

“A”-21 is certainly a peculiar performance: the translation of an entire play set within a long poem, the choice of the play, the off-beat idiolect into which Zukofsky has translated it, and to top it off the whimsical and enigmatic voice-offs he interpolated throughout. What little commentary “A”-21 has received has mostly been limited to some excellent considerations of the translation of Plautus’ *Rudens*, usually as a contrastive companion to the other Latin project, *Catullus*.<sup>1</sup> However, “A”-21 is a poem into which a play has been interpolated, rather than the other way around. My concern will be with “A”-21 as a movement of “A”, which requires an account of Zukofsky’s extensions in and around the translated play—in other words the movement as a whole rather than detaching the play as a translation.

“A”-21 is dedicated to the memory of John Gassner, a prominent drama critic and Yale professor who was a classmate of Zukofsky’s at Columbia, and also to his older brother Morris Ephraim Zukowsky, both of whom died during the composition of “A”-21 in 1966-1967.<sup>2</sup> Along with a hint of nostalgia, there is a detectable darkness of tone through many of the voice offs that refer to aging and mortality. Zukofsky himself was now in his mid-60s and an inveterate hypochondriac, but also the troubling background of the times surely had its effect—the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights struggle and the various national and international traumas mentioned throughout the other movements of the 1960s. Yet at the same time, as we will see, “A”-21 includes a good deal of the period’s utopianism. Arguably “A”-21 is Zukofsky’s most political movement of the post-World War II period—or, since he would adamantly refuse this descriptor, it is the most preoccupied with social critique. This in part explains the surprising incorporation of a play, a more public form of address than is the case with the rest of “A”, but its intention is considerably enlarged and complicated by the voice offs. To begin with, I want to pursue the question of why Zukofsky specifically chose *Rudens*, for which there is no single or obvious answer.

## I

One of Zukofsky’s augmentations to *Rudens*, although not labeled as a voice off, is the epilogue—what Zukofsky designates as the “first epilogue” although Plautus’ play includes none at all. Here, in the voice of Greave, Zukofsky recalls his childhood experiences of spending weekends at the theater with his older brother Morris, and one of the few details about his childhood that he was fond of mentioning was first seeing Shakespeare and other classics performed in Yiddish.<sup>3</sup> The heart of the New York Yiddish theater district, then in its heyday, was just a few blocks from where Zukofsky grew up, and aside from the Yiddishized

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<sup>1</sup> See Burton Hatlen, “Zukofsky as Translator” in *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*, ed. Carroll F. Terrell (National Poetry Foundation, 1979): 345-364; and David Wray, “‘cool rare air’: Zukofsky’s Breathing with Catullus and Plautus,” *Chicago Review* 50.2-4 (Winter 2004/05): 52-99. There is also a queer reading by Nick Salvato, *Uncloseted Drama: American Modernism and Queer Performance* (2010): 73-84.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life, A Biography of Louis Zukofsky* (2007): 400-401.

<sup>3</sup> See *Autobiography* 33, “A”-8.83.25-29 (this passage is clearly echoed in the epilogue to “A”-21) and “A”-14.339.1-3.

versions of European classics, one imagines he also saw vaudeville and other high-spirited comedy for which the Yiddish theater scene was well-known—at least he hints in the epilogue at his delight in such rough and tumble performances. If we recall Zukofsky's enduring fondness for Charlie Chaplin and that he even wrote a story entitled "A Keystone Comedy" (a good deal more leaden than "A"-21), we can understand that Zukofsky recognized in Plautus the vaudeville and slapstick comedy of his youth, a vibrant performing art that by the time of "A"-21 had long been eclipsed by less visceral forms of comedy. Older readers, however, will recall that in the early days of television vestiges of this kind of comedy were still common, not to mention the endless reruns of early shorts (e.g. The Three Stooges, Our Gang). New Comedy, of which Plautus is the earliest example for which a substantial body of intact examples survives, is in many respects the prototype for this whole tradition of comedy, which of course makes a considerable appearance in the work of Shakespeare.

Particularly after World War II, a high proportion of Zukofsky's reading was in the Greek and Latin classics, which is clearly evidenced in *Bottom* where Aristotle is one of the key authors in Part Two, and Part Three has several sections listing parallels with Shakespeare's texts from across the full spectrum of Greek and Latin classics. The family's 1957 trip to Europe seems to have enhanced Zukofsky's appreciation particularly of Roman culture (*SL* 240), and soon after, he and Celia began the *Catullus* project. The seemingly unpromising choice of Plautus for "A"-21 reflects a number of long-held views. The static, pre-typed characters and rudimentary, overtly unrealistic plot follows his general disinterest in plot and character verisimilitude in his treatment of Shakespeare.<sup>4</sup> One might say Zukofsky is disinterested in the drama, preferring to focus on the poetic text and texture. However, it would be more accurate to say that he tends to relocate the drama in the action and dynamic among the words rather than in the flimsy scaffolding of the plots and characters. Zukofsky rather outrageously suggests that *Pericles*, with its flat characters and implausible make-shift plot, is Shakespeare's best play. The point for Zukofsky is simply that these corny plays throw the interest onto the language and its enactment rather than the manipulative distractions of suspense and psychology. I will argue that a number of the voice offs function precisely to emphasize this focus on the linguistic play and away from the story, and overall one might claim that the voice offs have a certain Brechtian effect of interrupting the illusionism of the play, such as it is.

The incorporation of a play into "A" in one sense simply pushes the elasticity of its absorption a step further. If we take a long view, "A" begins with a series of stylistically similar movements whose principle of order is the interweaving of various thematic motifs, and even the abrupt appearance of the dense verbal formalities of "A"-7, -9 and -11 can be digested as centripetal movements alternating with more centrifugal collage movements. But particularly with "A"-13 and the nine movements composed in the 1960s, both what is incorporated into individual movements as well as their formal distinctness from each other becomes increasingly pronounced. If "A" has all along been concerned with challenging assumptions as to just what is or is not properly poetic—a central tendency of the Poundian long poem generally—then the whole-sale absorption of a play seems almost a natural step. However, Zukofsky's work has always been importantly interested in the performative, as distinct from what is said, and this is one way to understand his insistent musical analogies—for most of us at least music is always necessarily performed rather than simply read. Aside from the fact that Zukofsky would expect his work to always be sounded, his notorious

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<sup>4</sup> In *Bottom* Zukofsky mentions Ben Jonson's dismissive comment on *Pericles* as "a mouldy tale" (103, 165, 322), out-of-date as opposed presumably to his own modern plays, as an example of an admirer who nevertheless lost *sight* of Shakespeare's intent.

