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MAPPING THE HERO'S DREAMS:
IMAGINATION AND TRAVEL IN NABOKOV'S *GLORY*

Glory was Nabokov's fifth Russian novel. Originally written in 1930, the novel was not published until 1931 in Berlin. Not well received upon its initial publication, critics noted that, although the stylistic and physiological elements of the novel were of high quality, they appeared superficial when set against an insubstantial, meandering narrative: the uneventful life of a Russian émigré in Europe, whose academic pursuits, seemingly adolescent love interests, and social engagements were objectively average. However, what was noted widely by critics was the extraordinarily rich detail Nabokov used in his description of both the journey and various locales visited by the protagonist, Martin. Even those critics who took umbrage with a perceived lack of depth in Nabokov's novel, such as Vladimir Varshavsky, remarked on this descriptive vibrance in the text. Varshavsky noted in the Paris-based journal *Chisla* that, "What amazes me more than anything else in [Nabokov] is the all but oppressive wealth of physiological vitality. Everything is exceptionally lush and colorful, and somewhat pinguid" (Varshavsky 1933, 266). Thus, the apparent richness of the novel is discovered in the depictions of place and the transition from one location to another. Can we then examine the novel not upon the protagonist's romanticized aspirations – his search for heroic exploits in an otherwise boring existence, but rather by exploring his various travels across the narrative? Can *travel* itself be the hidden gem in that "wealth of physiological vitality" that offers new insight into Nabokov's *Glory*?

In his foreword to the English translation of the novel, Nabokov notes the arduous task undertaken by his son, Dmitri Nabokov, in translating the text due to the “Russian preoccupation with physical movement... [which] seems especially strong in *Podvig*” (Nabokov 1991, x). Alexander Dolinin discusses the linguistic significance of Nabokov’s chosen title, noting that the term is used in reference to a heroic deed, while also relating to distance: “the path, travel, and movement” (Dolinin 2004, 83), and in his commentary to the novel, he remarks that Nabokov wrote the text in such a way as to create a story of travels and adventure, in which the *travel* plays a primary role (Dolinin 2000, 19). By blurring the degree to which Martin’s travels mirror his own, Nabokov affords himself the ability to create a parallel between fiction and reality within the body of the novel. Nabokov follows in the tradition of other modernist authors such as Proust and Joyce, who created works of fiction by incorporating materials from their own experience, as well as inventing new events based on the texts of other authors. However, Nabokov diverges from the traditional use of fact and fiction in his writing, as some of his work can be read as unactualized opportunities in his own life (Richardson 2011, 75). This, in turn, develops an inherent tension in the text, a tension that increases over the narrative.

Glory is deeply connected to the author’s personal experiences: a depiction of Nabokov’s travels at a similar age in his life. Unlike in novels such as *The Gift*, in which Nabokov distances himself from his protagonist,¹ Martin’s trips and periodic residences in Europe mirror Nabokov’s own personal history, and in a rare confessional moment in the foreword to the English translation, Nabokov admits the resemblance between himself and his kind, upright protagonist.² This admission provides historical context for the relatable experience of exile. By referring to Martin as his “distant cousin,” Nabokov includes him in the generation of young emigres who departed their homeland as teenagers, without having a clear understanding of Russian culture.³

¹ Although Nabokov is often deceptive in framing his novels for the readership, he does clearly state in his foreword to *The Gift* that he should not be associated with the protagonist (*The Gift*, ix).

² Nabokov insinuates that there could certainly be a *relation* of sorts; he could “be considered a distant cousin [...] (nicer than I, but also much more naïve than I ever was), with whom I share certain childhood memories, certain later likes and dislikes...” (*Glory*, xi).

³ This connection underscores how Nabokov viewed travel: as an adventure or quest. Poetry from the likes of Gumilev (“Muza dal’nikh stranstvii;” 1916), which Nabokov read in his youth, influenced his idealization of travel as a glorious prospect. On the possible importance of Gumilev’s death for *Podvig*, see Dolinin, Aleksandr A., and G. Utgof, *Nabokov V.V. Russkii period. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, Sankt Peterburg. Simposium, 2000.

