



CURTIS ZAHN

Poems

A CRITICAL READING EDITION

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

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ARCHIVAL PORTFOLIO

A selective visual record placed at the front of the volume



Curtis Zahn as a child; family photograph preserved in the local archive.

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

OSWALD F. ZAHN, OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.

WINDOW-SASH WEIGHT.

No. 826,708.

Specification of Letters Patent.

Patented July 24, 1906.

Application filed November 3, 1904. Serial No. 231,179.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, OSWALD F. ZAHN, a citizen of the United States, residing at Los Angeles, in the county of Los Angeles and State of California, have invented a new and useful Improvement in Window-Sash Weights, of which the following is a specification.

One object of this invention is to provide a window-sash weight which will be of cheap construction.

Another object of this invention is to provide a window-sash weight the weight of which can be readily adjusted.

Another object of the invention is to provide a sash-weight which will conform approximately to the shape of the recess in the casing, so as to take advantage of the room therein to the greatest possible extent.

The accompanying drawings illustrate the invention.

Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 is a vertical section of the sash-weight. Fig. 2 is a detail section of the cap-plate before application to the main tubular weight member. Fig. 3 is a plan. Fig. 4 is an inverted plan of the sash-weight. Fig. 5 is a partial vertical section showing a different form of sash-weight. Fig. 6 is a perspective view showing another form.

The device comprises a casing or shell preferably formed of a square or rectangular tube 1, of sheet metal, in each end of which tube is placed a sheet-metal end plate which is square or rectangular and conforms to the interior of the tubular member 1. The top end plate or cap (indicated at 2) is shown in Fig. 2 and is provided with an upwardly-extending flange or rim 3 around its edge. The end plate 4 at the bottom or lower end of the tubular member 1 is similarly formed with a downwardly-extending flange 5. These end plates are secured in the tubular member 1 in any suitable manner, preferably by upsetting or crimping the walls of the tubular member 1 at the ends thereof over the longitudinally-extending flanges 3 and 5 of the plates 2 and 4, respectively, as shown at 8. Each end plate is bent outwardly, so as to give it an outwardly-convex shape, and the flange member consisting of the flange element 3 or 5 is bent over to conform to the convexity of the ends, thus giving rounded or oblique corners that will prevent interference with the walls of the containing-recess. The rounded or convex ends are stronger than a flat end would be.

The upper end cap 2 is provided with means for the attachment of the suspending or operating cord, (indicated at 6.) For this purpose the said end plate is preferably slitted transversely and the portion 7 between the slits bent up to form a bail or strap to receive the rope or cord 6, which is passed under the said bail and looped around and then tied. The portions of the plate 2 adjacent to and on the outer side of the said slits are preferably bent down to facilitate the passage of the rope under the bail, and the edges of the bail are bent up for the same purpose and to give a rounded bearing for the rope.

The interior of the shell or tubular member 1 is filled or packed with any suitable weighting material or filling, (indicated at 9,)—for example, iron ore, sand, or other cheap substance of the requisite specific gravity and suitable state of division. This filling may be inserted in the tubular shell 1 after the bottom end plate 4 is put in place and while the upper end of the shell is still open.

A washer or packing-plate 10, preferably of pasteboard or similar puncturable material, is placed on top of the filling or packing 9, said plate substantially fitting the interior of the tubular shell 1, so as to prevent the filling from escaping through the slitted upper end plate 2. The rectangular or square shape of the sash-weight above described is of advantage in utilizing to the full the space within the window-casing recess. The fastening of the end plates by the above-described expedient of turning in the walls thereof over the flanges of the end plates forms a strong and cheap fastening for said plates, and, moreover, gives a smooth external surface.

In applying the sash-weight if it is found to be too heavy a screw-driver or other instrument can be inserted through one of the slits or openings 13 in the cap or end plate 2 and forced through the plate 10 to puncture the filling material. The weight is then inverted and the filling material is allowed to run out through the puncture until the weight of the device is sufficiently reduced.

The device may be variously modified. For example, as shown in Fig. 5, the means for attachment of the suspending or operating rope may consist of an eye 11, fastened to the top plate, (indicated at 12,) said plate being in this case similar to the cap-plate above described, but without the bail. No specific claim is made in this application to the form

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INTRODUCTION

Editorial scope and the shape of the surviving record

Curtis Zahn wrote across poetry, fiction, drama, journalism, painting, collage, radio, and the practical work of building places where artists could meet. His poems share the satirical pressure of his stories: bureaucratic language, advertising, suburban engineering, border tourism, and Cold War confidence are made to stutter until their violence shows. The line can be bluntly documentary or wildly synthetic, with corporate and scientific jargon pushed into grotesque comedy.

