

READING EDITION

COMMENT IN MOTION

TRANSLATIONS

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COMMENT IN MOTION

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Followed by translations of poems by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Goethe, Hölderlin, Chénier, Heine, Leopardi, Nerval, Bécquer, Rosalía Castro, Verlaine, Moréas. — GROVER JACOBY,
Translator

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The presentation of this book is offered in memory of Rosalie S. Jacoby and those generous initiatives of hers that were essential to the continuance of the Variegation publications; in memory also of her pleasure in all things radiant.

COMMENT IN MOTION

Translation should be “comment in motion”; in other words it should set forth or present without becoming static. If the disposition of the host language is properly respected, there is no danger of such congealment. We should not demand from translation that which we do not ask of criticism or the essay in general: a mirror that turns all things to stone.

As a reinforcement of this concept of movement in language, I have used a multiprosodic approach in translating these masterpieces. More than one kind of prosody has been utilized in most of these translations as a tool selected for the purpose of capturing ideas and cadences. In other words when a satisfying movement slant has not been forthcoming in one prosody, prosodies other than the one used up to that point in translating the particular poem have been drawn on, always with attention to the attainment of a harmonious synthesis. This procedure has been followed even in those cases where the finished translation, rhymed or unrhymed, appears to relate to only one of the used prosodies.

This new edition differs in a number of respects from the first. It retains the poem “Clytie”, an illustration of the type of translation that attempts to carry over a certain emphasis on the caesura into English.

This collection includes additional poems from the works of Hölderlin and Heine. Some changes have been made in several of the reprinted translations.

William Butler Yeats waited a generation or two for the revision of his early poems. The time interval for translators is evidently shorter by decades.

Grover Jacoby

NOTE: These observations are not intended as strictures regarding those works of scholarship that are employed as aids in the perusal of texts in foreign languages.

Translated Poetry

Comment in Motion · No. I · Issue p. 7 · Scan p. 11

HALF THROUGH LIFE

Friedrich Hölderlin

All with yellow pears
And brimming with wild roses,
The land hangs lakeward.
You swans well-favored,
And drunken with kisses,
Dip with your heads
In the water's pure calm.

Alas! Where shall I find, in
Wintertime, flowers; where are they
And the sunlight
And shade of the earth?
The high walls stand
Silent and cold; in the wind
Clap the weather vanes.

NEVER MORE

Jean Moréas

A gaslight weeping in the mist,
A gaslight weeping like an eye.
Good reason now to mourn and sigh,
For as we are, we must persist.

The asphalt beaten by the shower
Is like the rock against the wave.
—What rides on shoulders to the grave
Describes the limits of our power.

Let us not go, my sister dear,
Like any other stubborn child
To where the storm pours down so wild,
To dream of unreal sweetness here,
Of sweetness here, of some bright wreath.
The winter scythes away the heath.

WISDOM

Paul Verlaine

The sky is high above the roof
So blue, so calm.
A tree is up above the roof—
A shifting palm.

The bell is seen within the sky,
Gently ringing.
A bird is seen within the tree,
Singing, singing.

My God, my God, all life is there
This quiet day.
Village hums come flowing there
From faraway.

What have you done, you who there—
Weep unceasing?
Say what has happened, you there,
With youth's passing?

FROM “RIMAS”

Gustavo Bécquer

10

About me the unseen atoms of the air
Palpitate and splash their fiery sparks;
The sky is shattered into golden rays;
The earth is trembling gaily;
I hear in floating waves of harmony
The sound of kisses and of beating wings.
My eyelids close! What happened?
Love passed by.

FROM “RIMAS”

Gustavo Bécquer

71

I could not sleep for wandering in that limbo
Where earthly form and shape must slip away
In those mysterious spaces felt between
Asleep, and then awake.

Ideas that make their rounds in silence
Gave turn on turn about the waking brain.
Little by little the movements of their measured
Dance had fall'n away.

My eyelids closed with veiling of that mirror
Where human souls reflect the light of day,
But other light illumined far within
A world of visionary shape.

Just then there was a sounding in my ears
Like that which drifts about a church's aisles,
As prayers confused are ending in the hum
Of amens when the faithful rise.

Thereupon I heard a sad thin voice
Calling me by name from quite afar
And breathed a whiff then of extinguished candles,
Of incense and of humid air.

.....

At last night came; from the arms of memory's loss
I fell, like any stone, on that deep breast;
I slept, only to exclaim on waking, "Someone
That I loved is dead!"

FROM “NEUER FRUHLING”

Heinrich Heine

The slender waterlily
Looks dreamily up from the glass.
The moon sends greetings downwards
Lit through with love's alas.

