

READING EDITION

COMMENT IN MOTION

TRANSLATIONS

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FLUCTUANT SYLLABIC VERSE

COMMENT IN MOTION

A Quarterly of Fluctuant Syllabic Verse

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*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
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The contents page of this number does not list the unnumbered leaf of front matter. What it passes over is set here where the printer put it, under the title and the name he gave it on the leaf itself; the line above is in brackets because it is this edition's line and not his contents page's.



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The printer set his contents page at the back of this number, on the leaf after the last translation, and gave the fourteen sonnets of Louise Labé a single line for the whole run of folios 130–143. It stands at the front here, and each leaf he grouped takes a line of its own, so that every poem can be reached from it.

Followed by translations of poems by Leopardi, Du Bellay,
Louise Labé, Verlaine, Hölderlin, Eichendorff, Heine, Rosalía
Castro. — GROVER JACOBY, *Translator*

The essay, "Fluctuant Syllabic Verse" appeared in
"Comment in Motion, Number II." © 1967 by Grover
Jacoby

With this issue, the first of 1968, it is appropriate to make
clear that the presentation of all volumes of this series,
Comment in Motion, is dedicated to the memory of the
translator's mother, Rosalie S. Jacoby.

[REACTIONS TO FLUCTUANT SYLLABIC VERSE AND COMMENT IN MOTION]

"I was pleased to read more about your fluctuant syllabic verse in *Comment in Motion*, Number II, and agree with the very favorable reactions of important poets and translators found in Number III." Dr. A. Preminger, Editor of *The Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton University Press) and co-author of the article on the Alexandrine in that work.

"Less well-known, but outstanding, are the poems by the nineteenth-century Galician, Rosalía Castro. Also of special interest are the translations of sonnets by Louise Labé of sixteenth-century France. In these, Grover Jacoby's fluctuant syllabics and slant rhyme combine to produce a dense and unusual line structure." Anne Stanford in the *Los Angeles Times* (September 10, 1967).

"In his brief preface, Mr. Jacoby tells us, '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'. The second number continues this enterprise in the same spirit." *Poetry* (Chicago), July 1967.

FOREWORD

In fluctuant syllabic, all varieties of imperfect rhyme can assert themselves without disharmony because this end-rhyme is not usually involved in the struggle to stand out against as great a proliferation of terminations of metrical units in line after line as that to be found in accentual verse. This result naturally follows the shift of focus from the metrical foot to the hemistich.

For the benefit of those who did not read *Comment in Motion*, Number 2, I reprint the explanation presented in that issue:

Fluctuant Syllabic Verse
(*An American Alexandrine*)

In the seventeenth century, attempts were made to interest readers of poetry in English adaptations of the French Alexandrine. At that time it was not realized that a large percentage of French classic Alexandrines were susceptible of being counted in two ways; in other words, there existed a *de jure* Alexandrine and a *de facto* one. The *de jure* Alexandrine was a twelve-syllable line, but the beauty of this classic measure issued from the gently swaying fountain of a fact that twelve was not always twelve in the spoken, *de facto* Alexandrine whose variations reappear in the fluctuant syllabic verse in the first section of this volume.

Firstly, the fission of some French diphthongs adds to the syllabic count. Secondly, within the line, the letter “e” in cases where it is usually not pronounced in French, was considered pronounceable theoretically (except at the end of a hemistich) and then was counted as one syllable. In actual practice this extra syllable was in a large number of

cases not uttered, and thus the Alexandrine became flexible, and a certain “free rhythm” entered the citadel of classic French prosody. To this day the camouflage persists with such success that most people pay no attention to a presence that governs the cadence of the French verse of several centuries, but accept this flexibility without giving it conscious recognition.

The French Alexandrine is very often recited as a nine, ten, eleven or thirteen syllable line. Counts have been taken of the number of syllables in classic Alexandrines spoken by experts at the Collège de France, and these variations have been substantiated.

In my translation of Alexandrines and of decasyllabic verse in this volume, I have employed these variations, though I did not find it possible or necessary to pay attention to the occurrence of the letter “e” since English is governed by different laws of pronunciation from French. One might say that an invisible letter “e” as a kind of guardian angel has accompanied me in this experiment.