Zahn published only one dedicated poetry book, *One Extraordinary A.M.: Some Poems* (1964), and later gathered mixed work in *The Plight of the Lesser Sawyer's Cricket*. Neither complete volume is present in the local archive or available in a verified online scan. The present edition therefore does not pretend to be a complete collected poems. It prints every poem for which a primary or independently checkable witness was located: four from *Poetry Los Angeles*, the long border poem "Tijuana," and archival documentation of additional titles and manuscripts.

This limited but substantial group clarifies Zahn's range. "Later Than There Is No Never No" compresses deferral into a broken corporate maxim; "Cupcake" addresses an aging mass-media fantasy; "Success Story" turns professional qualification into nonsense machinery; "Southern California as the State of the Union" treats the region as a national diagnostic; and "Tijuana" exposes the economic and ideological fence that tourism crosses more freely than residents can.

BIOGRAPHY

A documented life in poetry, print, and public culture

Curtis Langalier Zahn was born in Detroit, Michigan, on November 12, 1912, the son of Oswald and Edith Langalier Zahn. His paternal grandfather had practiced medicine in Southern California before the Civil War, and his father was a businessman. Zahn was raised in Los Angeles and Coronado. He attended the University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State College, and the Williams Institute and School of Authorship in Berkeley, though the surviving biographical accounts describe each period as brief rather than as a completed degree course.

Zahn inherited his father's love of sailing. In 1938 he served as an able-bodied seaman on an oceanographic expedition and used that experience to secure work writing a fish-and-game column for the *San Diego Tribune-Sun*. His 1940 draft registration places him in Coronado, self-employed, and identifies Oswald Zahn as next of kin. By 1947–48 the San Diego city directory listed him as a writer living with his wife, Elizabeth H. Zahn.

During the Second World War Zahn declared himself a conscientious objector and spent approximately a year in federal prison. The experience became one element of a durable antiwar politics rather than a temporary refusal. He later wrote and organized antinuclear theater; the Boston University archive preserves materials for 5-4-3-2-1, *Under Ground*, and poems including “Rationale for the First Undocumented Victim of Benevolent Nuclear Energy.” His political commitments were joined to a suspicion of consumer language, technological abstraction, and official benevolence.

Zahn began organizing writers while still working as a journalist in San Diego. In the mid-1940s he moved to Los Angeles and contributed poems, stories, and plays to venues including *Cross Section 1945*, *Contour Quarterly*, and the *Experiment Theatre Anthology*. His work later appeared in *Coastlines*, *Mainstream*, *The Outsider*, *Trace*, and other little magazines. A 1962

symposium identified him as an associate editor of *Trace*; his response emphasized the little magazine's role in defending integrity and individual work against mass-market pressures.

By 1951 Zahn had acquired oceanfront property in Malibu and built a villa-like home and adjacent studios of his own design. The site became a workshop and gathering place for writers and artists; Anaïs Nin, Henry Miller, and Christopher Isherwood were among the better-known visitors. Zahn also became a professional painter and collagist and served as chairman of the Malibu Art Association. His efforts joined private hospitality, small-scale patronage, and public programming rather than separating art from its material conditions.

In 1959 Zahn founded the Pacificus Foundation. It supported emerging writers in poetry, short fiction, and drama with typewriters, small grants, workshops, and later an annual poetry prize. He also helped organize poetry readings for Pacifica radio station KPFK. A March 1960 broadcast listing advertises his satirical blank-verse work *5-4-3-2-1* in the Poetry Los Angeles series at Barnsdall Park, performed by Ruby Payne and Phil Lipman.

Zahn's short fiction gained its widest circulation in *American Contemporary*, published jointly by New Directions and the San Francisco Review in 1963 with an introduction by Herbert Gold. Gold described the stories as linked satirical fragments whose apparently cool style carried "dissent and protest." Zahn's plays developed the same method. *The Reactivated Man*, first produced in Los Angeles in 1965, imagines surgery that removes guilt; the one-act *Conditioned Reflex* reached Off-Broadway in 1967.

