

Hopping to It

THE KEEPSAKE enclosed with this issue is a special offering from Keefer Street Press, a venture of Peter and Meredith Quartermain.

A successor to Slug Press, which the Quartermain disbanded in 1997, Keefer Street Press launched in 2001 and published a smattering of broadsides and bagatelles (mostly by Robin Blaser) prior to its first significant work, the verse chronicle 1976 *What I Did for Christmas* (2005). It specializes in limited edition letterpress work from a small studio located on Keefer Street in the Strathcona neighbourhood of Vancouver, B.C.

The current offering is a version of the lines that open the second movement of the long poem *A*, by the American Modernist poet Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978). The second movement begins with section 13, a segment of the poem modelled on the musical form known as a *partita*—specifically, J.S. Bach’s Second Partita for Solo Violin in D Minor. The second movement where the lines appear parallels the *courante* movement of the *partita*. Written in 1960, the section is set on the Brooklyn Esplanade, with Zukofsky and his son Paul watching traffic on the bay at the mouth of the Hudson River.

“The section as a whole is a tribute to Zukofsky’s New York, an affectionate tour through his own memories of the city and the literary and historical associations those memories evoke,” writes Mark Scraggins in *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky* (2007).

Barry Ahearn, in his study *Zukofsky’s “A”*: *An Introduction* (1983), describes section 13 as the first of several in which Zukofsky “lists the contents of his world,” “details that illuminate his life.” The section later states,

You cannot think illogically,
But the illogical is always logical:
Tape recorder—tape reason—is that *my* voice,

as it rolls through other musical points of reference that informed Zukofsky’s experience and

creative process. Writing is reminding, and it explicates the poet’s life.

“Poets are magpies, they love the shiny bits in other people’s work and adapt/adopt it into their own nest-lining,” Quartermain explains to *Amphora*, quickly adding: “The piece I reprinted as a keepsake is NOT, repeat NOT, by Louis Zukofsky, a poet whose work I still deeply love.”

Rather, the keepsake offers a variant on lines first published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in October 1875. Submitted by an unknown correspondent of the magazine (Quartermain suspects it was the Freethinker Moncure D. Conway [1832–1907]), the anonymous poem is attributed to “an English provincial on the occasion of a visit by the Lord Bishop to a country parish, and was actually sung by the choir.” The original runs,

Why skip ye so, ye little hills,
And wherefore do ye hop?
Is it because ye do expect
To see the Lord Bish-op?

Why hop ye so, ye little hills,
And wherefore do ye skip?
Is it because you do expect
To see the Lord Bish-ip?

Why hop ye so, ye little hills,
And why do ye jump up?
Is it because ye long to see
His Grace the Lord Bish-up?

Why jump ye so, ye little hills,
And wherefore do ye leap?
Is it because ye eager are
To see the Lord Bish-eep?

By “pinching” the piece from *Harper’s* (to use Quartermain’s term), Zukofsky deploys the poem as both performance piece and an adaptation of earlier work—in this case, Psalm 114. Zukofsky polishes the original (“improved it, certainly,”

Quartermain says), weaving it into his own work and thereby placing himself in a larger context. Our memories often run deeper than we expect, the act of remembering an instance of

blind research,
 Only an excuse for laziness
 Or the harmony of chances.

Quartermain, for his part, returned to the original source and, like Zukofsky, polished it for his purposes. "I changed the source poem a very little indeed, but I wanted to print it as a keepsake because, well, it's fun," he said. "I'd been looking for this source for many years (since

around 1970), as had quite a few other people (professors, editors) and I thought the Alcuin Society provided a great venue in which to share my pleasure. I like the staid cheekiness of it."

And, speaking of cheek, Quartermain notes that the keepsake thumbs its nose at Zukofsky's son Paul, who fanatically guards what he considers his copyright and prerogative. By taking Zukofsky's source as his own, Quartermain engages in a similar creative process, tipping his hat to a benchmark for his work while engaging with the broader tradition in which he, Zukofsky, the parish choir and the psalmist all stand.

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 ~ Peter Mitham is editor of *Amphora*.






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