The translations in fluctuant syllabic verse contain all these variations of the twelve syllable line (lines where twelve is not twelve but nine or ten or eleven or thirteen) and also the varying hemistichs and placements of the internal caesura. Here is a list of these lines accompanied by indications of the variations in the hemistichs (in parentheses):

Nine (four and five, five and four)

Ten (five and five, six and four, four and six)

Eleven (six and five, five and six, four and seven, seven and four)

Twelve (six and six, seven and five, five and seven)

Thirteen (six and seven, seven and six).

For example, it should be possible to find in a decasyllable one of the three pairs of hemistichs in the

syllabic arrangements listed within the parentheses after the word "Ten".

In these pages the French rule of ending the first hemistich in a line on the accented syllable has not been followed closely since the pronunciation of English does not call for the exclusive fall of the accent on the last syllable of words. The caesura under consideration is the one near the center of the line, and the natural ending of a phrase usually determines it. Where the phrasal structure fails to indicate the attribution of a monosyllabic verb to one or the other of the hemistichs of a verse, the verb in question should be assigned to the line's second hemistich.

Grover Jacoby

NOTE: It is advisable that the reader of fluctuant syllabic verse be somewhat caesura-conscious; however, this special awareness is not necessary for reading the translations from the poetry of Von Eichendorff, Heine, and Hölderlin in this volume.

Translations in Fluctuant Syllabic Verse

Comment in Motion · No. 5 · Issue p. 125 · Scan p. 11

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

74

I was not born for hatred, doubtless:
Nor was I born for the sake of love
Though hatred and love have come to injure
My heart in a way quite equally grave.

As the hidden rock in a mossy growth
Silent, alone at any stream's foot
Still and forgotten I would remain—
Alive without love, alive without hate.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

61

A walk that is narrow, a pliant river,
The abandoned country and pinewood forest,
And, then, the old bridge so rustic and simple
Adding its grace to the desert quiet.

What leaves you lonesome? For the world's saturation,
Sufficient at times a single thought.
You take at this moment, overflowing with beauty,
Bridge, river, and forest as an arid lot.

No flower or cloud can ever enamour.
Heart, it is you, whether sad or contented,
Present arbiter of sorrow and pleasure
Who make a sea dry or a pole inhabited.

TO THE MOON

Giacomo Leopardi

O moon of grace, there comes to me
Here at year's ending how on this hill
I came in anguish to look toward you again.
Over the forest, you hung there at the time
As you are doing now, clarifying all.
But shaken and nebulous in my eye's weeping
Your face appeared; such was my perception,
For troubled was my life, and still it is
Nor is there change, delectable moon,
And yet how comforting it is to me
To be recalling, running through the hours
Of all my pain again. Oh, how welcome
In the time of youth, when there is length
To hope, and briefness is memory's course itself,
The reviewing of whatever's past
Although so sad and with enduring grief.

INITIUM

Paul Verlaine

Through singing of flutes, violins weaving laughter—
As the ball whirled on, I saw her pass,
Her blonde hair brightening the volutes of her ear
Whereto hope embarked, indeed, like a kiss
And wanted to speak, but hardly dared this.

She passed by, however, and the mazurka slowed,
With her swept in rhythm, no verse more indolent,
No rhyme more melodious, nor no image thus sparkled,
And her soul's candor shone through and at
The sensuous fullness of her eyes' green-gray light.

My mind, ever since, is fixing, grown still,
Evocation of splendour—in adoration;
Within memory of her as in some temple
My love has entered, in all superstition.
I recognize here the coming of passion.

FROM “THE REGRETS”

Joachim du Bellay

France, mother of arts, of arms, and of laws,
The milk of your breast has flowed for my sake.
Now like the lost lamb which pathetically calls
I fill woods and caves with the sound of your name.

Shall I, O cruel one, hear you no more
Call me your own child? How long must I wait?
No-one but echo replies when I call.
France, France, reply to my sad complaint.

Among the cruel wolves I wander the heath.
I feel winter coming, whose cold river of breath
Runs over my skin; in horror I shake.

Ah, the rest of your lambs are not lacking food;
They fear not the wolf, the wind, or the cold.
Am I therefore the least and last of the flock?

SONNET I

Louise Labé

It was hardly Ulysses or a cleverer still
Who ever foresaw from that godlike air
Full of grace, of respect, and also of honor
The torments and woe that at present I feel.

However, my love, you have fashioned so well
The peculiar wound in my innocent heart,
Already your prey and your ardor's safe port,
That any relief is but grant of your will.

