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Josef Horáček

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Date

Eloquent Barbarians: Poetry, Translation, and the American Avant-garde

By

Josef Horáček

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts

---

Angelika Bammer, Ph.D.

Advisor

---

Dalia Judovitz, Ph.D.

Committee Member

---

Walter Reed, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Accepted:

---

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.

Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

---

Date

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An abstract of  
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
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## Abstract

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By Josef Horáček

This dissertation contributes to recent debates about the interventionist potential of literary translation by tracing out a genealogy of modernist poetry translations extending from the beginning of the twentieth century into the present. I argue that the translation projects discussed in this study, from Ezra Pound's *Propertius* to Celia and Louis Zukofskys' *Catullus* and Jerome Rothenberg's Navajo and Seneca oral poetries, seek to renegotiate the function of translation and the tenuous distinction between translation and other forms of writing. The translators in this study adopt avant-garde experiments with collage, sound poetry, and concrete poetry to develop a variety of decidedly non-normative approaches to translation. As a result of these approaches, the translations become reflexive, allowing the reader to glimpse and interrogate the inner workings of the translation process.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Poetry in Translation As a Literary Subculture*

One of the standard narratives surrounding contemporary American poetry has it that poetry has lost its once prominent place in mainstream culture (see Gioia). Similarly, it has become a popular theme in translation studies to decry the marginalization of literary translation in the U.S. (see Venuti, *Scandals of Translation*; Grossman; Lennon). The interesting paradox is that while poets blame their marginalization in part on the claim that “too much” poetry is being published (Rasula 2-3), which prevents a select few bards of exceptional quality to rise to the top and capture the popular imagination, translators lambast the publishing industry for willfully ignoring works in translation. Whatever the reasons may be, perhaps it is time to acknowledge that poetry, translation, and especially poetry in translation are a kind of institutionally sanctioned subculture and to study them as such. The status of poetry in translation as a subculture, rather than mass culture, gives it certain advantages, and I would like to venture that in the U.S., poetry in translation has never done better. As major publishing houses, which indeed have systematically marginalized translation, are themselves becoming increasingly marginal with the emergence of new media and business models, the number of small presses and online



publications devoted to poetry in translation is expanding, and with it the variety of poeties and approaches to translation that see publication. The flexibility of small presses combined with a lack of commercial pressures allows translators to be in control not only of what they translate but also how. The sales numbers may pale in comparison with major fiction and non-fiction bestsellers, but the industry is vibrant and diverse, and its products are available with little effort to those interested.

On the side of translation theory and criticism, we are currently witnessing the field of translation studies enter a phase of relative maturity, both in terms of institutional support and in terms of the debates the field fosters. Instead of paying lip service to the well-worn truism that there is more than way to translate a text, we now seriously explore the wealth and diversity of possible approaches to translation. Scholars, critics, and translators interested in the interventionist potential of literary translation – which is the focus of this study – no longer need to argue for the visibility of the translator but instead are able to discuss the various possibilities for intervention that literary translation offers. Among readers of poetry, there seems to be an interest in interventionist or otherwise innovative translations, to the degree that some critics have come to wonder whether certain forms of intervention – of othering, defamiliarizing, minoritizing, or foreignizing the text of the translation – have become normative.

The present study contributes to these debates over interventionist translation in several ways. I am interested in the influence of modernism, especially the historical avant-garde, both on translation theory and translation practice in the American literary context. My purpose is not to advance a new theory of translation; rather, I aim to consolidate certain trends in translation studies, trends I see as directly influenced by modernism, and use them to gain new perspectives on an existing body of translations. In my case studies of Ezra Pound, Celia and Louis Zukofsky, and Jerome Rothenberg, I trace out a genealogy of avant-garde-inspired poetry translations that extends from the earliest years of the modernist rupture onward and prefigures our current debates and practices.

*Translation As A Genre: A Conceptual Framework*

My conceptual framework is constructed out of elements directly influenced by the modernist rethinking of authorship, artistic expression, and textuality. Such an approach to translation only became possible with the emergence of the descriptive school of translation studies in the late 1970s. (The emergence of cultural studies and postcolonial theory in the subsequent decade was another important factor.) Initiated by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, descriptive translation studies approaches translation as a

literary genre, a system which forms part of the larger polysystem of national literature. In contrast to prescriptive models of translation, it refrains from attempts to identify any universal characteristics of translation. Instead, it views translation as a dynamic cultural practice. My case studies reinforce this view of translation as I highlight the disagreements among critics as to what qualifies as a “good” or “legitimate” translation and trace the shifting attitudes toward translation over the course of several decades.

The descriptive school has inspired a varied body of influential scholarship. I will draw on Theo Hermans’ theory of adequacy, Lawrence Venuti’s writing on the domestic recontextualization of the translated text, André Lefevere’s theory of translation as rewriting, and Kate Sturge’s discussion of reflexive ethnography. In his theory of adequacy, which serves as a corrective to the traditional concept of fidelity or equivalence, Hermans demonstrates that a text in translation derives its authority less from its correlation to a foreign source than through various gestures that secure its acceptance in the domestic context. This claim finds its correlative in Lawrence Venuti’s assertion that the foreignness of a translated text is invoked by means of resources proper to the target language (“Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation”). These theoretical breakthroughs signal a shift in emphasis in the study of translation from a comparative approach in which the translation is judged first and foremost against the background of

the source text to an approach which focuses on the reception of the translated text in the context of the receiving culture. While I do consider source texts, whether directly or through the commentary of other scholars, my focus is on domestic reception.

My domestic or target space is American literary culture, specifically American poetry. My target language, therefore, is not simply English but American English. The difficulties that arise from choosing this particular focus are immediately obvious: to begin with, Ezra Pound, who is at the center of this study, came of age as a poet and translator under the direct influence of the Victorian poets of England. Even more importantly, Pound spent most of his career overseas and in close contact with writers and artists not just in England but also in Italy and France. However, even as Pound absorbed English and continental influences and integrated into European culture, he kept very close ties, both personal and professional, to his home country. In the end, Pound's ambiguous status as an American poet and American citizen (which was further complicated by his pro-Mussolini radio broadcasts during World War II) only highlights the fact that the domestic space is hybrid and multiple, a fact further compounded by the relentless efforts by the poets associated with the avant-garde to contest their received literary tradition and to reinvent their poetic language. Interestingly, though, one way in which they did so was by incorporating contemporary American idioms, slang, and

regionalisms into their poetry and translations. Both Pound and Zukofsky regularly turn to distinctly American linguistic features in their work. For his part, Rothenberg contests the idea of the domestic literary space by exploring North America's indigenous literatures.

One of the characteristic traits of avant-garde movements is their effort to challenge the boundaries of art and literature and the hierarchy of genres. Accordingly, avant-garde translation attempts to renegotiate the function of translation and the tenuous distinction between translation and other forms of writing. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, many critics have sought to elevate translation to the status of an autonomous creative practice rather than a purely derivative craft (Walter Benjamin's well-known, if little understood, essay "The Task of the Translator" is a frequently cited example). I, on the other hand, approach the question of the status of translation from a different direction: rather than arguing for the relative autonomy of the translated text, I adopt a critical position that emphasizes the derivative and intertextual nature of all texts. Lefevere's theory of translation as rewriting is useful in this regard. Lefevere reconceptualized translation as a form of writing that transforms – rewrites – the source text. Rather than replacing the source text, translation is yet another iteration – a "refraction," to use another of Lefevere's terms – of the text alongside other forms of

rewriting such as criticism, commentary, historiography, or live performance. (Along similar lines, Maria Tymoczko argues that translation functions not as a metaphor for the source text, or its figurative replacement, but as a metonymy, or displacement;

*Translation in a Postcolonial Context*.) Lefevere unsettles the distinction between primary and secondary texts by showing how the various forms of rewriting shape the readers' understanding of a particular text, often more substantially than the presumed source text itself ("Mother Courage's Cucumbers" 241). As I study the work of my selected poet-translators, I consider the entire ensemble of texts that contribute to our reception of the translations in question. I read not only the text of the translation and, where available, its various drafts and editions, but also the translator's notes and commentary, related correspondence, contemporary reviews, alternative versions of the text by other translators, as well as later scholarly studies related to the text.

As any literary genre, translation, even if it eludes definition, is nevertheless guided by an implicit set of norms, and the focus of descriptive translation studies has largely been on analyzing large bodies of translated material in order to identify prevalent, often unacknowledged stylistic and methodological tendencies (Venuti, "Translation Studies" 302). My approach differs in that I focus on ostentatiously non-normative examples of literary translation. Ethnographers have long been aware of the

problems inherent in the normative guise of objectivity and have concerned themselves with developing new strategies of indicating the researcher's positionality and presenting both the voice of the subject and their own voice (Clifford and Marcus, Marcus and Fisher, Geertz). This is precisely what I see occurring in the transgressive translations I highlight in the chapters to follow. The comparison between translation and ethnography, as two modes of representation of otherness, is therefore particularly salient for this project. Several authors have noted the parallel developments in translation studies and reflexive ethnography; however, the methods and terminology developed by theorists of ethnographic writing have yet to be productively applied to the study of literary translation. For example, Kate Sturge combines the theoretical viewpoints of ethnography and translation studies in order to reevaluate alternatives to objective strategies in ethnographic writing. Whereas Sturge applies concepts from translation studies to her discussion of reflexive and heteroglossic ethnography, I move in the opposite direction and adapt her findings to develop the concept of reflexive translation.

Such an approach is not without its pitfalls. In translation studies, the ongoing effort to make the translator visible, that is, to acknowledge and highlight the translator's hand in the creation of the text (as a counterbalance to the credit automatically given to the author of the source text), has served a distinct political goal: translation is an arduous

task that often goes unrewarded, whether in terms of including the translator's name on the cover of the publication, offering fair monetary compensation, or considering translation work in academic tenure promotions, which is a state of affairs many commentators find unacceptable. However, this intense focus on authorship too often conflates the author-as-laborer with the author-function of the text and is at odds with the methods of textual analysis we have developed following the "death of the author" turn in literary scholarship. My concern here is not with the physical author but rather with the reflexive moments in each text, which not only highlight the author-function of the translator, but also, and more importantly, expose the inner workings of the translation, its methods and the effects those methods produce.

While I insist that translation has no universal definition or precise boundaries, the question as to what is and is not a translation clearly plays a major role in my study. In fact, this question is embedded in the very texts I analyze. Some poets and critics, especially those favorably disposed toward modernist and avant-garde notions of authorship and textuality, adopt an expansive, anything-goes view of translation. Such an attitude, while refreshing for a kind of generosity rarely accorded to translation, runs the risk of diluting the specificity of translation among other forms of rewriting so as to make it once again invisible. To further complicate the matter, many scholars, often those



involved with postcolonialism, transnational studies, or other cross-border discourses, use the term translation metaphorically to denote not just a textual practice but a whole set of linguistic and cultural forms of boundary-crossing (see, for example, Bhabha). I agree with Sturge who urges us not to lose sight of language translation when we engage in such metaphorical forays (13). While I do argue that translation is in many ways more closely related to other forms of writing than is generally believed, it remains a fact that translation is thought of and practiced as a distinct activity and understood as serving a distinct set of purposes, even if these distinctions are continually under scrutiny. As such, translation occupies an important place in the literary polysystem and deserves our close attention.

My criteria for whether or not a text can be or ought to be read as a translation is based in the history of that particular text's reception. While some critics (or even the poet-translators themselves) may have argued at various points that a particular text is not a translation at all, this type of argument implies that the text in question had, at least initially, been presented by its author or apprehended by its readers as a translation. Even as I am interested in texts that challenge the accepted boundaries of translation, I specifically choose to read them as translations. In other words, I examine how these texts perform their critique of normative translation from within, as translations.

*An Avant-Garde Genealogy: The Case Studies*

The translation projects I discuss in the chapters of this study are far from obscure. There is a wealth of scholarship surrounding these works, but they do deserve another look for numerous reasons. First, while some of them have been revisited by scholars and critics in recent years, several still await a comprehensive analysis using the most current perspectives in translation studies. Among other things, the existence of a rich critical apparatus surrounding these works allows me to chart the history of the reception and shifting perspectives on these works as our aesthetic, political, and theoretical stances on translation have evolved over the course of a century. This will help bolster my premise that translation is not a static, clearly defined enterprise but a dynamic cultural practice. Secondly, even though there have been efforts to contextualize these translation projects in the larger poetic and critical output of their respective authors, I will develop this context further, stressing just how central these translations are to the poetics of the poet-translators who undertook them. Finally, I challenge the prevalent view that the translations in question are no more than isolated aberrations in the context of literary translation. Instead I argue that the series of translation projects discussed in this study, from Pound's *Propertius* to the Zukofskys' *Catullus* and Rothenberg's Navajo and

Seneca oral poetics, suggests a continued trajectory of avant-garde-inspired poetry translation. I will show how these projects are in direct communication with each other and with their shared roots in the poetics and politics of the historical avant-garde.

In chapter one, I open a discussion of Pound's prolific and influential translation career with an analysis of his complicated attitude toward history. Rather than rejecting the antiquarian poetics of his Victorian predecessors, as might be expected of the ultra-modern poet who coined the phrase "make it new," Pound appropriates the Victorian penchant for poetic archaisms to suit his modernist goals. In his early translations of Italian and Provençal poets, Pound overlays deep anachronisms with contemporary poetic forms in search of a new, distinctly modern idiom.

My main focus in this chapter is on Pound's translation of the elegies by the Latin poet Sextus Propertius. Produced at the height of Pound's vorticist period during the Great War, a time when Pound was most intensely engaged with the work of the continental avant-garde, his *Propertius* is a product of what I call methodological collage: a blending and juxtaposition of disparate and ostensibly arbitrary translation techniques. While Pound's vorticist program shows a clear influence by the Italian futurists, I argue that the primary effect of Pound's collage is not greater emotional expressiveness, as was the case with futurist collages. The effect of Pound's collage is intellectual rather than

emotional: it challenges the integrity of Pound's medium, that of literary translation. This aligns Pound more closely with the French cubists, especially Pablo Picasso and his paper collages shot through with ironic attacks on traditional modes of representation.

In chapter two, I argue that Celia and Louis Zukofsky's 1969 *Catullus* dismantles the concept of transparent literalism as a foundation of fluency-based approaches to translation. Unlike subsequent examples of homophonic translation, or translation that privileges sound over meaning, the Zukofsky *Catullus* never abandons semantic correspondence but rather redefines it. The Zukofskys read the dictionary against the grain, often privileging words' connotations and etymology over denotation and register. When each single word is closely scrutinized for all its properties, a literal reading in the usual sense appears impossible.

Many readers have approached the text with anxiety over its perceived difficulty, focusing on its procedural rigor and apparent lack of transparent meaning at the expense of its playfulness and performativity. As I seek to demonstrate in this chapter, we can also read the Zukofsky *Catullus* for its surface pleasures. I suggest a reading that takes a visceral response to the material surface of language—its shape, sound, and rhythm—as a starting point. Specifically, I consider the Zukofskys' handling of Catullan obscenity as a thematic as well as a formal layer of the text. Obscenity and poetic innovation rely on

similar processes, such as puns and neologisms, and they uniquely converge in the work of Catullus. Rather than delimiting Catullan obscenity as a discrete category of language, the Zukofskys place it at the center of their generative procedure and allow it to suffuse the entire text. As a result, their unique blend of learned pedantry and obscene innuendo presents a particularly well-rounded version of Catullus, who is known for his versatility. The Zukofskys' homophonic procedure generates a new kind of poetic language that backgrounds reference and expression in favor of material and visceral qualities of speech.

In chapter three, I turn my attention to Jerome Rothenberg's concept of ethnopoetics. Emerging in the 1960s, ethnopoetics sought to bridge the gap between ethnography and poetry in presenting indigenous oral literatures from around the world to contemporary American audiences. Jerome Rothenberg, a leading figure of the movement, developed a set of innovative translation techniques based on a perceived affinity between oral literature and the formal experiments of European and American avant-garde.

In his critical essays on ethnopoetics, Rothenberg searches for universal forms and themes across widely divergent cultures and times. However, his translations of oral literature subvert the universalizing tendencies of his critical work and assert the

irreducible difference of the source texts. They do so by emphasizing the moment of performance unique to each text. Rather than providing a transcript of a hypothetical performance, Rothenberg's translations enact a performance of their own with the use of avant-garde techniques adopted from concrete, visual, and sound poetry.

Both Zukofsky and Rothenberg openly acknowledge their debt to Pound, who inspired and influenced their aesthetic theory and practice for much of their respective careers. On one level, then, this study reinforces the widely accepted image of Pound as the most important pioneer of modern translation of poetry. On another level, though, I seek to complicate this narrative by showing that Pound's successors adopted his practices critically and with serious reservations, often transforming them entirely. In other words, I hope to show that Pound's influence on subsequent translators has not been as straightforward as we may have believed.

Further, I must stress that the particular genealogy I highlight is by no means the only trajectory connecting contemporary non-normative translation to the legacy of early modernism. Just as Peter Nicholls argues for alternative lineages in modernist poetry that largely bypass Pound as an influence (150), I suggest that similar genealogies could be uncovered for translation, as many translators working today under a clear influence of the historical avant-garde do not acknowledge or exhibit much affinity to Pound. This is

but one of many directions that future explorations of the history of poetry in translation may take.

CHAPTER 1. IN THE VORTEX: EZRA POUND'S *PROPERTIUS**"Thy Affrighted Soul": Poetic Antiquarianism and the Avant-garde*

The avant-garde is typically characterized as a series of movements that enacted a clear break from tradition in the arts. However, attitudes toward tradition and history differ among avant-garde schools and individuals. On one end of the spectrum are the Italian futurists, lead by T. F. Marinetti, who very vocally and resolutely rejected all tradition and made a concentrated effort to focus solely on the present (and, as the name of Marinetti's movement suggests, the future), both with regard to subject and form. In contrast, Apollinaire, the most prominent poetic and critical voice associated with the French cubists, had a less antagonist attitude toward tradition. Apollinaire's early poems like "Mirabeau Bridge" reveal his talent for closed form and lyrical verse, and the 1913 poem "Zone," often taken to exemplify the spirit of early modernism, offers a mix of the new and old and thematizes the slipperiness of that distinction:

You're tired of this old world at last

.....

You've had enough of living in the Greek and Roman past



Even the cars look ancient here

Only religion has stayed new religion

.....