This fact is simultaneously a departure from the author, who himself was well versed in the cultural values of a wealthy, aristocratic Russian family, and a connection through exile. By including that element as a component of Martin's story, as well as his professed desires for traveling and heroism, Nabokov incorporates the subjective travel experience into the novel, a vision of his own life overlaid onto Martin's – a double exposure of subjectivity. This essential autobiographical quality is often a hallmark of travel writing and travelogues.

Travel writing, on a basic level, is a record or a product of an encounter; however, it is one that intrinsically carries with it the implication of a subjective perspective. Though travel writing is generally difficult to define, there are certain aspects which are widely accepted as fundamental to the genre, not least of which being the notion that the author should pass on documented information through their account in the text (Youngs 2013, 2). However, the lens through which that information is carried is critical to that conveyance. Carl Thompson asserts that travel writing appears to have two major components: it is both a report of the wider world from the subjective perspective of the author and a self-referential statement by the author themselves. Travel writing presented the opportunity for authors to depict more credible interpretations of fictional worlds, worlds that would have been disregarded by the readership as exaggerated in nature (Thompson 2011, 147). Though some scholars have attempted to draw a line between fact and fiction in travel accounts, it is undeniable that even evidently impartial accounts can vary based on the subjective interpretation of the author. Such reliance on the reimagining of the journey resulted in a wealth of texts which interpreted documented travel experiences through a fictional lens: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) relies heavily on the true story of Alexander Selkirk and other actual travel accounts as source material and Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771) is directly informed by the author's personal travel experience in Scotland, France, and Italy. Even Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/1735) is a parody of travel accounts.⁴ All of these works explore the similarity between the travel story and the modern novel, based, in large part, upon an "imaginative reshaping of reality" (Thompson 2011, 134). The most pivotal links in the

⁴ For further details on various definitions on travel writing see Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*; Jan Borm, "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing, and Terminology"; Tatiana Pecherskaya, *Russkii travelog XVIII-XX vek: marshruti, toposi, zhanri I narrativ*; Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*; and Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*.

ambiguous chain are that of the journey itself and the author's subjective recollection of said journey.

The delicate interplay between subjectivity and creative freedom is a fundamental concept which Nabokov applies liberally throughout his works: the "Tender Interval" between fact and imagination.⁵ It is no wonder then, that the concept of traveling, discovery, and spinning tales of adventure are so commonplace in his oeuvre. As far back as the eighteenth century, subjectivity and reality intertwined in stories of travel and travelogue journals. Many point to Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) as the possible origination of this concept in literature, a work that is less an examination of traveling through place and time, but rather as a chain of minor social interactions leading one along a more or less subjective series of events. It was at this early stage that subjectivity was applied with more intention when writing about travel, the journey, and exploration (Das and Youngs 2019, 99). Examination of the world through travel was bound tightly with imagination and fabrication, tools which Nabokov has often cited as critical to the masterful creation of art. The many geographic and ethnographic depictions in Nabokov's work are founded on similar principles.⁶

Simon Cooke, in his article "Inner Journeys: Travel Writing as Life Writing," cites numerous examples of previous works of travel writing that focus primarily on the authorial presence, rather than the description of the area in which they travel. This is not to say that Nabokov intended for his protagonist, Martin, to be portrayed as a travel writer; rather, it is meant to highlight that Nabokov underscores the subjective life experiences of the protagonist across his travels. Norman Douglas claimed that it was this combination of the two journeys, "the sentimental or temperamental voyage, which takes place side by side with the outer one," that produces the method for travel writing (Fussell 1980, 203). Although Douglas's statement may appear to create

⁵ Nabokov famously noted this fact when discussing *Pale Fire* during an interview in 1969, when asked about the truth of reality in his writing: "Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialized... You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable" (*Strong Opinions*, 10-11).

