"To 'Tune in' to the Human Tradition"
Louis Zukofsky's Homophonic Practice

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Résumé : Lorsque le poète américain Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978) commence à recourir à la traduction homophonique, elle n'existe pas en tant que telle : Zukofsky parle indifféremment d'homonymes, d'imitation sonore ou de translitération. Contrairement à Howard Chace (*Anguish Languish*, 1956) ou Luis van Rooten (*Mots D'Heures: Gousses, Rames*, 1967) qui furent des amateurs passionnés, Zukofsky consacra sa vie à l'écriture ; la traduction homophonique n'était pas pour lui une obsession singulière mais une technique parmi d'autres. Retracer l'apparition et l'évolution de la pratique homophonique chez Zukofsky montre qu'elle est en cohérence avec l'ensemble de sa poétique, à commencer par son matérialisme ; qu'elle participe d'une recherche prosodique et reproduit à l'échelle individuelle un fonctionnement structural des langues qui empruntent parfois le système prosodique ou les caractères d'écriture à leur voisine ; et qu'elle cherche à offrir l'accès le plus objectif possible à la tradition, en créant un contact matériel, mais médiatisé, avec les œuvres du passé.

1 "To breathe the 'literal' meaning with him"

Catullus (Gai valeri veronensis Liber), Celia and Louis's translation of Catullus, came out in 1969, published simultaneously in the United States by Grossman and in Britain in a deluxe edition by Cape Goliard. [1] A translation of the complete works of Catullus as provided by the Loeb Classics edition, both editions are bilingual, with the original Latin printed on the facing page. The Zukofskys devoted eight years to the project, leaving no doubt that the work was meant as a genuine translation and an earnest endeavor. Had it been a hoax, as the almost contemporary *Mots d'heures: Gousses, Rames* by Luis d'Antin Van Rooten [2] clearly was, it would have elicited a chuckle

1. All references to *Catullus* will be to Zukofsky, Louis, *Anew: Complete Shorter Poetry*, foreword by Robert Creeley, New York, New Directions, 2011.

2. Zukofsky's preparatory notebooks to *"A"*-23 contain a clipping with a review by Sherwin D. Smith from the *New York Times Book Review* for 22 Oct. 1967 of d'Antin Van Rooten, Luis, *Mots d'Heures:*

or a shrug from the classicists, well used to their own students' calques or hereby reminded of their own pranks as schoolboys learning Latin. [3] It was the manifest earnestness of the Zukofskys' endeavor that triggered the classicists and the critics' almost unanimous hostility. They disparaged it as "knotted, clumsy, turgid and ultimately silly", as so much "unreadable", "gibberish" [4]. Worse than inept, it conspired against civilization: "The Hun is at play—worse still, at work—among the ruins", wrote one reviewer. [5] Lawrence Venuti's analysis of the reviews perfectly brings out the implicit ideology governing acceptable translation, which the Zukofskys eagerly violated by promoting sound and a varied lexicon at the expense of communication and homogeneous diction, by foregrounding the body of the original at the expense of its paraphraseable soul, and by claiming homophonic translation as a legitimate approach to canonical authors.

Not that the Zukofskys called it homophonic, which might have defused its disruptive potential by identifying it too readily and sealing it off. Their very short translators' preface says the following: "This translation of Catullus follows the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin—tries, as is said, to breathe the 'literal' meaning with him" [6]. What the inverted commas around "literal" indicate is that the word is to be taken literally, signifying not a *verbatim* translation, one that remains close to the text, but a translation 'to the letter', both as grapheme and phoneme, script and sound. Much of the success and enduring interest of the Zukofskys' *Catullus* stems from the fact that they are constantly trying to do three or four things at the same time and *not just* following the sound as a more one-dimensional procedure might propose to do. While the first dozen or so poems follow mostly the semantic meaning, from poem 8 ("Miser Catullus"), Zukofsky begins to select words according to four criteria: "sound, rhythm, and syntax" as mentioned in his preface, and meaning.