O Christianity you alone in Europe are not ancient

The most modern European is you Pope Pius X (Rothenberg and Joris 120)

Ezra Pound's relationship to tradition and history was even more complex than Apollinaire's. After emerging onto the scene as a postsymbolist poet, Pound spent the first decade of the twentieth century trying to shake off the inheritance of the Victorian era. His translation projects at the time were shaped by the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti, author of *The Early Italian Poets* (Dennis 29), and by his interest in Romance languages, which he formally studied at the University of Pennsylvania and Hamilton College and briefly taught at Washburn College (Sieburth 1208). Outwardly, Pound ended up rejecting symbolist poetics, railing at every opportunity against the softly archaizing Miltonesque diction of "Rossetti, Pater and Co." (Sullivan 9), but in practice he built an entire poetic program on a fascination with the past which he inherited from his immediate predecessors. Rather than rejecting Victorian antiquarianism, Pound radicalized it. In his translations of the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel, the early Renaissance poet and Dante's contemporary Guido

Cavalcanti, and the short Anglo-Saxon epic “The Seafarer,” Pound searched for ways to bring his poetry into the modern era by digging deeper into the past than the Victorians did.

Not only did Pound reach into obscure corners of the literary canon to bring to light lesser-known works, works he believed possessed certain modern qualities, but he also excavated the history of the English language in search of a new idiom. His intention to rid English of the burden of Milton and Shakespeare by reviving the language of early Renaissance poets such as Thomas Wyatt is well documented. Pound sought to undo the softly mellifluous language of symbolism, the “all legato” music of the “PYE-ano,” as he sarcastically remarked (Kenner 85), by reintroducing archaic vocabulary slanted toward the hard and punchy Anglo-Saxon stratum of English. Later on, this trajectory would lead Pound to his imagist program, which he first articulated in 1912 and which privileged directness and hardness both in terms of sound and rhythm and in terms of theme and imagery, but for the time being, Pound was working on simply disrupting the stale diction of symbolism with “emphatic” and “chaotic archaisms,” as Helen Dennis puts it (37, 29).

Again, the influence of Rossetti is evident here, as the following examples will show. This is how Rossetti translates a sonnet in which Cavalcanti “rebukes Dante for his way of Life, after the Death of Beatrice”:

I come to thee by daytime constantly,

But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find:

Greatly it grieves me for thy gentle mind,

And for thy many virtues gone from thee.

It was thy wont to shun much company,

Unto all sorry concourse ill inclined:

And still thy speech of me, heartfelt and kind,

Had made me treasure up thy poetry.

But now I dare not, for thine abject life,

Make manifest that I approve thy rhymes;

Nor come I in such sort that thou mayst know.

Ah! prythee read this sonnet many times:

So shall that evil one who bred this strife

Be thrust from thy dishonour'd soul and go. (237)

According to Dennis, Rossetti's translations of early Italian poetry bear all the classic hallmarks of Victorian poetics: regular meter and rhyme, liquid sonorities, neo-Platonic idealism (32). Indeed, for the most part, Rossetti's archaisms are the stock archaisms of Victorian poetics and are in fact the default poetic idiom of his time. Aside from the obligatory *thee*, *thy*, and *thine* and verb forms such as *mayst*, only a few words stand out as markedly archaic; the noun form of *wont* and the alternatively spelled interjection *prythee* (typically *pritheee*) may be such exceptions, yet even those words would present little trouble for the reader if they were noticed at all. Pound translates the same sonnet as follows:

I daily come to thee uncounting times

And find thee ever thinking over vilely;

Much doth it grieve me that thy noble mind

And virtue's plenitude are stripped from thee;

Thou wast so careless in thy fine offending,

Who from the rabble always held apart,

And spoke of me so straightly from the heart

That I gave welcome to thine every rhyme.

And now I care not, sith thy life is baseness

To give the sign that thy speech pleaseth me,

Nor come I to thee in guise visible,

Yet if thou 'lt read this sonnet many a time,

That malign spirit which so hunteth thee

Will sound forloyn and spare thy affrighted soul. (*Poems and Translations* 208)

Pound adopts the basic sonnet form but his meter and rhyme is much looser. He is also less interested in soft euphony and more in sonic contrast, such as when he chooses the abrasive *stripped* where Rossetti opts for *gone* to underscore the sense of loss the speaker feels with regard to his friend's mental condition. All these are distinct traits of a modernist move away from late Victorian poetics. As for Pound's ostensibly antimodern archaisms, the reader is much more likely to notice them against the background of contemporary diction (including neologisms such as *uncounting*) and a syntax unencumbered with poetic inversions. Aside from the usual stock of archaic vocabulary, Pound also reaches for older and more obscure words such as *sith*, here meaning *since*. The last line, especially, is punctuated with words long gone from everyday usage: while *affrighted* was still in sporadic use in literature, the Chaucerian *forloyn*, signifying a

recall of the hounds from a wrong scent, was already considered obsolete in the early 1700s (“forloin”).

Richard Sieburth asks the following question with regard to Pound’s archaisms:

Is it simply a vestige of the pseudo-historicist Wardour Street diction of the

Victorians, an elitist desire, as Marxist critics might claim, to steep the

commodity in nostalgia, to fetishize or glamorize the cultural capital of the past?

Or are we to understand archaism as a more modernist strategy, that is, as an

attempt to violently estrange language from its current linguistic norms by

displacing it into an anachronistic—or indeed an a-chronistic—dialect . . .

untimely, out of date, and which thereby calls into question what exactly it might

mean to speak as a “contemporary”? (qtd. in Perloff, *Pound Ascendant*)

Most critics agree that the latter is the case. Dennis concludes that Rossetti in his

translations domesticates the Italian poets, “not by translating into a contemporary

discourse” but by acting as a “collector and purveyor of exotic beauty” (33). In contrast,

Dennis argues that “Pound’s versions of ... Cavalcanti deploy heterogeneous discourses

to suggest both the remoteness and the potential modernity of these poets” (29). As in

many of his other works, Pound’s approach has the effect of presenting history as both

intersecting with the contemporary moment and as irretrievably distant.

This tension between closeness and remoteness and between familiarity and difference has of course been a long-standing subject of debate in translation studies. Venuti sums up Pound's contribution as follows: "The discursive heterogeneity of Pound's interpretive translations, especially his use of archaism, was both an innovation of modernist poetics and a deviation from current linguistic and literary values, sufficiently noticeable to seem alien. Pound shows that in translation, the foreignness of the foreign text is available only in cultural forms that already exist in the target language, some with greater cultural capital than others" (qtd. in Dennis 33). In short, while the purpose of any translation is to make a foreign text accessible to a new audience, a translator may choose to mark the text as other in the process of doing so. However, even this mark of foreignness is an effect achieved with the use of whatever tools and materials are available to the translator in the target cultural space. The defamiliarizing quality of the translations is thus a result of Pound's deliberate use of poetic elements drawn from the margins the Anglo-American tradition – elements either long forgotten (such as archaisms) or only recently introduced (such as, in the case of his Propertius, free verse). Pound's use of archaisms is thus distinctly different from Rossetti's and most consider it a modernist technique. The distinction becomes even more prominent in Pound's later writing, especially his middle *Cantos*, where his chaotic

archaisms function as one of many layers of language ranging from slang to foreign words.

If the first decade of the twentieth century was for Pound a decade of reckoning with tradition, the second decade found him in the midst of a rapidly unfolding modernist revolution. Pound quickly assumed an active role in the avant-garde movement, promoting his imagist poetics, spearheading a vorticist group in London, and finally developing the ideogrammic method of composition as he began to work on his long poem, the *Cantos*. Along the way, Pound's approach to translation continued to evolve alongside his poetry and critical work, so when selections from Pound's translation of the elegies of Sextus Propertius appeared in *Poetry* and in *The New Age* in 1919 (Sullivan 4-6), readers could recognize trademark features of the style Pound developed in his imagist period: free verse and paratactic accumulation of images free of verbal clutter.

Here is the opening of Sequence I:

Shades of Callimachus, Coan ghosts of Philetas,

It is in your grove I would walk,

I who come first from the clear font

Bringing the Grecian orgies into Italy,

and the dance into Italy.



Who hath taught you so subtle a measure,

in what hall have you heard it;

What foot beat out your time-bar,

what water has mellowed your whistles? (Sullivan 115)

Save for a solitary *hath* in this opening, the diction is now entirely free of archaisms. As a result, the work may at first appear more unified in comparison to his archaizing earlier translations, but quite the opposite turned out to be true. Even lay readers could not miss Pound's ostentatious anachronisms ("My cellar does not date from Numa Pompilius ... Nor is it equipped with a frigidaire patent"; Sullivan 119), and those well versed in Latin were baffled by the appearance of dogs and tortoises amid the more customary lyres and singing. Pound regularly reaches for images and allusions which seem to lack an obvious motivation in the source text and cannot easily be accepted under the guise of paraphrase. For these reasons, the translation met with a vicious backlash that put even the confrontation-seeking Pound on the defensive. The critics' first conclusion was that Pound's *Propertius* was a translation ridden with errors, which set in motion a decades-long debate centered primarily on the question of Pound's so-called howlers and his competence in Latin. What complicates matters is that the work indeed contains numerous factual inaccuracies. However, as later critics such as J. P. Sullivan and Hugh

Kenner point out, many moments that were initially labeled as errors are in fact the result of Pound's unorthodox but deliberate translation choices. Still, aside from Sullivan's assertion that Pound's success ought to be measured by the success of the resulting translation as a poem in English, very little has been written about Pound's guiding principles for his *Propertius*, and the question remains as to whether the translation has any. Did Pound follow a method, and if so, what is it? I propose to read Pound's translation against the backdrop of the avant-garde cultural environment in which Pound was steeped at the time. My argument is that Pound adopts the method of collage, which was then being developed by the French cubists and the Italian futurists, to translation. More specifically, Pound's *Propertius* is the product of a methodological collage, a varied blend of well-known and newly invented translation techniques. I will show that Pound, like other artists at the time, sought to challenge the unity of a text or work of art, the established hierarchy of genres, and the nature of representation. Pound's contribution is unique in that it poses these essential questions for translation.

*"Nothing ... but Suicide": Pound's Fatal Howlers*

The critical response to Pound's *Propertius* was swift. The opening salvo came in a letter from the Latin scholar William Gardner Hale, published in the very next issue of *Poetry*

in April 1919. In it, Hale identified “about three-score errors” (52) and famously quipped that “If Mr. Pound were a professor of Latin, there would be nothing left for him but suicide” (55). Other critics followed suit, and Pound felt compelled to defend himself, which he did both publicly and in private correspondence. In his responses, Pound offers some valuable clues as to his intents and methods. He is very clear about the broad outlines of his project and explains his purpose in taking up Propertius as follows: “it presents certain emotions as vital to men faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the British Empire as they were to Propertius some centuries earlier, when faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the Roman Empire” (Sullivan 10). Pound is interested in Propertius’ “new and exquisite tone” (Sullivan 9), particularly his wit and irony, which he seeks to highlight in his translation. As is clear from the following defense of the work, his view of the overall character of Propertius directly informed his approach to the translation: “I certainly omitted no means of definition that I saw open to me, including shortenings, cross cuts, [and] implications derivable from other writings of Propertius” (Sullivan 11). Pound’s stated priorities seem to suggest that his version of Propertius was to be read as an imitation rather than a translation, but early readers clearly understood it as an attempt to translate. In response to his critics, Pound protested that the work was not a translation at all (Sullivan 10) and used the title *Homage to*

*Sextus Propertius* in all subsequent publications (the initial selection in Poetry appeared under the heading “Poems from the Propertius Series”; 291). This, however, was a belated and futile attempt to appease the critics. Regardless of its title, the work bears unmistakable marks of a close translation, which have prevented its readers to easily file it under accepted forms of paraphrase or imitation. For example, even though Pound expressed a clear intent to make the text speak to his contemporaries and address a present-day social situation, he consistently insists on reproducing Propertius’ numerous references to Greco-Roman mythology, which is perhaps the most dated element of the work, and he does so without a hint of irony. In short, the work demanded to be read as a translation but blatantly disregarded many basic conventions of the genre.

To accusations that he was not sufficiently competent in Latin to translate Propertius, Pound responded with a characteristic blend of snideness and evasion: “As if, had one wanted to pretend to more Latin than one knew, it wdn’t have been perfectly easy to correct one’s divergences from a Bohn crib. Price 5 shillings” (Sullivan 11). Pound of course never did so, as this was not the kind of activity that his priorities and working methods required. To put it simply, Pound hardly fit the typical mold of a meticulous translator. He liked to work quickly and with seemingly little regard for factual or historical accuracy. This does not mean, however, that Pound did not concern

himself with details. After all, his mature work of poetry, the *Cantos*, is constructed in large part on his theory of the luminous detail (Kenner 152-53): Pound was infatuated with certain minutia of language, culture, and history. But he was much more invested in the poetic and political resonance of such details than in their factual accuracy, and these priorities likewise informed his translation work.

The position Pound assumed on the question of accuracy has much to do with his conflicted attitude toward the academy. Unwilling to make the compromises that would have permitted him to launch an academic career in the U.S., Pound leaves the academy in 1908 with a great degree of bitterness; however, Pound never entirely abandoned scholarly aspirations. His interest in the medieval troubadours of southern France and in Roman poets like Propertius grew out of his studies as a classics major, and today we might think of many of his translations as recovery projects. As late as 1920, Pound made a bid (unsuccessfully) for a doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania on the strength of his publications (Sieburth 1216). Yet Pound publicly positioned himself in direct opposition to scholars and scholarly approaches to poetry and translation, accusing philologists of “stripping the classics of interest” (Sullivan 9). To put it simply, Pound was vociferously opposed to anything that even vaguely smacked of pedantry. As one of his reviewers correctly, if disapprovingly, points out, “Mr. Pound refuses to make a fetish

of pedantic accuracy” (Sullivan 7). In Pound’s view, the kind of fanatic commitment to detail and factual accuracy that classicists and philologists espoused at the time (Pound called it “the method of multitudinous detail,” which he opposed to his method of the luminous detail; Kenner 152) came at the expense of poetic expression, whereas the scholarly aspect of Pound’s translation work was always subsumed into his guiding concern with poetry. For Pound, poetry was the umbrella activity that sheltered all of his other interests, whether academic or political. Pound viewed the role of translation in those terms: translation for Pound was first and foremost an aide to poetry, and he devoted much of his career trying to wrench classical texts away from scholar-translators and reclaim them for poetry. Further, the scholars’ priorities implied a certain detachment from the concerns of the modern world and an espousal of traditional values, both moral and aesthetic. Whether or not Pound’s view of his academic opponents was fair, and whether or not it had to do as much with personal reasons as with reasons of politics and poetics, the conflict was heated and represented a larger public conflict over the value and function of new art in general and of translation in particular.

As time went on, Pound’s *Propertius* has won its supporters, and the 1934 edition of the work in a separate volume attracted more favorable reviews. In London’s *Spectator*, Stephen Spender writes, “It is the most interesting and the most sustained of

his translations... He has not made a literal translation, but he has created, in his own version, what he finds to be the quality of Propertius. His function then is not merely that of a translator, but, in the most literal sense, that of a creative critic. ... He has invented a Propertius of his own with an English meter and an English diction: this is the highest and most daring function of a translator” (Erkkila 231). J. P. Sullivan adopts a similar standpoint in his 1964 volume *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius*. Decades after Pound’s *Propertius* first appeared, Hale’s shadow still compels Sullivan to take up the question of Pound’s errors. Against Hale’s accusations of sheer incompetence on the part of Pound, Sullivan offers the sensible observation that “Were Pound as ‘incredibly ignorant of Latin’ (in Hale’s words) as to make unintentionally the bloomers Hale accuses him of, he would not have been able to read Propertius at all or get anything like the sense out of his elegies that he actually does” (5). Yet Sullivan makes important concessions, citing “the misspellings of classical proper names, the misreadings of nonfunctional tenses, and the confusing mythological and historical references” as common sources of errors (97). However, Sullivan clearly articulates a difference between Pound’s mistakes and his deliberate translation choices: “It is perfectly true that Pound is careless, almost scornful, about minutiae and that he was guilty of some unintentional mistakes ... but a great many of the examples selected by Hale for examination were deliberate and serious attempts to

produce certain poetic effects” (5). Sullivan measures the success of these choices by the poetic effect they produce in English and on the whole finds the translation successful. In what follows, I will summarize Sullivan’s findings, and then extend his analysis by repositioning Pound’s *Propertius* in the framework of collage.

Sullivan carefully classifies Pound’s alleged errors into several categories. The first distinction he makes is between deliberate choices and inadvertent mistakes. The latter group includes imprecisions in spelling and historical accuracy, several “misreadings of nonfunctional tenses” (Sullivan 97), and confusion with regard to boundaries between poems. Pound worked with a corrupt edition of the text in which those boundaries were often either wrong or not clearly discernible (Sullivan 111). This explains why Pound sometimes seems to combine two separate poems into one. (On the other hand, Pound often quite deliberately omits certain lines or entire blocks of text.) Sullivan quickly dispenses with these obvious errors, arguing that they “neither obscure the logic of a Section nor affect its poetic impact” (97), and turns his attention to the more deliberate peculiarities of the translation.

This first group among these includes moments where Pound foregoes an obvious, denotational translation in favor of a “more suggestive” meaning (97). For example, in Section I, Pound translates the Latin “gaudeat ut solito tacta puella sono,”



(“may my mistress, touched, rejoice in the familiar music,” according to Sullivan) as “the devirginated young ladies will enjoy them / when they have got over the strangeness”

(117). Sullivan suggests that “the plural is easily explained by Pound’s tendency to distill from what is for Propertius a private and particular situation a more general view” (96).

As for the translation of *tacta*, usually translated as *touched*, Pound allows the common phrase *virgo intacta* to suggest a less obvious possibility. Sullivan sees this decision as successful but concludes that the overall effect of this category of choices is mixed. Quite frequently, they prove beneficial to the translation as Pound, mindful of the general direction of the text rather than the particular detail, succeeds in sharpening a dull moment in the source text. However, other such deviations contribute little to the text or indeed obscure it unnecessarily (98). It appears that, in spite of his well-defined overall program for the translation, Pound frequently allows himself to get lost in the charm of a single word, phrase, or image regardless of its context or contribution to the whole.

The next, “really important and interesting category of ‘mistakes’—the apparent ‘howlers’”—takes the above approach a step further (Sullivan 98). Critics see this category as “the most crass examples” of Pound’s errors, but according to Sullivan there is evidence to suggest that they cannot be unintended: “Certain apparent pieces of bad construing may be due not to an ignorance of syntax and concord, but to an attention to

the Latin word-order in the interests of Pound's notion of melopoeia" (ibid.). In other words, these choices are motivated by Pound's desire to follow closely the Latin word order for the sake of sound rather than denotational content. The very first line of Pound's sequence contains an example of this approach: Pound translates "Coi sacra Philetas," instead of the usual "rites of Coan Philetas," as "Coan ghosts of Philetas" (115). Sullivan argues that "the line succeeds rhythmically and the meaning is not changed" (99), but it should also be added that the unusual phrasing calls attention to itself and immediately announces to the reader the fact that Pound wishes to manipulate the text with an openness typically unseen in translations.