⁶ Nabokov notes that he tends "more and more to regard the objective existence of all events as a form of impure imagination... Whatever the mind grasps, it does so with the assistance of creative fancy..." (*Strong Opinions*, 105).

parameters for travel writing, its ambiguity cannot be denied, which Carl Thompson underscores in his examination of ways of self-revealing through travel writing:

Underpinning this literary-critical valuation, it should be noted, is a more general critical assumption that travel writing is usually, or properly, a highly autobiographical form and a genre that is typically just as concerned to explore and present the subjectivity of the traveler-narrator as it is to explore and report the world. (Thompson 2011, 97)

In travel writing, trips to other countries and subsequent encounters therein are a pretext for narratorial self-examination (Thompson 2011, 98). In *Glory*, this manifests in Martin's introspective development over the course of his travels. The overarching journey of the novel is internal, taking place against the backdrop of the act of traveling over the course of the narrative. As Alexander Dolinin noted, the title thus serves a double purpose, both representing the heroic aspirations of the protagonist, while also placing the concept of *travel* center stage. As Martin moves with greater freedom along different paths, he more acutely examines his own feelings towards others and himself. He explores his place in the world, and perhaps, even beyond it.

Martin's first notable journey occurs on the initial pages of the novel. Nabokov connects the protagonist's journeys to imagination and fiction from the onset, not only by the texts which his mother reads to him as a child, but by his distinct memory of the dreamlike journey into a mural in his bedroom.

Над маленькой, узкой кроватью, с белыми веревчатыми решетками по бокам и с иконкой в головах... висела на светлой стене акварельная картина: густой лес и уходящая вглубь витая тропинка. Меж тем, в одной из английских книжонок, которые мать читывала с ним... был рассказ именно о такой картине с тропинкой в лесу прямо над кроватью мальчика, который однажды, как был, в ночной рубашке, перебрался из постели в картину, на тропинку, уходящую в лес. Вспоминая в юности то время, он спрашивал себя, не случилось ли и впрямь так, что с изголовья кровати он однажды прыгнул в картину, и не было ли это началом того счастливого и мучительного путешествия, которым обернулась вся его жизнь. (*Podvig*, 157)

On the bright wall above the narrow crib... hung a watercolor depicting a dense forest with a winding path disappearing into its depths. Now in one of the English books that his mother used to read to him... there was a story about just such a picture with a path in the words, right above the bed of a little boy, who, one fine night, just as he was, nightshirt and all, went from his bed into the picture, onto the path that disappeared into the woods... When, as a youth, he recalled the past, he would wonder if one night he had not actually hopped from bed to picture, and if this had not been the beginning of the journey, full of joy and anguish, in which his whole life had turned. (*Glory*, 4)

It is this event which sets the stage for what will become a lifelong fascination with traveling and discovery, all tied intrinsically to imagination. Martin's dream journey into the mural is prefaced with the stories he read in his youth, those being English works. Although the reader is never told precisely which titles Martin references among the stories that his mother read to him, it is worth noting that the primary English works that he recalls are those of Rudyard Kipling and generic texts on "Boy Scouts" (Nabokov 1990, 93). Though there could theoretically be several texts included in Martin's bedtime reading list, it is more than reasonable to assume that Kipling's *The Jungle Book* would have been one of the texts, if not the specific text, to which Nabokov is alluding. *The Jungle Book*, combined with handbooks about forest exploration, camping, and survival such as *Scouting for Boys*, written by Robert Baden-Powell and published in 1908, indicates that an interest in traveling and journeys was cultivated in Martin's childhood through the combination of stories and an overactive imagination. Furthermore, Nabokov connects that interest to fictional stories of exotic adventure that spawned Martin's first memory of any exciting trip – the trip into his mural.

At this early stage of the novel, we see that Martin is himself unclear as to whether he entered the mural or not. His hesitation and uncertainty could very well have been the catalyst for the "beginning of the journey" which would then continue for the rest of his life. It is only at the conclusion of the novel that the reader finds the mirror image of this first experience reflected in the forest path into which Martin disappears. The final scene, bearing such an uncanny similarity to the initial memory of Martin's dreamlike journey into the mural, serves as an example of the imaginative powers Nabokov references in his introduction to the English work – Martin's unique

creative ability to have his wishes fulfilled. In his childhood memory, Martin predetermines the forest path that he traversed in his youth, which will appear again as he disappears from the novel entirely. Thus, this becomes the first example of Martin using fiction to influence reality in the text. The personal view of the forest path becomes the path that the reader arrives at upon the culmination of the story. The events are separated by the body of text, accentuating the boundary between reality and fiction, and acting as the first instance in which Martin transitions across that boundary.