Poets typically overemphasize sound but rarely to the extent of Zukofsky. Introducing his current collaborative translation in a preparatory note for his November 1960 Library of Congress reading, Zukofsky explains that his wife supplied a pony of the grammar "to the n^{th} inflection", and put a seal on his sensitivity when he was faced with a multiplicity of choices in his obstinacy of trying to render Catullus' sound as English. In the process, Zukofsky explains, he must "sharp" and "flat" those sounds to make sense at all. Never academically trained as a Latinist, Zukofsky would have perceived the sound and script of the original Latin over and above its meaning. This enabled him to treat Catullus not only as a text to be translated but also as a score to be performed, with the same leeway that the contemporary aleatoric composers (Cage, Feldman . . .) were allowing their performers, a comparison Zukofsky makes in a July 30^{th} 1963 note. While listening to Catullus as music, Zukofsky never gives up on

Gouses, Rames: The d'Antin Manuscript. As Jeff Twitchell-Waas remarks, "Van Rooten's work would have intrigued Zukofsky because, although it purports to be an obscure book of poems in archaic French, it is actually Van Rooten's homophonic translation of English nursery rhymes into French".

3. French students of Greek, for instance, have long chuckled at the homophonic translation of this fragment attributed to : "Ουκ έλαβον πόλιν, αλλά γαρ ελπίς εφή κακά" ("Ouk elabon Polin alla gar elpis Ephe Kaka").

4. All quotes from Venuti, Lawrence, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London & New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 221. Venuti's analysis of the Zukofsky's *Catullus* is p. 214-220.

5. Conquest, Robert, quoted in Hatlen, Burton, "Zukofsky as Translator", *in* Terrell, Carroll F. (Ed.), *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*, Orono, National Poetry Foundation, 1979, p. 349.

6. Zukofsky, *Anew*, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

semantic meaning. In fact, the power of Zukofsky's poetics is very much predicated on his refusal to separate sound and sense, a consequence of his consistent materialism: there is no such thing as a free-floating meaning waiting to be incarnated in one linguistic body or another. Sound was hardly the opposite of sense for Zukofsky who constantly revived the other meanings of the word, notably as an adjective meaning solid and sensible and as a verb meaning to test and to fathom. Praising a sixteenth century translator of the *Aeneid*, Zukofsky had written in 1948:

> The sound of the words is sometimes 95% of poetic presentation. One can often appreciate the connotations of the sound of words merely by listening, even if the language is foreign. The Scotch of Gawin Douglas [in his 1513 translation of the *Aeneid*] can hardly be called foreign, if one reads English. What is foreign to poetry is the word which means little or nothing—either as sound, image, or relation of ideas. [7]

And on the previous page Zukofsky had stated his faith in the power of pronunciation out loud to make sense: "The spelling should help sound the words. Sounded, they make sense" (*ibid.*, p. 57).

What does Zukofsky imply when he writes he follows rhythm, his second criteria? Clearly, he strives to retain the number of syllables of the original line, a constraint which preserves the visual layout of the poem and produces condensation. In a 1978 letter to Burton Hatlen recapitulating what their working procedure had been, Celia Zukofsky explains she "wrote out the Latin line and over it, indicated the quantity of every vowel and every syllable, that is long or short; then indicated the accented syllable" [8]. Whether Zukofsky was successful in rendering quantity and accents and approximating the characteristic tune of the original Latin meter is hard to tell, and commentators disagree. [9]. It is not all that clear that classicists agree on what Latin hendecasyllabics sounded like; certainly, no distinct pattern emerges from the recorded readings of Catullus available online. The issue of translating the rhythm and prosody of a foreign language will be pursued further down.

In a 1960 note, Zukofsky claims that following Catullus's sounds syllable for syllable and line for line has involved him in his syntax, his third criteria. In her 1978 letter to Hatlen, Celia Zukofsky explains that "[b]elow the Latin line I wrote the literal meaning or meanings of every word indicating gender, number, case and the order or sentence structure. I used Lewis & Short *Latin Dictionary* (Oxford UP) and Allen & Greenough *Latin Grammar* (Ginn & Co.)" [10]. But Zukofsky's claim can only be partly true since he appears more committed to retaining sounds than parts of speech. And even when he does follow the syntax closely, the semantic strangeness

7. Zukofsky, *A Test of Poetry*, Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 2000 [Objectivist Press, 1948], p. 58.