difficulty boils down to a stubborn insistence that what is said is never simply said or enough—there is always something much more complexly material and social going on. Zukofsky's early interest in drama is evident in *Arise, Arise*, written in the mid-1930s, a play with no plot and characters who do not develop but which was clearly intended to be a more public work responding in its way to contemporary events. This play was sufficiently important to him that he published it almost as soon as the opportunity arose in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> In the catalogue of stillborn projects that appears near the end of "A"-12, a high proportion are dramatic or performative works, on which he wryly remarks he would have been happy to pursue them if he had been given the slightest encouragement (252). In "A"-12 these works represent opportunities lost, so that "A"-21, which includes so much remembrance, might be seen as an effort to make good, within the context of his eventual trajectory, on at least some of those possibilities. With "A"-24 (not originally composed as a part of "A"), Celia would draw out one possibility of the performative aspect implicit in "A", or in Zukofsky's work generally, although Zukofsky would not know about this until after completing "A"-21. It is perhaps worth noting that "A"-20 (written 1963), in part a tone row composed out of the titles of Paul's musical compositions up to the age of 20, is explicitly performative and only "makes sense" if sounded out.

Focusing for the moment on the translation of Plautus' play, Zukofsky adopts a strict procedure: he translates the Latin text line by line into five-count (five word) lines, which will now become his set form for the last decade of his life in "A"-22 & -23 and *80 Flowers*.<sup>6</sup> Whereas translation naturally tends to expand the original in order to draw out as much of the semantic content and complexity as possible, Zukofsky's imposition of a five word line to render the long Latin lines requires considerable condensation resulting in an elliptical and telegraphic style. Within the strictures Zukofsky has imposed on himself, his rendition is quite faithful and, barring the occasional exception, he is not generally interested in altering the local sense beyond the necessities of condensation. As David Wray has emphasized, Zukofsky is not making a homophonic translation in the manner of *Catullus*, although as he proceeds he constantly has an eye and ear out for cognates and homophonic suggestions from the Latin text (Wray 69-70).

Zukofsky's overall handling of Plautus simply repeats the Roman playwright's procedure of translating and freely reworking previous Greek works—the prologue tells us that *Rudens* is a version of a play by Diphilus, now lost, and in the opening speech of the play, Scape describes the tempest by referring to a famous instance in a lost play of Euripides (even though Scape is presumably an uneducated laborer). As is the case with New Comedy generally, Plautus' plots are functional and improbable, while the characters are types. But while the overall plot and characters may be insipid, their local working out in dialogue is complex: full of sharp repartee, convoluted hair-splitting and all manner of verbal play—in other words, linguistic fun, which is precisely what Plautus is most noted for and obviously what appealed to Zukofsky. As mentioned, this is consistent with Zukofsky's approach to Shakespeare in *Bottom*. Zukofsky's interest in the local verbal play draws freely from

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<sup>5</sup> Written in 1936, *Arise, Arise* was first published in *Kulchur* 6 (1962) and then in book form in 1973.

<sup>6</sup> As is almost always the case with Zukofsky, although he imposes a strict procedure he will occasionally veer and there are instances where he condenses even further by making one line from two of the Latin text. I have not noticed any instance where he expands the number of lines, other than of course with the voice offs. Zukofsky's text was the Loeb Classical Library edition of *Plautus*, Vol. IV, trans. Paul Nixon (1932).

vernacular and colloquial possibilities, but is little concerned with vocally distinguishing the characters or with producing a realistic impression of spoken speech. Yet Zukofsky's manner constantly draws on and suggests something of the effect of spoken speech, relentlessly energetic talk, rapid, clipped and always looking to push speech into new and witty shapes. Indeed, in Plautus dialogue tends toward a form of verbal competition. The bulk of the play consists of rapid-fire exchanges only occasionally counterpointed by lengthier soliloquies. The play maintains the classical unities of time and place, and although it is divided into acts and scenes, there are in fact no real breaks, simply a change in the combination of characters, so the dramatic action is virtually non-stop banter.

This is not to say, however, that the world presented by the play is unimportant since it is the vehicle for Zukofsky's social critique. The world of *Rudens* is thoroughly fallen and commercialized, which is most distinctly marked by the intersecting facts of class division and human trafficking. All the significant characters are either property owners (Dads, Leno, Placey) or owned property (Polly, Amabel, Scape, Track, Greave). The working out of the requisite comic conclusion turns on the recognition that Polly belongs by rights to the former class while the others achieve "freedom" through monetary transactions, and particularly the latter half of the play is preoccupied by often confusingly legalistic debates on property ownership. The nominal comic resolution does not pretend that anything has changed—simply that an accidental injustice, in the case of Polly, has been rectified, but otherwise even the bad guy has not only been let off but paid off by Dads who remains a land owner as well as a human owner—despite his moralizing on the virtues of the simple life. One of those humans, Greave, remains at the end still aggrieved, yet is given an epilogue added by Zukofsky to assure us, none too convincingly, that it is all in fun. Indeed this epilogue, with its autobiographical details, hints at the poet's identification with Greave, who is the puller of the rope of the play's title and salvages the wicker from the sea upon which the latter half of the play turns. The rope image becomes for Zukofsky an image of both the poem braided together from various materials, as well as of the social bonds that hold us together, which in the terms of the world of the play are primarily monetary and legal. However, it must quickly be added that Greave belongs to his world, and his momentary dream of what he will do when he hits the jackpot involves owning a slave farm, becoming richer than anyone else and being famous (476).

The legal-linguistic complexities particularly kick in from the moment Greave salvages the wicker, and not by chance it is from this point that the voice offs become more prominent. Before Greave has even opened the wicker, Track appears and subtly lays claim to it knowing it contains trinkets that prove Polly's true identity as a freeborn Athenian. The rest of the play is largely taken up with complicated legalistic debates about the ownership of the wicker: by Greave by right of salvage, by Track in the name of Polly for his owner Placey, by Leno who is the original owner and whose gold it contains, by Dads as father of Polly and owner of Greave. All of which beyond the comic verbal gymnastics such debates generate, indicate the close intertwining of law, property (including humans) and money all upheld by legalistic technicalities Zukofsky never fails to highlight in his translation. That is to say, the translation of human relations into matters of ownership and money. Polly is owned by a pimp who plans to sell her into prostitution, and she is freed by a father who is a slave owner, who manages to finagle things so that in the end he uses the pimp's money to "buy" the freedom of Polly's companion Amabel and to give Greave money to buy his freedom from himself (Dads). All is well—or is it? In this world it is impossible to extricate love and family relations from the networks of property and money, and this is what most of the voice offs comment on in their oblique fashion.