In this first example it is safe to assume that Martin's age is a significant factor in his ability to recall the events of his childhood dream. The truth behind his experience could be reasonably muddled by a combination of forgetfulness, nostalgia, and childlike enchantment as Martin himself notes that he can only remember certain "feelings" from the event, such as the "chilly touch of the ground" (холодок земли) or the "green twilight of the forest" (зеленые сумерки леса) (Nabokov 1991, 5). Scholars such as Haber and Toker have discussed the elements of enchantment which appear to be at the heart of Nabokov's novel, but there is also a foundational connection to a sense of wonder that is indicative of another trope in travel writing – exaggeration. Historically, travel writers, perhaps more so than traditional literary authors, exert an enormous authority over their written work ordained by their presumed witness accounts. The border of fact and fiction is drawn by the autocratic author, which has led to frequent exploitations throughout history, often blending the two into a fictional account which can appear strikingly authentic. Although the propensity for exaggeration is connected to travel writing early in its literary infancy, this is not to say that intentional deception or misleading accounts overwhelm the genre. On the contrary, it has been documented that accounts which were considered to be imagined or too wonderous by critics were found to be factual upon later review, but at the time of their initial publication were considered so outlandish that the author was disregarded by the general readership as hyperbolic and overly imaginative. Exotic areas that travel writers would depict were often beyond the ken of the readership back home, which would lend credence to the stereotype of the traveler as a liar (Thompson 2011, 65). From its inception, travel writing has walked a razor's edge of either being considered dull and obvious or outlandish and alien. The contrast, it seems, lies somewhere between truth and imagination.

Nabokov highlights that contrast further along the narrative, as Martin stands alone in quiet contemplation on the terrace in Switzerland. Prior to this scene, Martin's love of travel has only been referenced by the narrator; however, it is in this moment that the term 'travel' is invoked by the protagonist for the first time. As Ekaterina Nikolaeva points out, Switzerland plays a double role in the novel for Martin as both a new home for him and his mother, and a launching point for his future travels to Cambridge, Paris, Berlin, and eventually back to Russia (Nikolaeva 2015, 396). Martin is Swiss on his father's side. With his closest family relations currently residing there, and his genealogy traced back to the same country, Switzerland becomes a reflection of his homeland: the focal point from which the young travelling protagonist can contemplate his past while simultaneously planning his future trips.

Standing on the terrace, Martin's thoughts drift to traveling as an act of discovery. The word travel is born through Martin's imagination into the narrative; he claims it for himself in a new form, crafted by him alone. This relates to the personal experience that Martin associates with exploration. In a letter to Gleb Struve, Nabokov remarked that the novel was reminiscent of *The Children of Captain Grant* by Jules Verne (1867-1868), which tells the tale of a shipwreck and the expedition to recover the lost captain. Even though the comment seems to be made ironically by Nabokov, as it would be difficult to compare Martin's travels with that of Verne's characters, Nabokov's protagonist does cover significant geographical space, by land and sea. In the original Russian translation, the word is personified in the action of 'travel' having "extracted all meaning until it cast off its long, dry, lexical skin."⁷ or, in the English translation, shedding its "silky skin" (Nabokov 1991, 132). The terminology in both the Russian and English creates the image of travel as a living being, one that captivates Martin over the course of the narrative. As the word is quickened, Martin utters four invocations that punctuate his yearning for future travels and frames that desire in his uniquely personal view. «Звезда. Туман, Бархат, бар-хат» ("Star. Mist. Velvet. Vel-vet") (Nabokov 1990, 143). Each utterance can be interpreted from several perspectives.