Besides rhythm and word order, Pound also notices sound and occasionally makes translation choices on the basis of a homophonic resemblance between certain Latin words. For instance, in Section II, Pound translates "nocturnaeque canes ebria signa fugae" (Sullivan suggests "you will sing of the drunken evidence of a nocturnal escapade") as "Night dogs, the marks of a drunken scurry" (Sullivan 99-100). Sullivan concedes that "by no stretch of the imagination could Propertius have worked for this connotation; the Latin simply does not admit of any ambiguity here, as was conceivably intended in the *tacta puella* of Section I" (100). Still, Sullivan maintains that the result is successful as it results in a "greater vividness of the image" (ibid.).

Finally, Sullivan moves on to “the last and most notable set of mistranslations,” which he subdivides into two groups. The first group is the result of a “collage of sense, which consists in taking a few of the Latin words, ignoring their grammatical connections and offering for the original meaning an impressionistic sentence which fits plausibly to what has gone before.” For example, “multi, Roma, tuas laudes annalibus addent, / qui finem imperii Bactra futura canent” becomes “Annalists will continue to record Roman reputations, / Celebrities from the Trans-Caucasus will belaud Roman celebrities...” (100) (G. P. Goold, in his 1990 prose translation, suggests “Many, O Rome, will add new praises to your annals, singing of Bactra as the future limit of empire; 253-54.) Sullivan explains that Pound removed the words *Roma*, *laudes*, *imperii*, and *Bactra* out of their context and reassembled them to suggest a new meaning for the second line. Sullivan defends the choice on the basis of “the ability of these lines to express more clearly Pound’s concerns, which are an ironic extension and a deepening of the Propertian attitude” (101). In contrast, Sullivan is much less comfortable with the second group of these examples, which, he argues, are more “extreme” and have “a slightly different rationale” (ibid.). Among these is the well-known tortoise moment in Section XII. For the Latin “tale facis Carmen docta testudine quale / Cynthus impositis temperat articulis,” which in Sullivan’s translation reads as “you produce such a poem as the Cynthian god

produces, with his fingers on his artistic lyre,” Pound offers the following lines: “Like a trained and performing tortoise, / I would make verse in your fashion, if she should command it” (ibid.). Sullivan suggests that the passage is the result of the following associations: “*docta*/'learned' and thus 'trained'; *testudine*/the 'tortoise-shell lyre' thus 'tortoise'; *impositis articulis*/'the imposed articulation'; *Cynthus*/'Cynthian' thus 'Cynthia'; *temperat*/'modulate' thus 'tone down,' 'reduce my verse to your level'” (102).

What, then, is the rationale for this technique? We may argue that this example combines several of the techniques described above. The primary approach is the “collage of sense” technique as shown in the “celebrities from the Trans-Caucasus” example but with some of the words also subjected to homophonic substitution as exemplified in the “night dogs” moment. In other words, the motivation for Pound’s choices is considerably more far-fetched, but it is still present and discoverable.

Sullivan admits that “such associations are possible, and can be evoked at will for purposes of amusement; they can become sort of bilingual pun” (102). However, for Sullivan this alone is not sufficient justification of Pound’s approach: “it seems an *arbitrary* technique” (ibid.; emphasis added). As usual, Sullivan seeks additional justification in the success of the resulting expression. This time, however, we can detect a shift in his criteria. Sullivan does not see this moment as a plausible translation but

rather as Pound's own poetry, posing, rather half-heartedly, as translation: "The justification of these passages is that here Pound is concerned to express more of himself, his feelings, his irony and bitterness. The method is purely heuristic, a way of allowing himself a leap into his own poetic concerns to the neglect of Propertius, while retaining a tiny thread of linguistic association with the original" (103).

Is there a way to read Pound's method in this moment of the translation not as "purely heuristic" but as meaningful, as a contribution to Pound's overall approach to his translation? I would like to embrace this moment not as a place where Pound all but abandons translation but as a place where he interrogates its limits. The "tortoise" moment is essential to the entirety of Pound's translation project – rather than undermining it, this moment defines it. Let me begin by examining Sullivan's view that "the only real defense [for Pound's unorthodox choices] is that they produce good poetry or do no major injustice to the vital thought of Propertius" (99). Indeed, Pound himself repeatedly expressed his desire for translations of verse to read as good poetry. The critic and the translator are in agreement on this particular point, but I would like to suggest that their views diverge when it comes to the definition of good poetry. As we saw above, Sullivan consistently adheres to a handful criteria in his assessment of poetic success: a particular choice is justified if it (1) contributes to Pound's overall goal to highlight

elements of irony and social critique in Propertius; (2) sharpens a dull phrase or image; or (3) produces a close approximation of Propertius' Latin rhythms. Applying this set of criteria to Pound's use of collage and puns, Sullivan concludes: "there is no need to understand or even see the bilingual pun[s], although we may derive some nonpoetic pleasure from so doing. Insofar as they produce poetry and express what Pound wants to express, they are justified," but "it is not a deliberate exercise in wit for the classically trained" (104). In other words, Sullivan is willing to accept Pound's puns and collage as long as these techniques produce results that meet his criteria of good poetry. Within this framework, "amusement" or "exercise in wit," while offering a kind of "nonpoetic pleasure," do not have a poetic value, and unless they significantly contribute to the poetic qualities of the text, Sullivan dismisses them as "arbitrary" (23). Pound's poetic reach, however, is wider than that. I believe that the moments in Pound's translation which Sullivan sees as mere "exercise in wit" not only can be accepted as having poetic value, they are what makes this project decidedly modern. We may only think of parallel cerebral activities in the work of Marcel Duchamp, not to mention the various games and puzzles devised by poets such as Velimir Khlebnikov and Tristan Tzara. Sullivan himself makes the connection to European avant-gardes in his discussion of collage in Pound: "The technique is not unlike that of Apollinaire; any stray piece of knowledge or random

image might serve to produce a line. Apollinaire's connection with the Cubists, his appreciation of an object as an assemblage of aspects, makes his technique similar to the method of collage used by Picasso and Braque" (100-01). In the following section, I will expand Sullivan's use of the term collage as I consider its application not only to specific moments in Pound's translation but for the project as a whole. I will also further situate Pound's specific approach to collage in the historical context of the various avant-garde movements operating at the time.

*Expressive Emotion or Cold Intellect: The Uses of Collage*

In Marjorie Perloff's definition, "collage juxtaposes objects, object fragments, and materials drawn from disparate contexts, a process that inevitably alters their individual appearance and signification" (*Dance of the Intellect* 35). In Pound's *Propertius*, we could note the juxtaposition of the ancient and the contemporary at the thematic level, and we could argue that Pound's paratactic accumulation of images imposes a sense of cubist fragmentation. However, it is the free combination of disparate translation techniques that truly lends the work its collage character. Pound's technique alternates moment by moment: relatively unremarkable semantic paraphrase may wander into imitation, or it may be punctuated by elements of nonsemantic translation – places where

the sound or rhythm of the Latin takes precedence over its usually accepted semantic meaning. The amount of text taken into consideration as a unit of translation also oscillates, sometimes quite dramatically. At particular moments, Pound allows single Latin words, taken out of context and viewed as separate fragments, to suggest translation possibilities. A particular word's connotations or its resemblance to another word may be considered. At other moments, it is the semantic clusters suggested by groupings of words (groupings not always determined by the Latin syntax) that produce a line. Frequently, entire lines or stanzas are compressed into a single phrase. In other words, the Latin text is broken down into uneven fragments which are then subjected to a variety of treatments. Sometimes, the result is a striking image or a rhythm that approximates the Latin source; other times, the result is a witty puzzle or a game of chance and happenstance. The procedure is chaotic and its rationale is not immediately apparent. To better understand its effects and implications, we ought to consider Pound's collage in a broader context of his other works and the works of his contemporaries.

*Propertius* was not Pound's first experiment with literary collage. Not long before he began working on the Latin poet, Pound published *Gaudier-Brzeska*, a hybrid-genre document written in response to the death of his friend and collaborator, the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, in the trenches of the Great War in 1915. The work



assembles documents of various kinds with seemingly little regard for genre or chronology. Primary sources are mixed in with accounts retelling episodes from Gaudier's life and manifestos elucidating Pound's imagist-vorticist program. Perloff calls *Gaudier-Brzeska* a "collage in motion" (*Dance of the Intellect* 60) and holds it up as a prime example of Pound's particular version of vorticism, the avant-garde movement Pound spearheaded in England around that time, with Gaudier and Wyndham Lewis as some of his closest collaborators.

Perloff provides evidence which suggests that Pound adopted the idea behind vorticism as well as its name directly from the Italian futurists:

In 1913, Giacomo Balla made a series of charcoal drawings called *Vortice*, and Carlo Carrà published his manifesto 'The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells,' which contains the following passage: ... 'This kind of bubbling over requires a great emotive effort, even delirium, on the part of the artist, who in order to achieve a vortex, must be a vortex of sensation himself, a pictorial force and not a cold multiple intellect.' Here, and in related Futurist documents, are the immediate sources of Pound's *Vortex*. (*Dance of the Intellect* 40-42)

In a further analysis of the concept of the vortex, Perloff finds that "At the heart of all these formulations, we find the same paradox: the circulation occurs around a still center"

(40). In this tension between stillness and motion, notes Perloff, some vorticists have foregrounded one and some the other. Thus Lewis claims that “The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest” whereas Pound “is much less interested in the ‘point’ or axis of the whirlpool than in its energy, its rhythmic vitality” (ibid.). Perloff concludes that Pound’s famous articulation of the vortex as a “radiant node or cluster ... from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing” (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 92) sets Pound apart from “Lewis’ static and stylized hard-edged abstractions” (*Dance of the Intellect* 40) and reveals his close connection to the Italian futurists.

Perloff continues by noting that “It is a curious anomaly that of all the movements of the War period – Cubism, Futurism, Dada, the beginnings of Surrealism – Vorticism was the only one that engaged in no experiment with collage. For all their talk of a new non-representational art, neither the painters like Lewis nor the sculptors like Gaudier seem to have called into question the integrity of their medium” (48). Here Perloff strongly suggests that Pound’s collages inevitably lead to questions about the status and function of writing and translation, perhaps even of language in general. This however, is not a foregone conclusion. Christine Poggi argues that not all collage inevitably interrogates its medium, pointing out an essential difference between the French and the Italian pioneers of the technique. In her insightful treatise on the origins of the collage,

Poggi identifies Gino Severini as the first Italian artist to experiment with the technique (171). According to Poggi, Severini benefited from his time spent in Paris and his friendship with Picasso and especially Apollinaire, who first talked to him about the practice of including real objects in paintings (ibid.). However, Severini, as Poggi explains, used collage to different ends than the cubists: “Unlike the Cubists, who maintained a more self-conscious and often ironic attitude toward the use of collage elements, Severini sought expressive intensity from the collision of disparate kinds of objects and representations on his canvases” (172). This is in keeping with the proclamations by his fellow futurists advocating for “great emotive effort,” “a vortex of sensation,” and “a pictorial force and not a cold multiple intellect.” The cubists, on the other hand, “had severed their links to immediate sensation, choosing instead to emphasize the conventional and conceptual aspects of representation” (Poggi 171). According to Poggi, there are subtle but significant differences even among the French pioneers of the new technique with regard to how they use their materials:

Both Braque and Gris were attentive to the inherently expressive and iconic properties of the materials they used, whereas Picasso tended to use materials in ways that ran counter to their natural properties or everyday significations. Unlike Picasso, for example, Gris most often used newspaper to represent newspaper

itself. ... Picasso's collages, on the other hand, establish nonhierarchical oppositions, so that no single form or means of representation emerges as superior to or truer than any other. (19)

Contrary to Perloff, then, Poggi argues that among the earliest practitioners of the technique, collage was used in a variety of ways and for different purposes. While Picasso uses collage to not only attack the privileged position of painting, but also to question the stability of representational signs, others, especially futurists like Severini, adopt collage mainly for its expressive potential.<sup>1</sup>

If, as Perloff argues, Pound took his cues from the futurists as he developed his vorticist program, was then his primary goal “expressive intensity”? Sullivan certainly thinks so, claiming a greater intensity and vividness of imagery as the primary quality that redeems Pound's unconventional translatorial choices. Pound himself defends his translation by writing, “The tacit question of my ‘Homage to Propertius’ is simply: ‘Have I portrayed more emotion than Bohn's literal version or any other extant or possible strict translation of Propertius does or could convey?’” (Sullivan 8). However, as I have argued above, Sullivan's own analytical framework fails to account for some of the puzzling moments in the translation, the moments which Sullivan dismisses as arbitrary, concluding that “Pound, contrary to some of the charges of his detractors, did not always

free himself from unnecessary entanglement with the original. ... Pound ... sometimes let himself be led by the suggestions of the Latin text into mere word play and phrasemongering” (23). Sullivan believes these moments mar the overall success of Pound’s “creative translation” because they do not contribute anything to its expressive intensity. In fact, Pound’s methodological collage undermines the work’s thematic and stylistic unity. What, then, is the purpose of such collage?

The prominent Poundian critic Donald Davie was similarly puzzled by the formal and stylistic disunity in Gaudier-Brzeska, calling the work “incoherent” (Perloff, *Dance of the Intellect* 33). Perloff retorts by saying that the apparent incoherence “is not without motivation” (ibid.) and argues that “Pound’s ‘incoherent’ portrait of the artist is an assemblage of fragments that we must piece together, rather as we do when we look at Cubist or Futurist portraits” (49). Along the same lines, Pound’s incoherent translation of Propertius “is not without motivation.” For Sullivan, the motivation lies in using any translation technique available to produce a successful poem in English. But in order for the text to be accepted as a translation, its structures must also be seen as sufficiently motivated by the source text. In this regard, Sullivan is satisfied with establishing the minimum necessary link between the Latin source and Pound’s English, enough to satisfy himself that the work fulfills his definition of translation. However, while we may

successfully argue that the work fits the accepted limits of translation, it is equally important to point out that the work openly and repeatedly challenges those limits with its collage of translation techniques. It requires an active participation on the part of the readers, who are asked to reflect on the purpose and function of the text as they “piece together” the overall composition. The translation openly taunts its readers with its apparent discrepancies, inviting them to consult the Latin source and interrogate the text’s status as a translation, which is precisely what readers have done ever since the earliest critics began enumerating the work’s “errors.” Therein lies the motivation for Pound’s methodological collage: in its divergent mix of translation techniques, Pound’s *Propertius* interrogates the integrity of its medium, the medium of literary translation.

To extend Perloff’s argument, then, we must add that while Pound certainly borrows ideas from the futurists for this articulation of the vorticist program, in practice, specifically in the case of his *Propertius*, he comes closer to the ironic and arbitrary approach to collage as practiced by Picasso. Pound’s “collage in motion” sets into motion *Propertius*’ images and themes as it appropriates them for its time, but, even more importantly, it also sets into motion the medium of literary translation. According to Poggi, “The invention of collage put into question prevailing notions of how and what works of art represent, of what unifies a work of art, of what materials artists may use”

(1). The collage elements in Pound's *Propertius*, rather than contributing to the text's expressive intensity, allow Pound to test the limits of translation, not by resorting to imitation but by adhering to a set of translation procedures in which sound and rhythm – the material properties of language – matter as much as semantic content. The results may at times appear puzzling, but it is in these moments of intellectual play that the translation becomes reflexive, interrogating its own processes and its purpose.

### *Conclusion*

According to Poggi, soon after Picasso began to experiment with collage, his work began to bear marks of “his recognition that plastic signifiers, like those of writing, bear an arbitrary rather than substantive link to their signifieds. This led him to explore the traditional codes of representation in order to undermine their seeming transparency through a systematic play of formal and material oppositions” (5-6). One example of Picasso's method is his approach to color. Poggi notes that “Picasso exploited collage materials so that color became independent not only of form, but also of any true relationship to the depicted object” (15). The colors in many of his collages are simply the colors of the found materials rather than the colors of the objects these materials are meant to represent in the composition. According to Poggi, “This is consistent with

Picasso's arbitrary and highly imaginative use of materials and with his recognition of the arbitrary and therefore mutable character of representational signs" (16-17). Despite the resemblance between Picasso's use of materials and Pound's arbitrary choices of linguistic equivalents in his translation of Propertius, it would be going too far to suggest that Pound understood language as arbitrary and linguistic signs as mutable. Even as he continues to experiment with formal indeterminacy and fragmentation in the *Cantos*, Pound never abandons an instrumentalist view of language as a tool for naming outside reality. As Nicholls argues, "Perhaps the trickiest thing about the *Cantos* – and especially about these late sections – is that a radical fragmentation of syntax belies the drive toward the ideational coherence on which Pound's model of social order increasingly depends" (143). Further, Perloff notes Pound's lyric poetry of his later period, including his translations, "oddly becomes less rather than more imagistic, Vorticist, or ideogrammatic" ("Pound Ascendant"). Still, his translation of Propertius, produced during a period when Pound was the most closely connected to the continental avant-gardes, goes against received notions and established procedures of literary translation as it exceeds concerns for expressive intensity and thematic cohesion and ventures into an intellectual play of disparate translation techniques. In doing so, Pound's *Propertius* set into motion a particular trend in modernist translation that reverberates all the way into



the present. While Pound's legacy as a translator continues to be debated, it is beyond dispute that the moments of "arbitrariness" in his *Propertius* and elsewhere have led his successors to develop new, decidedly modern approaches to translation. Two such examples will be the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2. PEDANTRY AND PLAY: THE ZUKOFSKY *CATULLUS**A Serious Endeavor: Translation and Difficulty*

In *The Practice of Poetry*, a popular collection of creative writing exercises, Charles Bernstein proposes the following procedure: “Take a poem, or part of a poem, in a foreign language and translate it word for word according to what it sounds like in English. . . . Try this with a language you know and then with one you don’t know. Don’t use a dictionary, just rely on what your ears hear and go from there. . . . Use slang and other nonstandard English words. Let the syntax take care of itself” (126). Nowadays one can find similar instructions on eHow, and a leading journal of poetry in translation *Circumference* features a regular section on homophonic translation, as the procedure is known, with contributors of such divergent poetic persuasions as Jen Hofer and Billy Collins.