8. Hatlen, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

9. See notes 26 and 55 in David Wray's " 'cool rare air': Zukofsky's Breathing with Catullus and Plautus", *Chicago Review*, vol. 50, No. 2/3/4 (2004/05), p. 52-99, one of the most illuminating readings of Zukofsky's *Catullus*. Wray is both a distinguished Latinist and an informed reader of Zukofsky. For an up-to-date list of commentaries on the Zukofskys' *Catullus* see Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas's *Z-site: A companion to the Works of Louis Zukofsky* (`www.z-site.net/notes-to-poetry/catullus-1969-with-celia-zukofsky/`).

10. Hatlen, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

of the words juxtaposed supersedes the foreignness of the syntax. That syntax isn't Zukofsky's prime criterion can be felt by comparison if one turns to Pierre Klossowski's 1964 French translation of the *Aeneid* which some critics disparaged as calque for remaining too close to the Latin syntax. [11]

Finally, although he does not refer to it in his preface, Zukofsky remains committed to semantic meaning. The Zukofskys consulted several historical translations [12] as the two notebook pages for *Catullus* 85 reproduced on the Cape Goliard cover indicate. In most cases one would be incapable of reconstituting a paraphrase of the original poem based solely on Zukofsky's translation, but all commentators have shown that the juxtaposition of Zukofsky's translation with the original Latin or a more standard translation yields countless semantic echoes and complexification, Zukofsky's translation functioning as a commentary or variation or riff on the original.

2 "The sound's a mollycoddle"

Depending on the criteria that Zukofsky foregrounds, the translations sound quite different. Until poem 8, Zukofsky foregrounds semantics and, to some extent, syntax:

> Whom do I give my neat little volume
> slicked dry and made fashionable with pumice?
> Cornelius, to you [...] (*Anew*, p. 245)

Then comes the oft-quoted poem 8, rather typical in its mixing of sound and semantics and it its creation of a noble if tortuous species of English. It begins:

> Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire
> et quod vides et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.
>
> Miss her, Catullus? don't be so inept to rail
> at what you see perish when perished is the case. (*Anew*, p. 248)

Sonics lead but semantics resist in "what you see" for "quod vides". Finally, beginning with poem 25 and increasingly toward the end of the volume the reader must ford through a delightfully if disconcertingly strange English riddled with Latin sounding words:

> Conniving Thallus, mulley, you, cony cully, cop below—
> Wee, anserous medulla, well immolated auricula—
> Wee, pain and languid older sense, see, too extraneous—o so—
> And then qua Thallus, turbid air, rape packing off, a hell of
> Come diva mull over Aries—oscine oscitancy (*Anew*, p. 256)

11. For a commentary on Klossowki's translation see Berman, Antoine, *La traduction à la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain*, Paris, Seuil, 1999.

12. *The Poems of Catullus and Tibullus, and the Vigil of Venus, A Literal Prose Translation with Notes* by Walter K. Kelly, to which are added *The Metrical Versions of* [George] *Lamb and* [James] *Grainger*, and a selection of versions by other writers, London, George Bell, 1878. Kelly supplies extensive annotations to the poems (Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas: `www.z-site.net/notes-to-poetry/catullus-1969-with-celia-zukofsky/`).