O hardening fate that is forcing me
At a Scorpion's point, that for venom's relief
Insists that to it I address my plea.

I ask only annoyance may be destroyed,
Not the longings extinguished dear to my life
For better without them, myself were dead.

NOTE: This poem appears in Italian in the slender volume of Louise Labé's collected works. Her other sonnets were written in French. All of her sonnets can be found now in translation in Numbers II, IV, and V of *Comment in Motion*.

SONNET IV

Louise Labé

Since cruel Love made use of his flame
To poison my heart from the very first,
Not a day may pass that I ever find rest
From the fury that burns in his sacred name.

Whatever my labors and great they seem,
Whatever menace and ruin next,
What thought of death, of all things the last—
Now nothing, my heart, may overwhelm.

The more that he, Love, comes forth to assail,
To hold our force back it does seem well,
And always refreshed we then shall be.

But he shows no favor in anything here,
Before gods and men has one paltry care:
To prevail against strength that all may see.

SONNET VI

Louise Labé

Twice-over fortunate—thrice, the return
Of clarity's star, and happier still
This object whereon his eye deigns to dwell:
To her a good day in complete possession;

May she proudly know that celestial turn
Which would kiss the gift that is Flora's all,
The exhaling sweet visions Aurora knows well,
And would ever itself on her lips maintain.

To me alone is this good over-due
For many tears lost and much time too;
But seeing him here, I would fête him no less

And using my eyes, indeed their power,
Would exert attraction on him still more,
In little time would make great conquest.

SONNET VIII

Louise Labé

I live, I die; I burn and I drown.
In extreme of warmth, I endure the coldness.
Life's soft, then hard, and each to excess.
All annoyances, joys weave about in confusion.

Of a sudden I laugh and am weeping again
And I find in pleasure tormenting duress.
My happiness leaves and it stays no less.
Of a sudden I wither and then I green.

Love holds me wavering in its tether,
And when thinking myself in sorrow finished
Without ever thinking am freed of dolor.

When at last convinced that joy is in store,
While I'm reaching at last the height of contentment
Love fully restores my unfortunate lot.

SONNET X

Louise Labé

When your laureled blond presence has made me aware
In the plaintive sound of the lute that you pluck
With ease constraining each tree and rock
To follow behind you; when arrayed you come here

With thousands of virtues in encircling air,
Secure in honor from approach or attack,
Extinguishing praise—its high flare spark by spark,
Then my heart will speak from its passionate core:

So many virtues that make you beloved,
That leave you by everyone always esteemed,
Are none of these able to leave you in love,

And add to the virtues so praised by all
The epithet also of being merciful,
That inflamed of my love you may sweetly live?

SONNET XI

Louise Labé

O sweetest of looks, O eyes full of beauty,
You little gardens of flowers amorous
Where are love's arrows all so dangerous,
O felonious heart, O brutal cruelty,

You arrest my eyes with longing to see
Your conduct with me is so very rigorous,
Making my tears run in streams so languorous
Conveying the heat of my heart's own agony.

Thus, my eyes, you possess such very deep pleasure,
From his eyes receiving such good things whatever;
But you, my heart, the more they are pleased

The more you languish and feel annoyance:
You may wonder, indeed, if my unease be less,
While knowing my eye of my heart contráried.

SONNET XIV

Louise Labé

As long as my eyes are scattering tears
Regretting the loss of our time together,
Though my voice enough can manage to spare
Itself sobs and sighs so one comprehends,

As long as my hand produces tensions
In strings of my lute to sing your allure,
As long as my soul seeks its only cheer
In awareness of you and nothing else knows,

My wishes to die are yet unreal.
But whenever my eyes are a drying well,
My voice quite broken, my hand without strength

And my spirit here in its mortal stay
Without sign of love shows itself at length,
Implore Death blacken my clearest day.

SONNET XV

Louise Labé

With aim to honor return of the sun
The Zephyr apparels the once calm air
And wakens from sleep both earth and water,
That sleep which halted the murmur of one

In its sweetest flow and the other then
From wearing its flowers of unequaled color.
Already the birds make gladly aware,
Reducing all boredom to moderation.

In a thousand frolics now nymphs disport;
By their moonlit dance the lawns are attacked.
Give me, O Zephyr, of your treasured gladness

That therefore of you I may have renewal;
Make return of my Sun an act of his will,
And see him invest me with lovelier grace.

