours, weeks, months:"

Impatiens L. Balsam, Jewelweed, snapweed, touch-me-not. Balsaminaceae. About 500 spp. of ann. or per. herbs or subshrubs, widely distributed, particularly in the tropics & subtropics of Asia & Afr.; sts. mostly succulent; lvs. simple, alt. or opp. or whorled, generally without stipules: fls. solitary or variously clustered, sepals 3, rarely 5, the upper 2 small and generally green, the lowest one petaloid, asymmetrically funnel-form, usually with a long nectariferous spur, petals 5, the uppermost one (the standard) flat or helmet-shaped, the 4 lower ones usually united in lateral pairs (the wings), stamens 5, united in a short tube toward the top, ovary superior, 5-celled; fr. a 5-valved caps., explosively dehiscent into 5 coiled valves.⁶

In an essay on Santayana & Spinoza, Zukofsky quotes Bach: "Materialist philosophers of history may do well to think about Bach's remark: The order which rules music is the same order that controls the placing of the stars & the feathers in a bird's wing."⁷ (Or the parts of a flower.)

And in the short story, "Ferdinand" (one of the principle characters of which is a plant, "Creeping Charlie," or Wandering Jew, *Commelina virginica*), comes this exchange: (my emphasis):

⁵ Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions* (Berkeley, Ca: Univ. of California Press, 1981), p. 20

⁶ *Hortus Third: A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States & Canada*, Initially compiled by Bailey & Bailey (New York: MacMillan, 1976) p. 594.

⁷ Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions*, p.55.

...And yet I know very clearly what I wish to do.
 -- Still the work on Linnaeus? Ferdinand questioned.
 -- Yes, but more than that. Rather a work on the order
 of thought he effected by *making order in a world of
 things growing*. Isn't that the way science works?
 -- Or a poet or anybody? his aunt ventured pleasantly.⁸

("Linnaeus" is Carolus Linnaeus, the 18th Century Swedish
 botanist and philosopher who originated the Linnaean system
 of taxonomic classification and nomenclature.)

To Zukofsky, "making order in a world of things growing"
 is poetry.

In Hebrew the word for *word* is also the word for
thing. The roots and stems of grammar are foresights
 and hindsight so entangled that traditions and
 chronologies mean little if not an acceptance, a love
 of certain living things as seen things.

(Bottom: On Shakespeare)⁹

In *80 Flowers*, the organization is of *words* ("words, consisting
 of syllables, in turn made up of phones that are denoted
 by letters that were once graphic symbols or pictures").

In adhering to a 5-word count in the line, words are freed
 of the usual subservience to demands of syntax. The entire
 arrangement becomes more spacious, less linear. Words begin
 to move in several directions at once, in a grid -- 40 units
 to each poem, each word a unit, whether a or anemone. This
 was the next step in a 50 year old process:

One is brought back to the entirety of the *single*
 word which is in itself a relation, an implied metaphor,
 an arrangement, a harmony or a dissonance.

The economy of presentation in writing is a re-
 assertion of faith that the combined letters -- the words
 -- are absolute symbols for objects, states, acts, inter-

⁸ Louis Zukofsky, *Ferdinand* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1968),
 pp. 60-61 (my emphasis).

⁹ Louis Zukofsky, *Bottom: On Shakespeare* (Austin, TX: The Ark
 Press, 1963), p. 104.

relations, thoughts about them. If not, why use words
 -- new or old?

("An Objective," 1930)¹⁰

...i.e. a case can be made out for the poet giving
 some of his life to the use of the words *the* & *a*: both
 of which are weighted with as much epos & 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.

("Poetry," 1946)¹¹

Words, unbridled, flex, shift from noun to verb to adjective
 to sounder, break to form other words, recombine, all still held
 in the suspension of *words together*. A multiplication of precise
 relationships between words, this "flowering." Words here do
 not fly from sense, even meaning, do *not* become "non-
 referential."

Impossible to communicate anything but par-
 ticulars -- historic and contemporary -- things, human
 beings as things their instrumentalities of capillaries and
 veins binding up and bound up with events and con-
 tingencies. The revolutionary word if it must revolve
 cannot escape having a reference. It is not infinite. Even
 the infinite is a term.