The translation of the famous *Carmina* 16 belongs to the second category which balances sense and sound:

> Piping, beaus, I'll go *whoosh* and I'll rumble you
> pathic Aurelius and catamount Furius,
> who mix my versicles with your poor tasties—
> the sound is a mollycoddle's, I'm not up
> to par for chasteness. But the pious poet
> is chaste, his versicles not nailed to his need,
> quick to themselves with no lack of decorum,
> if the sound models not quite pure for pudency
> what incitement it carries passes into
> now I won't say hairless boys', but such hoary
> necks as endure not quite up to feel lumbar.
> Milling thousands of kisses are base or make
> me out some mare of a male—you impute that?
> Piping, beaus, I'll go *whoosh* and I'll rumble you. (*Anew*, p. 253)

One can very well and very enjoyably read this poem on its own for its sonic profusion and the innuendoes aroused by rare words and their juxtaposition. As Venuti has shown, the homophonic constraint uncovers "a dazzling range of Englishes"[13], juxtaposing levels of diction, mixing the archaic and the scientific, joining the vulgar and the precious. Where translators typically seek to recreate a voice by establishing a homogeneous *diction*, Zukofsky mines the *dictionary* to present heterogeneous Englishes. A tease to the linguistic imagination, Zukofsky's poem also invites the reader to scour the dictionary and come out with a new poem. I always took "The sound's a mollycoddle" (line 4) as a commentary on homophonic translation, based on the assumption that "mollycoddle" must mean a muddle, a tangle, a jumble. But the Oxford English Dictionary reveals it means "an effeminate man or boy; a milksop". Does this imply that sound is effeminate, mere matter as opposed to the father's informing seme, as a structuring metaphor of the western tradition would have it? Following in the footsteps of Lori Chamberlain[14] who revealed the gendered nature of the Western metaphorics of translation—riddled with issues of fidelity, paternity, authority, rightful progeny, and rape—, one can consider Zukofsky's indulgence in sound and scattering of semantics as a form of queering. Performed at the linguistic level, it chimes with Catullus' erotic contents, especially in this poem whose first line flaunts oral and anal sex. *Carmina* 16 is famous for its indecent contents and was never fully translated before the second half of the twentieth century. While Zukofsky stated that he didn't want his "Cats" to "titillate the passion"[15], homophonic translation allowed him to provide the innuendoes and let his reader's imagination do the rest.

13. Venuti, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
14. Chamberlain, Lori, "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation", *Signs*, vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring 1988), p. 454-472.
15. Hatlen, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

Carmina 16 is also famous for asserting the distinction between the author and the persona. Catullus argues that tender or lewd verse does not imply an effeminate or lecherous author, and that while the author must be chaste, his poems need not be. The poem was referenced by later Latin poets as an authority on this matter. The poet abuses two male friends who, finding his verse *molliculi* (tender, delicate), imply that Catullus is an effeminate poet. Catullus's warning hasn't prevented generations of scholars from reconstructing his life from his poems, since "we know next to nothing about the poet and his actual biography"[16]. Catullus's warning would have struck a chord in Zukofsky who similarly discouraged his readers from wanting to reconstruct the author's intentions from the works: "I hope everybody would read me the same way—that is, not wonder whether I was afraid of a draft as I am at the moment, but just read the words"[17]. This emphasis on words at the expense of a voice, on the dictionary at the expense of a coherent diction, is the basis of Zukofsky's translation method and poetics.

3 Per-sona

There is only one entry for the word translation in the index to *Prepositions*, Zukofsky's collection of essays, and it refers to one of his earliest, devoted to Ezra Pound. It was Pound, of course, who had insisted on the importance of translation and, by his own achievements and authority, convinced several generations of American poets to translate. In his essay, Zukofsky praises Pound the translator for "the distinction of rendering into English unexplored poetic forms", and for "translating himself through personae"[18]. While Zukofsky praises Pound for translating, "not merely dramatizing", himself into a persona, by the end of the section the dramatization seems to disqualify Pound's use of persona, because it is historically ungrounded, implicitly a mere psychological projection: "What after all, asks Zukofsky, does Ezra Pound know about En Bertrans [twelfth-century troubadour Bertran de Born] to attempt a persona?"[19]. As is so often the case, Zukofsky arrives at his own solution by subverting Pound, here by taking him at his word, literally; in this case, by attending to the etymology of *persona*—at least, the generally accepted nineteenth-century etymology of *persona*—: "to sound through", shifting the focus from the actor's mask to the voice that filters through: "En Bertrans, as Pound's measure reflects him, and as he reflects Pound, can bear but the relation of a veracious actor to his historic original, and act him, mask penetrated, per sonum—through sound" (*ibid.*). The rest of the paragraph deserves to be quoted in full as Zukofsky advances an early (1929) and prescient formulation of his own approach to historical material, articulating the poetics he will carry out some forty years later in *"A"*-22 & 23, the final movements of his 800-page lifework:

> Only speech transforms whatever skeleton remains of the past and conveys judgment of it to the intelligence. Try as a poet may for objectivity, for

16. Ziolkowski, Theodore, "Anglo-American Catullus since the Mid-Twentieth Century", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 13, No. 3 (Winter 2007), p. 409-430, here p. 417 (`www.jstor.org/stable/30222155`).

17. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, *The Collected Critical Essays*, ed. Mark Scroggins, Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 2001 [1967], p. 24.

18. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

> the past to relive itself, not for his living the historical data, he can do only one of two things: get up a most brief catalog of antiquities (people become dates, epitaphs), or use this catalog and breathe upon it so that it lives as his music. This latter action need not falsify the catalog. (*ibid.*)

But of course, the second branch of the alternative also foreshadows the Catullus translation and its ambition "to breathe the literal meaning with him"— not impersonating Catullus but mouthing his sounds and encouraging the English-speaking reader to do the same, thus each time resuscitating the skeleton of Catullus with live breath. By taking the demiurge's creative breath literally, Zukofsky turns idealism on its head. As against humanist translators and critics who wish for the spirit of the original—and that would include Pound whose ambition, for all his archaisms and literalisms, is to evoke the power (*virtù*) of the original—Zukofsky focuses on the letter (as sound and script), and takes spirit literally, not as the distinctive style of the dead author but as the breath of the living reader. Homophonic translation offers Zukofsky a materialist approach to the past that he will fully carry out in the final movements of *"A"*.

4 Fluorescence

If Zukofsky formulated an argument in favor of homophonic translation as early as the late 1920s, he didn't enact it fully before 1958, ten poems or so into *Catullus*. But he had already experimented with it in the 1930s, without identifying it as such, while composing the first canzone of *"A"*-9. Like *Catullus*, *"A"*-9 is a work that hovers indefinably between translation and creation. Following in the footsteps of Pound, who had himself devoted more than a decade to Guido Cavalcanti's thirteenth century doctrinal canzone and translated it twice, Zukofsky spent seven years considering and two years translating Cavalcanti's canzone on love (1938-40), successfully retaining its rigorous formal features in a way Pound had never been able to, but replacing the treatise on love by a treatise on labor, couched in phrases drawn from Marx's *Capital*. In a decade when their political views were increasingly at odds, this constituted both a homage and a challenge from Zukofsky to his mentor. Even more than the later *Catullus*, *"A"*-9 considers the translation of form as a perfectly acceptable alternative to the translation of paraphraseable content. Zukofsky retains the rhyme-scheme, approximates the Italian hendecasyllable with eleven syllable lines and retains as much of the original sound as he can. Juxtaposing the Italian original and the English translation of the fifth stanza shows that approximations of sound begins with the rhyming words, suggesting that transliteration can be viewed as a continuation of rhyme by other means—a species of translingual rhyme.

> Dissemble—pledging complexions so guarded
> Da ssimil tragge complessione e sghuardj [20]

In the first, privately printed edition of the canzone (1940), in which Zukofsky compiled the various sources for his poem, he makes no reference to his homophonic

20. Zukofsky, *"A"*, New York, New Directions, 2011 [1978], p. 108; Guido Cavalcanti, "Donna mi priegha", *in Ezra Pound*, *Translations*, New York, New Directions, 1963, p. 138.

practice. The "fluorescence" he evokes in the foreword is as close as he gets: "These aids are presented in the foregoing order, the poem last, so that if the intention to have it fluoresce as it were in the light of seven centuries of interrelated thought has at all been realized the poem will explain itself"[21]. But twenty-five years later (in 1965, at the time he was translating Catullus), when he describes the poem in view of a German edition of "*A*"-9, Zukofsky revises his 1939 formulation and introduces the term "transliteration".