SONNET XVI

Louise Labé

When after a time of hail and thunder
Has beaten in strength a Caucasian summit,
The lovely day comes, invested with light.
After circling earth through his path of air,

Phoebus regains the realms of water,
And his sister appears at her pointing height.
If fighting Parthian enough time has passed,
He turns to fleeing with bowstring looser.

When plaintive, defying my temperate flame,
You were seen and consoled of me all the same:
But now as your presence leaves me consumed,

Arrived at the point of your once desiring,
Your flame in water has known a dampening—
With you become colder than I ever seemed.

SONNET XVII

Louise Labé

I'm fleeing the town, the churches, all places
Wherein in pleasure I'm hearing your plaint,
For you without effort might bring the constraint
Upon me of giving what most one esteems.

All tourneys and masks seem tiresome revels.
Without you what beauty is there to paint?
Endeavoring to leave desire extinct,
To form a new object in sight of my eyes

And lead me apart from the thought of love
I follow liveness through thick of the grove.
But well I perceive, having strayed much about,

How if ever of you I at last am delivered,
From my very self I must live removed
Or ensure that my sojourn is elsewhere set.

SONNET XX

Louise Labé

Already foretold was my love's direction
Toward him whose person was all described,
With love's firmness too, and only thus painted
He was known to myself as quickly as seen.

When seeing him love in a fatal vein
I pitied him, who had sadly ventured.
Then to such an extent my nature was led:
As deeply he loved, I too loved then.

Who never would think that increase of favour
Follow Heaven and fate, what they will together?
When myself can observe the dim preparation

As resides in storms and the cruel winds,
The infernal judgments, to me it is known,
Were weaving me shipwreck from earliest times.

SONNET XXII

Louise Labé

O lighting sun, you are happy indeed
In seeing before you a friend's face forever,
And you, his sister, Endymion's lover,
On the honey of love intently have grazed.

Mars gazes on Venus; see Hermes reflected
In all skies and places where he may adventure;
A place comes often to notice of Jupiter
Where gay heated years were long since passed.

Therein is lying the mighty harmony
That is binding together their world of divinity,
But if everything loved were quite beyond one,

Their order and harmony now irreversible
Would turn to error as truly variable,
And even as I, they would labor in vain.

SONNET XXIV

Louise Labé

Reprove me not, ladies, if ever I loved,
Felt thousands of torches, their ardent flame,
Thousands of labors, of sorrows, like sum,
If, in my weeping, time is consumed

Alas! let my name be not always accused.
If I failed in aught, enough troubles have come.
Leave all their points no harsher from blame
But esteem that Love, in a trice revealed,

Without a Vulcan as excuse for your ardour,
Without such beauty as Adonis discover,
Might render yourselves indeed infatuate

In the having less than I a real occasion,
And with a stronger, a stranger passion.
And be preserved from things more unfortunate.

SONNET XXV

Louise Labé

Alas for the day! I distrust its appearance
Since his eyes prepared to enflame my soul!
Love, why must it be our good fortune's goal
Is changing ever to hopelessness?

If one could perceive what comes perchance
In the way of complaints, pricks, and spoken ill,
If fresh flower's issue be no fragrance at all,
And always such days open out to such nights;

If I'd known in advance his fatal power,
How quick my escape would have happened there!
Without further waiting, how quick myself gone!

Alas! Vacant talk! If the very sweet day
Could find its rebirth, when he came my way—
That bird of all lightness I'd go after then.

Other Translated Poetry

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APOLOGY

Friedrich Hölderlin

Sacred one! with frequent troubling have I touched
Your golden god-given rest, and of the depths
Of life's deeper more secret pains,
You have learned from me.

Oh, forget this, forgive! Like the clouds there
Before the moon's stillness, I depart, and you
Rest and are gleaming
Once more in your loveliness.

CURTAILMENT

Friedrich Hölderlin

“Why so sudden an end, and not as formerly
Your fondness for singing? You found in youth
In the days of eagerness
Never an end for your song.”

Like my fortunes—my song. You would bathe content
In evening’s red glow? It departs. Earth is cold,
And before your eyes, night’s bird
Spins by uneasily.

THE UNPARDONABLE

Friedrich Hölderlin

When friends are forgotten, the artist scorned,
And the mind's depth belittled, meanly viewed,
God is forgiving; only leave untouched
Always the peace of the lovers.