The germ of "A"-21 undoubtedly goes back to *Bottom*, where the section on "Latine" includes an extensive list of parallels between *Rudens* and *Pericles* (396-397). As pointed

out, Zukofsky evidently took *Rudens* to be a source for *Pericles*—there are obvious plot parallels as well as the similarly flattened handling, although the verbal texture of *Pericles* tends toward the ceremonial and decorous.<sup>7</sup> One of the earlier voice offs is largely constructed from brief selections from *Pericles* (from five different passages) all quoted in the *Rudens* section of *Bottom*, in which the key social realities of Plautus' play are clearly touched upon: a thoroughly monetarized existence within which thrive class inequalities—"great ones eat up little ones" ("A" 456-457; *Pericles* II.i.31). This voice off echoes the opening scene of Act II where two fishermen talk of their hard lot, jokingly referring to themselves as plutocrats, which has a complementary scene in *Pericles* that was among Zukofsky's favorites. These latter fishermen save the shipwrecked Pericles, and when he complains he is a "man throug'd up with cold," they offer him a gown to warm him. Pericles is not simply chilled from his dunking but suffers from over-cerebralizing—he tends to think and talk rather than act—so the laboring fishermen counter him with some practical commonsense (*Bottom* 98-99). With the fishermen, eyes and thought are one, which is to say they are anchored in sensory existence, whereas with Pericles eyes and mind are split. I will resist the Hegelian fugues one might elaborate on all this, except to point out that the world of Plautus is made up of masters and slaves and the depiction of their differing states of consciousness is clear enough and clearly of interest to Zukofsky. In the voice off, the snippet of Pericles' chilly complaint is spliced with, while at the same time separated by a dash from Falstaff's highly tactile description of a hot bath—the man of the body juxtaposed to the man of the head. In the complex that is this voice off Zukofsky implies connections between commercialization and overly abstract thinking, and both Plautus and Zukofsky are interested in the sophistries of legal discourse in upholding the privileges of property.

Although the world depicted by Plautus' play is and remains unredeemed, it is framed by an outside, an ethical perspective that in the *Rudens* segment in *Bottom* Zukofsky gives some emphasis. This is represented most obviously by the prologue spoken by the rather pompous star Arcturus who assures us that the gods are keeping an eye on earthly matters and distributing due justice—a claim that hardly seems borne out by the world of the play itself, except for Arcturus' act of creating the storm that aborts Leno's trip to Sicily and sets in motion the comic outcome of the play. In addition there is the presence throughout of Venus' fane—this rather quaint term is often reiterated, sometimes punned with "fain." The presence of this temple is a constant rebuke to the actions of the play—most obviously when Leno, who is in the love business, desecrates this sanctuary in an attempt to forcibly recover his "property" (Polly and Amabel). Despite Arcturus, this is a thoroughly secularized world in which the temple functions as an empty signifier since Venus or the sacred never manifest itself in the play—love and justice remain thoroughly human and entangled in conceptions of property. However, as already mentioned, it is not to the action of the play that one should primarily look but to its verbal action. It is the linguistic comedy that makes and saves the play—which is to say, it is the comedy that enables the play to transcend the severe limitations of its actions and characters. Although this is a world where human relations are thoroughly defined in terms of exchange and class division, the comic banter is the great equalizer that enacts the possibility of a redeemed form of social interaction. There are a number of moments where the lower class characters are reminded that they are taking too

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<sup>7</sup> There is a note indicating the kernel of the idea for "A"-21 dated 5 March 1960 at the time Zukofsky was getting ready to return to "A" with "A"-13 after almost a decade preoccupied with *Bottom* (HRC 3.13).

many liberties when speaking to their superiors, but it never seems to make the slightest difference—everyone or at least those of the lower class in the play freely speak their minds. It is precisely the comedic environment or genre that allows for this utopian possibility—comedy’s venerable right to ignore social barriers and distinctions. In Zukofsky’s general treatment of Shakespeare in *Bottom*, he tends to privilege the comedies and romances over the tragedies and histories, although it needs to be kept in mind that his thesis is that all Shakespeare’s works are tragic regardless of genre—that is, they enact the failure of eyes and mind to fully realize love as one. This generic preference should not surprise us given Zukofsky’s general aversion to the tragic and heroic, and we are quite used to viewing Shakespeare’s lighter modes (or the comic within the tragic) as allowing more penetrating social critique. In “A”-21 the comic mode allows the characters to enact a linguistic egalitarianism, even while there are no characters who in any meaningful sense challenge the status quo. However, this very lack of any outsider voice allows for an immanent critique to be verbally acted out as the wranglings over questions of property manifest their all too real absurdity.

## II

The voice offs that Zukofsky interpolates throughout “A”-21 transform the movement into something more than an eccentric translation. Their most obvious precedent is the Greek chorus—New Comedy folded into Old Comedy—and Zukofsky referred to them as such.<sup>8</sup> These voice offs usually have a recognizable relation to the current action of the play and function as a type of running commentary, although very oblique. At the same time, the voice offs only occasionally refer explicitly to the action of the play and are distinct poems in themselves. If extracted and gathered into a chapbook on their own, they would make an intriguing collection and probably would have received more attention than they have since they evidence a type of dense, self-interfering poetry that would soon break out among a whole range of younger poets. For the most part, Zukofsky uses a word count line throughout—there are examples of one, two, three, four and five count poems, with variations. It is notable that as the play proceeds, these voice offs become more extensive and pronounced, as well as darker and even bitter, which suggests that they function to cast shadows in or on a play that appears all in plain view as far as its actions and themes are concerned.

The voice offs evidence what by this time was Zukofsky’s long established practice of reworking found materials. They are constructed almost entirely from small pieces of quotations, usually marked by italics or quotation marks, or more freely reworked. In either case, Zukofsky is using his materials to compose out of rather than to convey his or the originals’ expressed meaning. One can reasonably assume that Zukofsky generally agrees with the views of Spinoza, Issak Walton, Veblen or Buckminster Fuller, all of whom are used significantly in “A”-21, but his entire manner of using these materials goes out of its way to obscure whatever the “original sense” of them might be. He is more interested in making the materials sing, extracting poetry from and across these various texts, which tends to foreground their visceral qualities. Typically, Zukofsky braids shreds of text so that we can glimpse the original topics of the materials without however recovering the arguments or

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<sup>8</sup> Reading recorded 13 Dec. 1975 by Hugh Kenner at Johns Hopkins University, available at PennSound <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Zukofsky.php>>; Zukofsky reads the Act IV.7 voice off. Zukofsky also designates as voice offs what are asides spoken by characters in the play, but these are from Plautus, whereas those not spoken by designated characters are Zukofsky’s additions—with the exception of the epilogue previously mentioned which is put into the mouth of Greave.

contexts, even when he presents what nominally look or sound like propositions or statements. The reader is constantly teased and teased away from settling for fixed arguments. As already discussed, when we step back from a focus on the plot and characters of Plautus' play, we realize that the real action is in Plautus' verbal fireworks, which potentially at least transcend the specific concerns and views of the world of the play.

