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***Translation as Collaboration: Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and S. S. Koteliansky*, by Claire Davison, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press (ISBN 978 0 7486 8281 2), 2014, £70**

I sometimes wonder what Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield would make of recent scholarship, which increasingly tries to find alliances and connections in their creative endeavours—elements not always evident in their personal relationships. Away from their writing, Mansfield envied Woolf the stability of her home with the solid, dependable Leonard and her close-knit circle of family and friends. Mansfield, rather disparagingly, and perhaps owing to this envy, famously called them the ‘Blooms Berries’, in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell on 15 August 1917: ‘To Hell with the Blooms Berries. Don’t you think one must really run away as soon as possible and as far as possible—’ (Mansfield 326). On the whole, it is fair to say that Mansfield behaved quite badly towards Woolf: failing to return letters, cancelling plans at the last moment, and yet, when she did deign to make contact, Woolf felt herself drawn, in spite of herself, to this enigmatic ‘friend’, who shared a passion for the craft of writing that she struggled to find elsewhere. ‘[T]o no one else’, noted Woolf in 1920, ‘can I talk in the same disembodied way about writing’ (D2 45, 5 June 1920). Of course, their differing social attitudes and outlook on life in general may have contributed to a certain malaise in their relationship. Only once Mansfield was dead could Woolf write: ‘I was jealous of her writing—the only writing I have ever been jealous of ... & I saw in it, perhaps from jealousy, all the qualities I disliked in her’ (D2 227, 16 January 1923).

And yet, as intimated above, it is fascinating to see how many interests the two writers shared. Claire Davison’s magisterial new book turns the spotlight on their separate co-translations with S. S. Koteliansky—another element of their working lives that they had in common—and which is examined here in magnificent and fascinating detail. Five chapters interrogate their individual conceptions of translation: their translating voices used as a form of enactment; how angles of perception are rendered, picking up on examples of impersonation and mimicry; how, in the translation process, they also become co-authors; and finally how the role of translating can be viewed within the context of early-twentieth century life-writing, a facet of their work ‘to which all three co-translators were particularly sensitive’ (18).

Koteliansky, a Russian Jew from the Ukraine, migrated to England in 1911, following political harassment by the Tsarist government. Dorothy Brett would describe him in 1915 as ‘so broad-shouldered that he looks short, his black hair brushed straight up “en brosse”, his dark eyes set perhaps a trifle too close to his nose, the nose a delicate well-made arch, gold eyeglasses pinched onto it’ (quoted in Hignett 75). Although his real interest lay in literature, he worked in the Russian Law Bureau, translating Russian legal documents. As Dalya Giment notes, given that he was a ‘seemingly provincial Russian Jew not at all known for any particular talents or achievements, it is truly stunning that he was able to befriend so many by now legendary people’ (Giment 4).

Donald Carswell describes Koteliansky’s growing influence in Bloomsbury, noting that, with ‘the growing passion for all things Russian, he was beginning to be recognised not only as a translator but as a finder of new Russian material’ (Carswell 131). Darya Protopopova further underlines his influence in this regard, claiming that ‘Koteliansky was an infinite resource on the whole range of Russian literature; he translated not only the authors who were already well known in England, but also the contemporary Russian writers who left Russia after the revolution, but remained undiscovered by English readers, e.g. Ivan Bunin and Alexander Kuprin’ (Protopopova 4). This of course would explain how he came into the sphere of the Bloomsbury Group, whose ‘fascination with Russia had two major components: the Ballets Russes and Russian literature’ (Giment 4). Koteliansky’s Russianness would

therefore have been attractive to them all.

In his collaborative translations, Koteliansky, a native Russian speaker, undertook the translating, and the English collaborator carried out the finessing. His host of collaborators included the Woolfs, Mansfield, John Middleton Murry and D. H. Lawrence. Indeed, in this book, Davison reveals how, as creative writers, Woolf's and Mansfield's translations were much more successful than Koteliansky's collaborations with Leonard Woolf and Murry. Davison notes elsewhere that

Koteliansky's involvement in these circles was not as a bystander but as an active participant, even instigator, and specialist. ... He informed Lawrence's dream of a utopian community, 'Rananim', Virginia Woolf's reading of the Russians, Leonard Woolf's knowledge of the harsher political truths of the Bolshevik regime, Murry's study of Dostoevsky, and Mansfield's understanding of the revolution. (Davison-Pégon 336)

Quoting Rebecca Beasley, Davison explains how perhaps the main translation project of British modernism was 'the sustained attempt to create a canon of Russian literature in translation in the years 1890–1930' (2–3), and both Woolf and Mansfield certainly played their parts in this endeavour. However, until recently, this collaboration was more or less ignored and the process rather dismissed as merely giving 'a helping hand to a friend speaking cranky English' (8). Davison's book shows definitively how this process evolved into a serious creative endeavour, though frustratingly, although Woolf's efforts were always acknowledged, Mansfield's early efforts rarely were, because, as Koteliansky later claimed, 'she was not then known as a writer' (12). As Davison notes, such actions reflected 'dismally on his and Murry's gender politics and assumptions of professional visibility' (13). Later on, Murry would drop Mansfield and Koteliansky's names from the first *Athenæum* publication of Chekhov's letters, and then edit out Koteliansky's name and all evidence of the co-translations from his editions of Mansfield's letters and journals, in a deliberately vindictive act following the breakdown of their friendship. In turn, Koteliansky was critical of Murry's editorial influence over his publications of Mansfield's work after her death, stating 'that when Murry published her letters and diaries after her death he "left out all the jokes", to make her an "English Tchekov"' (cited in Glenavy 69). Mansfield's relationship with Koteliansky was not viewed as pernicious by anyone except Murry, whose own personal quarrels and resentments inevitably coloured his attitude.

And yet Mansfield, by mid-1922 and with less than a year to live, was 'finding it more satisfying to translate Dostoevsky and Andreyev than press on with her own fiction' (53). The process of translation for both Mansfield and Woolf 'evolved into a subtly disguised mode of experimentation in writing styles, which formed a very practical bridge between personal emotion and an escape from personality into the lives of other speaking, living selves, saying "I" without wholly being the "I" that speaks' (48). Indeed, as far as Woolf is concerned, Davison concludes that 'without the translations, there is a missing link in our assessment of [her] critical response to Russian literature' (41). This volume, rich in detail, offers an unparalleled commentary on a relatively unknown aspect of both writers' creative lives and clearly deserves this long overdue critical spotlight.

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