("An Objective")

Just a few more words about the overall organization of the
 work, before I go into specifics with a couple of poems:

There are 8 lines of 5 words each in each poem. Syllables
 don't count. The machine is fueled by the simultaneity of sound
 events within and the movement of words in several directions
 at once. If you imagine each poem laid out on a grid of 40 spaces,
 where each space is occupied by a single word (sometimes
 hyphenated), the action of each of these units moving up, down,
 and sideways to act on and through contiguous spaces in the grid
 is the movement of the poem.

So much of the sense-development is actually a growth in

¹⁰ Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions*, p. 14

¹¹ *Ibid.*, P. 10, p. 16

and out of a center, the poem unfolding like the petals of a flower. What you see and hear are *chords*, where chords are also *cords*, lines of stress between parts, plucked to sound. Linkages.

The wordsman knows the properties of each word -- its weight, valence, color, *how* its shape has changed over time.

Each unit (word) *counts*, as in a new "quantitative" verse.

We struggle for hypotaxis as we move, assigning relative values, for instance, to the *positions* of words in the 5-count, or to words according to frequency of occurrence. The words of greatest frequency have been in "A" from the beginning: Horse, ox, liveforever, a, low, no, know, water, furnace, roof, privet, leaf, time, heart, you. Many others are resuscitated dormant or obsolete words. If you turn to the OED to locate an unfamiliar word, it is usually the *most* obscure, rare and obsolete sense that is most applicable in the *80 Flowers* grid, but no sense or shading can be ignored, since many are undoubtedly in play. Guy Davenport, in an essay on Zukofsky collected in *The Geography of the Imagination*, notes:

(I once asked Zukofsky what the "mg. dancer" is who dances in "A"-21, a milligram sprite, a magnesium elf, a margin dancer, or Aurora, as the dictionary allows for all of these meanings. "All," he replied.)¹²

"All the questions are answered with their own words." It is true that most if not all questions arising from *80 Flowers* are answered somewhere in the work of the previous 50 years.

Linnaean classification is not an exact system. Plants get to be called different names in different places and the correspondence between these *actual*, common names and the proper, official Linnaean binomial is not always clear.

It took me two days to figure out what Zukofsky had in mind when he wrote "Liveforever", since Liveforever is an entire family of plants (Crassulaceae) which includes 500 species of *Sedum* alone.

80 flowers is not many. It is a very small selection from a very large field of choices. There is nothing apparently distinc-

¹² Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981).

tive about the selection. He favors wildflowers over domestics (but *Coleus* and African Violet are included), the sincere over the showy (see "Roses"), and includes many "weeds". It is, after all, a personal selection. These are all flowers that he knows from personal experience.

I used the same criteria in singling out poems for closer examination. First came the Hyacinth. I had just gotten a hyacinth plant, set to explode with fragrant blue blossoms. I bought it thinking of my lover, who had just left to spend six months in Paris.

Then the *Oxalis*, scourge of the Duncan garden. When Robert Duncan hired me to be his gardener, the garden had been let go for two years and two species of the mercenary *Oxalis*, *oregana* & *pes-Caprae*, had literally taken over. We spent hours, days on our knees, sifting through soil to extract the tiny corms by which these varieties spread.

And the hearty *Impatiens*, the clearest success in the first season. They took to ground and bloomed all summer, even crowding out the *Oxalis*.

As I considered plants for the garden, I'd read the poem for it first & made my decision on that basis. It can be a practically *useful* book, like building a ship from Homer's directions.

HYACINTH

Who hock in toss regret
regret Ai-hyacinthus veined petal eyes
 point to *larkspur* summers spring-*amaryllis*
 pale-teeth perianth limb *spart rue*
 dens earth's-floor abundance *iris* spire
 rows *gone-back* small stalks under
 earth swords nodes knot *gladiolus*
 calm *gladden gladwyn gladwin glad*

One first notices the rampant rhyming -- hock/toss, Ai-/eyes, petal/point, abundance/under, Who/rue.... Homomorphic punning and rhyming is the most prominent feature of the work --

Ai-hacinthus
 veined petal eyes
 point
 pale-teeth perianth
 larkspur/ spart rue
 iris spire

Alliteration is used to make periodic, structural divisions within the lines (in lieu of punctuation marks & conjunctions). Actually "alliteration" is an unfortunate term for what's being done with initial rhyme here, because it is not *letters* that are being rhymed, but *phones*, not *symbols*, but *sounds*. And "assonance" has been pre-empted in prosody to refer to only one kind of partial rhyme. This lack of prosodic terms recalls what I think is a "modern" distaste for this kind of activity in language.