Although I will comment more closely on several of the longer voice offs that flesh out the thematic concerns of "A"-21 as a whole, some of the shorter voice offs are antic in the extreme. One instance in Act II.6 is presented as an antiphonal extension of a scene between Leno the pimp and his cohort Chum and consists of a list of oddball town names in Texas plus a few more colorful colloquialisms. For the most part Zukofsky pulled these from an article on "South-Western Slang" by one Socrates Hyacinth.<sup>9</sup> This is the pure delight in lingo, a dadaistic slanging match, although at the end Leno suggests it means something "even if lunatic" (459). If we have not cottoned on yet, this voice off is a prod to direct our attention away from the not very profound sense of the play to the spirit and delights of its verbal shenanigans. It is also an indicator of Zukofsky's interest in the vernacular in action or *parole* as the site of linguistic innovation. Another instance in Act III.3 includes the somewhat notorious "mg. dancer" that Guy Davenport queried Zukofsky about, only to receive the reply that any possible interpretation is acceptable.<sup>10</sup> However, this entire two-count poem is deliberately unparaphrasable and perhaps even gives the impression that the right-hand side of the page has been torn away. We can only say it might suggest the movement of a dancer, an image which is surely not haphazard as Zukofsky directs our attention to the bodily movement of the words themselves. Zukofsky gives the musical stage direction "*cantabile*" for this voice off, and it is unfortunate that we do not have a recording of him performing this passage because it is not easy to hear how it is singable. However, perhaps the very challenge of trying to mouth it is the point—getting the words to move off the page, without any of the conventional harmonic indicators to instruct the reader just how to do that. This voice off immediately follows Track's plea to Venus to save Polly and Amabel from Leno who is attempting to forcibly reclaim them from the temple dedicated to Venus around which the action of the play takes place. Track remarks that since Venus was born from an oyster she ought to protect these "pearls" (465). This might suggest the mg. dancer, beauty or love, arising from the oyster of the words—or even letters since the abbreviation teases us into trying to fill it in.

Indeed many of the earlier voice offs, which tend to be shorter and even more nonsensical than those that come later in the play, persistently refer to song and poetry or poetry as song. The very first lines of "A"-21, which put together two phrases from two favorite plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*), mention nightingales and sprites respectively (438)—traditional images of poetry as song and supernatural. Both of these phrases as Zukofsky presents them begin with "an," which in a sense is required by the rule that each movement of "A" from "A"-14 onwards should begin (more or less) with "an" or "an-" (315). In this case neither "an" is an indefinite article but, in combination with their immediately following words, they mean "as if" ("an 'twere") and "and if" ("an if"; modern editors usually emend to "and"). "An" becomes a more slippery little word than we might have suspected, and here specifically indicates an "as if" frame to the movement as a whole,

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<sup>9</sup> *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* (Aug. 1869): 125-131. Zukofsky almost certainly found this reprinted in M.M. Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English* (1931).

<sup>10</sup> Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (1981): 103. Some further remarks on Zukofsky's response to Davenport can be found in the commentary on "A"-22 & -23.

the as if of song or dreams or drama—anticipating the utopian aspect to which we will return. A little way into the movement we encounter a short one count voice off constructed out of three seemingly disparate quotations: one from Shakespeare that mentions the game of Nine Men’s Morris, which therefore relates to Zukofsky’s brother as well as being another possible reference to dance, plus two that recycle phrases from early in “A” itself (445). The three quotes, printed as three separate stanzas (it may or may not be relevant that the “nine men’s morris” is a checkers-like game in which one tries to make a row of three), appear semantically detached from one another, which suggests we read them as in some sense analogous or conflated—three images of the poem: a game (that is also a dance), a form, a voice.<sup>11</sup> There is a decided emphasis on the lyrical in many of these early voice offs, which as indicated directs our attention to the verbal surface rather than the not very interesting plot and characters—“Not dull” as one voice off insists (451).

Turning to the voice offs as a commentary on and augmentation of the movement’s social critique, we might begin with an atypical example in that it consists entirely of three separate and reasonably straight-forward quotations from J.S. Bach (491-492). At the point where it is inserted, Greave has lost the wicker basket that he recovered from the sea and which he had hoped would enable him to buy his freedom from Dads. Bach’s letters complain about practical problems during his time in Leipzig, specifically earning enough money, professional annoyances and the difficulties of performing his works to his satisfaction. In other words, we have a quick documentary portrait of the artist as wage slave and unable to freely compose and realize his works as he conceives them—the first two short quotations are in fact addressed to Bach’s “owners,” the King-Elector of Sachsen-Poland and the Leipzig town council. The quotations are not without their humor, however, since Zukofsky is evidently amused by the fashionable sprinkling of Latin phrases in these letters—a reminder as well of the continuing presence and prestige of the Latin tradition. Bach is even caught complaining about the reduction in his supplementary fees due to the healthy environment at Leipzig, meaning there were less deaths and therefore less demand for funeral music. Undoubtedly Bach’s quotations speak in a sense for the poet or for all artists-poets caught in a system where matters of living and art are constantly translated into questions of money. In one of the earlier voice offs Zukofsky includes a potshot at Op and Pop art as a contemporary symptom of art’s capitulation to commerce (456-457). Here we hear how it has infected Bach, the exemplary artist of “A”, and the quotations follow a lament by Greave whose loss of the hoped for treasure in the wicker drives him to thoughts of suicide. This social critique mirrors the world of Plautus but with a degree of self-satire on the impractical desires of artists, at least in a world short of utopia. In any case, Zukofsky is fleshing out the implications of how one might read Plautus’ play. In fact this voice off in the form of Bach’s complaints appears to introduce two subsequent voice offs, which also deal with cultural and artistic matters.