EVENING PHANTASY

Friedrich Hölderlin

Quiet in the shadows sits the plowman
At his dwelling door; for his frugal self the hearth smokes.
The evening bell's welcome greets
Through the friendly village the wanderer.

Ships enter harbours too, with good reason;
The active rush of the marketplace ends
In faraway cities; amid still leafage glows
The blessed repast of the friendly.

What of me? By effort and recompense
Thrives mortality; rest's succession to work
Is joy's source; why does the sleepless thorn
Find always a place in my breast?

All of spring is the blooming late sky:
Unavailing a count of roses, and the golden world
Shines in peace; there would I be carried off—
With you, purpling clouds! Might my sorrow and suffering

Escape into light and air ever upward;
But the charm flees disturbed by my asking
And folly; it is dark now, and alone
Under heaven am I, as ever I am.

Come now, sleep's softness! The heart
Is too eager; but finally, youth, your glow ends,
You, without rest but with dreams.
Now age is good humor and peace.

FROM “EN LAS ORILLAS DEL
SAR”

Rosalía Castro

Always pale, the moon keeps silence,
Meanwhile covering the blue sphere,
Well followed by her retinue
Of every cloud and star,
Though wakening in my memory
The phantoms of my rancor.

From her such poison scatters deep
With slanting mystery and sweetness
That gladly I think how she, the “eternal,”
Too of necessity will pass.

FROM “DIE HEIMKEHR”

Heinrich Heine

65

You have many a pearl and diamond,
All things whereon men set store,
And your eyes are so very lovely.
Why, dear, are you wanting more?

For them, your loveliest eyes, dear,
How easy it was to pour
Love's host of eternal poems.
Why, dear, are you wanting more?

Before your loveliest eyes, dear,
Tormented I adore
And you are leaving me prostrate.
Why, dear, are you wanting more?

FROM “VERSCHIEDENE”

Heinrich Heine

6

How firmly my ear is pressing
Against your lips, my love,
While curious seagulls are glancing
From around us and above.

They are anxious to be knowing
Therefrom whatever springs:
Is my ear all filled with kisses
Or merely verbal things?

If myself were only knowing
Within my soul what swirls!
The word-and-kiss confusion
Amazes while it whirls.

THE LOTUS FLOWER

Heinrich Heine

The lotus bloom's commotion
In presence of the sun
Leaves her head-lowered and dreaming,
Until his blaze is gone.

It is the moon, her lover,
Whose light can gently wake
Her countenance of chasteness,
Unveiling for his sake.

Alight, aglow, and trembling,
Struck dumb she stares above
Releasing her tears and fragrance
For love and the sorrow of love.

PSYCHE

Heinrich Heine

Small, indeed, the lamp she carries,
Great the flame within her breast.
Psyche glides beside the sleeper,
Gracious on his couch of rest.

Color and vibration wring her
As she all his beauty sees.
Love uncovered, all revealing,
Waking, rises up and flees.

Eighteen-hundred-yearlong penance!
She, poor creature, almost dies.
Psyche fasts and suffers lashing:
Naked Eros met her eyes.

FROM "LYRISCHES
INTERMEZZO"

Heinrich Heine

65

A star is falling downward
From a once enkindled height!
The star of love is falling
And I endure the sight.

There fall the leaves and blossoms
So many, from apple-trees,
Where winds drive with gay mischief
Whatever they may please.

The swan sings over waters
And draws itself along;
Soft voice and feathers are finding
A grave that is a song.

How still throughout the darkness
Is death of bloom and leaf.
The trace of star-flame scatters.
The swan song is as brief.

FROM "LYRISCHES
INTERMEZZO"

Heinrich Heine

2

Through tears of mine come springing
Such flowers in ample bloom.
There's turning to choirs of nightingales
My heart in its surge of gloom.

If only you loved me, dearest,
All yours the blooming throng,
And outside your window ringing
The nightingale in song.

MOON NIGHT

Joseph von Eichendorff

It seemed as though the heavens
Had kissed the sleeping earth.
Within lit tides of blossoms
Her dreams had heavenly birth.

In fields the air was streaming
And swelling through the corn.
Soft movement filled the forests
All star-clear till the morn.

My soul's own wings were spreading
Themselves athwart the night
To fly through earth's high stillness,
Secure in homeward flight.