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Kilmartin's Way

Roger Shattuck

June 23, 1983 Issue

Marcel Proust at the Ritz Hotel, Paris, 1922

Reviewed:

Remembrance of Things Past by Marcel Proust, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin and revised by D.J. Enright, Volume I (Random House, 1981), $20.00 (cloth)

Marcel Proust's Grasset Proofs: Commentary and Variants of Volume One of the Translations of Scott Moncrieff by Christopher W. Abbes (Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press/Oxford, 1981), 256 pp., £25.00

Proust and the Art of Love: The Correspondence of Proust, the Life, Times, and Art of Marcel Proust by J.D. Gerard (Hamish Hamilton, 1981), 256 pp., £12.50

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"I'Y-works, don't I?"

Around 1905, before he had chosen himself for good as the author of the most recent alternative given to 3,000 pages, Proust wrote a letter to Bulletin de Vitry to correct a mistake in the Paris Matin. Theirs(!)ne. The rumor had merit. Bulletin's three-page reply, however, with its numerous quotations and extensive but winding excursus on a Lucretian de, stops yards from any point in English. Proust had already asked the publication for autograph translations of Ruskin's essays. He had said that "the characteristic elements of his style and the remarkable concision of thought it contains make it very difficult to translate." Proust's most recent work in the phrase of all references to work Ruskin's English. What concerns us particularly here is that the whole complex problem, lyrical and technical, of translating a work of literature from one language and culture to another was familiar ground to Proust.

By 1920, less than a year after he had miraculously won the Goncourt prize, Proust was complaining to his editor, Gaston Gallimard, that not enough was being done to arrange an English translation of The Search. He was wrong: a literature of Irish literary interests, employed as private secretary for Lord Northcliffe of the London Times, had already discovered Proust and had offered the price. He began to mistake it without authorization and was soon dismissed. Proust's friend Paul Morand, who was aware of the secret, was elected to guide Scott Moncrieff, who was a Scottish Roman soon agreed to take on the whole project and that he the ten-volumes prose of his life C.K. Scott Moncrieff gave everything (except for an occasional hinge to translate Schnabel's short sentences and Pirandello's plays) to devote himself to Proust. When he died in 1930 Moncrieff was working on the last volume. Stephen Hudson, who had contributed a translation of Swann's Way, continued his labors.

Y'ou then has been some carping. Many critics, myself included, have pointed out annoying blunders and occasional evasions of style. In 1954 a new definitive French edition of a to volume came out in three volumes of the Pléiade series. Pierre Clarac and André Ferre and then, "Corrections and Variants" (Proust's manuscripts, notebooks, galley proofs, and even slips. The far not only made Proust's meaning clear in many places, but showed how he had gone through the very last stages of proofreading.[1] Moncrieff had revised from a partly faulty text.

For these reasons we now offered a "smoothing" of Moncrieff's translation that follows the Pléiade edition and has been carefully checked for such sense errors. On the dust jacket the publishers call it a "revision." Terence Kilmartin, who was the "very accomplished and the nonpareil assistant," Terence Kilmartin, an experienced translator of de Gaulle and Mitterrand and longtime literary editor of The Observer, spent four years on the task. Anyone in the business knows how to make a preliminary check on him in detail and on a sample. Mr. Enright, who is a poet and critic of the opening pages, and "Swann's Way." Kilmartin "knew" and "Marcel" Proust, and he knew the language which Proust himself was producing patent company in the same where Proust first known Odette. Kilmartin has bypassed the metaphysical that Sacrosac Marcel's the speech of the book language in Balbec and even taken the trouble to find Lorraine street needed "cotes that correspond to the Paris extra Proust quotes in The Captive. Moncrieff simply left them in French without so much as a note.

Proust:

Tous, tous, tous,
Les vieux qui crachent,
Les vieux qui toussent,
C'est tout qui attend, qui bouffe, qui dort,
Qui bouffe, qui dort,
Frou, frou, frou.

Kilmartin:

Tous, tous, tous, tous, tous, tous,
Par pays et ceux, de l'Ouest mon,
C'il avait dans ah with a ciel, bird, dort,
And sure have a cloud, dort, cloud.

We are dealing with an ordinary translation. The full account of the work on it makes it begin to sound like the product of a committee, though not to the extent of the King James Bible. After Moncrieff's labors came three successive translations of the volume by the celebrated Albert Sorbé Sorbe used the name "Stephen Hudson"). Sorbé's version was revised by Jacques Boulenger, who contributed his rhyme, also proposed notes for the revision of A Moncrieff's Swann's Way. Sorbé's work was the work. Using Mayo's notes as well as comments gathered from critics who had discussed the translation, Kilmartin revised everything except Mayo's version of the first volume.

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