Martin sees a falling star in the sky as he steps out onto the terrace. As his thoughts gravitate towards lofty aspirations of travel and exploration, it is possible to draw the conclusion that his

⁷ Translation mine.

dreams are still out of reach, as he is still only wishing upon falling stars, rather than achieving any tangible goals. The following term, “mist,” is frequently repeated in Nabokov’s narrative to indicate confusion, distance, and obscurity. Martin often refers to distant lands as disappearing in the mist or being obscured by fog; the word is used periodically as a cloud obscuring his reason, overwhelming him with emotion; in his imagination streets and buildings are “foggy” or obscured in the mist as he cannot create a clear image of the land he will travel to; certain fields of study⁸, such as law, are referred to as being obscured by “the mist”. This reasoning would seem logical enough, were it not for the odd caveat in the subsequent utterances “velvet” and its repetition. Furthermore, there is a distinct difference between the Russian and English translations: the term “Travelvet” appears in the English translation to replace “бар-хат” (“vel-vet”). Why does Nabokov include the term velvet and the amalgamation of velvet with travel?

These two words break the framework of Martin solely reflecting on his natural surroundings. There is no velvet present in this scene outside of Martin’s invocation of the word. This is only further obscured by his wordplay with travel, combining the terms in an odd, playful manner. The entire scene, including these specific terms, can be analyzed as an allusion to Mikhail Lermontov’s «Выхожу я один на дорогу...», and thus, relating to Martin’s memory of Russia. The episode of Martin standing on the terrace draws a close parallel with the first stanza of Lermontov’s poem:

Выхожу я один на дорогу;
Сквозь туман кремнистый путь блестит;
Ночь тиха. Пустыня внемлет Богу,
И звезда с звездою говорит.

The allusion to Lermontov foreshadows the appearance of this very poem later in the novel during Martin’s excursion to Mognac: his trial-run at the authentic expedition. It is there that he will

⁸ It is noteworthy that Martin also relates the excitement of discovery and imagination to several fields, including history and science. His attraction to these academic pursuits appears to stem from his perpetual desire to explore and discover.

recall a moment in Cambridge where upon he comes into contact with “a shameless paraphrase of Lermontov’s greatest lyrical poem”. The first stanza of the poem is quoted in the text but is done so incorrectly:

I walk along the road alone.
My stony path spreads far,
Still is the night and cold the stone,
And Star talks unto star.

The text is either paraphrased by the English author, A. Jameson, or was simply a poor translation. In either case, Martin notes the inability of the foreigner to understand Russia: he fosters an aura of mystery and foreign incomprehensibility through his superior comprehension of Russian poetry. In so doing, he intentionally creates distance from himself and his surroundings in an effort to make the experience of travel and cultural interaction that much more foreign, as subjective as possible. He lives in a paradoxical state of national identity; in Russia he was considered European (Edelweiss, having a Swiss heritage), yet in Europe, he is distinctly Russian (Matveeva 2009, 114). Nevertheless, we are still left with the seemingly odd inclusion of “velvet” among the terms with which he associates “travel.”

There are only a select few moments throughout the narrative in which Martin mentions velvet. In the original Russian, there are only seven such instances, several of which are in reference to clothing. However, one of the most poignant instances occurs on the initial page of the novel. Martin reflects on the nature of his own last name, Edelweiss, remarking that his Swiss grandfather introduced the name into the family line of St. Petersburg Russians. He reflects on the name’s reference to “the velvety white Alpine flower that pet of herbariums...” (Nabokov 1991, 1). Thus, Martin unites the term velvet with his own lineage. The utterance of travel on the terrace connects him personally with travel at his core. Further, the difference between Nabokov’s Russian original with the English translation is significant. Although one must be cautious when taking Nabokov at his word, it is significant that he saw fit to make the connection of the word “velvet”, a term that appears to directly connect Martin’s identity with “travel.” Through the unique,

velveteen description that the protagonist attributes to travel, in his English translation, Nabokov emphasizes a descriptive term that Martin associates with himself and his youth, while also invoking travel in a way only he can comprehend. This also gives credence to the notion that, later in life, Nabokov revisited his novel more aware of the significance of the subjectivity of Martin's thoughts on travel.

