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The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde (Hopkins Studies in Modernism)

Ruth Jennison

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Inaugurated in 1931 by Louis Zukofsky, Objectivist poetry gave expression to the complex contours of culture and politics in America during the Great Depression. This study of Zukofsky and two others in the Objectivist constellation, George Oppen and Lorine Niedecker, elaborates the dialectic between the formal experimental features of their poetry and their progressive commitments to the radical potentials of modernity.

Mixing textual analysis, archival research, and historiography, Ruth Jennison shows how Zukofsky, Oppen, and Niedecker braided their experiences as working-class Jews, political activists, and feminists into radical, canon-challenging poetic forms. Using the tools of critical geography, Jennison offers an account of the relationship between the uneven spatial landscapes of capitalism in crisis and the Objectivists' paratactical textscapes. In a rethinking of the overall terms in which poetic modernism is described, she identifies and assesses the key characteristics of the Objectivist avant-garde, including its formal recognition of proliferating commodity cultures, its solidarity with global anticapitalist movements, and its imperative to develop poetics that nurtured revolutionary literacy. The resulting narrative is a historically sensitive, thorough, and innovative account of Objectivism's Depression-era modernism.

A rich analysis of American avant-garde poetic forms and politics, *The Zukofsky Era* convincingly situates Objectivist poetry as a politically radical movement comprising a crucial chapter in American literary history. Scholars and students of modernism especially will find much to discuss in Jennison's theoretical study.

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