This reliance on alliteration & assonance (as well as the lack of syllable count) is characteristic of practically all Old Germanic poetry, that is Anglo-Saxon, Old High German, Old Saxon, and it wasn't until the Middle Ages in England that this was superseded by end-rhymed verse.

Also one notices the grammatical shifts of words like hock, toss, regret, point, summers, spring, etc., all of which can act as nouns or verbs and are here doing both. Who is it that's tossing regret and regretting the toss?

The valence of these selected words is such that they can separate and recombine without losing their integrity: larkspur/spart rue, iris spire is "ire is pyre." In "Swords nodes knot," I recognize "word", hemmed in by s's -- word no not, words kno(w) not. By this time, I am hearing "a bun dance" in abundance.

There are "run-on" lines that signify, such as "rue/dens" (lines 4 to 5), which is the title of "A"-21, derived, I suppose, from the Latin *rudera*, ruins (*ruderal* in botany means any plant that grows in rubbish, poor land, or waste places -- Liveforever is *ruderal*), and "under/earth" (lines 6 to 7), for Hyacinth is one of the flowers on the plain of Nysa, in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, a flower of the Underworld. It "stalks under earth."

Hyacinth is the Greek *ῥάκινθος* (some say derived from an earlier, non-Greek language, Thracian, connected with the blue color of the sea), Latin, Hyacinthus, the name of a youth beloved of Apollo and many others (including Zephyrus), who died tragically. One version of the story is in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. It is sung by Orpheus:

'Hyacinthus too, the boy from Amyclae, would have been given a place in heaven by Phoebus, had cruel destiny allowed the god time to set him there.

Still, he was made immortal in such fashion as was possible, and whenever spring drives winter off, and the Ram succeeds the watery sign of Pisces, every year he comes to life again, and grows as a flower in the green turf. My father, Phoebus, loved Hyacinthus beyond all other mortals, and Delphi, the centre of the earth, lost its presiding deity, while the god haunted Eurotas and Sparta's unwalled city, neglecting his harp and his arrows. Heedless of his old habits, Apollo was willing to carry hunting nets, or direct a pack of hounds, as he accompanied Hyacinthus over the rough mountain ridges and, by constant companionship, added fuel to the fire of his love.

'One day, when the sun was halfway between the night that was over and the night that was to come, equally far from both, the god and the boy stripped off their garments, rubbed their bodies, till they gleamed, with rich olive oil, and began to compete with one another in throwing the broad discus. Phoebus threw first: he poised the discus, then flung it through the air. Its weight scattered the clouds in its path and then, after a long time, it fell back again to its natural element, the earth. It was a throw which showed skill and strength combined. Immediately the young Spartan, in his eagerness for the game, ran forward without stopping to think, in a hurry to pick up the discus, but it bounced back off the hard ground, and rose into the air, striking him full in the face. The god grew as pale as the boy himself: He caught up Hyacinthus' limp frame, and tried to staunch the grim wound, rubbing warmth into the limbs, and applying herbs to stay the fleeting spirit. But Apollo's art was of no avail -- the wound was beyond any cure. Just as violets in a garden, or stiff poppies or lilies with clustering yellow stamens, once their stems are broken, no longer stand erect but, drooping, let their withered tops hang down and, with lowered heads, gaze upon the ground, so did the head of the dying Hyacinthus droop. His neck, drained of its strength, was a burden to itself, and sank down upon his shoulders. "You are slipping away from me,

Hyacinthus, robbed of the flower of your youth," said Phoebus. "Here before my eyes I see the wound that killed you and reproaches me. You are the cause of my grief, as of my guilt, for your death must be ascribed to my hand. I am responsible for killing you. Yet how was I at fault, unless taking part in a game can be called a fault, unless I can be blamed for loving you? I wish that I might give my life in exchange for yours, as you so well deserve, or die along with you! But, since I am bound by the laws of fate, that cannot be. Still you will always be with me, your name constantly on my lips, never forgotten. When I strike the chords of my lyre, and when I sing, my songs and music will tell of you. You will be changed into a new kind of flower and will show markings that imitate my sobs. Further, a time will come when the bravest of heroes will be connected with this flower, and his name will be read on these same petals."