> *"A"*-9 consists of two canzoni, the first a definition of value, the second a definition of love. Both are profiled after Guido Cavalcanti's Donna mi priegha. The rhymes of the second canzone of *"A"*-9 are the same as those of the first in the linear sequence which in its discourse attempts to transliterate the sound (or "Noise") of the original Italian as English. The intention is to have *"A"*-9 fluoresce as it were in the light of seven centuries of interrelated thought (the sound a part of it). [22]

"To transliterate" suggests that the thirteenth century Italian seeps through the twentieth century American English, while "fluorescence" implies that the heterogeneous material condensed formally into the poem shines, delighting the senses. In Marxian terms, Zukofsky's invisible labor resuscitates the dead labor already objectified by Cavalcanti into his poem, bringing it back to life. [23] So that Zukofsky's "breathing the literal meaning" doesn't only echo creation myths but also involves his Marxist view of labor and value.

5 Prosody and Accents, or "new-old quantities" [24]

Readers of Zukofsky know that he was constantly sounding script and transcribing sound, "to try the sound of words"[25]. Zukofsky signed his first discarded book of poems "Dunn Wyth (pronounced 'done with')" (1928). He named a 1963 volume of poems *I's* (pronounced 'eyes'). In his partly autobiographical fiction *Little*, the character of the poet (Dala) is shown making homophonic translations from medieval Welsh poetry.

> Dala, on his own time before another evening class completed his long day, transliterated, on his wallet's memo pad, from *Gorhoffedd of Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd*:

21. Zukofsky, *First Half of "A"*-9, New York, Louis Zukofsky, 1940, p. 1. A form of luminescence, fluorescence is the emission of (typically visible) light by a substance that has absorbed (typically invisible) light or other electromagnetic radiation.

22. Zukofsky archive, HRC, University of Texas, Austin, Works, "A", box 2.

23. Or, to quote Zukofsky quoting Marx, "by incorporating living labour power with their dead substance, the capitalist transforms value (past labour, objectified labour, dead labour) into capital, into self-expanding value, into a monster quick with life, which begins to 'work' as if love were breeding in its body". (*Zukofsky, First Half of "A"-9*, *op. cit.* p. 14, quoting *Capital*, Book I, section 3, The Production of Absolute Surplus-Value). In several preparatory notes Zukofsky calls Catullus his collaborator and the translation his chore, his beloved drudgery.

24. Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas reveals that the line "Cue in new-old quantities" (*"A"*-23, p. 563), at the very end of the last movement Zukofsky composed, is an oblique reference to his work on *Catullus* with his wife and their attempt to homophonically mimic Catullus' quantitative verse.

25. Zukofsky, *"A"*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

> is the dent roc towered
> [...]
> After an Institute *function* Dala was walking home with an equally questionable variant of Gwynedd:
> is that eye hant rack toward— [26]

The novella, composed between 1950 and 1969, opens with *A Note on the Pronunciation of Names*:

> As in Latin: names of two syllables are accented on the first (with a few exceptions, Dríscháy, Uńzúng Pháréttе); of more than two syllables, on the penult if that is long (Verchádet, Babállo, Sweetsíder); otherwise on the antepenult (Teárilee, Beármeout). [27]

Zukofsky clearly enjoys transcribing exactly the various foreign accents of his son's successive violin professors throughout:

> (Aside to Verchadet [Celia Zukofsky] and Baballo [Louis Zukofsky]: "No, no? you no American?" They and Little [Paul Zukofsky, their son] in unison, "But of course we are, what else?" Proba: "Maybe, no?" then back to Little—) "Play premier, third exercise Svecik. Bis, more once. Probier. *Moment* (pronounced as in French, probably to mean *momentum.*) Più ah più, *ma*! side of hair—happily! [28]