His poetry book *One Extraordinary A.M.: Some Poems* appeared in 1964. Later work included the prose-poem travel project *Patagonia*, portions of which appeared in *Abandoned Latitudes* in 1983, and the mixed retrospective *The Plight of the Lesser Sawyer's Cricket: Plays, Prose, and Poems* in 1987. The Curtis Zahn papers at Boston University preserve further published and unpublished poems, among them "The Natural History of Sunset Strip," "The Part-Time Girl from Over at Damaged Merchandise," "Standing Aghast in the Tense Present Imperfect," and "Tijuana."

The Malibu fire of 1969 destroyed Zahn's home, but he designed and built a new redwood house in the Los Angeles hills and reestablished the writers' colony there. The residence, containing his furniture, family photographs, and

artwork, became the Pacificus Foundation's headquarters. Zahn died in Los Angeles on September 24, 1990, aged seventy-seven. The continuing Curtis Zahn Poetry Prize extends the practical form of literary patronage he began three decades earlier.

POEMS

Located poems from the archive and independently verified online witnesses

Tijuana

In all that thin, squalid, exploited valley
there exists no security, only the stoic
freedom of the economically damned, and
everywhere hangs listlessly the olive-eyed
color of greasewood's smoke. Here, crab-grass
rebounds under the lifted hooves of melancholy
cattle, but it's crew-cut, it's sparse, dry
and creamed with dust. And manzanita thinks
adolescent thoughts about willow, knowing, too
the peculiarized smell of corrugated tin
roofs that defend from rare rain, the radios
which talk all day long of things
nobody will be able to buy.

Here they grow soft, small, men with musical hearts
and wives gone fat with poverty's diet, and absurd
dogs that caricature a civilization
ground thin between two restless nations, and
slowly pulverized by shock of opposed ideologies.
A wire fence makes it Mexico, but God
has never been asked. And the vegetation
does not change its citizenship overnight, nor do
the Animals, and even the river
in its winter plumage, traffics casually
across the International Line, bringing home
the raw sewage deposited there when
Good Neighbors built the fence
and created an incident, and
caused a City, a roadside beggar whose hat had
better stay away from his head.

But no, the birds need no passports
and coyotes can cross and re-cross; the
tourists too. Only the residents are immobilized;
frozen to the north by
the sprawling verbiage of passport wordage
and turned back south and east by centuries
of sterile desert, and held to the western
beaches by the Pacific's relentless combers.

Tijuana? One can get into but not out of it
and into it from the whole world
have come seekers, drifters, escapes;
wanted men and unwanted women, come here
for the final stalemate. Their shoes—
their city shoes frozen by dust, and
stomachs bleached by begged Tacos shot with horsemeat.
Here to dry up while drinking and stealing
and waiting. Converting their German, French,
English, Chinese into the oiled, grey
pidgin Spanish of bordertown; to wait
beside the flagrant streets for new faces
come to be horrified by sin, and to
grovel in the spectacle
of abortion and absorption. And to hear
lame, warped, U.S. made guitars, chord-wreaked
by Indians too poor to fatten
their dogs for the eating.

Publication. Text established from the local archive and Estelle Gershoren Novak, ed., *Poets of the Non-Existent City* (2002); a typescript and 1982 periodical witness are listed in the Curtis Zahn papers.

Later Than There Is No Never No

Later,
When you no longer wanted it;
Later, they said, save it
For later.

Soon,
But it could never be too soon.
Nor too early, only
Too late.

Too,
They said,
Too easy is too early for two; later
Will be soon enough.

Later
Is for non-profit ideas but now
Is for now,
Now is for things you
Need to need. Later is non-realistic
Now; later
Is for later, they said.

Publication. *Poetry Los Angeles* (Villiers Publications, 1958).

Homage to a Girl Named Cupcake

First remembered as the imagined mistress
They dreamed that you stayed awake nights
To earn your livelihood by sleeping.
And you were born too late to be
Absolutely apropos, Baby,
Squeezed from the cooling Twenties
Until they could no longer lie about your age;
Leftover from something out of F. Scott Fitzgerald
Long after the last copy
Was called back.

Yet, I never saw your name among the uninvited then.
The face is gone; your crazy dialogue is something come to us
Just off the boat, wildly wet, and orchestrated
With laughs, screams, squeals too soprano for contemporary sex.
Now, only your classified smile holds solvent
Among the debits; and that, even,
Stripped of its built-in hysteria,
No longer's piped indiscriminately to collective mankind.

