Yuan, L. (2023). [Review of the book *Vladimir Nabokov as an Author-Translator: Writing and Translating between Russian, English and French*, by J. Loison-Charles]. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, *22*, 188–190

As a world-famous novelist, Nabokov's writing career is closely intertwined with his translation activity. Following Shvabrin's (2019) inspiring research on the impact of Nabokov's translation on his literary creation, *Vladimir Nabokov as an Author-Translator: Writing and Translating between Russian, English and French* by Julie Loison-Charles sets out to further explore the interaction of writing and translating during Nabokov's lifetime, with three parts dedicated to three borderline cases, namely "Nabokov and Pseudotranslation" (Part 1), "Nabokov and the Author Behind the Translator" (Part 2), as well as "Nabokov as a French Self-translator" (Part 3).

Starting with a thorough literature review on the term "pseudotranslation", Part 1 contains five chapters, which are logically well-organized, getting readers prepared by showing the intertextual links between famous European pseudotranslations and Nabokov's works in Chapter 2, the pseudotranslations that Nabokov translated and even wrote himself in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, before delving into the controversial question-- "Are Nabokov's Novels in English 'Pseudotranslations'?" in Chapter 5. Loison-Charles provides her own answer to this question, "It is therefore better not to apply the notion of translation to all types of bilingual writing" (p.89). To label the writings of Nabokov as "pseudotranslation" would "diminish" (ibid) his achievements in any of his languages. Moreover, the actual mechanism of cooperation between writing and translating in Nabokov's case is much more complicated, and this complexity leads us into the next part.

Part 2, including four chapters, is mainly a case study of Nabokov's translation *Eugene Onegin*. Loison-Charles firstly analyzes the evolution of Nabokov's ideas on translation from free translation to strict literalism, then discusses how Nabokov switched between the figure of the author and that of the translator, and finally investigates the transnational dimension of Nabokov's translation. In Chapter 6, Loison-Charles focuses on the unique use of language of Nabokov, which has been described as "Nabokovese" by critics. And Chapter 7 is abundant in vivid examples carefully selected from Nabokov's version of *Eugene Onegin* to demonstrate his foreignizing strategy of translation from two aspects--syntax and vocabulary. During the close text analysis, one cannot help noticing Nabokov's excessive resort to French language, which again encourages Loison-Charles to further examine the "clarification and exoticization" in the translation of *Eugene Onegin*. By adding a great number of xenisms and loanwords into his translation, Nabokov managed to make it more explicit of the Gallic dimension of Pushkin's language. Such concrete investigation into Nabokov's translation practice enables us to come to the critical statement that to some extent, Nabokov was appropriating Pushkin when he was translating his works, or he was indulging in otsebyatina, the term Nabokov coined to describe the translators' tendency to appropriate their translating texts.

In Chapter 8, Loison-Charles centers on Nabokov's literalism in translation through the comparison with Chateaubriand and Venuti. Based upon the different foci of "transparency" between Chateaubriand and Venuti, Loison-Charles on one hand moves forward to draw the similarities between Chateaubriand and Nabokov in terms of translation theory, and distinguish the "foreignizing" strategy of Nabokov from that of Venuti on the other. Although Nabokov shows noticeable differences with Venuti in both practice and theory of "foreignizating" translation, the comparison between these two figures adds a new dimension to the research of Nabokov's translation--"a political reading" of it. And the possible role of Nabokov in reshaping the English-speaking vision of the Russian canon emerges from this new perspective. And in Chapter 9, Loison-Charles involves more historical contextual elements to demonstrate Nabokov's contribution to promote the Russian canon, especially in the English-speaking world. Among those elements, the most important one is Nabokov's prominent status as an author-translator. And the appropriation of his translation of *Eugene Onegin* also attracts us to probe into the other side of the coin--how did Nabokov perform when his own works were translated by others?

Part 3 is intended to answer the question concerning Nabokov's role of co-translator. This part is quite challenging and demanding, since Loison-Charles employs the approach of genetic translation studies to search all kinds of archives, including manuscripts, drafts, correspondence and other working documents, which are not easy to acquire. In Chapter 10, it is stated that Nabokov acted more than a mere collaborator, especially when his works were translated into French. And Chapters 11 and 12 are devoted to exploring the different aspects of Nabokov's practice of collaborative translation into French, including the interpersonal relationships that Nabokov had with his collaborators and the linguistic elements exhibiting his "creative involvement" into the translation. It has always been a tough task to translate Nabokov's works, since he insisted that he should always have the last word in the translation. Through four close-up case studies, Loison-Charles manages to portray a vivid picture of Nabokov as an arrogant and sensitive co-translator, which is almost unknown to the public. However, the involvement of Nabokov in the process of translation as displayed in his correspondence with translators is not enough to convince readers that Nabokov's co-translation is actually "mediated self-translation" as proposed by Loison-Charles. Therefore, specific elements, including fauna and flora, poetry and puns are further investigated. Meanwhile, more unpublished archives are invited to identify Nabokov's creative role in translation. Finally, in Chapter 13, based upon the previous discussions, Loison-Charles comes to the reevaluation of translation and retranslation-- "to explore the original text in the best, most complete way" (p. 219).

The most striking merit of this book lies in its novelty in both research perspective and material. Thanks to the author's efforts, we are able to access a great number of unpublished archives, especially in Part 3, and approach the different facets of Nabokov's personality. Moreover, correspondence between Nabokov and his translators also reveals the otherwise

unknown process of translation, which, to some extent, helps demonstrate the unpredictable complexity of translation. In addition, Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin* was often criticized as a kind of "Nabokovese", "an invented language, one that could not possibly be written by a native" (p. 100). However, few scholars have taken the language traits of Pushkin, the original author of *Eugene Onegin*, into consideration, while Loison-Charles makes it the starting point for her to penetrate into Nabokov's translation process in details so as to determine where his faithful translation stops and "where his own brand of English, as an author, starts" (ibid). Obviously this is the key issue to identify Nabokov's dual role as an author-translator.

Meanwhile, the whole book is neatly organized with the first chapter of each part as the introduction one, providing the outline of the following chapters, while the last chapter as a further discussion inducing readers into some profound questions, such as "Are Nabokov's Novels in English 'Pseudotranslations'?" and "Should Nabokov be Retranslated?" There are even short paragraphs at the end of several chapters to summarize the main ideas of each. A clear development of argumentation can also be easily figured out from one part/chapter to another. For example, in the conclusion of Chapter 7, Loison-Charles moves smoothly from what has been discussed to what is going to be, which will help readers follow the author's ideas through the whole book.

However, despite its thorough text analysis, abundant supporting evidence and highly-logical structure, the book lacks a satisfactory conclusion, in which the specific findings of each part should be restated with interaction with each other so as to highlight the significance of the research, or to provide us at least a vague but complete picture of Nabokov as an author-translator. The absence of necessary links to previous parts results in the inconsistency of the whole structure of the book and therefore causes a certain kind of confusion among readers. Nevertheless, Loison-Charles does an excellent research in this book, providing us her enlightening ideas on both translation and translation studies as well as the detailed interaction between Nabokov's writing and translating.

References

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