In his essay on Charlie Chaplin entitled "Modern Times" (1936), Zukofsky reveals why transcribing foreign accents is so pleasurable. Commenting on the famous scene at the end of *Modern Times* when having lost the lyrics of the song Chaplin launches into a mish-mash of European languages, [29] Zukofsky writes: "Singing, Charlie concocts his words internationally. The result is the effect of words conveying a familiar feeling of being spoken without the least affectation" [30]. We tend to think of the 'mother tongue' as our linguistic home but for Zukofsky, it is this gibberish of European languages that feels 'familiar', a feeling perhaps shared by first generation immigrants, exiles, and those who live near borders or in cosmopolitan cities. Zukofsky was born in the Lower East Side of Manhattan from Russian Jewish parents whose first language was Yiddish. An oft-repeated anecdote pictures him reciting Longfellow's *Hiawatha* in Yiddish to a gang of Italian bullies. Because his parents could not decipher the birth certificate filled out in English by the midwife, Zukofsky never knew what his birth date was until he applied for a passport. Then he found out that the midwife had written his name down as Sallikowsky, practical proof that transliteration is how different languages tune into each other.

26. Zukofsky, *Collected Fiction*, Elmwood Park, Dalkey Archive, 1990, p. 70-73.
27. *Ibid.*, xii.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.
29. On Chaplin's 'nonsense' songs, see also Charles Bernstein's opening essay in this book.
30. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

6 "to 'tune in' to the human tradition"

That the recourse to homophonic translation is enmeshed with the quest for new prosodic forms is further demonstrated by Zukofsky's mature poetics which emerged in the early sixties, while he was deep in *Catullus*. Starting with *"A"*-14 (completed in 1964), Zukofsky's poetry demonstrates two striking features. First, Zukofsky introduced a new prosody based on word-counted line: *"A"*-14, -18, -19, -21, -22 and -23 are all composed of word-counted lines. Second, he incorporated homophonic translation at the service of his compositional strategy: *"A"*-15 opens with a transliteration from the Book of Job ("He neigh ha lie low h'who y'he gall mood", p. 359); *"A"*-19 contains transliterations and free translations from Mallarmé ("Place / it futile", p. 409); *"A"*-21 is a translation in five-word lines of "Rudens", a play by Latin poet Plautus. While not strictly homophonic it keeps an eye and ear in the Latin, as David Wray has shown ("Your mendacious tool of tongue / magnified auscultation worked my mendacity", p. 458). And *"A"*-22 & 23 are a pair of universal histories, the former scientific the second literary, each composed of 1000 lines, 5 words to a line.

> Charred roots: why you goad
> Loved weed loam more than
> Harm'll frame (why) whom now
> Wind's woodpeople move, rue, ache,
> Choir shocked call rest, pause
> Renew—whirligig punning tempest, cut (*"A"*-23, *op. cit.*, p. 545)

Zukofsky condenses his readings, collaging and transliterating freely. *"A"*-22 & 23, particularly the latter, include substantial passages of homophonic renderings from Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Old English, with shorter passages from Sanskrit, Welsh, Provençal, and Spanish. In addition, Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas has identified individual lines, phrases and words homophonically generated from close to ten further languages. *80 Flowers*[31], Zukofsky's final book of poems (1978) perfects this systematic association of word-count and homophonics. Apparently independent these two features work in cooperation. The word-counted line is Zukofsky's ultimate answer to the quantitative quest launched earlier in the century: a numerical yet flexible constraint. Inaudible and invisible, it is a metrics for the intellect, which is why it needs to be supplemented by homophonics (along with other compositional techniques) for the sake of sound, syntax and diction.

"A"-22 & 23 accomplish the second alternative that Zukofsky had drawn in 1929 for the poet trying "for the past to relive itself": instead of getting up a catalogue of antiquities, he "uses this catalog and breathe[s] upon it so that it lives as his music"[32]. "History's best emptied of names" claims *"A"*-22, which Zukofsky conceived as "a history without (the) dates"[33]. I find the justification for this final crowning project best expressed in "A Statement for Poetry" (1950), where Zukofsky vindicates a poetry that reaches out across time, place and languages.

