***Between Rhyme and Reason: Vladimir Nabokov, Translation, and Dialogue***. By Stanislav Shvabrin. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. xv, 419 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $75.00, hard bound.
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The celebrated Russian-American author Vladimir Nabokov was not only a successful novelist, but also a prolific multilingual practitioner of literary translation. As a translator and translation theorist, he is mainly known for his controversial literalist rendition of Aleksandr Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and his polemical prioritizing of semantics over form. In reality, Nabokov's practice of translation was more variegated and flexible than what his rigid theoretical stance would suggest, however. As Stanislav Shvabrin demonstrates in this fascinating study, for most of his life, and even *after* his conversion to literalism, Nabokov had no qualms about producing the kind of "poetic," rhymed versions that he so vehemently attacked in others. Translation was an important activity for Nabokov throughout his career, whether it be from English, French, German, Italian, and Latin into Russian or from Russian into French and English. Shvabrin's painstaking investigation covers Nabokov's complete output as a translator, including many unpublished texts and drafts preserved in Nabokov's archive.

Proceeding chronologically, Shvabrin begins with Nabokov's earliest translations, written between the ages of eleven and twenty. Shvabrin's focus is less on the quality of these texts as adequate renderings of their source than on what they reveal about Nabokov's literary interests and his artistic development. Theorizing Nabokov's translational activity as sort of Bakhtinian dialogue, Shvabrin is interested in the echoes that the translated texts left in Nabokov's later novelistic work. Thus, he demonstrates that the first attested use of the word *potustoronnost'* (otherwordliness), which Nabokov's widow famously declared to be his main theme, occurred in his 1917 translation of Emile Verhaeren's "Les Voyageurs." Likewise, the important *doppelgänger* motif, according to Shvabrin, came to Nabokov via his translations from Alfred de Musset, Henri de Régnier, and Heinrich Heine. After his departure from Russia, Nabokov continued to translate texts congenial to his own artistic inclinations. At the same time, he favored poems that resonated with his autobiographical situation. The crucial theme of exile, for example, informs his rendition of Musset's "Rappelle-toi" or Charles Baudelaire's "L'albatros." Contrary to his later theoretical pronouncements, Nabokov was at that time still an unabashed "domesticator," as demonstrated by his Russianized *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. He also did not hesitate to bowdlerize sources if they somehow offended his sensibilities, as can be seen from his toning down of the Rabelaisian scatological humor in Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon*, or replacing the homoerotic male addressee of Shakespeare's sonnets with a female. Shavbrin argues that the French translations included in Nabokov's Pushkin essay of 1937 constitute a turning point, given their practical purpose of acquainting a French readership with Pushkin's poetry. Nevertheless, these translations, written in elegant rhymed French verse, are still a world apart from Nabokov's later literalist practice.

After his emigration to the US, Nabokov at first continued to translate verse into verse—an approach he described in a 1952 talk at Harvard

University as "sinning lovingly, sinning tenderly"—resulting in such indubitable masterpieces as his English rendition of Fedor Tiutchev's "Silentium." By the time he began working on *Onegin*, however, his approach had fundamentally changed. The 1955 essay "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English," as Shvabrin puts it, "often reads like an eviction notice served to a creative genius used to calling the Paradise of artistic license his home" (279). Compared to "The Art of Translation," Nabokov's earlier manifesto of 1941, where he asserted the primacy of the creative artist over the scholar and drudge, he had now executed a 180-degree turn by denying the very viability of a poetic transposition. In his literalist rendition of Pushkin's novel in verse, he was stepping on the throat of his own song, as Vladimir Maiakovskii would have put it. At the same time, Nabokov insisted that his method was the only legitimate one and launched vigorous attacks against anyone who considered the formal features of a poem worthy of transposition. Amazingly, in spite of this uncompromising stance, he continued at the same time to produce formal, "paraphrastic" translations. As Shvabrin shows, they include his poetic rendering of *The Song of Igor* and rhymed verse translations of poems by Rémy Belleau, Henri de Régnier, Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and the Soviet bard Bulat Okudzhava.