The business of the arts was much on Zukofsky’s mind in the later 1960s, which undoubtedly had to do both with his own career as well as that of his son. Immediately after finishing “A”-21, Zukofsky would return to and complete the novel *Little*, which in large part is taken up with the dangers and degradations of the music profession and indicates his anxieties about his son’s future. This was already evident in “A”-19, which in part deals with a violin competition Paul entered and also works with materials from Mallarmé’s *Le Livre*

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<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking this voice off also includes an additional final word or name, “*Palaestra*,” which is actually Plautus’ name for the character Zukofsky calls Polly, who is the immediately following speaker. As I read it, this is spoken in the voice of the voice off but directing the reader away from the preceding voice off back to the play proper.

project, including problems of finance and audience (425-427). By the late 1960s, when Zukofsky was finally achieving a degree of recognition and respect and able to publish without difficulty, he was becoming increasingly reclusive with not a little bitterness, the reasons for which are complicated and difficult to pinpoint. It would seem that this bitterness was bound up with this very success, the sense that, after decades of neglect, this attention was motivated by interests other than a proper appreciation of his poetry, that poetry itself was hopelessly compromised in a world dominated by money and a concern with careerism and prizes. Zukofsky himself was hardly immune to such temptations, and one might suspect that part of his bitterness was due to his own sense of being infected—desiring yet never trusting this new-found attention. Certainly the trajectory of Zukofsky's work of the 1960s fits a common ideological reading of the fate of modernism as ever more extreme defensive formations against the encroachments of a degraded and commodified world, as if to make it as difficult as possible as a means of testing whether the reader can properly appreciate poetry: the pure pleasures of linguistic intricacies. Yet at the same time Zukofsky always worked out from assumptions of the intrinsically social nature of language and writing—the communicative axiom constitutive of even an expression of rejection or criticism. In fact, he assumed that poetry and any cultural labor was inherently an act of bonding with others—with the dead and the future as well as the living.

Bach's complaints are picked up and echoed in a curious voice off that appears in Act V.i, which sounds like the most directly personal of the voice offs. This begins with a rendition of Plautus' epitaph, which declares that when he died Comedy itself wept (turned to Tragedy) along with innumerable mourners. This leads into a bitter complaint against long neglect (a biblical 40 years), which is more applicable to Zukofsky than Plautus: accused of obscurity he attracted a certain cult which in his innocence used him or his name for their own self-promotion. It is not obvious who Zukofsky is referring to or addressing in this bitter lament, but this is of minor importance relative to the attack on the poetry business, on poetry as careerism. The poet's grievance is less directed at a lack of appreciation, as at old friends, presumably fellow poets. Just as Bach complains that his own creative efforts are distracted by the politics of patronage and local councils, Zukofsky implicates the analogous contemporary circumstances, although specifying that it is friendship, the sense of working together with others that writing necessarily always is, that is the prime casualty. The concept of friendship is of central importance to Zukofsky, who takes this term in the Aristotelean sense of human bonds generally (the rope of *Rudens* or, perhaps better, the wicker)—bonds that are strengthening or not as effects of the general social order—and these include, as they did for Aristotle, relations between generations, including the dead and the future.<sup>12</sup> This voice off ends on a more positive, if enigmatically compromised note: if the poet is still alive then "a dead mask smiles" on old friends as when they were still young and each speaks with their own tongue. In one sense Zukofsky seems to be evoking his younger days, the high tide of modernism and the sense of working alongside other writers all busy pursuing their various developments, individual yet bound up with each other. Whatever remains living in his work relates to those youthful endeavors and hopes, and therefore continues to "smile" through and participate with those other "friends" as if they are still young rather than old (past) friends. The ambiguous image of a "dead mask" that smiles designates the poet's text, which once written becomes separated from the poet's self and is living or dead depending on the readers' animating powers. Hopefully the text smiles on the young and engenders their

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<sup>12</sup> For Aristotle on friendship, see Book VIII of *Nicomachean Ethics*, and for Zukofsky on friendship in Shakespeare and Aristotle, see particularly *Bottom* 90-92.

own writing without mere imitating—“young” here might be generational but could simply distinguish the living from the merely imitative poets, true friends (young) from false (old). The dead mask that smiles loops this voice off back to its beginning where grieving Tragedy gives voice to the dead Comedy of Plautus—epitaphs are themselves death masks that speak.<sup>13</sup> Of course “A”-21 is itself a death mask through which Plautus continues to smile on the young. It is interesting that Zukofsky published the first four of the six stanzas of this voice off under the title “Song” in the letters to the editor section of the *New York Times*. Zukofsky was often indifferent about titles, but this case is suggestive if we take it to indicate that it is a song about the contemporary fate of song, about the question of whether it is possible to sing (which implies a public) any more. This “Song” is in fact unusually lyrical for the late Zukofsky, and the primary example in “A”-21 of a voice off that does not adopt a word count line.

In many respects the most striking voice off is a lengthy five pager in Act IV.2, the bulk of which is worked from Izaak Walton’s 17<sup>th</sup> century classic, *The Compleat Angler*. This appears at the pivotal moment of the play when Greave has just fished up the wicker that will reveal the true identity of Polly and reunite her with her long lost parents.<sup>14</sup> We first have a soliloquy by Greave as he is hauling his net with the as yet unopened wicker, in which he hopes that he has caught some treasure that will enable him to buy his freedom from Dads and live a life of ease and fame. So we are to imagine in the mind’s eye that Greave is literally pulling the rope of the play’s title as we read/hear the long voice off that follows, whose narrow three-count line perhaps visually suggests a rope. On the other side of the voice off, Greave is still hauling his prize but up pops Track who will be the first of several claimants that will eventually leave him with nothing. The fishing motif explains at least nominally the use of Walton in this voice off, which is another example of Zukofsky composing his own poetry out of bits and pieces “quoted” from another text. It is perhaps not irrelevant that *The Compleat Angler* is itself cast in dramatic form as dialogues and that its sui generis form is elastic enough to incorporate songs, poems and other texts. Walton’s work is a practical pastoral idyll where fishing has been “transfigured” from Greave’s wage labor into a recreational way of life. Although characteristically elliptical and sometimes enigmatic, for the most part the long Walton passage is understandable enough and effectively gives the gist of the source text: natural description of flora and fauna, practical instruction on angling and making fishing flies, punctuated by philosophical and moral observations. It is a paradisaical vision, although not without its hints of the fall, such as the mention that a fisherman’s gain is the trout’s loss couched in the language of business, to remind us of larger social realities (479). Zukofsky concludes the Walton passage with an enigmatic reference to Diogenes—that anti-philosophical advocate of the simple life—observing “finimbruns” at a fair, an amusing obsolete word that simply means trinkets or knick-knacks. What Zukofsky leaves out, but would assume is clearly enough implied, is Diogenes’ observation, “Lord, how many things are there in this world of which Diogenes hath no need!”—a rejection of the consumer desires and needs created by the world of money. This entire Walton passage is introduced as a simile following mention of autumnal images: fallen leaves implying transience and aging,

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<sup>13</sup> Whether the actors of Plautus’ plays used masks is a matter of considerable debate, but the majority consensus among scholars is that they did.