31. Zukofsky, *80 Flowers*, reprinted in *Anew: Complete Shorter Poetry*, *op. cit.*
32. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
33. Zukofsky, *"A"*-22, *op. cit.*, p. 511; notes for *"A"*-22, 23, 24, HRC, University of Texas, Austin.

> It is this musical horizon of poetry [...] that permits anybody 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 natural things, and thus escape the confines of time and place, as one hardly ever escapes them in studying Homer's grammar. In this sense poetry is international. [34]

For Zukofsky, as we have seen, this international character is not to be achieved by a universally translatable transparency but concocted by an idiosyncratic sonic obduracy.

7 Three hypotheses

Having now delineated the emergence and stakes of transliteration in Zukofsky's work, I would like to draw three hypothetical implications for homophonic translation more generally.

First, that transliteration blurs the customary boundary between creation and translation. As we have seen, Zukofsky increasingly incorporated unassigned quotations and translations in his compositions while making his own collaborative input manifest in his translations. In his obstinacy to render the sound of the original, Zukofsky brought out the productive and creative power of translation, its ability to uncover a new diction or lexicon, to help achieve a new prosody. The implicit refusal to discriminate between composition and translation rests on a radical materialism which also refuses to oppose sound and sense, and justifies, even requires, transliteration.

Secondly, that Zukofsky's transliterations seem part of a wider quest for an alternate prosody after the demise of metered verse and the (real or imagined) dulling of free verse invites us to view homophonic translation as a modern outlet for the phonological impulse. Translingual, and expanding its field from consecutive end-words to entire poems printed on facing pages, homophonic translation can be viewed as a limit case of rhyme. But linguistic sound is sense, "matter that thinks" [35]. In "A Statement for Poetry" (1950), having defined the three components of poems as "A. Image B. Sound, C. Interplay of Concepts", Zukofsky associates puns and "the homophonic devices of syllabaries" not with the second but with the third category, "in which words involve other words in common or contrasting logical implications, and to this end it [Interplay of Concepts] employs sound, and sometimes image, as an accessory" [36].

Thirdly, Zukofsky's reference to the final scene of *Modern Times* in which Chaplin's voice can be heard for the first time suggests that the increasing use of sound recording technologies, with their foregrounding of speech as noise, has probably favored the spread of homophonic translation. Its boost in the 1950s and 60s certainly corresponds to the marketing of tapes and tape-recorders. Zukofsky's 1962 preface to the *Catullus*

34. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

35. Zukofsky, *"A"*-8, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

36. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22. This may be the only occurrence of the term 'homophonic' in Zukofsky's writing and it refers not to homophonic translation but to the homophonic imagination deployed by syllabaries.

translations published in *Kulchur* appears strangely consonant with William Burroughs's statement in his almost contemporary introduction to "The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin", soon applied to splicing tape:

> This version of Catullus aims at rendition of his sound. By reading his lips, that is while pronouncing the Latin words, the translation—as his lips shape—tries to breathe with him. L.Z.
>
> Shakespeare Rimbaud live in their words. Cut the word lines and you will hear their voices. Cut-ups often come through as code messages with special meaning for the cutter. Table tapping? Perhaps. Certainly an improvement on the usual deplorable performance of contacted poets through a medium. [37]

Both convert the spiritualist lure of an immediate contact with dead writers into a mediate and material transformation of previous texts. If, as Zukofsky once defined it, "poetry is information" [38]—form preserving the clarity and allowing the complexity of the message—, then transliteration, predicated as it is on noise, makes palpable the loss of information which besets any transmission while offering a manner of experimenting with it.

37. Zukofsky, Louis and Celia, from *Catullus*, *Kulchur*, vol 2, No. 5, spring 1962, p. 47; Burroughs, William, "The Cut-Up Method of Brion Gysin", *in The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, ed. Leroi Jones, New York, Corinth Books, 1963.

38. Zukofsky, *A Test of Poetry op. cit.*, p. 84.