This range suggests that homophonic translation has gained wide acceptance among poets. In contrast, the work that ushered the procedure into our literary consciousness more than forty years ago continues to occupy an ambivalent place in critical scholarship. The work in question is Celia and Louis Zukofsky’s translation of the first-century BCE Latin poet Catullus. Published in 1969, the Zukofsky *Catullus* is

generally regarded among poets as the pivot between earlier, modernist pioneers, most notably Ezra Pound, and poets associated with the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, including Bernstein himself, who subsequently popularized the procedure.<sup>2</sup> It has also found its advocates among scholars, especially Mark Scroggins, who places the project in the context of Louis Zukofsky's exploration of non-referential poetic language (*Poem of a Life* 313-16, 368-75; *Louis Zukofsky* 331). In the fields of translation studies and classical scholarship, however, the Zukofsky *Catullus* is still seen as a "problem" or an outright "failure" (Wray, "Cool Rare Air" 52; Vandiver 534). I see at least two reasons for this resistance to the project. Put simply, the work announces itself as a *difficult translation*, a collusion of two qualities that place it on the margin of recognized genres and interpretive practices.

Let me consider these two qualities for a moment: its status as translation, and as difficult. First, the project quite unambiguously presents itself as a translation, and it has been the subject of intense battles on those grounds. At times, the translation appears to read as nonsense, and many readers are clearly challenged by the Zukofskys' radical reevaluation of the role of denotational content in the text. For example, poem 116, the last complete poem in the *Catullus* oeuvre, closes with the following lines: "Contra notes tell

you I stay to evade you – mused arm, sling too / that fixes our straits, your doubts  
supplicate them.”

The linguistic preoccupations that underlie the Zukofskys’ approach to the translation are laid out in the brief, versified “Translators’ Preface”: “This translation of Catullus follows / the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his / Latin – tries, as is said, to breathe / the ‘literal’ meaning with him.” As is often the case when translators attempt to elucidate their method, the statement is both a clue and a red herring. To begin with, while the prefatory note explicitly mentions “the sound, rhythm, and syntax,” a reference to the semantic relationship between the source text and the translation is conspicuously missing, as Steven Yao points out (225). Further, Daniel Hooley observes that syntax is more often than not completely disregarded (56). Rhythm, on the other hand, is followed closely in that the translation matches the syllable count of each verse, representing a “full-scale assault on the time-honored norms of what constitutes a ‘meter’” (Scroggins, *Louis Zukofsky* 39). But as Robert Conquest notes, “The syllable count is often wrong, through lack of attention to the Latin rules of elision” (57). This is likely because Louis knew no Latin and Celia’s own command of the language was limited. Regardless, the syllable count poses a significant constraint, one of the self-imposed rules of the Zukofskys’ game.

An additional “Poet’s Preface,” published separately, sums things up more directly: “This version of Catullus aims at the 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” (qtd. in Scroggins, *Poem of a Life* 316). The approach to the translation, as described here, is a natural extension of Louis Zukofsky’s lifelong preoccupation with sound and music and stems in part from his understanding “that the composing poet as often as not attends first and foremost to the music of the verse, and worries about the ‘meaning’ later. Before poems are marks on paper ... and even before they are expressions of meaning, they are sequences of human breath modulated into patterns of sound” (Scroggins, *Poem of a Life* 374). Despite its focus on the sound and rhythm of language, however, the translation never abolishes semantic correspondence. Rather, the constraints of sound and syllable count compel the Zukofskys to radically expand their vocabulary as they search for words that approximate the Latin sound and resonate with Catullus’s Latin semantically at the same time. As I hope to show, the work relies on unconventional uses of the dictionary in the pursuit of its particular brand of literalism. In doing so, it calls into question a central tenet of the Western tradition of translation: the concept of literal interpretation as the most basic, determinate, and easily discerned reading of a text. I contend that the Zukofsky *Catullus* exposes the artificial

constructedness of literal translation and offers a critique of fluency-based models of translation.

Second, in addition to being a translation, the Zukofsky *Catullus* has consistently been perceived as difficult. The work is the result of a highly structured generative procedure we could only call pedantic. But the Zukofskys' pedantry, by which I mean their persistent adherence to procedure and constant attention to minute detail, is not the humorless and rigid attitude of classical philologists against which Ezra Pound positioned his own pioneering projects in modernist translation. While Pound strove to negate the pedantry that guided translation practices at the time, the Zukofskys embrace their pedantic proclivities as they devise the parameters for their witty translation game. Still, the project's unflinching rigor, along with its ambitious scope, has compelled critics to read it against the background of serious works of difficult modernism at the exclusion of the work's humor, playfulness, and performativity. Leonard Diepeveen identifies difficulty as a central term in the public battle over art between modernists and traditionalists in the first half of the twentieth century (15). Over the course of the interwar period, Diepeveen observes, difficulty gradually passed from being considered a trend to being seen as "the established *property* of what had become canonical texts" (ibid.). Consequently, difficulty became a cultural gatekeeper guarding access into high

art; as such, it is equated with seriousness and “implies a host of behaviors and attitudes” which include “eschewing ‘easy,’ nonproblematic pleasures” (224). However, if the Zukofsky *Catullus* is to be read as difficult, it is precisely because of its interest in the simple pleasure of wordplay. I suggest that the Zukofsky *Catullus* falls into the category of difficult works alongside James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* or Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* for which the critical apparatus devised to assimilate modernist difficulty appears insufficient. As Diepeveen points out, these works may have achieved canonical status yet continue to frustrate readers who attempt to read them seriously. Nonetheless, if difficulty is a matter of reception, as Diepeveen argues, other interpretive approaches to such texts ought to be possible.

With this in mind, how might the work be read differently if we recast it in a broader context of parallel activities in lowbrow genres and popular culture? From the long tradition of macaronic verse, such as Jonathan Swift’s “Apud in is almi des ire / Mimis tres Ine ver re quir re” (“A pudding is all my desire, my mistress I never require”) (qtd. in Scroggins, *Louis Zukofsky* 36), to homophonically generated subtitles for foreign-language music videos on YouTube, such as the viral “Benny Lava” (Buffalax), popular culture is permeated with genres that relish in wordplay and nonsense, treated in a lighthearted and humorous way. While a “serious” critical analysis of such works is

possible, the primary focus in these forms of punning is on immediate enjoyment, on the humor that results from the collision of sonic likeness and semantic discrepancy between two languages. In my reading of the Zukofsky *Catullus*, I will adapt Steven Shaviro's theory of the cinematic body to suggest a reading of the Zukofsky *Catullus* that takes a visceral response to the material surface of language – its shape, sound, and rhythm – as a starting point. Specifically, I will consider the Zukofskys' handling of Catullan obscenity and point out similarities between the linguistic processes that undergird Catullus's use of obscenity and the procedure the Zukofskys develop to generate the text of their translation. Much like homophonic translation, obscenity frequently relies on wordplay, bringing the material qualities of language, particularly its sound, into sharp focus. Rather than delimiting Catullan obscenity as a discrete category of language, the Zukofskys place it at the center of their generative procedure and allow it to suffuse the entire text. As a result, their unique blend of learned pedantry and obscene innuendo presents a particularly well-rounded version of Catullus, who himself is known for his unparalleled versatility. In attempting to “breathe” with Catullus and read “his lips,” the Zukofskys' homophonic procedure generates a new kind of poetic language that backgrounds reference and expression in favor of material and visceral qualities of speech.



*“Unbelievable Crankiness”: The Genesis of the Project*

As Scroggins points out, “Catullus was in many ways a natural choice for Zukofsky.”

Like Catullus, Zukofsky was a “quintessentially urban poet” as well as somewhat of an outsider in his metropolis (*Poem of a Life* 373). Above all, Zukofsky’s formal and thematic range, with its mix of densely allusive, learned verse and bawdy ephemera, is well suited to Catullus’ poetry and explains why Zukofsky would have been drawn to it (ibid. 374). Among classical poets, Catullus is highly regarded for his formal variety, tonal range, and attention to craft. Best known as a writer of elegiac love lyrics, Catullus also produced biting epigrams laced with obscenity as well as short epics in which he displays great erudition and familiarity with the Greek canon. Indeed, Catullus’s variety has led critics to privilege certain genres of his writing over others at different points (Gaisser 1). David Wray notes that for much of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, interest in Catullus’ biography seemed to overshadow his poetry, and he was read as a Romantic poet of intense emotions, a poet in love (*Poetics of Roman Manhood* 2). The middle of the twentieth century saw a renewed interest in Catullus’s longer, more erudite poems (Skinner 1) and brought him into the modernist context of a poet writing in a time of crisis (Wray, *Poetics of Roman Manhood* 34). Still, according to Wray, Catullus “was to be ... not a playful, performative and technically brilliant

wordsmith ... but rather an intensely personal maker of a meaning” (ibid.). To this day, Wray continues, many critics arbitrarily privilege certain modes of Catullan writing over others, with his love lyrics receiving the most attention (ibid. 35). In contrast, the Zukofskys’ self-imposed constraints compel the translators to push the limits of poetic language in ways that match Catullus’s performativity and technical brilliance.

Long among the most popular Latin poets, Catullus has attracted a diverse group of English translators over the years, and several translations of Catullus’s complete works were in wide circulation when the Zukofskys set out to work on their version in 1958. To offer a glimpse of the background against which the Zukofsky *Catullus* appeared, I will present examples from two other translations. Francis Warre Cornish’s prose translation, first published in 1913, came out as part of the popular Loeb Classical Library series containing all of the major classics. The Zukofskys kept a revised 1924 edition of this text by their side as they worked on their versions (Catullus MS). Frank Copley’s translation, published in 1957, features a mix of free verse and metrical forms and is notable for unconventional typography, colloquial speech, and dialect. In choosing prose and free verse respectively, both translators reflected the translation trends of their time.

As I have suggested above, the Zukofsky *Catullus* is the product of a highly controlled working process. The procedure was as follows: Celia neatly copied the Latin text onto the left-hand pages of a series of standard spiral-bound university notebooks, skipping every other line. She then provided dictionary equivalents of each word in the alternate lines, producing a rough but detailed interlinear crib. Louis followed by working out a draft or a series of drafts of each poem on the even-numbered lines of the facing page, leaving the odd-numbered lines for a clean copy of the final version (Catullus MS). Their working arrangement is worth noting, as it contributed to the shape of the final product—a fact that has not escaped critics' attention, although their evaluation of the process varies. Yao refers to their procedure as “rigorously principled” (220), whereas Alan Brownjohn deems it “an enterprise of almost unbelievable crankiness” (151). Louis Zukofsky reflects on his own pedantic tendencies in a letter of 24 April 1958 to the poet Cid Corman: “dogged as ever, I’m doing ‘em in order.” Zukofsky is referring here to his decision to make his way through the complete works of Catullus systematically from beginning to end, following the established numerical order of the Catullan manuscript. The work, however, was intermittent, and the translations emerged in clusters over the span of some eight years.

As we will see below, the translation evolves as the Zukofskys progress through the project, sometimes gradually and sometimes by leaps. The different stages of evolution across the project can primarily be attributed to a series of shifts in emphasis with regard to phonetic and semantic correspondence. As Scroggins writes, “Zukofsky would try harder and harder to hew to the sound of the Latin, producing less familiar sorts of English ‘sense’” (*Poem of a Life* 316). The evolution, according to Yao, can be read as the Zukofskys’ enactment of their gradual departure from the traditional precepts of translation (231). It must be noted, however, that the movement away from a semantically based to a sound-based translation is by no means linear, and the various forms of homophony across the book, rather than forming intermediate steps toward a final goal, suggest a variety of possible ways to carry out homophonic translation. Moreover, the Zukofskys never abandon their attention to semantic correspondence; rather, they continuously redefine it as homophony begins to significantly constrain the project.

The evolution is best illustrated with a few examples from across the collection. The first few poems are relatively unremarkable. Here is the opening of poem 1, a dedication:

Cui dono lepidum nouum libellum

arido modo pumice expolitum ? (Green 44)

F. W. Cornish's 1924 prose translation of Catullus's dedication reads:

To whom am I to present my pretty new book, freshly smoothed off with dry  
pumice-stone? (3)

Nearly thirty years later in his 1957 edition of Catullus's complete poems, Frank O.

Copley offers a more vernacular, free verse translation:

who'll I dedicate my pretty new book to  
  
all fresh and  
  
shiny and  
  
just off the shelf? (1)

A decade later, the Zukofskys open with a fairly straightforward semantic translation:

Whom do I give my neat little volume  
  
slicked dry and made fashionable with pumice?

As unexceptional as these lines may appear, they already begin to establish the Zukofskys' procedure of counting syllables, foregrounding sound, and seeking to redefine the rules of semantic correspondence. For example, *little volume* is a clear homophonic echo of the Latin *libellum*. The phrase *made fashionable*, on the other hand, is semantically motivated by the Latin *modo*. Celia's crib, which Louis uses as a

guideline, suggests *recently* (Catullus MS), but Louis appears to also think of *modo* as the root of our *modern* or in relation to the French word for fashion, *mode*.

Poem 8 arrives a full two and a half years after poem 1 (Catullus MS), with markedly different results:

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,

et quod uides perisse perditum ducas. (Green 52)

Cornish's translation reads:

Poor Catullus, 'tis time you should cease your folly, and account as lost what you see is lost. (11)

Copley's translation, once again, is characteristically informal:

Catullus, it's too bad, but don't be silly

you see it's gone; well, gone is gone, that's all. (9)

The Zukofsky translation, following the syntax of Catullus's Latin, returns the lines to a kind of rhetorical formality:

Miss her, Catullus? don't be so inept to rail

at what you see perish when perished is the case.

In poem 8, homophony becomes a consistent guiding principle. The Zukofskys begins to reach for less expected lexicon, but the semantic motivation is usually still obvious and the syntax remains fluent and coherent.

Interrupting the established pattern of “doing ‘em in order” from poem 1 to poem 116 and subsequent fragments, Louis decided to reserve poem 64, Catullus’s longest, for the end of the project. Poem 64, the epic of Peleus and Thetis, is thus the last translation the Zukofskys completed. It opens as follows:

Peliaco quondam prognatae uertice pinus  
 dicuntur liquidas Neptuni nasse per undas  
 Phasidos ad fluctus et fines Aeeteos,  
 cum lecti iuuenes, Argiuae robora pubis,  
 auratam optantes Colchis auertere pellem  
 ausi sunt uada salsa cita decurrere puppi,  
 caerula uerrentes abiegnis aequora palmis. (Green 64)

Cornish’s translation reads:

Pine-trees of old, born on the top of Pelion, are said to have swum through the clear waters of Neptune to the waves of Phasis and the realms of Aeetes, when the chosen youths, the flower of Argive strength, desiring to bear away from the

Colchians the golden fleece, dared to course over the salt seas with swift ship,  
sweeping the blue expanse with fir-wood blades... (99)

Copley's translation here borrows the spondees and dactyls of Catullus's Latin:

On Pelion's top one time were born the pines  
(men say) that sparkling swam the Neptune-waves  
to Phasis' floods and confines Aeetean,  
when picked young men, oaks of the Argive youth,  
the golden fleece of Colchis prayed to steal,  
down the salt deeps dared race their nimble craft,  
and swept the bright blue sea with piney palms. (69-70)

Likewise, by the time Zukofsky arrives at poem 64, homophony reaches a level at which readers reciting the poem aloud could hear the Latin in their own English delivery:

Pelion could one time prong its top worthy keel in pines  
ancestor lugged clear to Neptune in his sea purr on thus  
to Phasis what flood tides on the fees of Aeetes,  
came elect young ones ace, Argive eye robe awry pubes,  
aureate time hoped on there's Colchis afar to raid pelt home,  
asea soon what deep salt sough hit at the careerer poop in



cerulean currents abeyant knees a fir oar palm ease

Syntax breaks up considerably, with phrases sliding from one to the next without precise boundaries; certain words could be read variably as part of two adjoining phrases.

Vocabulary now oscillates freely from archaic to mundane to bawdy: the distinctions among different levels of diction are effectively erased. Semantic correspondence is fully subordinated to homophony but not in the least ignored. A reader familiar with the original or another translation will recognize references to pines, the sea, oars, and other details. Other semantic correspondences are more oblique but no less resonant. For example, the startling lexical concoction *awry pubes* can be interpreted as an allusion to the crew's youthful virility. As we can see from the three excerpts, the project's tight constraints allow, perhaps even encourage, a considerable amount of play. The tremendous variety that the Zukofskys' procedure generates across the arc of the project meets the challenge of Catullus's own technical prowess and formal range.

All three translations present a different Catullus as they pursue their divergent goals. Cornish's translation is written in pedestrian prose fitting the utilitarian purpose of reaching a broad lay audience. Exemplifying a philological approach to translation in the early twentieth century, Cornish focuses on semantic accuracy, and his translation is indeed known for being factually reliable (France 503). On the other hand, it shows little

attention to the finer details of Catullus's style. For example, the important diminutive *libellum* in poem 1 is simply translated as *book*. At the same time, the translation also contains remnants of Victorian poetic usage (*'tis, pine-trees of old*). Still, it represented a particular breakthrough as it moved away from the long-standing practice of paraphrase and from Victorian ideals of poetic form traditionally imposed on classical translation.

In contrast, Copley is less interested in literal accuracy than in endowing Catullus with a distinctly modern voice. For his translation, Copley borrows from the poetic language of the modernist generation immediately preceding his own. In the shorter poems, which he translates in free verse, Copley uses a thoroughly colloquial idiom and often breaks long Catullan lines into shorter ones. Occasionally, Copley embellishes the translations with "marked typography" (Drucker 96), as in poem 17:

Colonia

OCO

LOH

nee

yah

you gotta bridge, a nice Long Bridge

an ya wanna havva dance

on yer nice long bridge, but,

How ya Gonna Dance

(yeh, howyagonna dance) (20)

In his introduction, Copley invokes E. E. Cummings as a model (xiv). We can see Cummings' influence clearly in the opening lines of the above example, but the fact is that Copley rarely subjects the poems to this sort of treatment. More frequently, he relies on nonstandard spelling to evoke colloquial speech and dialect, as he does in the latter half of the excerpt. Here, the similarity with Cummings is less obvious. Cummings's use of typography is part of a larger manipulation of language; he is more interested in neologisms than colloquial speech. Where Cummings turns to nonstandard spelling simply to represent slang and dialect, the result is much denser than Copley's:

oil tel duh woil doi sez

dooyuh unnurs tanmih eesez pullih nizmus tash,oi

dough un giv uh shid oi sez. (20)

Like Cummings, Copley's Catullus is lively and playful; unlike Cummings, Copley is always fluent.

The longer epics are translated in meter, as in poem 64 quoted above, rendered in iambic pentameter inflected with Catullus's Latin meters. Hoping to conjure a more

somber tone in these poems, Copley turns to archaisms and syntactic inversions, which enrich the stylistic variety of the translation but compromise its modernizing direction. Overall, Copley's strategies may appear bold for a classical translation, but they do not significantly challenge the limits of poetic language at the time.