Ashamed her head is sinking
Again down into the lake,
For there at her feet she sees him,
So gaunt and pale for her sake.

DER ASRA

Heinrich Heine

Every day the very lovely
Sultan's daughter came, departed,
There at evening near the fountain
Of the whitely plashing waters.

Young, enslaved, each day he stood there
Every evening by the fountain
Near the whitely plashing waters;
Daily he turned pale and paler.

Then one evening rushed the princess
On him there with angry words,
"Let me know your name this moment,
Then your home, your real descent."

And the slave spoke, "I am called,
Called Mohamet, him from Yemen,
And my race reveals that Asra
Who must, always, dying love."

FROM “NEUER FRUHLING”

Heinrich Heine

6

Moving faintly through the mind,
Peals that are endearing,
Ring, O little springtime song,
Ring through all the clearing.

Ring until you find the house
Set among the flowers.
Greetings to the first-found rose;
Tell her they are ours.

WITH YOUR BLUE EYES

Heinrich Heine

With all of the blueness of your eyes
You dearly look my way.
They come so dreamily to mind
There's nothing more to say.

And now in a vision of blue eyes
All things will take a part.
A blue and liquid sheet of thoughts
Comes pouring over my heart.

IM WUNDERSCHONEN MONAT
MAI

Heinrich Heine

When, in immaculate May, once more
The season's buds unfold,
The leap of love within my heart
Is high and making bold.

When, in immaculate May, once more
The birds awake with song,
Therewith I must confess to her
How eagerly I long . . .

CHILDE HAROLD

Heinrich Heine

Masked and silent guardians sit there
In the solemn funeral bark
Which is sailing ever onward,
Mournful, powerful and dark.

Fallen poet, he lies quiet
With a pale uncovered face;
Blue the eyes that keep on looking
Heavenwards toward light and space.

From the water's depths an ailing
Voice of faëry seeks its way.
On the boat the waves do shatter
With a sounding of dismay.

FROM “THE NORTH SEA”

Heinrich Heine

On the wan shore I sat
Idea-plagued and alone.
The sun lowered; it flung
A streaked red glow on the waters;
And the white full waves,
Impelled by high tide,
Foamed, speeding nearer and nearer—
A weird rush, a whisper, a flute-note,
A laugh and a murmur, a sighing and whistling.
Through it all ran an intimate cradlesong.
It was like hearing forgotten legends,
Old lovely fairy tales
Heard once years ago
From a neighbor's son,
When, of a summer evening,
On the doorsteps we cowered
At some quiet tale
With small intent hearts
And inquisitive eyes;
While the girls full-grown
Were set in the window opposite
Among the incense of flowerpots,
Rose-faces
Smiling and moonlit.

WHERE ?

Heinrich Heine

Where within this wandered vastness
Is that final rest of mine?
Under palm trees, southern palm trees?
Under lindens by the Rhine?

Shelved away within some desert,
Labor of indifferent hand?
Or, as likely, on the seacoast
Underneath a stretch of sand?

Doubtless there will be about me
God's own heavens, here or there,
Over me death's lanterns floating,
Stars around me everywhere.

LUCK IS JUST A COMMON
SLATTERN

Heinrich Heine

Well, luck is just a common slattern
And wastes no time on another stay;
She shoves your hair right off your brow
And kisses quick and flies away.

But Frau Ill-luck on the other hand
Will hold you tight against her breast,
And says she's not in a hurry now:
She sits down first; she's knitting next.

COMPLAINT CONCERNED WITH CERTAIN ANNOYANCES

Jules Laforgue

A sunset of cosmogonies!
How life, each day, is everyday . . .
Whatever you may think or say,
How never great, how mean one is . . .

With frankness we might even tell
Of those surprises met en route,
Across our poses, then, bear fruit
To know each other very well.

Silence has something that might bleed
And shake the exile of small chat.
But no! These ladies barter that
For who shall follow, who shall lead.

They look efficient, discontented,
And under heaven, we confess
To the esthetic super-mess
By which they are adored, defended.

Right now I think that one is playing
For help in searching out a ring
(Where in all vagueness is the thing?),
A souvenir of love, she's saying!

And they are all adored, defended.

TO HER PORTRAIT

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

This that you see, this colorful deceit,
exhibiting the graces of the art,
with its false choice of colors, takes the part
of feeling's cautious and most wary cheat;
herein where flattery is pretending,
excusing the horrors of the years,
conquering the rigor of time's spears
to triumph over age and all forgetting;
it is a stupid studied artifice,
useless precaution confronted by fate's power;
a quaint mistaken carefulness is this,
in the wind naught but a delicate flower,
obvious solicitude with everyone aware,
a corpse, some dust, a shadow, nothing there.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

1

Through perennial foliage
That suffers a new flowing murmur,
Through the green undulant ocean,
Amorous mansion meant for the warbler,
I can see from my window
The church I deeply cared for.