Martin relishes the thrill of discovery and travel. The final falling star confirms his aspirations: his wish to journey to a distant, unexplored land is perhaps achievable. The first star falls outside of his line of sight, discernable, yet unclear; the second star appears clearly within his field of vision. As the star tumbles through the night sky, so too does Martin fall back into his memory, directly associating the night sky with his childhood in Russia. This nostalgic moment enlivens his yearning for travel once more, as he contemplates from which distant unexplored lands he will gaze at this same night's sky. It is here, yet again, that the reader witnesses Martin's subjective influence on the narrative, as he indulges his dreams of future travels, initially in his imagination, then spilling over into a semblance of reality:

[...] Мартын, с замиранием, с восторгом себе представлял, как - совершенно один, в чужом городе, в Лондоне, скажем, — будет бродить ночью по неизвестным улицам. Он видел черные кэбы, хлюпающие в тумане, полицейского в черном блестящем плаще, огни на Темзе, — и другие образы из английских книг.

(Podvig, 187)

[...] Martin, in a breathless trance, imagined how, completely alone, in a strange city — say, London — he would roam at night along unfamiliar streets. He saw the black hansom cabs splashing through the fog, a policeman in a shiny black cape, lights on the Thames, and other images out of English novels.

(Glory, 49)

At first, the moment is simply an imagining of what a visit to London could be. Then, the moment seamlessly transitions into the reality of an actual visit to London. In the Russian translation, this is signaled through the ellipsis [...], in the English translation, by the use of the exclamation point

(!). We are reminded in this scene of Nabokov's earlier statement that his protagonist is "that rarity — a person whose 'dreams come true'." The scene changes to Martin acting the role of the flaneur, browsing the shops from the streets, sampling alcohol in the pub, and even finding the time to engage with a prostitute. Noting Martin's earlier reference to the "усатый Бел-Ами" (mustached Bel-Ami), an erotic encounter (albeit seedy and unsatisfying) during his trip was key to the small achievement of making his dream a reality.

Throughout the novel, the reader relies solely on Martin's interpretation of events and personal experiences during his travels. Transitioning from Switzerland to London is done seamlessly, because the reader is following Martin's thoughts, not only his movements. As the plot progresses, that tension between the imaginary and the real becomes tauter. He recalls scaling the cliffside in Switzerland, an intensely dangerous undertaking, which he performed on a whim having suffered a bout of restlessness during a summer visit at his mother and stepfather's home. Martin muses about the event in a late-night discussion with Sonia.

“Что вы делали летом?” — спросил Мартын, стараясь побороть что-то глухое, сумасшедшее, совершенно невозможное, от которого даже знобило. “Так. Ничего. Были в Брайтоне”. Она вздохнула и добавила: “Летала на гидроплане”. “А я чуть не погиб, — сказал Мартын. — Да-да, чуть не погиб. Высоко в горах. Сорвался со скалы. Едва спасся.”

(*Podvig*, 218)

“What did you do this summer?” inquired Martin, struggling to subdue a dark something that was quite mad and unthinkable and that even induced a febrile chill. “Nothing in particular. We went to Brighton.” She sighed and added “I flew on a hydroplane.” “And I very nearly got killed,” said Martin. “Yes, yes, very nearly. High up in the mountains. Rock climbing. Lost my hold. Saved by a miracle.”

(*Glory*, 93)

Martin's immediate instinct is to retort to Sonia's mundane experiences with a life-threatening circumstance, one that he perhaps makes in the hopes of impressing her or eliciting concern. In this moment we see that Martin is certainly not above using his travels or experiences to influence or affect the opinions of those close to him. Further, it is here that there is another nuanced difference between the Russian original and the English translation: in the Russian original, "Едва спасся" would translate as "[I] barely escaped," whereas the English text notes that he was "Saved by a miracle." Though the experience was no doubt exhilarating, and surely dangerous, in the English text Martin expresses a hint of divine intervention to the events. It is a subtle play towards Sonia's perception of the story, one that adds an air of danger and mystery. The scene culminates in Martin making advances on Sonia, which she rebukes.