'While Apollo, who cannot lie, was uttering these words, the blood which had flowed to the ground, and stained the grass, ceased to be blood, and a flower brighter than Tyrian purple grew up and took on the shape of a lily: but it was purple in colour, where lilies are silvery white. Phoebus was responsible for so honouring Hyacinthus, by changing him into a flower; not content with that, he himself inscribed his own grief upon the petals, and the hyacinth bears the mournful letters AI AI marked upon it. Nor was Sparta ashamed of having produced Hyacinthus, for he is honoured there to this very day, and every year the Hyacinthian games are celebrated with festive displays, in accordance with ancient usage.'¹³

Robert Graves comments, "...both *Narcissus* & *Hyacinthus* seem to have been names for the Cretan Spring-flower hero whose death the goddess bewails on the gold ring from the Mycenaean

¹³ *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, Trans. Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 229-230.

Acropolis; elsewhere he is called *Antheus*, a surname of *Dionysus*."¹⁴

Graves also states categorically that "Homer's hyacinth is the blue larkspur - *hyacinthus grapta* - which has markings on the base of its petals resembling the early Greek letters AI."¹⁵

According to Ovid, it was a deep red or purple *lily*, but it's variously taken by scholars as a *gladiolus*, *iris* or *larkspur*.

So, 1 Who hock in toss regret
hock:¹⁶

1) obs. a general name for various mulvaceous plants, esp. the Marsh Mallow & the Hollyhock

2) the joint in the hinder leg of a quadruped (corr. to the human ankle), bet. the true knee and the fetlock, the angle of which points backward
the knuckle-end of a gammon of bacon, the hock-end.

3) obs., rare a caterpillar

4) also hocke, hoc (shortened fr. Hockamore), the wine called in German, Hochheimer, produced @ Hochheim on the Main; hence commercially extended to other German wines

5) a rod, stick, or chain, with a hook at the end

6) in the game of faro, the last card remaining in the box after the others have been dealt

7) Informal. to pawn - in hock 1. Being in pawn.

2. Being held in jail 3. In debt (fr. Dutch hok, prison)

The most likely definitions and connotations of hock in this case are 3) (obsolete & rare) a caterpillar, as Apollo tossed and regretted killing Hyacinthus, the boy, before he was mature, the caterpillar; 5) hock as rod or stick, replacing the "broad discus"; and 7) in pawn or in debt, being responsible for Hyacinthus' death.

¹⁴ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin Books, 1955), Vol. 1, p. 288.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, P. 325

¹⁶ All dictionary definitions are taken from *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971)

2 regret *Ai-hyacinthus* veined petal eyes

Ai-Hyacinthus, the grief of Apollo

"veined petal eyes" - the boy *and* the flower

3 point to *larkspur* summers spring-*amaryllis*

"eyes/point to larkspur" because larkspur has the AI
AI on the petals

Larkspur: any plant of genus *Delphinium* (spur-shaped calyx). Common larkspur is *D. consolida* (*L. consolari*, to comfort-consolation). It is spring, early summer blooming.

The OED notes one bit of lore in connection with larkspur that's worth repeating:

Lawrence, *Cattle*, 1805 "The old shepherds had a comical notion, that sheep blind in the summer were lark-spurred; that the sheep having trod upon a lark's nest, the old one had spurred the intruder in the eye.

We begin to see what a nest we step into in *80 Flowers*, words not flowering so much as *exploding* in our faces, like the seed pods of the *Impatiens* -- words as seeds. A barely controlled domestic garden plot, as field poetics.

"spring-*amaryllis*" Greek *Ἀμαρυλλίς*, is the name of a country girl in Theocritus, Ovid and Virgil. The *Amaryllis* family, *Amaryllidaceae*, is a family of autumn-flowering bulbous plants including wild onion and wild hyacinth, occurring next to the *Iris* family in the Linnaean order.

Botany:Etymology. The ambiguity of botanical classification is continually counter-pointed with ambiguity in word-sense.

4 pale-teeth perianth limb *spart* rue

The perianth is a structure surrounding or forming the outer part of a flower, enclosing essential sexual organs (stamens & pistils).

So, pale teeth over sexual parts.

Spart, for *Esparto*, Spanish broom (used to make ropes and cables), *spart*-grass. Also *Hyacinthus* is from *Sparta*.