The church I cared for deeply . . .
I never know what I love any more,
For my thoughts in a rudeness of traffic
Are stirring against each other.
There is real doubt if my love
Can form in my breast with harsh rancor.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL SAR”

Rosalía Castro

2

I hear the slow ringing; it comes as then
It came to my bed with its call
As its echoes spread notice of dawn,
And with a caress meanwhile
A gilt ray of the sun would enter
And leave my room tranquil.

Pure the air, the light made of roses,
How happy I was to awaken!
I saw among clouds of incense
Winged visions, all of them golden.
I saw faith's bandage over their eyes,
Celestial strip, by one and all worn.

That sun is the same, but they
Do not come when I call them,
And across all the space and clouds,
And the water's dizzy oblivion,
And the air's blue transparency,
Alas! I am calling, searching in vain.

White and deserted the way
Among the luxuriant hedges,
And the forests and streams that accompany
Its borders with pleasant mysteries
Seem to draw me on, to entice me

To follow its line ever endless.

Let us go anyhow, since the ancient road
Shows itself at our passage,
Though sad, rough and deserted
And changed like ourselves with age,
Full still of white phantoms
We adored in that age.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

55

That of all hope for a life such as mine—
This sad and discolored arriving sunset.
Into the house of gloom, dismantled and cold
Let us return step by step,
Lest before all of light's joy my bitterness swell
In the white air of day.

The bird of omens seeks happiness in its black nest;
The wild beast stretches out in its far-away cave,
Death's prey in the sepulcher, the somber one in neglect
My soul in some waste.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

64

In the linked falling sounds of the wave
 And the moaning of wind,
In reflection light shifts through
 The forest and cloud,
In some bird's chirp in passage,
In the simple perfume ignored,
 That the west wind robs
 From valley and peak;
Worlds exist where those find themselves sheltered—
 The souls who succumb with
 The weight of the world.

FROM "EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR"

Rosalía Castro

69

Every time she recalls that opprobrium,
Each time, I say; she is forced to remember!

 In humiliation her soul
Aspires to canceled being in air
 As whitest cloud
Space-diffused through blue atmosphere.

Memory? The thing charming to madness
Or ever bringing death-bringing grief?

 No, it is not only memory
 But the gathering in of
What is past, present, and infinite,
What was, is, forever, below, and above.

THE HOMELAND

Friedrich Hölderlin

Noiseless currents bear home the boatman
Content from far islands, lands of his harvest.
Now I too would return to the homeland;
But what grief was harvested?

Pleasing shores, you that reared me,
Can you still love's hurt? Oh, give me
My childhood's forests; at my coming,
A return of tranquillity.

HYPERION'S SONG OF FATE

Friedrich Hölderlin

You move about within light
On soft floors, favored natures;
Quick airs and god-like
Lightly pluck you,
As a girl's able fingers
The sacred strings.

Fate-free, as the sleeping
Infant, breathe the spirits;
Ever chaste
And shy flowers
Their essence
Opens eternally,
And the blessed glances
Fall among calming
Eternal clarities.

To us it is given
Nowhere to rest,
Suffering mortals,
Who, vanishing, fall
From hour to hour;
Unseeing as
Water is, cliff
To cliff flung,
Yearlong, downward, into
uncertainty.

ODE

Friedrich Hölderlin

With my boyhood hours
A God came to the rescue,
As free from harsh voices and whips
I played in sure innocence
With the blooms in the thicket,
And the airs of heaven
Played round me.

And as you rejoice
The heart of plants,
When toward you
Their frail arms are reaching,
You have lifted my heart,
Father Helios! And as Endymion
Was I one favored
Of the unsullied moon.

All of you intimate
True divinities,
You knew all
Of my soul's affection.
Certainly then I called you
Not by name, you too
Never named me, as mortals each other
Assuming acquaintance.

Informed of airs blown
From the rustling grove

I grew, and learned love
Under the blossoms.

In the arms of the Gods was my increase!

HER HEALING

Friedrich Hölderlin

Your friend, O Nature, suffers and sleeps, and you,
The all-quickenings, hold back — ah — and heal her not,
You powerful airs ethereal,
You sources of sunlight?

All earth's flowers, all the joyous
Fair fruit of the grove, do not cheer
This one life, O you gods,
One reared in your love.

Already sacred pleasure in life breathes and sounds
Once more, in pleasing words, and now
The eye of your favored one
Opens and kindly glows for you.