In contrast to the semantically accurate translations by Cornish and Copley, the Zukofskys' translation completely upends the received tradition of translation. Scroggins notes that while we may find a precedent in the occasional gestures toward homophony in Pound's "Seafarer," "for the most part the Zukofskys' procedure is entirely new, and indicates a radical shift from earlier conceptions of the goal of a poetic translation" (*Poem of a Life* 374). The project reflects Louis Zukofsky's lifelong interest in formal constraints and various forms of wordplay, charting a new territory in the author's own poetic development toward non-referential, material forms of language. In focusing on Catullus's sound and rhythm, Scroggins argues, the translation "allows the English-speaking reader ... to experience an essential aspect of Catullus's poetry that a more conventional translation would ignore altogether" (ibid. 375). Further, the gamelike features of the translation foreground Catullus's playfulness and performativity without sacrificing his learned allusiveness.

*“The Entire Dictionary”: Redefining the Literal*

Given the curiously persistent legibility of the Zukofskys’ homophonic translation, some critics, such as Hooley or André Lefevere (*Translating Poetry*), go to great pains trying to reconstruct the semantic content of the work and show how the translation semantically corresponds to its source text. Burton Hatlen, in particular, provides a detailed and generous interpretation of several excerpts from the Zukofsky *Catullus*, pointing out the rich play of possibilities in New Critical fashion (345-64). His effort to validate the project by subjecting it to a close reading may convince readers that the translation “makes sense,” but such a painstaking and meticulous reading process has obvious limits. Not even Hatlen is able or willing to extend his analysis beyond a few carefully selected moments of the text. More importantly, though, his anxiety to legitimate the translation in terms of one-on-one semantic correspondence compels Hatlen to abandon his initial argument about Zukofsky’s material use of language. Hatlen’s argument in this direction deserves our attention. Over the course of his career, Hatlen suggests, Zukofsky departs from the use of language as a vehicle for naming reality: “in seeing words too as material objects, Zukofsky opens up a radically new way of thinking about language” (345). Hatlen argues that the Zukofsky *Catullus* is a direct application of the translator’s material, non-referential approach to language and praises the translation for its “refusal

... to pander to our fear of language, our hunger to escape from words into ‘meanings’”

(347).

The Zukofskys’ prefatory note to the translation seems to confirm Hatlen’s observations, as it omits any direct reference to semantic meaning: “This translation of Catullus follows / the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his / Latin.” However, it does include a mention of the literal when the translator expresses his intention to “breathe the ‘literal’ meaning” with Catullus. How is such translation thinkable? How does one read and translate literally without recourse to outside reference? Hatlen correctly notes that the quotation marks around the word signify a desire to redefine its meaning, adding that “the Zukofskys remind us that the ‘littera,’ the letter, is an aural and visual shape, not a ‘meaning.’ In practice, the Zukofskys force our attention back toward the ‘literal’ by treating each of Catullus’s words as a sequence of syllables” (348). In a letter to Cid Corman dated 7 May 1958, Zukofsky puts it simply: “I don’t want paraphrase. I wanta transliterate.”

Extending Hatlen’s observations, I argue that the Zukofskys appropriate the concept of the literal to also redefine the function of semantic correspondence in translation. The idea and practice of literal interpretation has long been ensconced in the Western hermeneutic tradition as the most basic and transparent interpretation of a text.

According to Maria Tymoczko, this fact carries serious repercussions: “The history of Western European translation privileges in implicit literalism that has been used to disseminate the empires of religion, secular rule, and commerce throughout the last five hundred years” (8). The practice of literal interpretation has been thoroughly naturalized, but upon closer look, it becomes clear that a literal reading is always contingent on a shared body of references and a utilitarian theory of language. Far from simple or straightforward, literal interpretation is a set of heterogeneous practices rendered de facto invisible through repetition. In short, its processes and results are curiously disconnected from its widely accepted definition and function. By extension, the same can be said of translation models based on literalism.

Reflecting the prevalent trend in homophonic translation today, Bernstein instructs poets not to use a dictionary and instead rely on sound alone. The Zukofskys of course did use a dictionary and in fact made it indispensable to their procedure, appropriating what Lawrence Venuti calls the lexicographical approach to translation: “Today most translators see themselves as maintaining at the very least what I shall call a lexicographical equivalence, a semantic correspondence to the foreign text based on dictionary definitions” (“Translation, Intertextuality” 162). However, dictionary definitions are a double-edged sword. Mindless reliance on the dictionary as ground zero

of literal equivalence, without a consideration of the words' usage and connotations, often leads to blatant mistranslations and is considered a hallmark of the novice or incompetent translator. The Zukofskys exaggerate such an approach to lexicographical equivalence to the point of parody. They read the dictionary against the grain and draw from its margins, so to speak: obscure and archaic meanings of words and their etymologies are all fair game when it comes to choosing the right word. As Guy Davenport puts it, "The first implication of Zukofsky's game is that diction as every other poet has known it must go by the by. He needs the entire dictionary to supply him with words" (366).

The Zukofskys dismantle the concept of transparent literalism from within by taking the literal at its word: when each single word of a text is considered in isolation, not just for its denotational meaning but also for its sound, connotations, and etymology, a literal reading in the usual sense suddenly appears impossible. Daniel Tiffany labels this "the paradox of extreme literalism," arguing that "the most faithful translation is also unintelligible" (190). Or as Mark Scroggins puts it, "The stringency with which Zukofsky adheres to his transliterative template ... accounts for the strangeness, the opacity, of the resulting poem." As a result, "the verse becomes not transparent meanings but words visible" (*Louis Zukofsky* 276).



As I have suggested, the Zukofsky *Catullus* can be read as a parody of transparent literalism in translation. Lawrence Venuti argues that the dominant aesthetic of translation in the twentieth century highly favored fluency (*Translator's Invisibility*). Fluency, which relies on stylistically unmarked English, was (and often continues to be) regarded as the high mark of good translation. By glossing over the difficulties that are presented by the translation process, fluency renders translation transparent. Readers readily accept a transparent translation as literally accurate. In their translation of *Catullus*, the Zukofskys turn a critical eye toward the tradition of classical translation and its readers. In their own “dogged” approach to translation, the Zukofskys send up the pedantry of classical scholars and conservative critics who insist on semantic accuracy without interrogating its basis.

It is hardly necessary to mention that concepts of lack and absence have long dominated translation discourse. The traditional focus on fluency attempts to deemphasize the bodily, material aspects of language in favor of presenting the text's logos. The body of the text is thought to be lost in translation. The Zukofskys refuse the view of translation as a pale shadow of a more real, more perfect but absent original. As Scroggins points out, “Poetry is for Zukofsky largely a somatic affair, a matter of the poet's making sounds through his physical organs” (*Poem of a Life* 374-75), and the

Zukofskys apply the same uncompromising principles to translation. Rather than representing an absent body, the Zukofskys' translation presents itself as a body in its own right by embracing procedures that emanate from the material qualities of language. The Zukofsky *Catullus* asks its readers to look *at* the words rather than *through* them and to embrace the pleasures of sound, rhythm, and wordplay.

*“A Musical Game” for a “Lazy Afternoon”: Choosing Between Depth and Surface*

Louis Zukofsky certainly anticipated a backlash to his exercise in corporate translation with *Catullus*. As he writes in a letter of 13 July 1961 to Corman, “The scholars I know will have at it with all that they won’t see – but that doesn’t matter.” Wray has suggested, moreover, that “Zukofskian ‘translation’ seems almost engineered to provoke fright and outrage” (*Poetics of Roman Manhood* 41). Indeed, critical response following the book’s publication was sharply divided. Critics such as Hugh Kenner and Cid Corman known for championing Zukofsky’s work wrote guardedly positive reviews (Hatlen 350), but their voices were drowned out by the highly charged and emotional tone of those who came out against the publication. Poet Alan Brownjohn called the translation “knotted, clumsy, turgid and ultimately silly” and “surely one of the oddest misuses of talent ever undertaken by a poet of distinction” (151). Historian and poet Robert Conquest

commented, “The Hun is at play—worse still, at work—among the ruins” (56). Finally, Burton Raffel, himself a translator of classic works of literature, called the book mostly “unreadable” and wondered who the intended audience might be (444, 440).

The critics’ vitriol betrays a widespread attitude toward translation that regards any significant deviation from the norm as fundamentally flawed, not only conceptually and aesthetically but also ethically. Hale’s famous response to Pound’s *Propertius*, discussed in the previous chapter, set the precedent. Such visceral reactions, typically manifesting as anger or laughter, are not exclusive to translation, however. Diepeveen documents a rich history of similar responses throughout the twentieth century, identifying them as expressions of anxiety over modernist difficulty: “the general public and artists alike recognized that laughter and rage were related, and that they arose, explosively, from difficult art” (65). In this larger context, the reaction to the Zukofsky *Catullus* echoes not only the attack on Pound’s *Propertius* but also responses to the 1913 Armory Show, the riotous premier of Stravinsky’s ballet *The Rite of Spring* in the same year, the publication of T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* in 1922, or the various iterations of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* throughout the 1930s. The visceral responses to certain strains of modernism arose in part out of a mismatch between what a text seemed to demand of its audience and the audience’s own expectations of how a text ought to

signify. Following the canonization of difficulty after 1945, art scandals decreased in frequency. In recent decades, fewer works and events have elicited the sort of visceral response commonly seen in the first half of the twentieth century, although there are some notable exceptions: Diepeveen points to publicly displayed and publicly funded visual art as the last remaining target attacked with regularity (232). Another category of art still capable of scandalizing its audience on purely formal grounds is, I would argue, literary translation.

Though easily dismissed in light of Zukofsky's canonization as a major experimental poet, the reviews by Brownjohn, Conquest, and Raffel nonetheless show traces of an honest attempt to make sense of the Zukofsky *Catullus* and reveal valuable hints pointing toward alternative readings of the work. Let me begin my analysis of the critics' visceral responses by returning to Conquest's striking metaphor: "The Hun is at play—worse still, at work—among the ruins." I believe Conquest's invocation of the symbol of the Hun reveals more than a desire to cast out Zukofsky as a malicious outsider. The Huns, of course, figure in the Western imagination since late antiquity as the most violent of barbarians. The word *barbaros*, coined by the Greeks around the seventh century BCE and later adopted by the Romans, referred to all outsiders – literally people who could not speak Greek (Pagden 15-16). The word has an onomatopoeic

origin, being an imitation of the babble of an incomprehensible tongue. The barbarians did not just pose a communication problem, however, as their inability to speak the language of the metropole was equated with lack of access to the cultural and political structures that the ancient Greeks and Romans equated with civilization. Conquest's comment implies that Zukofsky the Hun, in translating Catullus into his barbarian tongue, is rendering the classical poet virtually unintelligible, an action that threatens translation's critical function in preserving cultural memory. To suggest that "our Catullus" (Wray, *Poetics of Roman Manhood* 4) may in fact be barely recognizable to us is to bring the entire foundation of Western civilization into question.

No wonder, then, that the anxious critics found the difficulty of the Zukofsky *Catullus* threatening. In an effort to overcome their anxiety, they struggled to place the work in a familiar context. For instance, several of the critics raised the possibility of reading the work lightly, as a casual punning game. In the same breath, however, they pronounced this possibility foreclosed on account of the project's palpable ambition. Brownjohn remarks, "A few curiosities in this vein would have been agreeable as a kind of mad literary exercise" (151), and Conquest adds, "It might even be argued that to try to do what he claims to be doing is not in itself a harmful way of spending a lazy afternoon. But to be given it seriously ... is to feel a chill wind from the abysses of unreason."

Raffel follows up in a similar vein: “As a musical game, it has a kind of organized charm—but Zukofsky does not offer it as a musical game, he claims much more for it” (444). We can see these comments cohere into a narrative: the Zukofskys’ project would have been acceptable, and even enjoyable, as a witty game if only it were presented in smaller doses and a different context. But due to its enormous scale and ambition, the work must be taken seriously and therefore calls for a different sort of reading, one that puts an unbearable strain even on the most persistent reader.

Brownjohn and Raffel were quick to reject their own suggestion to read the Zukofsky *Catullus* lightly, but perhaps the idea is not so far-fetched. According to Diepeveen, modern writers and critics made a consistent effort to reinvest difficult texts with a similar potential for immediate pleasure, such as when T. S. Eliot famously proposed that “genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood” (qtd. in Diepeveen 126). It is clear, however, that “Eliot did not reject logical understanding; his use of the word ‘before’ suggested both a temporal trajectory of understanding and different levels of reading” (ibid.). While it was not necessary for the reader to grasp the semantic content of the poem in order to enjoy and on some level even understand it, Eliot’s statement implies that properly trained critics should be able to go further: “Professional readers, under this scheme, could not be content with the passivity

suggested by the above quotation” (ibid.). Further, while claims for interpretation beyond rational understanding were commonplace, arguments in favor of “formal pleasures of pure sound” (127) were much less frequent: “when it was offered as the *only* pleasure a text might offer, this kind of argument was made primarily for works that were publicly acknowledged to be at the far edges of artistic innovation, works like those of Stein and the later Joyce” (128).

Most attempts to determine a coherent semantic content in these works are either thwarted or partial at best, and in any case incommensurate to the effort required of even the most astute readers. In light of this, interpretation centered on the enjoyment of the sonic properties of language seems to emerge as a last resort. However, perhaps the problem is not that these works are simply too difficult or too innovative but that their difficulty is of a different order. George Steiner makes an important distinction in this regard between what he terms tactical and ontological difficulty. Tactical difficulty is a result of “the poet’s aim to charge with supreme intensity and genuineness of feeling a body of language” (34). Spurred by a desire to renew tired ordinary language, the poet invents new forms of expressions. This, according to Steiner, was the practice of the early futurists, dadaists, and surrealists (ibid.). The meaning of such poetry may be highly indeterminate, but the poems still uphold the contract between the work and the reader of

ultimate intelligibility. Ontological difficulty, on the other hand, “confront[s] us with blank questions about the nature of human speech, about the status of significance, about the necessity and purpose of the construct which we have ... come to perceive as a poem” (41). While tactical difficulty may delay understanding or multiply possibilities of signification, ontological difficulty threatens to foreclose any understanding whatsoever (45). According to Steiner, we are dealing with an instance of self-generating language: “it is not so much the poet who speaks, but language itself” (46). We cannot read such writing with the goal of determining its meaning; instead, as Steiner suggests, we “bear witness to its precarious possibility of existence in an ‘open’ space of collisions, of momentary fusions between word and referent” (ibid.).

This is the mode of writing embraced by Zukofsky and subsequently by the language poets who sought to deemphasize the subjectivity of the speaker and move away from the romantic concept of language as expression. Such writing is often generated with the help of a constraint-driven procedure such as homophonic translation. What the Zukofsky *Catullus* shares with Stein and Joyce is that the material surface of language, not its semantic meaning, functions as the central organizing principle in these works. Therefore, some form of interpretation which foregrounds surface is called for,



not as a last resort but as a reading that approaches these texts on their own terms: a littera reading.

*“Pleasure and More Than Pleasure”: Reading Through the Body*

When Raffel complains about the Zukofsky *Catullus* that “most of this book is unreadable; most of this book was not meant to be *read*, in any realistic sense of the word” (444), his comment contains a kernel of truth. The work will quickly frustrate any sustained effort at a close reading in search of semantic coherence. In what other sense of the word, then, might the work be *read*? Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus observe a recent turn in literary criticism away from symptomatic reading, a mode of interpretation “that took meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter,” and toward “modes of reading that attend to the surfaces of texts” (1-2). Steven Shaviro presents such a mode of reading with his theory of the cinematic body. While arising specifically out of film theory, Shaviro’s theory can certainly be applied to literary scholarship and is particularly well suited for texts which foreground the material surface of language. Shaviro observes that the traditional preference for depth over surface goes hand in hand with an inclination to approach depth with a critical distance. He writes, “On one hand, theory seeks compulsively to reproduce the experiences of

which it is the abstraction. In film viewing, there is pleasure and more than pleasure ...

On the other hand, however, theory derives its particular form from its endeavor to separate itself from these founding impulses. It tries to assume as great a distance as possible from its object" (10). Rejecting the dominant semiotic and psychoanalytical approach to film criticism as "largely a phobic construct" (16), Shaviro turns his attention to the prominent place of the body in cinema, not as a representation defined by lack and absence with regard to its referent, but as a fullness of presence.

Shaviro proposes "a theory of cinematic fascination" (24), a passive, precognitive state that focuses on the material image itself rather than what it represents. Such a theory, of course, poses significant challenges when it comes to generating new readings of film. In practice, Shaviro ultimately seeks a balance between his desire to remain a passive spectator and his "analytic, intellectualizing impulses" (10) as he delves into a close interpretation of various films. Still, Shaviro's attention on the body remains constant, and it manifests in two ways: on a formal level, Shaviro studies the bodies of images, that is, the material surface of the cinematic image; on a thematic level, he focuses on the human body as presented in cinema, particularly the gratuitously excessive bodies of zombie horror movies, sexually explicit films, or slapstick comedies. As will become apparent in my reading of obscenity in the Zukofsky *Catullus*, these two uses of

the body are closely linked. In what follows, I will pursue a reading of the Zukofsky *Catullus* that moves *through* the body rather than past it.

Aside from an anxiety-ridden anger and laughter, the text may elicit another kind of visceral response: the surprise and amusement triggered by wordplay. The correlative to the cinematic image is not the poetic image, whose sensory impact is contingent on semiotic processes, but the material surface of language, namely its sound and rhythm, as well as the visual presentation of language in the form of writing. Puns are as self-indulgent and gratuitous as they are humorous. They proliferate meaning to the point of nonsense, not as lack of sense but as an excess of meaning (see Rieke). As puns accumulate with increasing frequency across the arc of the Zukofsky *Catullus*, semantic content disintegrates through sheer proliferation, and formal properties of language become foregrounded. The incongruous mishmash of registers, clashes of archaisms against slang, and the sonic distortions that result from the overlay of the Latin and the English all invite laughter. Laughter, as spontaneous and innocent as it may appear, reveals underlying cultural assumptions on the part of the reader, assumptions which ultimately call for analysis and interpretation. In the following paragraphs, I will relate the laughter-inducing sonic fireworks of the Zukofsky *Catullus* to the politics of accented speech.

