

bristles with an armoury of pornographic abuse. Shifts of tone occur not only between poem and poem but also within the poems (as for example in the wonderful no. XI). Donne could have matched this but the Zukofskys cannot. Here too the obscurity is a crucial flaw. Catullus' voice, through all its shifts, is direct, simple, passionate. It knows what it means to say. It is immediately apprehensible. Its most powerful effects are often the most simple: *nox est perpetua una dormienda; odi et amo; nunc iam illa non vult*. Catullus as impersonated by the Zukofskys cannot approach this. He stutters. His words are awkward; he has problems with his meaning. The sense hobbles unhappily from line to line. I am reminded of Roger Ascham's tart observation: 'even the best translation is, for mere necessity, but an evil-imped wing to fly withal or a heavy stump leg of wood to go withal . . .' For all their ingenuity, the Zukofskys are never able to lay down the crutches of translation and fly. The air of Helicon hill is too rarefied to bear these cumbersome wings.

## *Evening near India*

The jackal's yelp from empty fields,  
 Firelight on bony faces,  
 Confirm earlier images in black and white:  
 Shuttered villages silently perched  
 On long horizons;  
 Cartloads of jute,  
 Foam-flecked muzzles,  
 The idiot drivers asleep.  
 The forests of the Terai  
 Once green and fabled  
 Now lie sapless and ploughs pick  
 At the hopeless land.  
 Above all, in the twilight  
 Like an emblem of underdevelopment  
 Hangs a swathe of dust and woodsmoke,  
 The grey flag of poverty  
 And despair in poor countries.

ALAN MCLEAN