With an ear tuned to the most delicate musical effects, an eye for exact and heterogeneous details, and a mind bent on experiment, Louis Zukofsky was preeminent among the radical Objectivist poets of the 1930s. This is the first collection to draw on the full range of Zukofsky's poetry-containing short lyrics, versions of Catullus, and generous selections from A, his 24-part poem of a life—and provides a superb introduction to a modern master of whom the critic Guy Davenport has written: Every living American poet worth a hoot has stood aghast before the steel of his integrity.

The most formally radical poet to emerge among the second wave of American modernists, Louis Zukofsky continues to influence younger poets attracted to the rigor, inventiveness, and formal clarity of his work. Born on New York's Lower East Side in 1904 to emigrant parents, Zukofsky achieved early recognition when he edited an issue of Poetry devoted to the Objectivist poets, including George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff. In addition to an abundance of short lyrics and a sound-based version of the complete poems of Catullus, he worked for most of his adult life on the long poem A of which he said: In a sense the poem is an autobiography: the words are my life.

Zukofsky's work has been described as difficult although he himself said: I try to be as simple as possible. In the words of editor Charles Bernstein, This poetry leads with sound and you can never go wrong following the sound sense... Zukofsky loved to create patterns, some of which are apparent and some of which operate subliminally... Each word, like a stone
dropped in a pond, creates a ripple around it. The intersecting ripples on the surface of the pond are the pattern of the poem. Here for the first time is a selection designed to introduce the full range of Zukofsky's extraordinary poetry.

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My Personal Review:
This book came out the EXACT MONTH I happened to be reading Zukofsky: Man and Poet, a collection of appreciations and essays assembled just after his death in 1979. What's sad is that the essays all start from the assumption that Zukofsky is almost totally unknown except among poets, a fact that caused him some bitterness in his final years. He died just before his masterpiece, "A," came out in a single edition from UC Press.

Flash forward a generation to this handsome Library of America edition. The pros will quibble over the sense of excerpting Zukofsky, which Z. himself tried to prevent in his lifetime. But it's hard to see this book as anything less than a vindication of the quiet, steady devotion Zukofsky showed to poetry over his productive life. Charles Bernstein, who's about the best ambassador the avant-garde's got to the publishing mainstream, is a great choice for the project: his selections are sympathetic and smart, aware of the larger work while giving you enough tantalizing bits to satisfy a healthy curiosity. I doubt Zukofsky's work has ever reached as broad an audience as it will here: it may be just the end run around the growing Zukofsky industry his work needs to find fresh readers. The poems deserve it, and somehow I think he'd be tickled pink to know this is out there.

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