In his well-known remarks on translating the classics, specifically Homer, Matthew Arnold articulates some of the basic precepts of fluent translation: “when, in order to render literally in English one of Homer’s double epithets, a strange unfamiliar adjective is invented . . . an improper share of the reader’s attention is necessarily diverted to this ancillary word, to this word which Homer never intended should receive so much notice; and a total effect quite different from Homer’s is thus produced” (244). Arnold instead advocates a style free of neologisms as well as historicisms: “the translator of Homer must not adopt a quaint and antiquated style in rendering him, because the impression which Homer makes upon the living scholar is not that of a poet quaint and antiquated, but that of a poet perfectly simple, perfectly intelligible” (273). When he argues that a translation of Homer ought not to call attention to itself but rather aspire to come across as “perfectly intelligible,” Arnold acts out a fantasy of Homer’s total assimilation into the British culture of Arnold’s time. Let us consider the immigrant experience, with which both Celia and Louis Zukofsky were intimately acquainted, as an analogy (Scroggins, *Poem of a Life* 13, 142). Assimilation, even when it is desirable and encouraged, has its limits. Even if nearly total assimilation could be accomplished, the foreign accent always remains as an indelible marker of otherness. Accented speech elicits visceral responses of various types depending on context. Foreign accents are often

perceived as “cute,” akin to baby talk, or as erotic; alternatively, they are experienced as menacing. (Actors in popular cinema have been typecast to draw such responses since the beginning of sound film: think, for example, of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich on one end of the spectrum and Bela Lugosi and Peter Lorre on the other.) On the other hand, imitations of accented speech are almost always meant to be humorous. These various reactions, often entirely subconscious, underpin the cultural construction of otherness and its role in the twin discourses of translation and immigration.

Louis Zukofsky, being the first child in his family born on U.S. soil, was familiar with the immigrant experience and as an aspiring poet and critic went to great lengths to absorb all aspects of American literary culture. “Breathing” with Catullus, the translator attempts to closely imitate the Latin poet’s speech. Donning the role of the cultured native vis-à-vis the Roman barbarian, Zukofsky imitates, as if to mock, the speech of the Latin poet whose language he does not understand. The resulting transliteration of the Latin with the use of English vocabulary can be heard in at least two ways: as English, inflected with Latin grammar and seemingly deaf to the nuances of register and connotations, and as Latin, pronounced with a thick American accent. Neither the poet nor the translator come across as competent speakers of the other’s language as they appear to chant in unison the text of the Zukofsky *Catullus*.

*“Fit Incest in Palimpsest”: The Generative Potential of Obscenity*

As I suggested above, the body as the material surface of language and the human body as a theme are closely linked in the Zukofsky *Catullus*. This becomes especially apparent in the case of Catullan obscenity, which ranges from invective to sexual innuendo to direct references to sexual acts. On a semantic level, obscenity far exceeds its denotative force and elicits a visceral response, whether it be outrage or titillation, and as such functions as one of the layers of the text that encourage a reading through the body. On a formal level, Catullan obscenity is often a locus of incredible stylistic inventiveness. Catullus is aware of the innovative possibilities offered by this particularly dynamic stratum of everyday speech and uses obscenity to its fullest potential in the service of poetry. As I will show, the Zukofskys’ translation procedure is well suited to Catullus because it mimics the patterns of innovation that drive the constant renewal of obscene terminology in everyday speech.

We can learn a good deal about translators and their era from their approach to the various forms of obscenity in Catullus. As could be expected, Cornish’s version is thoroughly sanitized. Copley, despite his relaxed, colloquial style, treads softly around certain subjects, most notably homoeroticism. (In contrast, he seems rather more

comfortable with portrayals of incest.) When it comes to sexual invective, Copley offends only with his quaintness, such as when he translates *Mentula*, a word denoting the penis, which Catullus uses as a derisive nickname for one of his rivals, as *Dickie-boy*. (Here, too, Copley falls short of his model Cummings, who enjoyed writing expressive erotic verse, sprinkled characteristically with a generous dose of puns and neologisms.)

Copley's slang seems outmoded, partly because the slang of any era quickly loses its edge and partly because of Copley's self-imposed limits of decency. Louis Zukofsky bypasses the problem by allowing his homophonic method to suggest entirely new expressions. In his version, *Mentula* is *Meantool*. In poem 89, Zukofsky uses *queue* as a verb signifying an act of incest. This is how the poem opens in Latin:

Gellius est tenuis: quid ni? cui tam bona mater

tamque ualens uiuat tamque uenusta soror

tamque bonus patruus tamque omnia plena puellis

cognatis, quare is desinat esse macer? (Green 194)

Copley treads lightly around the issue, translating as follows:

“poor Gellius is SO thin!”

why wouldn't he be?

what with a mother so Good to him

and a husky, handsome sister, too,

and my! how kind dear Uncle has been!

and the place is full of his cousins and aunts

how—but How?—could he help being thin? (106-07)

Despite its fractured syntax, the Zukofskys' translation is rather more direct:

Gellius is thin why yes: kiddin'? quite a bonny mater

tom queued veil lanced *viva*, tom queued Venus his sister

tom queued bonus pat 'truce unk,' tom queued how many plenum pullets

cognate is, query is his destiny *emaciate*?

The repeated expression “tom queued” is rife with possibilities. It is a homophonic translation of *tamque*, a word which in Latin means *and so* and bears no semantic resemblance to the Zukofskys' phrase. We see the Zukofskys playing a game, creating a kind of puzzle in which words chosen primarily by sound semantically resonate with various other moments in the poem. *Tom* could be read as an allusion to peeping Tom, while *queued* bears a resemblance to *screwed* as well as *queered*, besides alluding to an act of lining up or waiting in line, perhaps in reference to the serial and promiscuous nature of Gellius's incestuous habit. Additionally, *queue* is a French colloquialism for the penis.



Homophonically generated coinages of this sort permeate the text. Zukofsky also quite freely uses existing words like *queer* or *homo*, although not necessarily as direct invective. In fact, invectives as well as graphic references to sexual acts are usually less direct than they appear to be in Catullus, woven as they are along with the rest of the text into a web of puns and connotations. On the other hand, Zukofsky inserts sexual innuendo in places where none exists, at least not at first sight, in the Latin of Catullus. In poem 22, for example, Catullus ridicules Suffenus, a rival poet, without recourse to obscenity. Catullus mocks Suffenus for insisting on new papyrus and fancy accouterments, rather than the cheaper palimpsest, for lavish editions of his prolific but poor verse. Following is an excerpt from the Latin:

idemque longe plurimos facit uersus.  
 puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura  
 perscripta, nec sic ut fit in palimpsesto  
 relata: cartae regiae, noui libri,  
 noui umbilici, lora rubra membranae,  
 directa plumbo et pumice omnia aequata. (Green 66)

Copley translates as follows:

but then again he beats us all

at turning verses out  
 I bet he's got ten thousand  
 maybe more all finished off  
 and not (you know) the way we do  
 put down on any handy scrap around  
 no, sir! it's royal bond, brand-new,  
 new bosses, purple thongs, and sheepskin  
 ruled with lead, and pumice  
 to polish the whole job off. (23)

Finally, here is the Zukofskys' version:

his damn cue's long reams of preoccupied verses.  
 Put his goal at ten thousand, some decked out plural.  
 Poor script, eh? not so it fit incest in palimpsest—  
 reallocated: quires, regal eye, new cylinders,  
 new little umbiliform roll ends, rubric lore, thongs,  
 membranes ruled plumb o (my) all equated with pumice.

For Zukofsky, the word *palimpsest* is a portmanteau of sorts, containing itself as well as *incest*. The word *incest* finds no motivation elsewhere in the line, which is otherwise a

very close homophonic rewriting of the Latin. It is as if Zukofsky read *palimpsest* twice to get to his result.<sup>3</sup> The trick allows him to maintain a semantic connection with the source text: Suffenus refuses to place his inferior, incestuous verse in a palimpsest. It also attunes the reader to a network of sexual innuendo which has been operating in the poem all along, from “his damn cue” as a possible reference to a phallus to the polysemic “thongs, / membranes.”

Zukofsky does not artificially circumscribe sexual themes and the use of obscene language. He also has no need to make them determinate. The previously mentioned *awry pubes* from poem 64, for instance, can point to the virile youth of the crew, illustrate the crew’s excitement over the upcoming overseas exploit, or the suggestion may be homoerotic. As many scholars pointed out, Catullus’s sexuality cannot be placed within our contemporary categories of gender performance, sexual orientation, and sexual practice. Working with puns, neologisms, and open-ended innuendo in addition to contemporary slang, Zukofsky is able to present his readers with a delightfully raunchy Catullus without straightjacketing the poet’s sexuality inside contemporary categories.

Obscenities are of course already a particularly dynamic and innovative area of language use. The same goes for invectives, and the two areas frequently overlap, as they do in Catullus. (Scroggins mentions that Zukofsky was clearly drawn to Catullus’s

invective, since he too had written lines such as “Send regards to Ida the bitch” and planted names of adversaries into the later movements of his long poem “A”; *A Poem of a Life* 373). Ever determined to propel his poetic language into new areas, Zukofsky regularly relies on some of the same methods of innovation we see in these lowbrow genres and everyday speech: puns, shifts in semantic meaning, and neologisms. In other words, obscenity and poetic innovation rely on similar processes, and they uniquely converge in the work of Catullus. By bringing the processes of obscenity to the center of their generative procedure, the Zukofskys thoroughly integrate the various forms of invective, sex slang, and innuendo into the text of the translation. Catullus was a poet of many modes, from the obscene to the elegiac to the erudite, and readers and translators of different eras have often shown a clear preference for one mode over the others. Thanks to its generative procedure, which erases distinctions among levels of diction and dramatically opens up the semantic field of the text, the Zukofskys’ translation deftly moves among these modes and at times embodies them simultaneously with particular success.

Breathing with Catullus, the Zukofskys develop a translation procedure that is a logical extension of Louis Zukofsky’s somatic approach to poetry. In the first half of this essay I argued that the Zukofskys parody a lexicographic approach to translation as they

investigate each and every word not only for its semantic content but, above all, for its shape, sound, and rhythm. With their idiosyncratic version of literalism, the translators dismantle the traditional concept of literal interpretation as the most basic reading of a text and the foundation of fluency-based models of translation. Executed with a dogged pedantry necessary to its success, their constraint-driven procedure enables the Zukofskys to shift away from language as expression to language that speaks itself, that is, language that is autonomous and self-generating. In doing so, the Zukofskys are able to bypass the prevailing Romantic focus on Catullan biography and psychology; instead, the procedure generates an obscure and densely allusive Catullus but also a bawdy and playful one.

Innumerable readers have approached the text with anxiety over its perceived difficulty, but as I have sought to demonstrate in the second half of this essay, we can instead read the Zukofsky *Catullus* for its surface pleasures. I specifically focus on Catullan obscenity as a formal and thematic layer of the text that elicits a visceral response. I argue that the Zukofskys' procedure mimics the protocols by which obscenity regenerates itself in everyday speech. By placing it at the center of their procedure, the Zukofskys allow Catullan obscenity to permeate the translation. In place of a biographical Catullus, we find a learned, visceral, and playful Catullus.

## CHAPTER 3. TOTAL PERFORMANCE: JEROME ROTHENBERG'S

## ETHNOPOETIC TRANSLATIONS

*"A Massive Return to 'Instinct'": The Emergence of Ethnopoetics*

One of the characteristic features of the historical avant-gardes was their determination to dismantle the traditional boundaries of genre and form that constrained poetry as well as other arts. Hence Walter Lowenfels' statement that poetry is "the continuation of journalism by other means" (Rothenberg, "Total" 203) or Ezra Pound's characterization of the *Cantos* as a "poem including history," to quote just a few examples. The impetus behind these and other similar propositions was not only to open up poetry to new topics and styles but also to radically change the way we read other genres of writing such as journalism or history.

As the era of high modernism came to a close, a new generation of poets emerged in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s which sought to reclaim the inheritance of the early avant-garde as well as to connect with contemporary avant-garde movements outside the U.S. Among them was Jerome Rothenberg, who, with the help of numerous collaborators and contributors, pioneered the field of ethnopoetics. At the intersection of ethnography, literary history, poetry, and experimental translation, ethnopoetics was a double recovery

project: it drew parallels between indigenous oral literatures and the poetry of the early avant-garde in an effort to make both speak to the concerns of contemporary American audiences. With the breakup of old colonial structures, western modernity was in a state of crisis, and ethnopoetics became one of the many cultural movements that “captured the spirit of the 1960s with its restless search for alternatives to Western modes of conduct, belief, and understanding” (Christensen 141). In revolt against the “mindless mechanization” (Rothenberg, “Ethnopoetics & Politics” 9) of society, unchecked environmental devastation, and the racist underpinnings of colonialism, ethnopoets argued for “a *massive* return to ‘instinct and intuition’” (Michael McClure qtd. in Rothenberg, *Technicians* xvii) and a recovery of the “primary human potential” (Stanley Diamond qtd. in Rothenberg and Rothenberg, *Symposium* xi).

With these objectives in view, ethnopoetics places a troubling emphasis on identity over difference, on common origins, and on the universal over the particular. In his essays and commentary, Rothenberg is preoccupied with finding universal themes and forms of expression across widely divergent cultures and times, from aboriginal Australia to modern Europe, arguing for the central place of the irrational, the visionary, and the collective in the art of traditional indigenous societies and suggesting affinities between this art and the European and American avant-gardes. However, I contend that underlying

this overtly universalizing discourse is a radical particularism, which has its sources in Rothenberg's aesthetics and his understanding of language and becomes evident in his poetry and translations.

Even though the amount of commentary surrounding ethnopoetics is immense and integral to the project, the core of ethnopoetics lies in the translations. Rothenberg and his collaborators recognized early the central role of translation for ethnopoetics and stated clearly the need for developing new translation approaches to better suit their goals. For instance, Rothenberg and the poet-anthropologist Dennis Tedlock launched the journal *Alcheringa* (1970-1980) in part "to provide a ground for experiments in the translation of tribal/oral poetry & a forum to discuss the possibilities & problems of translation from widely divergent cultures" (Tedlock and Rothenberg). Rothenberg's own translations were some of the most innovative, involving a broad spectrum of techniques adopted from concrete, visual, and sound poetry. In an effort to capture commonly underrepresented features of oral performance in a written translation, Rothenberg developed a set of methods that he, perhaps with a bit of dadaist bravado, called "total translation." In this essay, I argue that Rothenberg's translations of Native American oral literatures subvert the universalizing tendencies of his ethnopoetics and assert the irreducible difference of the source texts. They do so by emphasizing the unique moment



of performance: rather than providing a transcript of a hypothetical typical performance in the source culture, they enact a performance of their own, a performance that is visibly inscribed into a specific context of the target culture.

*“Primitive Means Complex”: Ethnopoetics and Primitivism*

Although Rothenberg generally avoids using the term “primitive” except to problematize it with statements such as “primitive means complex” and “there are no primitive languages” (*Technicians* xxv), ethnopoetics must be considered within the context of primitivism, by which I mean the widespread interest among modern artists and writers in the art and literature of traditional non-literate societies.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon has been well documented in the domain of the visual arts. The “discovery” of primitive art by European artists and art critics at the beginning of the twentieth century came in the wake of increased interest in the cultures of Africa, Native North America, and Oceania following dramatic colonial expansion into those regions. The field of ethnography emerged out of the same context, and objects previously considered curiosities now became reclassified as either “primitive art” or “ethnographic specimens,” depending on the disciplinary perspective (Clifford 358). But primitivism is not just a matter of the visual and plastic arts, and Rothenberg is aware of his precursors:

Tristan Tzara, who did an unpublished 'anthologie nègre' at the time of Zurich Dada was one; Blaise Cendrars, who published an anthology of African myths & texts (largely translated as prose) was another. Khlebnikov, as a third great name of early modernism, both gathered & commented on Slavic oral & folk poetry as a kind of popular/magical basis for the new *za-um* language he was creating circa 1914. ("Ethnopoetics and Politics" 7)

As a consequence of the disciplinary split between art and ethnography, indigenous cultural artifacts began to receive different treatment in different contexts: "In art galleries, non-Western objects were displayed for their formal and esthetic qualities; in ethnographic museums they were represented in a 'cultural' context" (Clifford 358). In other words, while art history and criticism preferred to treat individual works as masterpieces whose timeless appeal needed no further contextualization, ethnography presented objects as inextricably bound to a specific culture and its practices. James Clifford concludes that to present "tribal objects" as art is to strip away their cultural context (ibid.), such as the fact that unlike western art, indigenous art is not an autonomous practice. According to some western scholars, what is known as primitive art is in fact so inseparable from other cultural practices as to be non-existent (MacGaffey

217). This results in a conflict of categories with far-reaching implications for poetic translation of oral literatures.

The irony of mainstream literary translation, especially the translation of indigenous oral literatures, is that it tends to typify its sources as representative of their respective cultures rather than uniquely individual phenomena with a complex and possibly conflicted relationship to their own traditions. As Kate Sturge argues, poet-translators who take up oral literatures “position themselves as a source of knowledge, as opposed to a source of poetic pleasure, and must therefore be judged by more than aesthetic standards alone” (126). Refusing to be judged by aesthetic standards alone, the historical avant-gardes turned to primitive art in their effort to change the social role of art in the west (Flam and Deutch 5). Following their lead, ethno-poetics aims to present indigenous oral literatures as aesthetic and ethnographic phenomena at once, arguing that western poetry, rather than being a limited, autonomous, “useless” practice, is capable of intervening in “scientific” fields such as linguistic and cultural anthropology.

Ethno-poetics responds to the perceived disregard for aesthetics in much of ethnography up to that point and to the critical and political naïveté of many previous poetic translations of oral literatures.

The call of ethnopoetics to change the way we read (and write) ethnography was generally well received by anthropologists, as it resonated with major shifts in the field of anthropology itself. Rothenberg's anthologies *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia & Oceania* (1968) and *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas* (1972) coincided with a flurry of activity that led up to the publication of *Rethinking Anthropology*, edited by Dell Hymes, who himself published in the field of ethnopoetics (1972), and *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Asad 1973), the first major pieces of evidence signaling a series of reflexive turns in anthropology which would culminate in the late 1980s, when anthropologists turned their attention to the "poetics and politics" of their own writing.