<sup>14</sup> Zukofsky consistently renders *vidulus*, which Nixon translates as “trunk,” as “wicker,” which may recall his description of the dynamically intricate sestina structure of “Mantis” as “wicker-work” (*CSP* 69). As already mentioned, “A”-21 is peppered with details recalling Zukofsky’s earlier life and work. However, in *Bottom* Zukofsky used a different translation of *Rudens* by Cleveland King Chase (1919), who translates the word as “hamper” and points out in his introduction that it might also have been rendered as “wicker basket.”

but also their beauty evoking “remembered / delight” even while they blow away. This paradisaal passage, then, is an example, even an enactment of this delight which presumably concerns all poetry and art, or human labor generally which in Zukofsky’s view is properly motivated by love. This is the force of his choice of Walton here, in which the subsistence need for food has been culturally transformed into a craft and an art form—an ideal realization of labor as intrinsically pleasurable and mutually self-realizing (“A”-9), where sufficient needs are realized as recreation, which at the same time activates an ecological sense of attention to and an equitable balance with the given world. It is in every way antithetical to the world depicted by Plautus’ play.

Within the full voice off, however, this idyllic Walton passage is framed by more complicated and darker segments that indicate its utopian function as critique and not merely an assertion of what poetry or art can pretend to realize. The voice off begins with some punning on the title of the play (“rude deigns” < *Rudens*), the rope that is literally being hauled by Greave at the end of which is his hopes for freedom and the good life. The rope becomes an image both of the poem braided together, as well as human ties, the social, which in some sense it is poetry’s task to enhance. The introductory segment leading up to the Walton passage is enigmatic, as if Zukofsky is braiding disparate threads. Nevertheless one can glimpse reiterated suggestions of poetry’s relation to the social, its utopian impulse as a counter to social discord and degradation, that is, its ropery role as binding people together. There is an odd mention of an “old chief” who has no need to read or write, although his children do: the chief here representing an older pre-literate social formation where the “stars / throb night” and songs speak to the future (476). This is to say, this indicates a culture that still feels an organic bond with the natural world which speaks to and with the human as well as a sense of continuity with past and future generations. Later, in history, such bonds are mediated and presumably weakened through literacy. Apparently the elliptical reference to the convict Gregor (from Chekhov’s *Sakhalin Island* reportage) expresses a disconnect between generations and the inability to pass on his own experience, which relates to the idea that experience (and writing) is not merely one’s own but always performed in and a continuation of the expression of the social. Then there is the suggestion that life writes out desire which is perceived as other. I take it that this refers to more than writing in a limited sense and can mean all socio-cultural manifestations which express humankind’s effort to realize itself, a basic model throughout Zukofsky’s thinking which also fits with a Spinozian conception that whether on an individual or social level an entity necessarily acts according to the realization of its nature. That this is perceived as not one’s own can be read in a number of different senses: one perceives life as if it is other than oneself, although one is necessarily part of it, not least in the act of perceiving; one reads or understands one’s own writing or endeavors as necessarily more than one’s own, that is, always socially mediated; the act of perception (thought) alienates one from what is felt so that one fails to understand one’s participation in life as writing. Zukofsky then expresses a long-held idea that the political or social is the reaction to disorder or the obstruction of a natural desire for order in the sense of well-being. We then find a most peculiar few lines suggesting that Job watched the weather, presumably meaning the whirlwind, in order to wish everyone “*Noël*,” which, in a bizarre manner that should not surprise us in Zukofsky, seems to be an example of the sense of suffering and injustice that triggers the awareness of others, of the ties that bind us and a desire for something like universal peace, which I take to be what is implied by “*noël*.” This at least is a major concern of “A”-15, which begins with Job: the desire to overcome history in the shared experience of trauma and mutual suffering. Rather than insist on any of my specific readings of these oblique lines, I am more concerned to suggest that threaded

throughout are ideas of the social and of writing and the latter's task in augmenting the sense of mutual existence that at least attempts to glimpse a possibility of something better than what is. The passage seems to function by suggesting a number of articulations ("images" does not quite seem an adequate term here) that are related without being obviously analogous, so that they throw off various possibilities or implications without, however, allowing a steady focus. We should avoid settling on a specific detail, such as the suggestion of an unfallen state of pre-literacy, as stating some nostalgic view of the poet or society. In this case, aside from the fact that Zukofsky evidenced little interest in primitivism so fashionable during his lifetime, that idea or image of the fall is thoroughly literate, a figure found "written" everywhere in our culture, and therefore its force is not some aspiration for a "natural" state of pure simplicity so much as an expression of alternatives to the always unsettled present. One could probably read all the pieces of this introductory passage as variations of the fall, but then this does not add up to the implication that we should or can recover some state of innocence but that transience and its discomforts are the human condition, and, as already mentioned, it is in fact images of impermanence and mortality (autumn leaves) that conclude this passage and sets up the long Walton passage.

On the other side of the Walton passage, introduced by the appearance of Diogenes, is a final segment worked mainly from Spinoza (480-481), as is signaled by the mention of "Blest"—Zukofsky's preferred sobriquet for the philosopher. Spinoza's political treatises and his correspondence are major sources of the voice offs in "A"-21, along with Shakespeare, Walton and to a lesser degree Veblen and Buckminster Fuller. Somewhat surprisingly Zukofsky does not appear to have read the political treatises until his son gave him a copy of R.H.M. Elwes' translation of Spinoza's major major works for Christmas 1966. Without getting bogged down in too close a reading, there is a relation between or at least the juxtaposition of the corruption of poetry (for Zukofsky's "poetry" at the top of page 481, Spinoza has "piety") and the effort to legislate blessedness—aesthetic or social perversions of the pursuit of one's nature, that is, the realization of one's and society's potentials. There is an image of the infant as "all wonder," an obvious state of innocence that leads directly into a complimentary adult image of pastoral retirement that Zukofsky has constructed out of a few bits from Spinoza's letters, which concludes with biblical emblems of the poet: prophecy and harp. This is no claim for the privileged powers of the poet except to say that singing (poetry) is prophecy as just demonstrated: it recalls the potential for wonder and harmonious existence against the forces that would erase such human possibilities and it recalls not so much by saying but by enacting or embodying that potential. Prophecy is not the power of prediction except as a demonstration of what might be. This roughly paraphrases what Spinoza says about prophecy in *A Theological-Political Treatise* from which Zukofsky snatches these two concluding words (Part I, Chap. 2), although in no sense can they qualify as an allusion to the source. Either the preceding voice off (or the larger poem generally) manifests this sense of prophecy or it fails. What immediately follows is the appearance of Track, who will begin to lay claim to Greave's *promesse du bonheur*—in other words, the forces that negate song and prophecy.

