



Glory

Vladimir Nabokov , Dmitri Nabokov (Translator)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➞

Glory

Vladimir Nabokov , Dmitri Nabokov (Translator)

Glory Vladimir Nabokov , Dmitri Nabokov (Translator)

Glory is the wryly ironic story of Martin Edelweiss, a twenty-two-year-old Russian émigré of no account, who is in love with a girl who refuses to marry him. Convinced that his life is about to be wasted and hoping to impress his love, he embarks on a "perilous, daredevil project"--an illegal attempt to re-enter the Soviet Union, from which he and his mother had fled in 1919. He succeeds--but at a terrible cost.

Glory Details

Date : Published November 5th 1991 by Vintage (first published 1931)

ISBN : 9780679727248

Author : Vladimir Nabokov , Dmitri Nabokov (Translator)

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Russia, Classics, Literature, Russian Literature

 [Download Glory ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Glory ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Glory Vladimir Nabokov , Dmitri Nabokov (Translator)

From Reader Review Glory for online ebook

Jeff Jackson says

So right, this is a minor work. Transitional, you might even say. Young Nabokov is figuring out how to structure a novel from an entire life - rather than a heightened episode - without shorting his substantial gifts for compression, velocity, and patterning. The initial chapters have a herky-jerk momentum, but the novel eventually finds its footing and races toward an astonishing metaphysical climax that frames all the previous material in a new light.

This is definitely **not** for newcomers or those only mildly invested in Nabokov. It's slightly meandering in some places, uncharacteristically didactic in others, and occasionally too broad in its effects. But I still found it far more electrifying than the work of acolyte Martin Amis, whose *London Fields* continues to be a relative slog compared to Nabokov's fleet-footed prose, indelible dilations of detail, and swift changes of scenery. At a fraction the length, *Glory* packs in exotic cruises, international espionage, affairs between married women and young boys, wartime tragedy, nighttime train journeys, ruthless flirts, concealed identities, mysterious mountain paths, bloody bare knuckle boxing, lovesick machinations, and lecherous professors. Not to mention a good chunk of London itself.

VN himself sez: "After all but lapsing into false exoticism or commonplace comedy, it soars to heights of purity and melancholy that I only attained much later in *Ada*."

Now off to read what Brian Boyd has to say about it....

Edward says

Nabokov's prose is brilliant even here, so early in his bibliography. But he commits the rookie mistake of assuming that a personal experience that has been so significant in his life (his own exile from Russia) is interesting per se to readers. *Glory* offers very little apart from this experience, and this, along with the writing, is not really enough to carry the novel. The plot wafts from trifle to trifle, but never really latches onto anything of importance. The ancillary characters are often quirky and charismatic, but add little to the narrative. *Glory*, though at times pleasant, ultimately misses the mark. This is one for the fans only.

John says

Glory is a tale of adventure and "coming of age" during pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg. We follow the life and development of Martin Edelweiss, a Swiss-Russian, from childhood to university graduate of Cambridge in England. As the years pass, Martin finds himself in situations, with increasing loftiness and grandiosity, where he feels the need to conquer in order to achieve, in his eyes, a sort of heroic status. Much akin to the "perfect throw" in football—whatever that is.

The crux of the problem is the impotence of the main character; that being, the drive and ambitions without the means and wherewithal to accomplish. Atop those dispositions, there is nothing of notable account about

Martin. I found difficulty in growing attached to the protagonist.

With leitmotifs of “light and dark”, “winding paths that disappear into the forest”, “the sound of water”, and the various modes of “journey”, a fairy-tale like quality to the novel is stylistically painted and lends to the enchantment of the story.

However, I found the development of the story sleepy and the stark conclusion dissatisfying. There are some nice turns of phrase and trademark drollery, but an uninspired protagonist and subtle multiplicity of meaning absent made a rather weak story. Overall I found nothing compelling about the novel.

<http://shortbookreview.blogspot.com/2...>

Evan says

Young White Russian emigre Martin Edelweiss is the sensitive and self-righteous protagonist of one of Vladimir Nabokov's least known and least-read novels, but where *Glory* is most glorious is in its peerless writing and not so much in its meandering, trifling tale of confused youth.