From the late 1980s onward, as avant-garde activity in poetry seemed to stagnate under the hegemony of the Language school and primitivism as a phenomenon in twentieth-century art became subject of intense scrutiny (Flam and Deutch 17), ethnopoetics lost its momentum as a movement. Following the controversial Museum of Modern Art 1984 exhibition, "'Primitivism' in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern," primitivism was rethought in terms of cultural appropriation and opinions on the matter have since run the gamut from categorical denunciation to vigorous affirmation. If Hal Foster speaks of primitivism in terms of "the ideological

nightmare of a great art inspired by spoils” (386), Sieglinde Lemke warns that “equating artists and colonists is inadequate.... Primitivist modernism ... undermined the opposition that the colonialist enterprise was predicated upon” (412). The difference of opinion often hinges on whether primitivism is believed to reaffirm traditional western values or subvert them (Foster himself makes a distinction between what he sees as affirmative cubism and subversive surrealism). Rothenberg sums up his position with regard to primitivism in the opening paragraph of his preface to *The Symposium of the Whole* (1983), a collection of critical writing that informs ethnopoetics:

When the industrial West began to discover – and plunder – “new” and “old” worlds beyond its boundaries, an extraordinary countermovement came into being in the West itself. Alongside the official ideologies that shoved European man to the apex of the human pyramid, there were some thinkers and artists who found ways of doing and knowing among other peoples as complex as any in Europe and often virtually erased from European consciousness. (xi)

Rothenberg clearly sees in primitivism an effort to subvert dominant western paradigms through a rediscovery of alternative, non-western perspectives.

*“The Kingdoms of the World”: Cultural Universalism, Linguistic Particularism*

However, if Lemke argues that the view of primitivist art as complicit in the colonial project is inadequate, she is quick to add that “the overly enthusiastic response to primitivism that celebrates the European appreciation of ‘primitive expressiveness’... is equally inept. To discover in primitivism evidence of a ‘universal’ or ‘trans-historical essence’ is to disavow important cultural differences” (412-13). Rothenberg’s utopianism and his search for universals of culture are indeed problematic, both on theoretical grounds and as an aesthetic proposition. In *A Seneca Journal*, he voices his position in a poetic form:

ethology the visions  
of McClure & Chomsky all  
the speakers of deep tongues point  
a route this generation  
will be privileged to assume  
a universal speech  
in which the kingdoms of the world  
are one  
the kingdoms of the world are one (3-4)

Rothenberg's reference to Noam Chomsky and his concept of deep structure serves as a reminder that the search for universals was a significant driving force in a number of academic disciplines at the time, from Chomsky's generative linguistics or Lévi-Strauss' structuralist anthropology. (Similarly, the presupposition of linguistic universals underlay the concept of equivalence as it was then developed in the newly emergent field of translation studies; see Venuti, *Translation Studies Reader* 147).

Rothenberg's universalism manifests on multiple levels. As some critics have remarked, the ambitious scope of Rothenberg's anthologies (all of North America in *Pumpkin*; the world in *Technicians*) runs the risk of obliterating the cultural specificity of the included material (see, for example, Bevis 701). This risk is further compounded by Rothenberg's constant search for affiliations across cultures, especially in the extensive commentary sections of his anthologies. Thirdly, Rothenberg's anthologies obfuscate the historicity of their material by collecting and juxtaposing sources recorded by westerners at different points in time across several centuries. Let me briefly dwell on this particular aspect of Rothenberg's approach, namely his management of history and temporality.

As Frederick Garber notes,

Ethnopoetics argues for a global history ... peopled with practitioners of perennial activities, a community steeped in recurrent acts of communion. The shaman's

up-front chanting is one of those acts that make history a series of repetitions, but that series is without sequence since the acts are always the same; history, in this reading, never progresses. (45)

The anthologies thus reinforce the view held by the early avant-gardes that “Primitive art had no known historical development and seemed to exist in a kind of temporal vacuum” (Flam and Deutch 3). Rothenberg places a great emphasis on what he perceives as an archaic quality of the texts, which however has more to do with their social function than their age (*Technicians* xxxi). The only historical moment that is of real concern for Rothenberg is the present, as is evident from the following statement: “I see the process in time as non-linear & multichronic ... though synchronic and simultaneous in consciousness: i.e. the mind bringing together a large number of elements from culturally & spatially separated chronologies” (qtd. in Garber 44). This is an elaboration of Pound’s statement that “*all ages are contemporaneous in the mind*” (qtd. in Perloff, “The Contemporary of Our Grandchildren” 138). Rothenberg’s anthologies produce precisely this effect of synchronicity and simultaneity of multiple histories, and translation plays a major role in this. Rothenberg warns against “temptations ... to keep-it-old” (*Pumpkin* xvi), against a false reverence that invariably locates the presumed cyclical time of traditional cultures somewhere in the past rather than the present. His translations, and



those of many of his collaborators, succeed in bringing the works into conversation with the immediate present, but it is the present of the receiving culture. To what degree and how are the source texts part of a living tradition within their original contexts? If ethnopoetics is in any way guilty of appropriation, in the negative sense of misrepresentation, it is in neglecting the question of the source cultures' present-day relationships to their own "primitive" traditions.

Rothenberg's strong tendency toward universalism is not completely unchecked, however. In fact, as Garber argues, Rothenberg has a double mind about history and temporality. For example, how does the view of oral literatures as essentially timeless combine with Rothenberg's statement that "the only absolutes for poetry are diversity and change" (qtd. in Garber 51)? This is where Rothenberg's views about language come into play. Rothenberg declares that if it were not for the Language school's adoption of the term, he would have readily called himself a language poet ("Ethnopoetics & Politics" 12), one of his common definitions of poetry being "charged language" (*Technicians* xx). Strongly influenced by Benjamin Lee Whorf's linguistic relativism as well as Tzara's constructionist conception of language and meaning ("thought is made in the mouth"), Rothenberg sees language, and by extension poetry, as a series of unique articulations that instantiate meaning in the moment of their performance (see, for example,

“Ethnopoetics & Politics” 12). Rothenberg consistently applies this conceptual framework to translation.

Despite his universalism, Rothenberg does not aspire to a closed system and readily accommodates discrepant positions within a single project. It is rather that the search for affinities and universals is one part of a pluralistic undertaking. The formulation of affinities and universals requires an abstraction of structures from language, and this is largely the work of Rothenberg’s commentary. Where language itself is more immediately concerned, as in the individual songs and poems (and their translations), we are in the realm of the irreducible moment of performance. Thus *Symposium* includes both the writing of Lévi-Strauss and Whorf, prefaced with the following comment from Rothenberg: “From our vantage, [Lévi-Strauss’] large, synthesizing works reflect the processes he describes (bricolage, etc.) and project a universalizing poetics that not only avoids an antiquarian response to ‘savage mind’ but leads toward one side of a possible ethnopoetics – just as that of Whorf ... might be seen as leading to the other” (*Symposium* 57-58). With an open, pluralist attitude, Rothenberg simply places the two competing viewpoints side by side without attempting an explicit reconciliation.

*Repetition and Variation: Native American Oral Literatures in English Translation*

Although the beginning of the twentieth century is widely recognized as the moment when a few European artists reclassified certain objects imported from the colonies as art, the literary merits of indigenous oral texts were recognized much earlier, as is clear from eighteenth and nineteenth-century English translations of Native American songs, which were invariably fitted into the poetic conventions of their time. Dell Hymes brings up the example of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's work from the mid-nineteenth century.

Schoolcraft's approach is significant in that he includes a transcription of the source text followed by a literal and a literary translation, which would become a standard procedure in later ethnography. Following is an excerpt from his literary translation of a Chippewa song as reprinted in Hymes:

Fire-fly, fire-fly! bright little thing,

Light me to bed, and my song I will sing.

Give me your light, as you fly o'er my head,

That I may merrily go to my bed.

Give me your light o'er the grass as you creep,

That I may joyfully go to my sleep. (347)

Hymes values Schoolcraft's pioneering work in ethnography more than his translations:

"Thanks to Schoolcraft's scholarship, we can appreciate in depth how bad his translation is" (ibid.). He offers the following retranslation:

Flitting insect of white fire!

Flitting insect of white fire!

Come, give me light before I sleep!

Come, give me light before I sleep! (348)

Rather than attending to the structure of the source text (Hymes defines structure as "the form of repetition and variation, of constants and contrasts, in verbal organization"; 349), Schoolcraft suggests a gradual development of a theme by altering each repeated line and inserting additional lines. Hymes prefers Schoolcraft's literal translation, which "lack[s] the supervening padding of the literary translation" and is likely to appear "more satisfactorily poetic" to a modern audience: "Flitting-white-fire insect! waving-white-fire bug! give me light before I go to bed! give me light before I go to sleep" (347). This is as much a reflection on the profound shift in aesthetic sensibility during the century separating Schoolcraft and Hymes as it is a comment on Schoolcraft's literary skills. For similar reasons to those of Hymes, Arnold Krupat downgrades Schoolcraft's translation in favor of the work of an "amateur" ethnographer and translator Washington Matthews,

saying that “the chief advantage the latter enjoys as a translator may be that he is not particularly interested in poetry as such” (8). The following excerpt is from Matthews’ “free translation” of the Navajo *Mountain Chant*, published in 1887:

Place-whence-they-came-up looms up,

Now the black mountain looms up.

The tail of the “yellow wing” looms up,

My treasure, my sacrifice, loom up. (Krupat 8)

The sense of the text can be better appreciated in conjunction with Matthews’ commentary, but this excerpt will suffice for our purpose of showing how, unlike Schoolcraft, Matthews does not shy away from syntactic parallelism and extended repetition (the phrase “loom(s) up” appears at the end of each of the sixteen lines of the translation), which are crucial to the structure of the source text.

From 1880 onward, researchers working for the newly established Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), Matthews among them, collected and published an enormous wealth of Native American oral literatures that would later become a rich source of material for ethnopoetics. Under the direction of Franz Boas, the nascent field of anthropology aspired to a science, and this was reflected in how many of the contributors to the BAE Annual Reports, including Boas, approached translation. Dennis

Tedlock argues that Boas' aspiration to scientific accuracy in translation resulted in "what professional translators would call a 'crib' or a 'trot' – not a true translation into literate English, but rather a running guide to the original text, written in an English that was decidedly awkward and foreign" (31). If ethnopoets such as Tedlock found such results lacking and in need of reworking, the Boasian approach must be credited with freeing the translation of traditional poetic texts of the "supervening padding" of conservative literary conventions in the English language.

*Total Translation As A Reflexive and Interrogative Practice*

If early ethnographers such as Matthews and Boas shed stale literary conventions in ethnographic translation chiefly because they did not see themselves as poets, Rothenberg sees the shedding of conventions as an ongoing task for the poet. In a new preface to the 1985 edition of *Technicians*, Rothenberg charts the progress ethnopoetics made since its inception, noting "a change in quality, a new degree of freedom related to the freedoms won in our own poetry – by which I don't mean a free & easy approach to the work at hand but translations & descriptions *freed from* conventional models of poetry & language that allowed us to see only a small part of what was really there" (xix).

Rothenberg's open sense of aesthetics is evident in the variety of techniques that he developed for his translations.

In a rather brief period of time from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, Rothenberg produced numerous translations of oral texts mainly from Native American languages. For Rothenberg, the particular challenge – a challenge he welcomed as an opportunity – of translating traditional Native American literatures lay in representing the oral performativity of the sources in written form (occasionally extended into vocal performance). His first attempts were, as in the case of many other poet-translators at the time, retranslations or versions of ethnographic material produced roughly between 1880 and 1940. The following example is Rothenberg's version of a Cherokee formula first translated into English by James Mooney:

THE KILLER

(after A'yu<sup>n</sup>ini)

*Cherokee*

Careful: my knife drills your soul

listen, whatever-your-name-is

One of the wolf people

listen I'll grind your saliva into the earth

listen I'll cover your bones with black flint

listen " " " " " feathers

listen " " " " " rocks

Because you're going where it's empty

Black coffin out on the mill

listen the black earth will hide you, will

find you a black hut

Out where it's dark, in that country

listen I'm bringing a box for your bones

A black box

A grave with black pebbles

listen your soul's spilling out

listen it's blue (*Pumpkin* 60)

This is one of Rothenberg's early attempts at a performative translation, with a temporal structure suggested spatially and the repeated command to "listen" evoking orality. One of Rothenberg's fiercest critics, William M. Clements writes:



In this marked recasting of Mooney's original, there is no serious breach of professionalism since Rothenberg indicates that it is his own '*working, after James Mooney.*' But serious questions may be raised about how Native American the result really is. We have absolutely no evidence of how this formula was performed orally ... Rothenberg has created what he must think the oral performance should have been. But he does not draw from first-hand knowledge of Cherokee culture and language: he is guessing. (199)<sup>5</sup>

Clements does not explain how he sees Rothenberg indicate exactly what the oral performance "should have been." The translation enacts a performance in very indeterminate terms. It is not clear, for instance, whether the spatial organization of the text into two columns suggest phrasing, a call-and-response format, or simultaneity of voices. It is not that Clements expects too much of the translation; he simply fails to see the particular correspondences Rothenberg's translation attempts to establish: the translation is not a transcript of a performance but itself a performance. Clements is more willing to find Mooney's translation adequate, ostensibly "since at least he knew the language he was translating from" (199) but more likely because he translated in unmarked prose, possibly the form furthest removed from a ritualized oral performance but associated with scientific accuracy in the target culture. As Hymes remarks, "it is a

mark of naïveté, not objectivity, to identify authenticity and pristineness with the ethnological translations” (362).

Clements voices a strong preference for the work of Dennis Tedlock, who, according to Clements, gives us “a clear sense of how the poem sounded when performed” (204). The following excerpt from a Zuni story titled “The Girl and the Protector” well illustrates Tedlock’s method:

The girl went inside and PUT MORE WOOD ON, the fire was really blazing,  
then it came CLOSER.

It came closer

calling

hoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

a

a

a

a

y it said. (84)

As Stanley Newman notes, Tedlock’s typography is “reminiscent of the devices used by E.E. Cummings and some of the poets during World War I who published in such

revolutionary magazines as BLAST” (262), the poetic of BLAST having in turn been directly influenced by the work of the Italian Futurist F.T. Marinetti. Tedlock adopts these typographic devices with a specific purpose in mind. He includes a reading guide in his book, which only corroborates what can be deduced intuitively: capital letters indicate a louder voice, line breaks suggest pauses, repeated vowels signify length, and cascading letters guide intonation. It is the perceived clarity and simplicity of this method of presenting oral performance that compels Clements to declare with certainty that Tedlock gives us “a clear sense of how the poem sounded.” As with Mooney, Clements mistakes Tedlock’s clarity of presentation for truthfulness of representation, a rather surprising lapse of judgment on the part of a literary scholar.

I am by no means disputing the fact that if Rothenberg had first-hand knowledge of the language and cultural context of the text, his translation might look quite different. The translation was produced under serious constraints of many kinds – the irretrievability of the source being one – and Rothenberg was aware of this situation. To the legitimate question as to whether such a translation ought to be undertaken at all, Rothenberg offers the following response:

[I]n first assembling [*Technicians*] I had to work within the limits of what was available in the middle 1960s: a tremendous amount of raw material collected by

anthropologists & linguists earlier in the century, very few solid or poetically viable translations, & a big gap between the poets & the scholars concerned with this kind of project. Since its publication in 1968, the work on all sides had increased tremendously, part of it, I would like to believe, as a direct or indirect result of what the first gathering had set in motion. (*Technicians* xix)

What *Technicians* set in motion for Rothenberg was a lasting interest in Native American literatures, which led to him to fieldwork and close collaboration with specialists. During a period of intense experimentation following the publication of *Technicians* in 1968, he devoted a sustained attention to two song cycles: the Navajo *Horse Songs* (*The 17 Horse Songs of Frank Mitchell*) and the Seneca cycle titled *Shaking the Pumpkin* (also the title of Rothenberg's edited volume of Native American poetries). Both cycles were new translations, the former carried out in collaboration with the ethnomusicologist David McAllester and the latter with the Seneca singer Richard Johnny John. They represent two major directions that Rothenberg took in his pursuit of total translation.

Bemoaning the fact that “we, as translators & poets, had been taking a rich *oral* poetry & translating it to be read primarily for meaning, thus denuding it to say the least” (“Total” 202), Rothenberg proposes a method of total translation, which he describes as a translation “not only of the words but of all the sounds connected with the poem,

including finally the music itself” (“Total” 203).<sup>6</sup> But Rothenberg goes even further and pays close attention to seemingly non-literary aspects surrounding each text, recognizing that the translator’s job significantly overlaps with that of an ethnographer.

As Lawrence Venuti points out, translation is a “radically transformative” act involving a decontextualization of the source text and its recontextualization in a target environment (162). This recontextualization is not only “interpretive” but also “interrogative” (165), placing both the “foreign intertext” and “receiving intertext” that ground the source and target texts in a new light. Wishing to engage the interrogative potential of translation, Venuti proposes the following scenario: “Imagine a translation where, in an effort to manage or somehow control the linguistic and cultural differences that follow upon the recontextualizing process, the translator deliberately inscribes an interrogative interpretation by constructing intertextual relations that are pertinent to the form and theme of the foreign text” (168). This is precisely the case with Rothenberg’s total translation. McCaffery and Nichol identify several key sites of this interrogation:

There are many socio-cultural implications to Rothenberg’s practice. His perception of parallels between old and new forms help reinforce the growing sense that “primitive” equals “modern,” that so much twentieth-century investigation in the arts has led to: the rediscovery of roots, to a re-establishment

of a past within the current, and the presidential belief that all history is contemporaneous. (50-51)

Rothenberg's recontextualization of Native American oral literatures is very deliberate.

For example, Rothenberg remarks that his ability to recognize the structural and semantic values of non-lexical sounds in Native American oral poetry is to be credited to his previous encounters with the modern sound poem ("Total" 202). It is the sound poem as pioneered by Hugo Ball and the Zurich Dada that provides the "intertext" in which Rothenberg places his translations of the Navajo *Horse Songs*. The following is an excerpt from Ball's "Karawane":

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla

grossiga m'pfa habla horem

egiga goramen

higo bloiko russula huju

hollaka hollala (Rothenberg and Joris 296)

Compare Ball's chant with an excerpt from Rothenberg's "The 13th Horse Song" as it appeared in *Shaking the Pumpkin*:

NNNOOOOW because I was (N gahn) I was the boy ingside the dawn but some

‘re at my house now wnn N wnn baheegwing

& by going from the house the wwwideshell howanome but some ‘re at my

howinow N wnnn baheegwing

& by going from the house the darkened hoganome but some ‘re at my house N

wnn bahhegwing (296)

In this translation, Rothenberg relies primarily on the phonetic potential of the English writing system to suggest pacing, word distortions, and non-lexical vocables.

Typographic elements are limited to occasional capitalization and parentheses, and their purpose is to suggest voice modulation. The text has a strong sonic quality and invites oral performance, compelling the reader to sound out the peculiar word distortions in order to decipher the word kernel they contain. However, this is not a puzzle to solve, and the word distortions are not entirely decipherable; the act of sounding them out, even if it only takes place silently within the reader’s mind, is an end unto itself.

