

READING EDITION

COMMENT IN MOTION

TRANSLATIONS

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FLUCTUANT SYLLABIC VERSE

COMMENT IN MOTION

A Quarterly of Fluctuant Syllabic Verse

Number 3 · July 1967 · Los Angeles

*Set from the scan of the magazine. The poems, their titles, the poets'
names and the figures at the feet of the leaves are the printer's; everything
in this color is this edition's.*

CONTENTS

<i>Reactions to Fluctuant Syllabic Verse and Comment in Motion</i>	
<i>From "The Second Book of Sonnets for Helene". Pierre de Ronsard</i>	87
<i>From "Rimas". Gustavo Bécquer</i>	88
<i>Wanderer's Night Song. J. W. von Goethe</i>	90
<i>From "Die Heimkehr". Heinrich Heine</i>	91
<i>From "En Las Orillas Del Sar". Rosalía Castro</i>	92
<i>From "En Las Orillas Del Sar". Rosalía Castro</i>	93
<i>From "En Las Orillas Del Sar". Rosalía Castro</i>	94
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Followed by translations of poems by Ronsard, Goethe, Heine,
Bécquer, Rosalía Castro. — GROVER JACOBY, *Translator*

Acknowledgement

Second translation of “Wanderer’s Night Song” by J. W. von Goethe appeared in “Comment in Motion” (unnumbered issue). © 1966 by Grover Jacoby.

The front matter of this number is unnumbered: the printer set his figures on the translations only, 87 to 95. The two pieces of editor's prose — his page of readers' reactions and his essay Rhyme Rhythm — stand at the head of the book in his order, and neither carries a figure. The contents opposite, which is this edition's, can name only one line without a figure and names the first of them.

THE END, VOLUME III

REACTIONS TO FLUCTUANT SYLLABIC VERSE AND COMMENT IN MOTION

“The attention to the caesura and what you describe as the de facto Alexandrine is a wonderful thing. I wish more poets were aware of the mechanics of such techniques.” William Packard, translator of the version of Racine’s *Phèdre* that has been successfully produced on the New York and London stage, instructor of poetry at New York University.

“It is a good theory, and I wish you continued success with it.” John Frederick Nims, distinguished poet associated with Poetry (Chicago) in past years.

“It’s fine the way you make the measures seem to come naturally, yet with grace. I’ll show them to my students who think metres are by nature stiff.” Josephine Miles, prominent poet and member of the English Department at the University of California at Berkeley.

“I have taken the liberty of copying your translation of ‘Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare’ for my own enjoyment.” Pádraig O’Broin, author of books of poetry in Gaelic and English, past editor of Canadian Poetry Magazine.

“The translations make good poems in themselves, especially the ones in fluctuant syllabic verse.” Myron H. Broomell, author of *Time by Dialing*.

“I think they read beautifully. The French ones also catch the mood and rhythm.” Germaine Brée, author of books on Proust and the modern French novel, head of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin.

"Among your translations, I particularly like the Hölderlin Before and After, Goethe's Found, the two poems by Leopardi, To Her Portrait, the Laforgue poem, and Half through Life But this is an impressive collection indeed." Christopher Isherwood.

"I like your Comment in Motion, both the theory and the practice." Dr. Kenneth Oliver, chairman of the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts, Occidental College.

"Careful work in these translations." Marianne Moore.

"It was really a pleasure to encounter poems which so naturally came from another tongue, with none of the slightly stilted or uneasy phrases which usually accompany translations." Frederick Noad, guitarist and instructor on television.

"There is much tenderness in Louise Labé, and you bring that over." Jean Starr Untermeyer, well-known poet and translator of Hermann Broch's, Death of Virgil.

"I have perused this pamphlet with great interest and will bring your translations to the attention of my students with pleasure." Richard Eberhart, distinguished poet, Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (1959-1961) and professor at Dartmouth.