Rue is sorrow, distress, repentance, *regret*. It is also a perennial evergreen shrub of the genus *Ruta*, esp. *Ruta graveolens*, having bitter, strong-scented leaves used for medicinal purposes.

The OED quotes a Scottish Proverb, circa 1721: "*Rue* in

Thyme shd be a maiden's *Posie*." If she would remain a maiden.
rue dens, ruderal, fr. Latin *rudera*, ruins. Also *rud*, red, the blood of *Hyacinthus*.

limb, with *spart*, can be here the male organ, gathering a constellation of words: hock, point, limb, *spart*, spire, stalks, swords, nodes, knot.

5 dens earth's-floor abundance *iris* spire

alludes also, I think, to the purely sexual love of Apollo for *Hyacinthus*. I get the sense that Zukofsky is here having a bit of fun at Apollo's expense -- "Sure you pine, now you're horny again."

dens is dense, thick, crowded (in abundance) as well as dens, or caves in the ground.

6 rows *gone-back* small stalks under

In these two lines we're looking at the *Hyacinth* blooms close-up. Sexual retreat or exhaustion? Why is *gone-back* italicized? I don't know. Throughout *80 Flowers*, names of plants & flowers are often italicized, but not always. Some poems have no italicized words, *Hyacinth* has more than most, in every line but the first. Perhaps italics are intended to indicate points of greater stress in reading? I don't know.

7 earth swords nodes knot *gladiolus*

node: L. *nodus*, knot

1) a knot or complication, an entanglement

2) a knot, knob or protuberance on a root, branch, etc., the point of a stem from which the leaves *spring*.

3) path. a hard tumour; a knotty swelling on some part of the body, esp. in a joint

4) Astr. a) one of the 2 points at which the orbit of a planet intersects the ecliptic, or in which 2 great circles of the celestial sphere intersect each other; ascending and descending nodes. b) a small ball representing a planet on the Ptolemaic sphere

6) a) a point or line of absolute or comparative rest in a vibrating body b) a central point in any complex or system

7) Geom. a point at which a curve crosses itself; a double or multiple point. Also, a similar point on a surface *gladiolus* L. dim. of *gladius*, sword.

used as a plant name by Pliny

1) a) the wild iris or *gladdon* b) any plant of the iridaceous genus *Gladiolus*, having sword-shaped leaves and spikes of the brilliant flowers; the commonly cultivated species are South African.

2) anat. a term for the second piece or body of the sternum.

These being brought (back) together, having common origins: hyacinth, larkspur, amaryllis, spart, iris, gladiolus (*gladdon*).

8 calm *gladden gladwyn gladwin glad*

Four derivations, historical variants of *gladiolus*, the sword lily. *Gladdon*, in America shortened to *Glad*, is a popular name for the iris.

A "calm" is also a mold in which metal objects (such as swords) are cast.

The calm hyacinth as opposed to the spiky, sword-like *glad*, or the continuum:

calm-----to-----glad
hyacinth----to---gladiolus

"From the blood of *Hyacinthus* sprang a plant named in his memory which is thought *not* to have been our hyacinth but a *gladiolus*, probably *Gladiolus italicus*, the lower petals of which have markings which might be taken to represent the mournful exclamation AI! AI!, alas, alas, or woe is me!"¹⁷

OXALIS

Wood-sorrel lady's-sorrel 3-hearts tow ox
a leese rapids whose soul
air-spring disperses thru water elator
ox lips mistaken for clover
more ruse mulberry locust-flower shield
welcome wanderer *oxalis* time primrose-yellow
a breeze sweet rampant pulse
scald scold honor the bard

¹⁷ William T. Stearn, *A Gardener's Dictionary of Plant Names* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972)

More rampant rhyming. Notice especially the alliteration and assonance up and down through the grid, *across* lines: lady's-sorrel/leese, tow/whose, elator/clover, lips/ruse, mistaken/mulberry, primrose/pulse.

Oxalis is the Wood-Sorrel Family (Oxalidaceae), also called Lady's-Sorrel. The family consists of 850 species, with a good deal of variety in methods of reproduction and development among them.

"*Oxalis*" is from the Greek, *ὄξύς*, acid, sour, sharp, referring to the taste of the leaves. Some species are cultivated to be eaten, others are poisonous. The botanical name has given a word to chemistry -- oxalic acid, which is extracted from the leaves.

