

**TRANSLATIONS INTO
LATIN AND GREEK VERSE.
WITH A PREFATORY NOTE
BY J.D. DUFF**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649763023

Translations into Latin and Greek verse. With a prefatory note by J.D. Duff by H. A. J. Munro

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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H. A. J. MUNRO

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H. A. J. Munroe.
from a photograph.

JOHN F. WARD AND SON

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INTO
LATIN AND GREEK VERSE

BY

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WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY

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AND A PORTRAIT

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
41 & 43, MADDOX STREET, BOND STREET, W.
Publisher to the India Office
1906

82517
5/6/07

PREFACE.

Munro printed these Translations in the autumn of 1884. Early in the following spring he left Cambridge for Italy and died at Rome on March 30th.

The Translations were not published; but he sent copies to many of his friends. Some of their acknowledgements amused him: thus William Cory, the author of 'Ionica' and of some Latin verse, which Munro declared 'the best and most Horatian Sapphics and Alcaics... that have been written since Horace ceased to write', remonstrated with him for 'printing that doggerel of Shelley's', the doggerel being the extracts from the Ode to a Skylark; while L. Friedlaender, who was at that time still professor at Koenigsberg, chose out for praise the rendering of 'Bannocks o' bear-meal!' Munro said to me that he would have expected his Alcaics to prove more attractive; but Friedlaender was then working at Martial and probably looked to see how Munro managed one of Martial's favourite metres.

Nearly all the copies were thus given away. It has never been possible to buy the book except at second-hand; and for years past the price asked has been high. It has therefore been decided, with the consent of Munro's representatives, to reprint his book, that those who are interested in Latin Verse and in Munro, may acquire a

copy at a reasonable price. In the reprint a few slight changes are introduced from Munro's own copy of the book; and two Translations have been added at the end. The second, a translation of the Dirge in *Cymbeline*, was found among Munro's MSS. and has already been printed for the use of Trinity College Lecture-Room; the first, from Scott, was also found in his papers and has not, it is believed, been printed before.

Some of the Translations were printed separately before 1884, mainly in *Sabrinæ Corolla* and in Holden's *Folia Silvulæ*; but these were much changed before their second appearance. The longest of them all, the version of Gray's Elegy, was printed at the Pitt Press about 1874. The paper and type were carefully chosen; the first stanza and the Epitaph were printed in red; the whole makes a desirable pamphlet of eighteen pages with a blue cover. This was not published; but a copy got into the hands of a critic who reviewed it in Macmillan's Magazine. He complained of the harshness and obscurity of Munro's verse. He did more: he was kind enough to show how it should be done, by translating some lines into Elegiacs of his own. Munro replied in the same magazine. Never eager for controversy, when once engaged in it he was a strenuous controversialist; and one of his shrewd blows may be quoted. His critic had quoted with approval Gilbert Wakefield's rendering of 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave': *In tumuli fauces ducit honoris iter*. This Latin, said Munro, is capable of but one meaning: 'the path of a public office leads to the gorge of a hillock'*

* Macmillan's Magazine for January and February 1875.

Another critic also expressed his opinion of Munro's version of the Elegy. This was T. S. Evans, then Canon of Durham, himself a writer of admirable Latin Verse and a lifelong friend of Munro's, who seldom mentioned to me the name of 'Tom Evans' without adding, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile'. Evans, on receiving the version, addressed a Latin epistle to Munro, from which the following lines are taken :

uersiculos laetus legi et his terque relegi
laetior usque tuos. quantum, si uiueret, ipse
confessurus erat Graius, tibi me quoque tantum
confiteor debere. at per uestigia uatis
Paeligni minus isse recer te, maxime Munro,
quam signasse nouum sermonem, dum tibi Musam
Nasonis numerosque repraesentare uideris.
de sermone tuo morem gere pauca monenti.
si qui forte satus Romana gente fuisset
Aeschylus, atque elegos uoluisset adire Latinos,
talem crediderim scripturum carmina uatem
haud aliena tuis, qui stant quasi marmore uersus
et similes solido structis adamante columnis.

The criticism is exquisitely expressed and is also true. Munro's verses were not Ovidian. When he wished, he could imitate Ovid closely enough ; but his preference for the poets of the Republic always influenced his verse ; and also he probably felt that Ovid's speed and lightness were out of place in rendering so grave and solemn a poem.

These Translations were not the serious business of Munro's life : he turned them over in his head on sleepless nights or in the course of his afternoon walk by Trumpington and Grantchester, which he generally took alone. When he had got them to his mind, he copied

them out, often many times over, on sheets of foolscap. He did not himself publish them, and he well knew that they were *lusus*. But though *lusus*, such things are not *ineptiae*, when they are based, as in Munro's case they were, upon a wide and deep knowledge of Latin and upon a real love of literature. Munro was not one of the old-fashioned scholars, who despise all your modern literatures: Homer and Virgil were hardly more to him than Dante and Goethe; Catullus he loved, but he loved Burns as well. Soon after he took his degree he spent some years on the continent, living in Paris, Florence, and Berlin; and he spoke French, German, and Italian, not indeed fluently—for in all languages he had a measured utterance—but with correctness and a pure accent.

It is remarkable that as an undergraduate Munro did not win any of the University prizes for Composition. He certainly competed once for the Porson Prize, but on that occasion he was disqualified for a reason which throws some light on the Don of those days. Two of his school-fellows, E. H. Gifford of St John's and G. Druce of Peterhouse, had also written for the Porson. On the day for sending in they all met at Druce's rooms to copy each other's exercises; for candidates, then as now, were not allowed to send up their translations in their own handwriting. When they had done their writing, they had supper together; and after supper Gifford carried off all the exercises to deliver them to the Master of St John's, who was then Vice-Chancellor, at St John's Lodge. Next day Gifford received a message from the Vice-Chancellor to this effect: that the academical day ended at 10 p.m.; that the exercises had been handed in after that hour;

and that he had therefore marked on all three copies that they were disqualified. Whether Munro competed for other prizes, is not known.

Munro played the game according to the strictest rules. His verses are not a cento of tags from the Classics, dovetailed together with more or less ingenuity; he never admitted the conventional Latin which appears so often in modern Elegiacs. All that he found in the English had, of course, to re-appear in the Latin; still more, he did not like material re-casting of the form. The severity of his method leads at times to a certain baldness. But at other times, when he is inspired by his English and writing in a favourite metre—take as an instance the version in Glyconics of Deborah's Song—the result is something not easily forgotten and not easily distinguishable from an original work of art.

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