Again, it is necessary to strongly qualify any paraphrases of a poetry that so overtly undermines any such straightforward statement. Zukofsky was always skeptical of tendentious poetry, of poetry that argued a point or even adopted the perch of social or cultural critique. At the same time, however, he also acknowledged that any text is largely molded by and cannot but strongly reflect its circumstances—indeed necessarily expresses its times.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, Zukofsky's poetry is implicitly or immanently critical, reflecting but in that reflection indicating society's own utopian aspirations and its falling short. On the one

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<sup>15</sup> See for example the "Foreword to 'A' 1-12" (*Prep+* 228).

hand, the voice offs are explicitly lyrical and therefore indicate a more singular and personal voice, yet at the same time they are largely made up of quotations, sometimes straight and more often strongly reworked. If this use of quotation undermines the illusion of the singularity of the lyric voice and indicates that the singular is always already plural, it nonetheless simultaneously asserts the singular, the egalitarian insistence on individualities. Absolute singularity is of course beyond or beside what can be enunciated, and one must bring in the enunciation, the give and take between the singular and the plural to gesture toward this immanent individuality. Such an enunciation might sound like “A”-21’s voice offs. It is certain in any case that Zukofsky intends us to sound these poems less for their specific arguments than for their tonal qualities, a mixture of lyrical formality and contemporary (or not so contemporary) vernacular, while at the same time throwing off clusters of disparate images and statements that serve more to provoke us into the issues and terms at hand than specific argued positions.

For example, there is a short puzzling voice off that touches on the intertwined matters of law and business at the end of Act IV.3 (485), which is worked from Thorstein Veblen, another early enthusiasm to which Zukofsky returns. “Sabotage” in Veblen’s argument refers to the deliberate disruption of production in order to maintain a profitable level of prices, while the striking word “usufruct” is a legal term designating the receipt of benefits from property one does not actually own, which in this case means the natural wealth that should be held in common. In all this “price, wage and right” are lumped together for the benefit of the few. By consulting Veblen one could flesh out further implications of this passage, but at some point we have to confront the obvious fact that these arguments are largely unrecoverable except as glimpses given Zukofsky’s manner.<sup>16</sup> In this case we cannot even argue that Zukofsky is making bad stuff sing, at least as we ordinarily understand singing. However, he does appear to be conveying the sound of some kind of dysfunction, as the general negativity of the content or words is explicit enough. Something is wrong even if we cannot very clearly see it. This perhaps is the point and is meant to reflect back on the surrounding scenes of the play, which are actually one continuous argument over the ownership of the wicker—first between Track and Greave and then with the addition of Dads as supposed arbiter. The interpolated voice off from Veblen then suggests the larger social machinations that lie behind this whole debate but elude representation. Presumably, however, even in the sound of dysfunction one hears something of the desire for its antithesis—what could be.

It is around the pervasive topic of property that the second long voice off in Act IV.7 twines its complexities. For this poem, Zukofsky invents a four-line stanza using a four count line except for the fourth line which has two words. As is frequently the case with Zukofsky there are the odd exceptions and occasionally a five-word line sneaks in, for example in a line that mentions five windows (495)—itself a word-image of the five-count line used for the translation of *Rudens*. The opening line offers a short list—bed, joy and prosperity (although not indicated as a quotation, this comes from Shakespeare)—and then goes on to declare that either we are immortal together or not at all (493). By Zukofskian standards this is clear enough: the perspective here is the social or “public,” with the opening line giving a concise measure by which any society should be judged, and anyone’s comparative lack is

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<sup>16</sup> The main Veblen text drawn on is *The Engineers and the Price System* (1921), but there are also a couple phrases taken from the essay, “The Intellectual Pre-Eminence of Jews in Modern Europe” (1919).

everyone's. Although often for Zukofsky the aspiration for immortality is a serious error, symptomatic of the fear of death (e.g. Lucretius in *Bottom* and "A"-12) and a refusal or inability to accept this world, in another sense immortality is simply a recognition that we are thoroughly social: that we exist and who we are is an overdetermined inheritance and will continue on in others. This is at the heart of Zukofsky's most persistent practice of self-consciously recycling and working with inherited materials. In the middle of this voice off is a stanza worked from Spinoza suggesting that perfection has to do with the understanding's inability "to leave undone what / is doing" (495). We might recall all the way back to Zukofsky's well-known objectivist discussions, including one definition of "an objective" as "desire for what is objectively perfect" (*Prep+* 189), which probably was already informed by Zukofsky's reading of Spinoza. In any event, the conception of perfection here is not static, some achieved or desired telos, but is the process of self-realization—the very activity or exercise of reason or understanding is "doing," the perpetual working out of one's or society's being or reality. Its perfection is in or implied (defined) by its nature which it is always in the process of doing—that is what it does by necessity. Spinoza's political treatises, based on the model developed in the *Ethics*, argue that the maximum free realization of the individual is coterminous with the maximum free realization of the state. Spinoza's treatises are one of the two major sources for this voice off, with the other an article from the *New York Times Magazine* on Buckminster Fuller, one of the great utopians in a period replete with utopian discourses. The stanza immediately preceding the one just discussed works some remarks of Fuller about his early career, speaking of a "blind date with principle," by which he means that despite the lack of encouragement and even failure of those days he persisted in his self-belief. Zukofsky maintains the economic metaphors Fuller deploys, in this case presumably in redeemed form. The following stanza places Fuller in a Spinozian context whereby he simply persisted in working out his own sense of himself (his principles), which is simultaneously working out the future of his society—quite literally in the case of Fuller. There is little mystery in why Zukofsky (and many others at the time) would be attracted by Fuller, a utopian engineer on a grand scale. The conclusion of this voice off begins with the poet looking out five windows toward Manhattan and then imagining it transformed by Fuller's vision into a geodesic sphere (his Biosphere served as the U.S. pavilion at the Montreal World's Fair which was taking place during the time "A"-21 was composed).<sup>17</sup> This vision modulates into suggestions from Fuller's designs for a floating city in which the parts could detach themselves and travel freely, and his view that nation states are obsolete, merely a passing phase of humankind's larger evolution. This utopian vision of nationlessness relates to the topic of property or rather to a social vision of the "commonwealth" (or "common meadow") mentioned earlier (494), as well as another stanza worked from Spinoza against the concept of owning land ("soil") which cannot be carried with one but should be for whoever uses it (495). All of this is placed before a scene in which Greave attempts to "negotiate" with Dads over his rights to the wicker.