Leaf-blades are divided palmately (around a center) into 3 segments, each notched, heart-shaped. The narrow seed pods split open explosively, scattering the seeds.

In California we have *O. oregana* (Redwood-Sorrel) and *O. pes-Caprae* (Bermuda Buttercup).

I'm not sure which species Zukofsky was familiar with in the East. There are 4 or 5 yellow-flowered species that occur there. I would guess *O. dillenii*, because of its method of reproduction, that explosion of seeds.

Darwin featured the Wood-Sorrel in his "Power of Movement in Plants," because of the way its 3 leaflets droop until they touch back to back at night, protecting the peculiarly sensitive leaf from cold by radiation. Even during the day the seedlings, scapes and leaves of the *Oxalis* go through some unusual movements.

So, we're into the first line:

1. *Wood-sorrel lady's sorrel* 3-hearts tow ox
"tow" sent me back to *After I's*:

THE
The
desire
of
towing

(A11, 233)

tow the unworked stem or fibre of flax, before it is heckled. verb, to comb or card flax. also a rope or fiber.

the action of towing: to draw by force, to pull or drag.

* obs. rare to convey, carry
under one's sway or control; in one's charge
a word used in calling a hawk and in urging on
greyhounds.

Middle English towe, prob. Old English tow -- "spinning"

In "A"-23, just before the passage I quoted earlier comes:

after a night thinking sun

towing of earth on earth:

("A"-23, 538)

the sense appearing to be that of drawing by force, or carrying.

2. a leese rapids whose soul

From the last line in the previous line we get a run-on pun in "ox a leese," for "oxalis". Leese is an "obsolete" word, difficult to pin down.

leese is to lose, also as a verb to set free, deliver, release. to loosen, unloose; to unfasten; open; to release (the body).

a leeser can either be a loser, a destroyer, or a deliverer.

lees (lēz) is sediment settling during fermentation, esp. in wine dregs (plural of obsolete lee, sediment).

lease a contract granting use or occupation of land or holdings during a specified period in exchange for rent. (fr. Middle English les, fr. Norman French, fr. lesser, to lease, fr. Old French laissier, to let go, leave, fr. Latin lāxare, to let go, loosen, fr. laxus, lax)

rapid adj. moving, acting, or occurring with great speed; swift. noun usually plural, an extremely fast-moving part of a river cause by a steep descent in the riverbed. fr. Latin rapidus, hurrying, seizing, fr. rapere, to seize.

"a leese rapids" looks like a phrase, could be a phrase. We can imagine that *a* is an article, *leese* is an adjective, and *rapids* is a noun. "an unloosed fast-moving part of a river." Or *a* is an article, *leese* is a noun, and *rapids* is a verb, hence, "a loss moves quickly." Or, *a* is the subject, *leese rapids* is the predicate, so " 'a' swiftly loosens."

Whose soul air-spring disperses thru water elator? Wood-sorrel, lady's-sorrel 3-hearts tow ox a leese rapids? Yes.

3. air-spring disperses thru water elator

air-spring puns spring water & the verb to spring (up or away). disperses is L. dispergere (past participle dispersus) to scatter on all sides, including to *publish* or broadcast, elator is ēlātus (past participle of effere, to carry out, lift up; ex-out + latus, carried. elatēr is driver, fr. Greek ἐλαύνω, to drive.

Both the reproductive methods of oxalis and the work of the poet is involved here.

4. ox lips mistaken for clover

"ox lips" is another pun (lisp) on "oxalis", the notched leaves of the oxalis do resemble the lips of an ox and now that we're here, let's acknowledge Shakespeare's oxlip, which appears many times in the plays, most notably in *The Winter's Tale*, as Perdita juggles the well known flower catalog of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter:

O Proserpina

For the flowers now that frighted thou let'st fall
From Dis's wagon! -- daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarred, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; *bold oxlips* and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one! -- oh, these I lack
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend,
To strew him o'er and o'er!

(Act IV, sc. 4, 116-129)

and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as Oberon plots to ply Titania with the "love-in-idleness" love potion:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows
Where *oxslips* and the nodding violet grows
Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk roses, and with eglantine.
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight.