SUNSET

Friedrich Hölderlin

Where are you? Elated, my soul faints
With all your light rapture, so it is,
That I listened, as with gold echoes
Full, the exquisite sun youth

Played an evensong on the heavenly lyre,
Through hills and thickets prolonging it.
Now he has left for the pious nations
Far away, where they honor him.

SOCRATES AND ALCIBIADES

Friedrich Hölderlin

Why regard him so, holy Socrates,
Always this youth? Is worth unknown to you?
Why do your eyes as on gods
Look there with such fondness?

Who has thought deepest, loves the quick.
Who knows creation best, can measure youth's tallness.
Not too rarely, at last, the wise
Give way to the beautiful.

THE RUN OF LIFE

Friedrich Hölderlin

My spirit leapt high, but love drew
It thoroughly downward; suffering pressed down on it.
So I proceed with life's curve
And return to the starting-place.

TO HIMSELF

Giacomo Leopardi

Forever now you will rest,
heart of grief. Annulled is the extreme imposture
I thought eternal. It has perished. I feel
in the dear illusions
desire's eclipse and hope's too.
Rest forever. Enough from you
so far, of pulsations! Nothing is worth
one beat of you, nor is the earth
worthy of sighs. The bitter and dull:
these are life and naught else; and the earth is slime.
Be still now! Despond
the last time. To our kind it is given
only to die. Disdain yourself,
nature, henceforth, the ugly
power, which, slyly, to the common hurt governs,
and the whole's infinite vanity.

L'INFINITO

Giacomo Leopardi

Ever dear to me the abandoned slope
and this hedge which from the view
excludes in great part the utmost horizon.
But with reclining and looking therefrom,
the everspreading of space and the unattainable
silences and the quiet in greatest depth
are imaged forth in the mind, when not for long
the heart is alarmless. And as I hear
wind's pressure through the planting, I find myself
weighing that *infinito silenzio*
with this voice: I remember the eternal,
and the dead seasons, and this one, the present
alive with the sound of itself. I find
in immensity the immersion of thought,
and a sweet capsizing in this sea.

Note: Pronunciation of the words in italics is as follows: *infinito*
silénzio.

FOUND

J. W. von Goethe

I went in the wood
With nothing to find,
All by myself
With a mindless mind.

In the shade I saw
A flower rise,
A star that shone,
A flower eye.

I wanted to break it.
It lisped in thread:
Break me and make me
Withered and dead.

I dug so that earth
Would deeply give,
Took flower and root
With me to live

And planted it then
In a quiet place.
It spreads and blooms
At a ready pace.

THE LORELEI

Heinrich Heine

Far-gone is my joyless mood today—
Nor easy to comprehend;
There comes to mind a fairy-tale
Whose hold will never end.

The air is cool and darkening now,
And quiet the flowing Rhine.
The mountain summit lifts in sparks
With moments more to shine.

High-throned is the beauty young and bold,
A wonder of wonders there.
In a blaze of gold and precious stones,
She combs her golden hair.

She combs it through with a golden comb,
And who hearkens, then, will see
Her singing and charm as one and the same:
A powerful melody.

Forgetting his boat and its doubtful lot
The sailor is gripped by woe.
He hardly sees the reef's great rock,
But only the height aglow.

I suppose the waves with a rushing sound
Fall to on sailor and sail.
The Lorelei's song has never been found
A likely one to fail.

CLYTIE

André Chénier

My Manes to Clytie: "Clytie, farewell.
Are your steps traveling once more where I dwell?
Speak, is it you, Clytie, or must I wait more?
Ah! When you arrive not, alone in the dawn,
To dream of my few days lived only for you,
See this shadow in love, and speak with it too,
The harsh peace of Elysium embitters my heart;
Never light on my bones, the earth when we part.
In those regions each time, morning with a fresh air
Runs caressing against your lips, breast and hair,
Weep, weep, adored girl; I am truly bereft.
The soul's sacred home by my soul has been left
Which rests on your mouth from its recent alarms.
Weep, set free a kiss, and open your arms."

IN THE WOODS

Gérard de Nerval

At last alive, he sings in spring.
Ah, have you never heard that sound?
Yet it is pure and simple, touching,
Where in the woods his voice is found.

In summertime, his mate is sought.
He loves, but not to love again.
How faithful, peaceful and how sweet—
Deep in the woods — the bird's nest then.

And then when autumn comes so dimly
A silence falls . . . before the cold.
Alas! How happy it must be,
The bird's death there — within the wood.

BEFORE AND NOW

Friedrich Hölderlin

In my youth I started off morning-gay,
Weeping at nightfall. Now I am older;
Doubt comes at dawning, but holy
And cheerful is the day's end.