This long voice off ends, almost like a tacked on signature, with "begin / anywhere" (496), which could be taken as a slogan for Zukofsky's late poetics. As already indicated,

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<sup>17</sup> This setting of five windows looking toward Manhattan echoes that in the fifth partita of "A"-13 (309). Although Zukofsky tends to be quite literal, Paul Zukofsky points out that none of the Zukofsky apartments in the Brooklyn Heights area between 1942 and 1964 had such a view across the East River to Manhattan (although from the Brooklyn Esplanade one could look across), nor as far as he can recall had five contiguous windows. Zukofsky's emphasis on these five windows may be intended to suggest the five senses or windows of the soul.

Plautus' play as well as Zukofsky's treatment of it reduces plot and character development to insignificance, and its thematic interest, its social critique, can be found here or there in the exchanges between characters. In *Bottom* Zukofsky approvingly evokes the flattened perspective of Persian painting that encourages the eye to wander freely over the surface, near and far equally important (184). It matters very little where you enter "A"-21, especially once you figure out the rudimentary plot on first reading, but this is an observation that by this time is true of "A" generally. The conception of a long poem of an arbitrarily pre-determined number of parts that remain relatively autonomous, yet will inevitably create their interrelations by simply being gathered under one cover, means that any movement of "A" can be a starting point around or to which the others can be related. The trouble with plots, development, frames and the like is that they serve to tame the heterogeneity of the text, which is not to argue that we can do without them, simply that no one be allowed to become fixed or determinant. Any such containment mechanisms function by triggering a level of abstraction that overrides the specificity of the textual detail. This also means that the visceral qualities of the text are attenuated, and therefore Zukofsky's counter-insistence on the "musical" properties of the poetry and the anarchistic propensities of verbal sounds vis-à-vis the semantic. But beyond the purely textual, since at least "A"-12 Zukofsky had been pursuing the implications that you start anywhere, where you happen to find yourself and then work out—the poem as a matter of thickening and intertwining, which is no different from what one necessarily does in everyday living and negotiating whatever the materials and circumstances in which one happens to find oneself. However, Zukofsky has tacked this slogan onto the end of this particular voice off which is concerned with property and Fuller's dream of a free-floating society where one is liberated from the restrictions of being rooted in any given place and by implication by any demands of property. It would be injudicious to implicate a political program or position from this in terms of a practical strategy for achieving this propertyless state, as Zukofsky's real concern is more with a sense of Spinozian freedom, a glimpsing sense of what it might feel like to live in the world alongside things without pre-determined borders or frameworks—necessarily a process of realizing one's own nature and possibilities. Actually, one begins anywhere because one must.

Possibly the most puzzling voice off of all is the single line that concludes "A"-21, spoken while the audience is moving out of the theater. The line appears to be spoken by the poet to his wife in bed, in any case clearly an ordinary intimate moment that abruptly pulls the reader or viewer out of the world of the play. This of course is a quite conventional dramatic tactic where at the end one of the characters turns and directly addresses the audience, but in this case that convention is already inscribed in Plautus' play so that this final voice off is an awakening of an awakening. The entire conclusion of the play is complicated:

- 1) Dads has been talking with Leno and Greave, turns to the audience to tell them they will be invited inside to dinner if they give the play their applause, and then turns back to Leno and Greave to invite them in as well;
- 2) Zukofsky then adds his own epilogue put into the mouth of Greave although what he "says" is in the mixed oblique voice off style, in which he seems to say (among other things) that Shakespeare (presumably he means *Pericles*) is a version of Plautus' version of Diphilus' "dream";
- 3) then Zukofsky returns to the last bits of Plautus' play with Leno's acceptance of Dads' invitation and Dads' request again that the audience applaud;
- 4) followed by the final brief voice off where spouse addresses spouse as the audience is filing out of the theatre.

This odd convolution may simply be an extension of the sort of verbal complication evident in Plautus' play, but there is also the suggestion of an endlessly receding origin for the play going back to Diphilus who presumably is reworking someone else's dream. This basic idea of composition as always necessarily re-composition is, as we have seen, fundamental in both the practice and assumptions of Zukofsky's work generally and is clearly enough built into this particular movement of "A" so overtly composed of a translation and other reworkings of prior texts. Here this idea seems to have become something more than the vagaries of textual migrations but also a series of what might be called states of awareness—the world of the play framed by the world of the audience framed by the personal world of the poet or whoever (perhaps the reader). This Chinese box-like reframing makes conscious the ultimately social and historical immanence of any consciousness. Obviously like textual transmutations, this reframing of awareness or consciousness goes on indefinitely in any direction. The final voice off suggests that there is a relation between the dreaming of the poet and that ancient "dream" of Diphilus, whose dream as a text is lost but then lives on in Plautus, Shakespeare, Zukofsky and ourselves as readers or audience. There is then a constant process of dreaming and wakening—we enter into a text and exit, yet text-world and exit-world are not in fact distinguishable. This final unexpected emphasis on dreaming implicates that ultimately utopian intentionality that motivates any work—literary or aesthetic, but finally labor generally—beyond whatever local or conscious concerns we may have in mind. There is another voice off I will not tackle here other than to point out that it opens by somehow intertwining "a concept of culture" and "the dead" with a set of sound-bites on dreams by Spinoza, Freud, Goya and the Talmud (473)—an intriguing complex I take to be concerned with how we necessarily work out the dreams of and with others. As the added epilogue suggests, "A"-21 in some sense goes back to Zukofsky's boyhood experiences at the theater, to whatever happened in those experiences, which is one way of indicating why or how he became a poet, or simply the person he became. But this is just one way to explain the "dream," which is not simply his but those other dreams he saw, behind which lie the dreams of society. Elsewhere is re-explained differently because necessarily one simply begins anywhere. But dreaming may be no more than verbal play, the activity of turning over and reworking the given. In that case this final line is not, or is not only, addressed to the poet's wife but to the poem so that the "turn" implicates *verse*, not simply the turn of the lines but the turning of the words on their sides—the sort of turning and gamboling we have just seen demonstrated in the epilogue spoken by Greave, evoking a New York boy's weekends spent at the theater, and indeed throughout the voice offs and the play generally.

10 June 2014