(Act II, sc. 1, 249)

The ambiguity in flower names & classification in Shakespeare is maddening to some botanists:

'Oxlip' has long since become the name of 2 or 3 different plants, the precise relationship of which, one to another, is a problem. The rich old Elizabethan flower -- that one which seems to oscillate between *cowslip* & *primrose* -- is now considered to be an oxlip only by courtesy.¹⁸

Cowslip, primrose and oxlip are all of the family Primulaceae. One species of oxlip is *Primula elatior*.

One species of *oxalis*, Deppei lodd, is called "lucky clover," but is not a clover at all.

5. more ruse mulberry locust-flower shield

ruse is a doubling or turning of an animal in the hunt, to evade dogs, a trick, strategem, artifice or dodge. It's also a variant of *rose*. I can't help but think Zukofsky is here *signalling* a ruse, telling us he's throwing up a (mulberry locust-flower) shield to block our way. He laughs, then welcomes us:

6. welcome wanderer *óxalis* time primrose-yellow

Welcome to the wandering, erring reader. "Welcome wanderer" is a fitting appellation for the rampant oxalis. Primrose-yellow is the buttercup color of oxalis.

"Welcome, wanderer" is also Oberon's greeting to Puck, when Puck returns with the flower, "love-in-idleness", for the love-potion.

7. a breeze sweet rampant pulse

could describe Zukofsky's rhyming virtuosity as well as the habits of the rampant oxalis. "Pulse" is also the name of the edible seeds of leguminous plants cultivated for food (such as the *acer*, or edible corms of the oxalis).

David Melnick suspects that this line too can be found in Shakespeare, but we haven't, yet.*

¹⁸Leo H. Grindon, *The Shakespeare Flora* (Manchester: Palmer & Howe, 1883) p. 117.

* David Melnick is a well-known authority on Shakespeare, now vacationing in Homer's Greece.

8. scald scold honor the bard scald

1) an injury to skin caused by hot fluid or steam

2) disgust, aversion, vexation -- heart-scald

3) a patch of land scorched by the sun scald-berry the bramble, *Rubus fruticosus*, related to the mulberry (a cord to pluck from here to mulberry).

Scald is also a variant of skald. The skalds were the court poets of ancient Norway & Iceland. It is said that their highly alliterative verse had the power to maim, even kill.

Skaldic verse is distinguished from other Old Norse poetries by the complexity of its measures, by alternating internal assonance and rime, whose nature and position within the line are strictly regulated, and by its extravagant use of "kenning" (fr. Old Norse *kenna*, "to ken, to call ((by a periphrasis))"; hence kenning, "descriptive appellation").¹⁹

Scold is also a variant of skald. We get to scold from skald in sense development by way of the later Icelandic law books, in which the derivative *skaldscaper* poetry has the specific sense of *libel* in verse. A scold, in early use, was "a person (esp. a woman) of ribald speech; later, a woman (rarely a man) addicted to abusive language."

1611 "a loude crying woman, and a scolde,
shall be sought out to drive away the enemies"

To the recent sense of a "common scold" (*communis vixatrix* or *vixen*): a woman who disturbs the peace of the neighborhood by her constant scolding.

All the way along and down we are talking about women with special powers, of language. Some sources quoted in the OED refer to the dunking and *burning* of scolds.

"The bard" is Shakespeare. It is also the Celtic equivalent of skald. And it is any poet.

The syntax allows for several different sense readings: "scald scold; honor the bard," as scold the scald, *but* honor the bard, or "scald, scold, honor the bard," these actions being taken against the bard in that order, or "scald/ scold honor/ the bard,"

¹⁹Lee M. Hollander, *The Skalds* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968).

as an injunction against distracting the poet by inflicting glory, fame or distinction on him while he is alive. All of these senses occurring, of course, at once.

This is, obviously, only an approach, a beginning. What we have here is flowers, *80 Flowers*, made of words. They continue to open and I continue to read.

"Then tell me, what is the material world, and is it dead?"
 He, laughing, answer'd: "I will write a book on leaves of flowers,
 "If you will feed me on love-thoughts and give me now and then
 "A cup of sparkling poetic fancies; so, when I am tipsie,
 "I'll sing to you to this soft lute, and shew you all alive
 "The world, when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy."

(from Blake's *Europe, a Prophecy*)

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SPECULATIONS THROUGH THE MIRROR: SILENCE

*UN-FOLDINGS
 THROUGH AN OTHER
 WITH/IN
 A DANCE OF WORDS
 RE-SOUNDING*