Though crestfallen, he continues his coquettish interactions by engaging her on topics of travel and exploration later in the text, primarily through playful word games. In her book, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym asserts that there is ample evidence to support the notion that Martin's primary impetus to travel and present himself as an adventurer stems from his adoration of Sonia. She argues that Martin's primary goal in the text are his romantic intentions, and that the final journey is specifically undertaken to win Sonia's heart through a heroic deed (Boym 2001, 268). However, considering the degree to which Martin is enamored with travels from the earliest years of his youth, and accounting for Nabokov's commentary on his protagonist in the English translation, I would argue that a romantic entanglement with Sonia is a diversion from his true objective. He is not "a spy for the sake of love," as Boym puts it. Rather, Martin uses playful banter with Sonia to begin formulating the ideal destination to which he has dreamed of traveling to for his entire life. The result of these flirtatious games is their mutual creation of an imaginary, undiscovered country – Zoorland.

Zoorland becomes Martin's imagined rendition of Soviet Russia, the new Russia to which he has never traveled. What appears at first to be nothing more than jovial banter between Martin and Sonia begins to paint a critical picture of what the Soviet regime could possibly look like, fashioning a dramatically altered image of their past homeland. "Pure" artistry and science are outlawed. No precise culture is ever alluded to, only that of customs and laws which, by and large, foster a false sense of equality among the ignorant, happy Zoorlanders, "честные невежды"

(honest dunces) who huddle together to warm themselves by bonfires piled high with burning musical instruments. Martin admits to himself that this could all be a game at his expense, and underscores again the boundary between truth and falsehood, as he notes that he is moving close to the border of reality, “...до черты, за которой бредни становятся безвкусны, и внезапным хохотом разбудив босого лунатика, который видит вдруг и карниз, на котором висит...” (256) (“...the boundary beyond which phantasms become tasteless — and the dreamwalker is jolted into seeing the roof edge from which he is dangling...,” 138); however, he continues to cultivate the imaginary country and doubles down on his aspirations to someday travel there, or, at the very least to a country equally as outlandish.

To set the stage for his final, fatal excursion, Martin takes it upon himself to travel alone to the small village of Mognac. Over the course of this trip, we see Martin intentionally living out the fantasy of his musings with Sonia, and it is here that Martin’s inherent subjectivity in the narration of his travels is presented with no sense of hesitation or doubt for the reader: it is clearly defined and easier to pinpoint.

Вольным заморским гостем он разгуливал по басурманским базарам, все было очень занимательно и пестро, но где бы он ни бывал, ничто не могло в нем ослабить удивительное ощущение избранности. Таких слов, таких понятий и образов, какие создала Россия, не было в других странах, — и часто он доходил до косноязычия, до нервного смеха, пытаясь объяснить иноземцу, что такое «оскомина» или «пошлость».

(Podvig, 266)

A carefree visitor from a distant shore, he strolled through the bazaars of the infidels, and everything was entertaining and colorful, but no matter where he might go, nothing could weaken in him the wonderful sense of being difference and elect. Such words, such notions and images, as those that Russia had engendered did not exist in other countries, and it often happened that he would lapse into incoherence or start to laugh nervously when

vainly trying to explain to a foreigner the various meanings of some special term, say *poshlust*'.

(*Glory*, 151)

As we saw Martin transition from a balcony in Switzerland to the streets of London, as well as the vague dreams of disappearing into his bedroom mural as a child, he has the capacity to shift the narrative in subtle directions when reflecting on his travels. This is not the case in Molignac, as Martin simply appears to take pleasure in the act of being a foreigner. When comparing the Russian original to the English, we also see that Nabokov appears to enjoy that he is unable to even attempt to explain the meaning of *оскомиha*, omitting it from the text entirely, and instead only including a word which Nabokov diligently tried, with some success, to turn into an English word and concept – *poshlust*. Martin callously paints the local villagers with the same brush that he would have painted Zoorlanders, those “honest dunces” to whom he is often incapable of speaking on an intellectual level. He strolls among them as if a colonial visitor, observing those who do not possess his self-determined superior qualities. He forces Molignac to become what he wants it to be, remarking that, upon his arrival at the train platform that the air was “velvety and warm,” yet again creating a personal, subjective layer to his circumstance which only he can define.