Who, how, retains the embarrassed hearts
Of the long, unlicensed line to the right?
The weary eyes that came to rest upon your hot slopes
Are merely migratory game,
Quacking flatly
In functional drawing-rooms
Over the state of the union;
And the promise once fraudulently drawn down
Deep inside your ermine—
The squish of your voice that made every wife old and tough
With protective invention—
Are the sounds of some cupie-doll, come unwound.

The wives? They're small and older now,
Saved by the belle
Finally tolled. It was they who hazarded
That your popularized bosoms
Were mere pincushions
For the underprivileged—
Dismissed as an architectural exaggeration
Or disallowed
As objects for the fumbling-of; promising
That any man willing to be unsprung against you
Was undeserving of rebuke.

You were nobody but Cupcake,
The woman with a thousand moving parts,
High heels, poodles, roadsters and a phone number.
And while our anxiety greyed into apathy
Some other world moved past your shaded afternoons
With a honk and a wave.

Publication. *Poetry Los Angeles* (Villiers Publications, 1958).

Success Story from an Economic Engineer

I took my ABC
1 2 3 for advanced aberrendophilia
At M.I.T.
Specializing in
Compressed Expanders, with 4-way pulsifiers
(Dynaforced on the logical principle
That torque was tantamount) and
As for belt-driven universals in cancelling phases
Everything already had gone over to
Rotogenetics; now
Employing the theory of cellular disintegration
I was ready
For a theoretical centrifigation
Of opposed exemplifiers—
Whereas
Old B.F. had never taken his M.S. and
Though a good man
Around instantaneous decibles
He'd never really gone beyond
Shock-insulated spacifiers, being willing
To coast among the Suspension People
With their low-hung sibernetics
And latent octograms, thus
When they asked me, had I had
Exploded harmonics with refurberating exemplification
I was able to say Yes
And moved up
From there
Into hypothetical X-23's with perpetuating
Detonations; I was ready, at last
For eradification.

Publication. *Poetry Los Angeles* (Villiers Publications, 1958).

Southern California as the State of the Union

Southwesterners
 Who'd avoid clobbering doves on Sundays
 Must forget remembering East
 When an afternoon's wry glean was crossfiled with
 Neo
 Geo-
 Political webbery; theft humaled sky suns
 From exhausted Buicks
 Some mysterious chemistry. And sad old steel towers
 Have their backs to the wall
 Heads in the clouds; it is
 Time for life
 And ultrasimplification.
 To reduce thought down to its lower common denominator
 The highest brains draw tall salaries.
 The months pass through
 Whistling sternly.
 A splendid year for removing old promises
 For exorcising promiscuity from the premises.
 And ashore, in the absolute west
 Birds on spindles
 With sticks for beaks bleat
 For tidal deposits of paper milk cartons.
 Exclamatory gulls commute to work
 In the city's playgrounds
 And the tested Coast comes a land of e-flat alto saxes.
 Still a great Cadillac country
 Reverberating its echoes to the forgotten east
 Where remain
 Secret wetnesses
 On posteriors and exteriors.
 And high tension wires, and Ford-owners
 Who perforate beercans with .22's
 Their radios running full volume, unattended
 And falling onto the Sunday side of it all. Sunday?
 The children nagging donkey-rides; the parents
 Hurrying home
 And all

Promised always
The classified superiority of practically everything.

Publication. *Poetry Los Angeles* (Villiers Publications, 1958).

Editorial note. Several lines are damaged in the surviving scan; only readings supported by the visible text have been retained, and unrecoverable typographic fragments have been omitted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Primary editions, archival records, and research pathways

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Boston University, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center. "Curtis Zahn" finding aid, including addenda for poetry, plays, and Pacificus Foundation material.

Broadway Play Publishing. "Curtis Zahn." Biographical and theatrical catalog page.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Textual method and limits of the present edition

This is a reset reading edition, not a facsimile. Lineation and stanza divisions follow the available primary witnesses. Narrow-page wraps were rejoined only when the source clearly indicated a single metrical line; meaningful indentations were retained in twelve-point steps. Obvious OCR noise was normalized, but uncertain readings remain recoverable against the scans preserved in the poet folder.

All interior pages use the warm-paper ground, mirrored sixty-six-point inner and forty-eight-point outer margins, and the EB Garamond hierarchy established for the Julia Boynton Green volume. Every poem begins on a new page, and every poem carries a publication statement.

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