

and it is here, I think, that most doubts will arise about this translation. The metres of the *Anacreonta* are simple and obvious, but evidently had, throughout the long period of compilation, the air of being appropriate to the themes of love and wine; and to employ in English simple and obvious metres may be dangerous, because of their associations with comic verse; for the *Anacreonta*, though light, are not comic. There is to my mind a considerable number of passages in these versions where the verse-form either provokes inappropriate echoes, or else by its sheer bounciness suggests a triviality or glibness foreign to the original, even though the verbal translation may be accurate. I would not suggest that all, or even most, of the versions have this fault; but it does seem to me too recurrent to be wholly ignored.

In actual translation, there are few serious misrepresentations of the Greek, though there is sometimes a tendency to prune in the interests of slickness. To say however that Orestes killed his mother when mad is to defy both mythology and the Greek text, and worse still, to spoil the progression of thought in the poem concerned; and to invent a plurality of *Bacchi*, where the text mentions *Bacchae*, the conventional figures in this type of poetry, seems indefensible. I also feel that the use of baby-talk in the poem 'Love and the Bee' is ill-suited to the grace of the original.

There are, however, many successful versions; the little drinking-songs, which call for neatness and a touch of humour, are often excellently rendered, as are the glimpses of the countryside; one short piece which Moore scorned to translate emerges here as a graceful little poem; and of the longer pieces, 'Frolic Wine', 'Love's Night Walk' and the elaborate description 'The Bowl' may be mentioned as good examples of what the translator can achieve in different styles. Altogether he has I feel not only succeeded in presenting the *Anacreonta* to suit modern taste, but has also preserved much of the spirit of the original. Here we have a translation which, despite its faults, is both gay and straightforward. It reads as though the translator enjoyed making it; many will, I think, enjoy reading it; and that is, after all, the whole purpose of such poetry as this.

DESMOND LEAHY

VICTOR HUGO. By André Maurois. Translated from the French by Gerard Hopkins. (Cape; 30s.)

It is really a tribute to M. Maurois if we say that this biography, while excellent, is, in one respect, disappointing. M. Maurois so loves his subject that, especially towards the end, we glimpse all too rarely that amused tolerance of human foibles usually so characteristic of him. Flashes of it there are, however, as in the description of Hugo 'holding

forth—charming, fluent and quite insensitive to other people's feelings' (448). Often Hugo appears to be accepted at his own valuation: not even a lifted eyebrow greets his statement: 'This century can show only one true classic . . . me' (p. 391). Where Juliette Drouet is concerned M. Maurois indulges in something very like special pleading: 'to inspire such feelings, a man must have . . . a great many human qualities' (p. 466). True possibly, but the evidence provided is, in this context, very inconclusive. We feel it rather unreasonable of M. Maurois to condemn Juliette's very pardonable doubts about Hugo's fidelity with the sentence: 'Woe to jealousy, the jaundice of the heart!' (p. 463) and to say that 'it would have been wise of her' to accept the inevitable. Wise it might have been, but M. Maurois, skilled psychologist that he is, knows well how slight is wisdom's role in such matters. It is an over-simplification to excuse Hugo's admitted harshness towards Juliette by saying: 'rules are not made for genius' (p. 238). It is Hugo's misfortune that certain of his traits—excessive prudence in money matters, for instance—while understandable, are not endearing. M. Maurois is too honest a critic to conceal such defects, but his affection for the poet leads him to seek to justify them. Thus it is implied that Hugo experienced a religious crisis when he realized that 'he had embraced in religion a theology which was not that of his imagination' (p. 124). Yet, from the facts, it appears clear that he 'embraced' religion for reasons of aesthetics rather than conviction. Indeed, an 'adolescent faith' (p. 133) which permitted Hugo to use a false statement, instead of receiving conditional Baptism, before his marriage (p. 92-3) is *very* 'adolescent'.

Yet these criticisms amount simply to saying that M. Maurois appears to us to be over-generous in his admiration, and, in an age more prone to denigration than to enthusiasm, this is, perhaps, a quality. It is incontestable, in any case, that the general picture, combining scholarship and readability to a rare degree as it does, is admirable.

There are some mistranslations which, considering Mr Hopkins' experience and general excellence, are surprising. The most startling is the rendering of *trainer* by 'to train' (p. 191), which produces an astonishing result. Good proof-reading could have eliminated many flaws: for instance *le samedi gras* becomes 'the Saturday in Easter week' (p. 192) but the date (February 16th-17th) suffices to prove that something is wrong. Elsewhere (p. 267) the omission of several poems, quoted in the original, makes nonsense of the commentary. In a book otherwise beautifully produced, it is a pity that the French extracts were not more attentively read; as it is, few of them are entirely free of misprints.

KATHLEEN O'FLAHERTY