Martin’s actions in this, his trial run before the final journey, are less those of a traveler-explorer, instead reflecting more those of the tourist: an individual who is decidedly unadventurous, relatively passive, and uninquisitive regarding the authenticity of their travels, tending to lean heavily on comforts and familiarity rather than experiencing anything profoundly new (Kinsley 2016, 237). Martin forces himself to experience alienation in an unfamiliar location by introducing artificial stereotypes into his experience — his imagined persona is that of a traveler. However, in falsifying the nature of his experience, he trends more towards tourist practices by seeking something pre-determined, a journey that is pre-packaged to his desired specifications. The journey is a false one, one that does not create tension between what may or may not have occurred. Here, in Molignac, Martin is still playing the game that he and Sonia

concocted in their whimsical flirtations. His last journey, that journey which he believes he has prepared for all his life, will no longer be playful or jubilant. It will likely be deadly and clouded in obscurity.

The final journey of the novel punctuates the fundamental importance of subjectivity in its absence of detail. After announcing to his friend Darwin that he intends to cross the Russian border, having prepared a meager plan to appease the anxiety of his mother through regularly delivered postcards, Martin vanishes entirely from the narrative. The disappearance of the protagonist leaves the reader to consider whether the journey indeed took place, and if so, what was the destination? How much has Martin's imagination influenced our interpretation of his excursion over the border, and was it to Russia, or to Zoorland? The obscure ending of the novel has resulted in various theories as to Martin's ultimate fate, and in his research of the symbolism and key terms which Nabokov left for the reader in the novel and intertextual references, Maxim Shrayer reviews what he believed to be the most reasonable conclusions of Martin's final journey. His analysis encompasses several possible outcomes, each of which points to clues Nabokov provides in the text, and from Nabokov's own commentary. Shrayer examines the logical possibility of a climactic confrontation with Russian border guards who perhaps capture, arrest, and shoot Martin. He also considers the historical influences of the time which could have played a significant role in Nabokov's choice of ambiguity in the ending. He cites émigré monarchists and other Socialist Revolutionaries who, during that time, sought a means to upend the Bolshevik power structure in the late 1920's. Furthermore, he explores the possibility that Martin's journey could represent a defiant stance against the position of Archibald Moon, who mummifies Russia in the past and expresses contempt for both its present and future (Shrayer 1999, 57).

Of all Shrayer's theoretical conclusions, one stands out in particular when considering the tension between fact and fiction connected to the subject of travel in *Glory*. Shrayer postulates that Martin could have crossed the boundaries of the narrative entirely and traveled to the country of true artistic imagination, in this instance Zoorland: a space of innate, unchanging, mythological perfection. He recalls Nabokov's statement about his protagonist, in which Martin is described as having a unique artistic capacity of thought. This artistry is then perfected through the creation and assimilation into Zoorland:

Его собственный художественный потенциал актуализируется в наиболее полной мере в процессе сочинения Зоорландии совместно с Соней. Неудивительно, что в конце романа Мартин, который воплощает чистое искусство либо как Муза, либо как джойсовский “художник в молодом возрасте”, исчезает в своей родной стихии? (65)

His own artistic potential activates to the fullest extent during the process of composing Zoorlandia together with Sonia. Is it not unsurprising then, that at the end of the novel Martin, who embodies purity in art either as a Muse, or perhaps a Joycean “artist of a young age” [*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*], disappears into his own native element?⁹

By elaborating on the potential of artistic creation, Shrayer emphasizes the inherent imagination in travel and the recurring topic of a transition between realities, rather than a singularly geographic take on transportation. In Martin, Nabokov creates the quintessential subjective traveler, through whose eyes readers can cross great distances and learn of foreign lands. By accepting that experience, the reader accepts the journey as it is detailed. However, Nabokov offers his readers the chance to explore the future of his protagonist beyond the text, through unseen travels to an undiscovered land. The ambiguous nature of Martin’s disappearance at the end of the novel thus creates a vacuum of facts within fiction, one that is left to be filled by those willing to look for the breadcrumbs spread out along a forest path leading back into the realm of dreams, where traveling is not bound by physical movement, and reality is what we, the readers, make of it.

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⁹ Translation mine.

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