The translations of the *Horse Songs*, while a unique artifact in their own right, are only an intermediary step toward a total translation. Rothenberg eventually turned the cycle into a polyvocal sound performance, which he considered to be his final version of the English translation (“Total” 214). While Rothenberg’s translations of the *Horse Songs*

represent “sound as sound” (“Total” 209) – whether by working with the sonic potential of the written word or by means of a sound recording – his translations of the Seneca song cycle *Shaking the Pumpkin* were “attempts at ‘translating’ words, sounds & (to some extent) ‘melody’ onto a visual field” (*Pumpkin* 413). According to Rothenberg, “Seneca poetry ... works in sets of short songs, minimal realizations colliding with one another in marvelous ways, a very light, very pointed play-of-the-mind, nearly always just a step away from the comic ... the words set out in clear relief against the ground of the (‘meaningless’) refrain” (“Total” 203). Following is Rothenberg’s interpretation of one of the songs:

(2)

T		H E H E H H E H
h		
e		H E H E H H E H
	o	
The doings were beginning		H E H <b>U</b> <b>H</b> H E H
o	e	
i		H E H E H H E H
n		
g		H E H E H H E H
s		

(*Pumpkin* 16)

Of his translations, Rothenberg says: “The resemblance of Seneca verbal art to concrete & minimal poetry among us was another (if minor) point these translations were making”



(ibid. 349). Concrete poetry typically arranges minimal sets of words visually on a page, setting them in motion through repetition, permutation, and punning. Rothenberg was well acquainted with concrete poetry and had previously translated Eugen Gomringer, the German-language writer who coined the term. The following is one of Gomringer's poems in Rothenberg's translation:

alike like alike unlike unlike

like unlike unlike alike

like

alike unlike unlike like

unlike unlike alike like alike (*Writing Through* 26)

The playfulness and visuality of concrete poetry refers to the visual poetry of the earlier avant-garde, all the way back to Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrams.

Just as with his translation of the Navajo *Horse Songs*, Rothenberg worked out an oral version of the Seneca cycle, which he performed live. However, these performances, rather than an extension or a realization of the written translation, are another distinct version of the source, making obvious the fact that the written translations cannot be performed out loud. Total translation thus involves two distinct projects. On the one hand, Rothenberg aims to make poetry the basis for mixed-media events in the vein of

“total theater” (“Ethnopoetics & Politics,” 10); on the other, he experiments with the limits and possibilities of the written page. Rothenberg considered the first approach more radical and prized it for its ability to reinsert orality into modern poetry. In contrast, McCaffery and Nichol consider the second approach to be “of greater significance because of the total notation it gives rise to,” combining as it does both acoustic and visual elements (50).

What unites both approaches is the emphasis on performance, which ethnopoetics shares with other art movements of the postmodern era (Garber). Traditional oral texts are never fixed but manifest variably through each new performance, with performers exhibiting not only their personal style but also responding to the particular context that frames each performance. In their notes and translations, Boas and his followers intended to present the *urtext*, the hypothetical template which underlies all individual performances of a given text, focusing on what they perceived as the typical, invariable aspects of the text, the presumed original. Sturge objects that in the “balance of constancy and mutability” which characterizes oral literatures, “there is no such thing as a sacred original which could give birth to the perfect translation” (101). As a countermeasure to the work of early ethnographers, Rothenberg conceives of translation as a one-time,

context-specific, active reinterpretation of the source text (also bearing in mind that the source text is in some instances little more than a hypothetical reconstruction).

In his review of *Technicians*, Jed Rasula notes that Rothenberg's commentary invokes "a poetics integrating language with social creation, so the gap between culture, society, and nature can be lessened." However, "given that ours is a non-integrated society," Rasula objects, "the upsurge of performance in art contexts in recent years has, I think, done little to subdue the ghetto-effect of all arts activities in the U.S." (139). Even though his concept of total theater is as much Wagnerian as it is shamanistic, Rothenberg repeatedly expresses a hope for "a language poetics . . . as a way of life" (13), appearing to align himself with the utopian program of the early avant-garde and its efforts to integrate art into life. However, following Stephen Melville, we may frame Rothenberg's position and its inherent conflict as quintessentially postmodern: "I want to argue that postmodernism begins where the myth of the end of art itself comes to an end, not by stopping but by being recognized as a permanent condition of the practice of art" (161). Melville recognizes the limits of avant-garde activity without putting into question its necessity. Rothenberg operates squarely within this framework, despite his persistent emphasis on the integrative potential of avant-garde art.

*Critical Responses to Rothenberg's Ethnopoetics*

A radical questioning of authorship and originality has been central to avant-garde activities since the 1910s, when Marcel Duchamp began exhibiting his so-called readymades – found and minimally altered industrially produced objects. In poetry around the same time, writers such as Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars began experimenting with found language such as overheard conversations or newspaper clippings. For their part, ethnopoets looked to oral literatures on the one hand and translation on the other for alternative models of authorship.

Shifting notions of authorship have altered the face of literary and translation scholarship as well. André Lefevere considers translation to be “an ideal introduction to a systems approach to literature,” an approach that allows us to bypass the romantic “assumption of the genius and originality of the author who creates *ex nihilo*” (240).

Adopting Lefevere’s systems method for this study, I approach ethnopoetic translation at the intersection of the source texts and the contexts in which they operate, the translators’ own poetics and their situatedness in the target context, the state of translation theory and practice, and the impact of criticism on the reception and dissemination of ethnopoetics.

As I have mentioned in my introduction, Lefevere argues that the various forms of rewriting are tremendously influential on how a given literary work is received and

interpreted. The critical responses to Rothenberg's translations are a particularly salient, if unfortunate, case in point. The reaction to Rothenberg's anthologies, while largely positive, has been sharply divided. William Bevis wrote an early negative response, and his essay was quoted by many subsequent critics including Clements, Krupat, and most recently Sturge, who all read Rothenberg partly through Bevis.

The problem here is that Bevis himself does not really read Rothenberg. His remarks are for the most part directed to the work of William Brandon, a modern-day Schoolcraft whose conservative, reified notion of poetry and sentimental treatment of the Native American material are quite contrary to ethnopoetics (see Brandon 1971). Yet Bevis makes no mention of the profound aesthetic and political differences between Rothenberg and Brandon. Where Bevis looks specifically at Rothenberg, he is critical of his reworkings of existing translations, claiming that Rothenberg obliterates the cultural specificity of the material in order to make his translations accessible to the average reader. On the other hand, Bevis is complimentary about Rothenberg's translations of the *Horse Songs* and the *Shaking the Pumpkin* cycle, calling his translations "a delight" (700).

Krupat's attempt at a more measured and detailed critique unfortunately adopts some of Bevis' misguided judgments and cites passages from Beavis that do not pertain

to Rothenberg as if they did. Krupat adopts wholesale Bevis' contention that the numerous post-war publications of Native American literatures compiled and retranslated by poets are too accessible (Krupat 15). He develops this claim into a formulaic distinction between "the esthetic/accessible axis of translation" and "the scientific/accurate" one, implying that literary translations automatically strive for accessibility at the expense of accuracy (8-9). Sturge makes it clear that Bevis' attack is aimed at Brandon but likewise ends up blurring the distinction between Brandon and Rothenberg in her effort to develop a position on the poetic translations of oral literatures. Her reading of Rothenberg's translations is further colored by Rothenberg's commentary, as she reads him solely through the lens of his universalism. Not unlike Krupat, she concludes that poetic translations of ethnographic material appropriate and distort their sources in order to achieve "accessibility and impact for the target-language reader" (126).

As should be evident from the examples given above, however, Rothenberg's translations can hardly be said to aspire to accessibility at the cost of accuracy. Concrete and sound poetry are not readily recognizable genres in American poetry, and Rothenberg in his translations shows a commitment to semantic polyvalence and indeterminacy. This corresponds to features of his sources, such as the "ambiguity and

mystery” of the *Horse Songs* observed by McAllester (395). Rothenberg repeatedly shows a concern for a thorough knowledge of one’s sources and for precision in translation, such as when he characterizes the translators who contributed to ethnopoetics as “technical & precise or experimental & precise or both” (“Ethnopoetics & Politics” 8). “Precise” here does not mean accessible or determinate, which is a distinction that Stéphane Mallarmé established for modern poetry when he uncoupled precision of style and diction from denotative clarity and instead put it in the service of his “vague literature” (99), which is to say poetry that foregrounds the play of connotations and the material aspects of language such as sound and rhythm. Ethnopoetics suggests an alternative model of accuracy in translation: unlike Boasian ethnography, it eschews the illusion of scientific accuracy and insists on poetic value, without relinquishing the need for thick commentary. In contrast to mainstream poetic translations, ethnopoetics chooses marginal poetic forms as the target intertext. Both the commentary and the marked style of the translations make ethnopoetics a reflexive practice.

In a review of *Technicians*, Jed Rasula remarks that the book is “unique among all compilations of world poetry because of its insistence on the primacy of the poetics of its own – rather than its source – language” (135). As an example, Rasula notes the extensive commentary which places oral literatures from around the world in the context

of modern and contemporary American poetry. To claim that ethnopoetics insists on the primacy of its own poetics seems an overstatement; more appropriately, the project is unique in revealing its poetics and acknowledging its role in the act of translation. A salient parallel with reflexive ethnography presents itself in this context. In Sturge's summary, "Reflexive ethnography specifically sets out to destroy the illusion of pure or indisputable facts ... by shifting the focus of the study to the conditions under which the research was carried out" (63). In marking their own situatedness, "reflexive ethnographies are about the culture of the target language and the discipline itself as well as about the culture of the source language" (ibid.). Shifting her focus to translation specifically, Sturge goes so far as to suggest that reflexive translation "offers to disperse the translator's authority, lessening the concentration of power in the translator's hands" (67). I would argue that the translator's authority is no less concentrated; rather, its workings are made visible and open to scrutiny. For instance, Rothenberg's total translation adopts avant-garde formal techniques which an informed reader may recognize as specific to the target literary tradition. Thus the translations invite an examination of their own methods and their possible implications. Rothenberg's essays and commentary, as well as the collagist approach to assembling his anthologies (Perloff, "The Contemporary" 138-44), also contribute to this examination.



The reflexivity of Rothenberg's translations makes them open to critical evaluation and vulnerable to attack, as has been evident from the existing criticism. However, their supposed failure is rather a refusal to give the reader "a clear sense of how the poem sounded" and is thus a way of signaling the irreducible difference of the source texts. Difference is here asserted without being gratuitously celebrated; it is simply a result of translation that acknowledges and reveals its own poetics.

## CONCLUSION

*“What You Can See Is Lost”: The Focus on Fluency in Mainstream Translation*

The Zukofskys’ *Catullus* and Rothenberg’s ethnopoetic translations arrived at a time when mainstream literary translation strove to deemphasize the visibility of the translator and the foreignness of the source text in favor of fluency and transparency. An alternative translation of Catullus by James Michie, first published in 1969, the same year that the Zukofsky *Catullus* came out, is an example of this trend. This is the opening of poem 8 in Michie’s translation:

Enough, Catullus, of this silly whining;

What you can see is lost, write it off as lost.

Not long ago the sun was always shining,

And, loved as no girl ever will be loved,

She led the way and you went dancing after. (29)

The translation received unanimous praise for its measured approach and fluency. M. L. Clarke found it “always clear and readable” (291), and Robert Lloyd praised it for being “simple and direct” (Lloyd). The translation rarely strays from the confines of Standard English; as Lloyd puts it, the language “neatly avoids the extremes so often encountered

of the stilted on the one hand and the ‘cutesy’ on the other” (279). Overall, the translation did neither excite nor offend its readers. Lloyd sums up the general attitude by saying, “While the result may fall short of brilliance, Michie has produced the most serviceable English Catullus currently available” (Lloyd). It should come as little surprise that the translation was reissued a number of times over the years.

*“Face Like A French Poodle’s”: Modernist Translation Today*

Not everyone has been content with the trend toward fluent translation, however. As I have outlined in my introduction, over the last couple of decades numerous scholars and translators have advocated for approaches to translation which account for the alterity of the source text as well as the cultural agency of the translator. As a result, even mainstream translation today tolerates greater methodological and aesthetic diversity. Therefore, when Peter Green, in an introduction to his 2005 translation of the complete Catullus, disavows the tradition of “extensive anglicization” as exemplified by Dryden (24), he knows he is speaking to a receptive audience. As a starting point, Green flatly rejects all new efforts to use English verse forms for translations from Latin, whether it be iambic pentameter or something “that reads like one of Pound’s earlier *Cantos*” (25), accusing those who follow “the Dryden principle” to be “after an easy fix” (25). (We can

read “easy” here both as a comment on the translator’s lack of effort and the ease with which the text is likely to be received.)<sup>7</sup> Instead, Green ventures to adapt Catullus’ own colorful array of Greek and Latin meters for his project, a feat rarely attempted by translators in English: “The last, and so far as I can determine, the *only* previous complete English-language version of Catullus with every poem done, as nearly as could be managed, in an equivalent of its original metre was that by Robinson Ellis (1871)” (27). The Zukofsky *Catullus* does not make the list, as far as Green is concerned, even though the Zukofskys do heed the meter of the poems by reproducing the syllable count of each line. At any rate, Green is anxious to distance himself from the Zukofskys, dismissing their project as a collection of “absurd grotesqueries” (26). Such ostentatious omission of the Zukofsky *Catullus* from his list of models and precursors – a list that otherwise extends all the way back to the Renaissance and considers a range of possible solutions to the metrical conundrum – belies Green’s ambition to reach a broad audience in spite of his audacious translation method. Consequently, his work, especially on the syntactic level, satisfies the basic expectations for fluency imposed by mainstream translation.

Here is how Green handles the opening of poem 64:

Once on a time pine trees from Pelion’s summit  
are said to have swum through Neptune’s crystal ripples

to the breakers of Phasis and Aeëtes' territory,  
 when chosen young men, the strong core of Argive manhood,  
 eager to filch that gilded hide from the Colchians,  
 dared in their swift vessel to traverse the briny shoals,  
 sweeping blue, deep-sea vistas with their blades of fir-wood. (133)

The translation is certainly syntactically fluent, yet it is far from transparent, owing to, among other things, Green's strong diction: Cornish's *top* becomes *summit*, his *waves* turn to *breakers*, and his *clear waters* transform to *crystal ripples*. Elsewhere, Green borrows vocabulary from a wide range of registers, from the technical (translating the *pumice* in the opening lines of poem 1 as *an abrasive*; 45) to the "learned," often used ironically ("hoc novum ac repertum / munus" in poem 14A, referring to a book of bad poetry gifted to Catullus by a friend, is translated as "this new *recherché* / gift"; 61), to carefully chosen archaisms. For example, in poem 29 the juxtaposition of archaic ("Who, pray, except some gamester") and colloquial ("Hey, / fag Romulus") forms of address aids the satirical intent of the poem (75). In an echo of the Zukofsky *Catullus*, the same poem closes with a slang question tag appended for the sake of meter: "Was it for *this*, you ultra-pious Roman pair, father and son-in-law, you blew the takings, eh?" On occasion, Green does not even hesitate to spice up the Catullan invective with a

deliberate anachronism, translating *ore Gallicani* in poem 42 (Cornish's "the gape of a Cisalpine hound") as "the face like a French poodle's" (89), a move that would hardly be permissible in classical translation today if it were not for Pound's choice to have Propertius sing about a *frigidaire patent*. All these features make the translation reflexive, as Emily Wilson points out approvingly in her review: "Nobody could mistake any poem from Green's Catullus – even the most successful of them – for an original composition by an Anglophone poet." This, writes Wilson, is the translation's strength, as "it is never possible to forget, reading Green, that Catullus wrote in Latin, and that our own culture is very different from that of ancient Rome" (6).

Even more conspicuous than Green's diction is his use of diacritical marks, a Renaissance convention clearly marked as archaic by the end of the nineteenth century. Green adopts diacritics not without misgivings: "I count it as a kind of failure when I need to nudge the reader, as is sometimes unavoidable, with diacritical signs: an accent to indicate unanticipated stress, a vertical divider showing a break in the rhythm, caesura or diaeresis" (31). The diacritics of course only appear unavoidable in the context of Green's self-imposed metrical constraints. They demonstrate that Green is willing to go to considerable lengths in his effort to reproduce Catullus' varied meters, though perhaps no as far as the Zukofskys went in their unflinching literalism.

Even though Green strives to distance himself from the Zukofsky *Catullus*, there is an obvious affinity between the two projects. Green's example makes it clear that critics and readers in the twenty-first century have developed a degree of tolerance for difficulty and difference in literary translation, and this has served translation well. We finally see translations like Green's whose range of registers and authorial self-awareness matches those of Catullus. Still, it is also true that the Zukofskys' non-referential approach to translation, even as it no longer inspires visceral outbursts of anxiety, continues to raise eyebrows.

In my genealogy of translation projects directly inspired by the historical avant-garde, I have hoped to demonstrate just how diverse and exciting poetry in translation can be even as it continues to satisfy, albeit not without contestation, the basic expectations for translation. The work of Pound, the Zukofskys, and Rothenberg continues to challenge our present understanding of translation and deserves our attention.

## Notes

1. Pound himself labeled futurism a “sort of accelerated impressionism” (“Vorticism”) although it is difficult to assess how much of that statement is Pound’s honest assessment of the movement and how much should be attributed to the general spirit of partisan bickering among the various avant-garde factions.
2. The original 1969 edition of the Zukofsky *Catullus* is not paginated; therefore, no page numbers will be given in subsequent citations.
3. Palimpsests contain traces of an earlier text and with some luck and effort may indeed be read twice. It is tempting to read the line as a self-referential moment, with *palimpsest* connoting the translation itself – a text twice written – and *incest* alluding to Zukofsky’s transgressive commerce with the source text.
4. Since the 1970s, the search for an accurate and politically correct term capable of replacing the concept of the primitive became a regular feature of primitivism. Although the term is shot through with racism and colonialism, it has been difficult to replace and continues to be used in present-day scholarship, albeit as a purely historical descriptor (see, for example, Flam and Deutch 1).
5. In the second edition of *Shaking the Pumpkin*, Rothenberg changes the designation to *version*, perhaps in response to Clements’s criticism. The second edition of



*Technicians*, however, identifies it simply as a translation but includes one more source: the French *Trésor de la Poésie Universelle* (1958).

6. As Steve McCaffery and bpNichol point out, Rothenberg's total translation is not to be confused with J. C. Catford's concept bearing the same name. Catford's definition, being restricted to lexis and grammar, is narrower than Rothenberg's (McCaffery and Nichol 52).
7. It is ironic that Green chooses Pound, whose translations around the time of his early *Cantos* (such as his *Propertius*, the focus of my earlier chapter on Pound) are an important model for Green's own thinking about translation. On the other hand, it is precisely because Green inherits Pound's model that he must disavow Pound's aesthetic, given that by this time, nearly a century later, Poundian free verse has become canonical.

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