"Your translation of Hölderlin's 'Hälfte des Lebens' is masterly." John Hall Wheelock, prominent editor and poet.

"It has been a pleasure to read your book of sensitive translations. The spontaneous rhythmic quality of your versions is something that I value." George Dillon, Pulitzer prize winner in the field of poetry and translator with Edna St. Vincent Millay of the Fleurs du Mal.

NOTE: The statements by Marianne Moore, Frederick Noad, Germaine Brée, Richard Eberhart, and George Dillon were written before April 15, 1967, when they had only the first volume of Comment in Motion at their

disposal.

RHYME RHYTHM

The term, *rhyme rhythm*, may sound “rich and strange” to some ears, but it should be admitted that such an expression fills a need in making clear a certain concept. This notion is that of the crucial role that rhythm plays in the creation of the accords of rhyme.

In nearly all poetry, rhyming with a weak syllable following immediately on a stressed unrhymed syllable has been avoided in those forms where the verse has a marked accentual tendency. Of course, there have been some important exceptions, but in those cases the unbalanced rhymes make themselves disagreeably felt.

Evidence of preoccupation with this problem can be found in Laurence Binyon’s preface to his translation of Dante, where he makes a skillful apology for rhyming with the concluding syllable of such a word as “forest.” He requests the reader not to distort the pronunciation of any word to fit the occasion, but to tolerate the irregularity as a source of rhythmic variety. He is certainly right not to advocate an unnatural shift in accent.

If rhythmic variety of this kind can be obtained without an overemphatic distortion, there is no doubt that rhyme will be in a position to give the world new auditory experiences. Mr. Binyon’s preface contributes to this end.

In the works of several great English poets of past centuries, a leaning toward this freedom is to be found. For instance, Keats in “The Eve of St. Agnes” does not hesitate to use such rhymes as “caress—comfortless” and “phantasies—eyes”, and we do not experience therefor anything that disturbs the harmonious fabric of the poem. However, the words, “phantasies” and “comfortless”, are

not accented on the penult, but on the antepenultimate syllable. At any rate, such rhymes are forerunners of experimentation with the rhyming of the final unstressed syllables of penultimately-accented words. Rhyme of this latter type is an irritant unless it is somehow resolved as in the case of most discords in music.

Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore confront this problem with great boldness and succeed in mitigating the irritant to a remarkable extent. By the introduction of angularities in a certain way within the line, Mr. Pound with his translations of Cavalcanti moves in this direction of making palatable such weak rhyme where it occurs. Miss Moore does something rather similar with her syllabic verse in the lovely and familiar lines of her poem, "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing":

subdivided by sun
till the nettings are legion.

In this particular instance, one rhyming word is an accented monosyllable, and the other receives the accent on the penultimate. That does not prevent the rhyme from belonging to this category.

In the fluctuant syllabic verse of *Comment in Motion*, Number II, fluctuating cadences attempt to arrive at a balance that makes pleasing to the ear weak rhyme following an accented penult. The following sestet is from the translation of Louise Labé's "Sonnet XXIII":

Thus, it is plain that end of your malice
Was but to enslave me pretending service.
Forgive me, my Friend, forgive me this time
That I being outraged, in anger and spite:
In knowing you martyr as much as I am,
Wherever you are, I take some comfort.

The opportunity that fluctuant syllabic verse offers in the free use of slant rhymes of all kinds supplies a great

area of maneuver not only for translators but also for all poets.

The interchangeability in common parlance of the words, "rhyme" and "verse", reinforces the argument that the rhythm, or cadence, of the entire line is an ingredient of rhyme. Let us find the rhythms that will reconcile us to the greatest company of rhymes.

Translations in Fluctuant Syllabic Verse

Comment in Motion · No. 3 · Issue p. 87 · Scan p. 13

FROM "THE SECOND BOOK OF SONNETS FOR HELENE"

Pierre de Ronsard

XLII

When aged, still living, near the evening candle
You sit by the fire, winding and spinning,
While singing my verses you will be marvelling:
"Ronsard did me honor when I was beautiful."

