Comparing Translations ... posted by Seth and Tom

Part 2, Chapter 8: Karenin sees Anna’s desk

*I've underlined what strike me as the most interesting variations. — TL*

There, looking at her table, with the malachite blotting pad lying on the top and an unfinished letter, his thoughts suddenly changed. He began to think of her, of what she was thinking and feeling. For the first time he pictured vividly to himself her personal life, her ideas, her desires, and the idea that she could and should have a separate life of her own seemed to him so alarming that he made haste to dispel it. It was the chasm which he was afraid to peep into. To put himself in thought and feeling in another person’s place was a spiritual exercise not natural to Aleksey Aleksandrovich. He looked on this spiritual exercise as a harmful and dangerous abuse of the imagination.

[The original Garnett has “abuse of the fancy.”]


Here, looking at her desk with the malachite cover of her blotter and an unfinished letter lying on it, his thoughts suddenly changed. He began thinking about her, about what she thought and felt. For the first time he vividly pictured to himself her personal life, her thoughts, her wishes, and the thought that she could and should have her own particular life seemed so frightening to him that he hastened to drive it away. It was that bottomless deep into which it was frightening to look. To put himself in thought and feeling into another being was a mental act alien to Alexei Alexandrovich. He regarded this mental act as harmful and dangerous fantasizing.

Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkhonsky, Penguin 2000, p. 143-44

Here, as he looked at her table, at the malachite cover of her blotting-book and an unfinished letter that lay there, his thoughts suddenly underwent a change. He began to think of her, of what she thought and felt. For the first time he really pictured to himself her personal life, her ideas, her desires; and the notion that she could and should have a separate life of her own appeared to him so dreadful that he hastened to drive it away. This was the abyss into which he was afraid to look. To put himself in thought and feeling into another being was a mental exercise foreign to Karenin. He considered such mental exercise harmful and dangerous romancing.


(The Edmonds translation was published by Penguin for almost 50 years, until it was replaced by P&V.)

Here as he looked at her table with the malachite blotting pad and an unfinished letter lying on it, his thoughts suddenly underwent a change. He began to think of her and of what she was thinking and feeling. For the first time he vividly pictured to himself her personal life, her thoughts, her wishes; but the idea that she might and should have her own independent life appeared to him so dreadful that he hastened to drive it away. That was the abyss into which he feared to look. To put himself in thought and feeling into another being was a mental action foreign to Karenin. He considered such mental acts to be injurious and dangerous romancing.

Louise and Aylmer Maude, 1918

Here, as he looked at her table, with the malachite blotting pad and an unfinished letter lying on it, his thoughts suddenly underwent a change. He began to think of her and of what she was thinking and feeling. For the first time he vividly pictured to himself her personal life, her thoughts, her desires, and the idea that she could and should have a separate life of her own seemed so dreadful to him that he hastened to drive it away. That was the abyss into which he was afraid to look. To transfer himself in thought and feeling into another human being was a mental activity alien to Karenin. He considered such mental activities as equivalent to indulging in harmful and dangerous fantasies.

David Magarshack, Signet 1961 (1st edition) p. 156
Part 3, Chapter 8: Dolly dresses for church

Dolly, somewhat excited, had dressed and done her hair with care. At one time she used to dress for her own sake, in order to look well and be attractive; later on, as she grew older, dressing became less and less agreeable to her, because it made the loss of her good looks more apparent; but now it again gave her pleasure and excited her. She was not dressing for her own sake, not for her own beauty, but in order, as the mother of all those charming children, not to spoil the general effect. She gave her hair a last glance and was satisfied with herself. She looked well: not in the way she had wished to look when going to a ball, but well for the object she had in view at present.

Darya Alexsandrovna had done her hair, and dressed with care and excitement. In the old days she had dressed for her own sake to look pretty and be admired. Later on, as she got older, dressing up became more and more distasteful to her. She saw that she was losing her good looks. But now she began to feel pleasure and interest in dressing up again. Now she did not dress for her own sake, not for the sake of her own beauty, but simply so that as the mother of those exquisite creatures she might not spoil the general effect. And looking at herself for the last time in the mirror, she was satisfied with herself. She looked nice. Not nice as she would have wished to look in the old days at a ball, but nice for the object she now had in view.

Dolly had done her hair and dressed with care and excitement. There was a time when she used to dress for her own sake to look beautiful and be admired; later on the older she grew the less and less pleasure she took in dressing up; she saw that she was losing her good looks. But now she was beginning to feel pleasure and excitement again in dressing. Now she was not dressing for her own sake, not to look beautiful, but so that as the mother of all those charming children, she should not spoil the general impression. And looking at herself for the last time in the glass she was satisfied with herself. She looked beautiful. Not as beautiful as she had wished to look when going to a ball, but beautiful enough for the purpose she now had in mind.

Darya Alexandrovna had arranged her hair and dress with care and excitement. She used to dress for herself, in order to look handsome and please others; later, the older she became, the more she disliked dressing; she could see how her looks had faded. But now she again dressed with pleasure and excitement. Now she was dressing not for herself, not for her own beauty, but so that, as the mother of these splendid children, she would not spoil the overall impression, and, taking one last look in the mirror, she was pleased with herself. She was pretty. Not as pretty as she had once wanted to be at a ball, but pretty for the purpose which she now had in mind.
Modesty forbids...
Occasionally in our meetings, we’ve wondered to what extent Kent and Berberova updated Constance Garnett’s original language, especially when it came to intimate matters. We can confirm that the word “pregnant” which appears in the revised translation (Part 2, Chapter 22, p. 215) was originally, “with child.” And the “sore nipples” that Dolly remembers on the way to Anna and Vronsky’s country estate were “sore breasts.” (The Maudes, publishing 17 years after Garnett, avoid Victorian prudery and use the same words as Kent and Berberova.)

Please feel free to add any other comparisons you find interesting as Comments to this post.