Shvabrin describes the goal of his book as follows: "By focusing on Nabokov's interlingual translations of others, I will lift the veil of mystery shrouding a strong interdependence of translation and original creativity unique to this writer" (25). One of the strengths of this study is indeed its demonstration of how Nabokov's translations affected his own work. Shvabrin chooses his words carefully: "interlingual" excludes what Roman Jakobson would call intralingual and intersemiotic translations, like Nabokov's conversion of *Lolita* from a novel into a film scenario (studied, for example, in Julia Trubikhina's 2015 monograph *The Translator's Doubts: Vladimir Nabokov and the Ambiguity of Translation*, which Shvabrin does not engage). More importantly, the qualifier "of others" excludes Nabokov's self-translations from consideration. Perhaps Shvabrin felt that such translations fall outside the dialogic concept adapted in his book, even though one would assume that a dialogue could happen not only between different people, but also between chronological and linguistic layers of the self. The neglect of Nabokov's self-translations is a regrettable omission. For one, taking into account the thirty-nine self-translated poems in the 1970 volume *Poems and Problems* (which Shvabrin never mentions) would have further enriched the discussion of Nabokov's inconsistent literalism during the post-*Onegin* period.

What new insights do we gain from this book? By putting Nabokov's practice of translation into dialogue with his literary career, Shvabrin shows how his translational work intersected with his fictional oeuvre. At the same time, it also becomes evident to what extent Nabokov's literalism was more of an aberration than a norm when considered in the context of his overall translational practice. Among more minor insights, we learn that Nabokov's knowledge of German was apparently more solid than he was willing to admit. Not only did he translate Heine and Goethe into Russian, but his English translation of Lermontov's "Iz Geine" seems to show an awareness of the underlying German original. Nabokov's German translation of

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the opening line of Pushkin's love poem to Anna Kern—"Ich erinnere mich eines wundervollen Augenblick" (270)—does not exactly instill confidence in his command of German grammar, however (unless the missing genitives in "Augenblick" is not Nabokov's mistake, but a typo). Another surprise is Nabokov's translations of Bulat Okudzhava's songs. As Shvabrin rightfully notes: "[Nabokov's] keen interest in the Okudzhava phenomenon shatters the myth of a disdainful exiled elitist out of touch with his homeland" (323). Shvabrin was able to ascertain that Okudzhava himself became aware of Nabokov's interest in his work.

As an avowed admirer of Nabokov, Shvabrin is hesitant to criticize him. The most he brings himself to say about the *Onegin* polemics is the mild observation that "[i]t must be admitted that even if one acknowledges the vindictiveness of some of his opponents, a share of the blame for this situation lands at Nabokov's feet" (337). While not exactly praising Nabokov's translation of *Onegin*, he does find it "phenomenally useful" (300), a qualifier that Nabokov himself, at least in his pre-literalist phase, would not have regarded as a compliment. Unlike other Nabokov apologists, Shvabrin does not seem particularly enamored of Nabokov's gargantuan *Onegin* commentary. Shvabrin himself certainly is no adherent of literalism. He regrets that Nabokov found it necessary to suppress his earlier, poetic translations. Rather tantalizingly and cryptically, we are informed that a magnificent poetic rendering of Pushkin's poem to Anna Kern "does exist but cannot be shared with the readers here and now" (269), suggesting that access to Nabokov's archive came with strings attached and that the Nabokov estate is censoring to this day what kind of translations can be made public.

There is certainly something unsettling about Nabokov's attacks on others for something that he practiced himself. Shvabrin tries to deflect blame as much as possible. Thus, he argues that Nabokov polemic against Robert Lowell, whom he accused of "mutilating defenseless dead poets," stemmed less from Lowell's "free" translation method than from his ignorance of the source language. This is true for Lowell's translations of Osip Mandel′shtam and Boris Pasternak, to be sure, but Lowell did know French, which makes this argument inapplicable to his renditions of Arthur Rimbaud or Charles Baudelaire. The interesting fact that Mandelstam's widow sided with Lowell rather than Nabokov in this dispute is also worth pondering.

Overall, Shvabrin has written an extremely thorough, learned, and "phenomenally useful" book. While it perhaps does not entirely lift the "veil of mystery" surrounding Nabokov's baffling conversion to literalism and polemic dismissal of any alternate approach, it greatly advances our understanding of Nabokov's evolution as a translator and highlights to what extent translations formed an integral and crucial part of his life and work.

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