No servant of yours at the news which you tell,
Who after day's work may be sometimes sleeping,
At my name's whisper will keep from awaking,
Blessing your name whose praise is immortal.

I shall lie in the earth a boneless phantom;
In the shadow of myrtles I shall find calm.
You will bend at the hearth with end of your days

Regretting my love and your proud disdain.
Live now, believe me, nor wait for a "then".
Gather the moment all of life's roses.

FROM "RIMAS"

Gustavo Bécquer

LIII

Once more with their return the dark-winged swallows
about your balcony have hung their nests
and again their wings alert us with their dallying
beside the window-glass,

but those who lingered, from further flight abstaining,
to view my glory and your loveliness
who took it on themselves to learn our names,
their return has long since passed.

The clustered honeysuckles will once again return
over garden walls to clamber at all costs,
and again toward evening, still more lovely,
they will blossom forth at last,

but not the ones, those weighted with thick dew,
those we once saw under trembling drops,
all falling there like late tears of the day,
they are forever past.

Once again the sound of all love's ardent phrases
will be returning as indeed they must;
your heart again no longer deep in dreams
will awaken then perhaps,

but silently and always kneeling
as at God's altar, even as one worships,

as I once loved you . . . believe it never,
no one will love you thus!

Other Translated Poetry

Comment in Motion · No. 3 · Issue p. 90 · Scan p. 16

WANDERER'S NIGHT SONG

J. W. von Goethe

First Translation (Morpheus)

Over all ridges
Is peace.
Over all branches
Release
From breath's smallest shift.
The birds are resting from song.
Wait, and hardly for long,
Till day's worries lift.

Second Translation (Dis)

Over all ridges
Is peace.
Over all branches
Release
From all signs of breath.
The birds are resting from song.
Wait! Your rest is the long
Vacation of death.

Note: Since these divergent concepts can be drawn from the same beautiful poem by Goethe, it might be possible to say that we have here an example of “comment in scission” as well as “in motion.” The final two lines of the original German are as follows: Warte nur, balde Ruhest du auch.

FROM “DIE HEIMKEHR”

Heinrich Heine

66

Novice lover, whosoever,
Luckless, yet results a god.
But whoever loves again,
Luckless loving, is a fool.

I, the greatest fool, am loving
Once again without return;
Sun and moon and stars are laughing.
Laugh along I shall—and die.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

62

—Wait but a moment, restless fancy,
For the victory is waiting;
Love and glory are there smiling.
Do they not flatter or enchain you?
—Leave me alone, forgotten, free.
In darkness I would wander vaguely
To receive illusion’s kiss,
There only, sweetly, without shame.

FROM "EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR"

Rosalía Castro

63

The sun is expiring, and from the oaks
Withered leaves, at the impulse of the air,
In the silence of their twists and turns,
Descend into the mire
They who in all purity and beauty
Came alive once with the April weather.

Now it is autumn, lovely and capricious—
How lovely and capricious is pleasure—
Since in the tomb of the dead leaves
Hopes and smiles are their only care.

The light extinguished, night finally arrives
Like pain and death, equally as somber;
The thunder bursts, the river overflows
Dragging with it victims in its waters;
And they are dying contented and happy.
How lovely and capricious is pleasure!

FROM "EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR"

Rosalía Castro

75

Hour after hour, day after day,
Between sky and earth with their long vigils
Ever remaining,
Dashed down in a torrent, life
Passes away.

Return the perfume once more to the flower
That is withering for lateness;
From the waves as they kiss the shore
One then the other, kissing, meeting its fate,
Gather the lament-filled sounding air,
Leave its harmony on bronze engraved.

Times now disappeared, smiles, tears,
Black rage and sweet prevarications.
Ah! Where, my soul, indeed, where
Have you left your traces?