Martin Edelweiss is a cosmopolitan bastard child of sorts; someone Oscar Wilde might have pegged as "young enough to know everything," a sensitive but insufferable little prig, modeled autobiographically via Nabokov himself, a fact which -- in light of some of the interviews I've read by the author -- is not surprising. If I were to read his real autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, I would better ascertain the parallels to this novel, but, alas, that is not presently in the offing.

At first, we feel for Martin because of the early loss of his father, his hypersensitivity as a child, his forced migration from his homeland due to the Russian Revolution. Born into privilege, he enjoys the benefits of his class, trips throughout Europe and an education at Cambridge. Despite a longing for his homeland, he clearly fancies the chameleon possibilities of being a free-floating cosmopolitan, of being Russian, English, Swiss, French, or German, such as his dandy whims dictate.

Nabokov starts the novel beautifully by placing young Martin in the context of familial aristocratic expectations. He is part of a long and glorious line, and in such a milieu is expected to carry on the traditions. Nabby evokes this in a loving and scintillating description of a vintage photo album highlighting the family's legendary grandfather; the mummified images of him caught in timeless stasis, in stiff Prussian-like splendor, sure of himself and his world, not bothered by any apparent self-awareness.

Almost right away we feel that Martin will rebel against this, yet at the same time realize his sense of guilt, or at least a sense of annoyance, at being bound to these expectations without having any intention of matching them. He clearly does admire the refined things, even the ancient rigid codes of conduct he is bound to break. It is an inevitable conflict in his Russian soul.

It is Martin's deep devotion and love for his mother that drives this conflict more than anything. Any desire that he would have to follow a preordained aristocratic path -- to make his own mark while safely replicating lives already lived -- stems clearly from his fear of disappointing his mother and her expectations.

When Martin befriends a married free-spirited artist/poet named Alla on a ship outbound from Russia, his first unrequited love foreshadows another that will later haunt him throughout the novel. That elusive desire becomes reserved for Sonia, the 16-year-old slightly common daughter of Russian emigres in London. Her

flighty nonchalance, along with her involvement with others in Martin's Cambridge circle drives him to distraction.

Along the way, Nabby takes his time in ample descriptions of flora and fauna, tennis games, how a peasant girl shakes a dirty rug, what the lights of Mognac look like from a moving train, how a girl's eyelash on a cheek turns an imperfection into something perfect. It is writing that will make you swoon, or yawn, or both.

My favorite parts of the book involved Martin's hopeless attempts to win Sonia's heart, as well as his descriptions of certain interesting characters, such as the Russian scholar, Archibald Moon, a professor whose amber-encrusted idea of Russia eventually drives Martin away, as does the professor's apparent gayness, only slightly subtly hinted at by Nabokov.

As in *Pnin*, and to some degree, *Lolita*, Nabokov expertly essays a reverence for the academic life, as it once existed.

Martin's sense of *ennui* demands a corrective that will be channeled into a youthful folly, an ill-advised adventure, and that is where, he believes, a true glory will define his life and his sense of worth and purpose. This is foreshadowed during a Swiss mountain hike, when he nearly slides off a cliff but is saved by a fortuitous grasp. Instead of cherishing this adventure as manly accomplishment, he resents it -- for the wrong reasons. And because of this, he becomes fixated on pursuing a death-dealing adventure that is purposefully sought, rather than accidental in nature.

This is one of the many blind spots in the youthful Martin. He did not seem to grasp that hiking up a mountain *was* the risk. The mere doing of it.

This leads the novel toward a very ambiguous ending. Clearly Martin achieves his goal, but we are given very little detail of its full outcome. In doing this, Nabokov pulls a risky narrative maneuver after having concentrated on Martin and his state of mind for 99 percent of the novel, wrenching the story to the perspective of the family and friends in his circle, who are left just as clueless about his fate as we are. Although not quite the same, this reminded me of the baffled mourners in Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru*, fruitlessly trying to guess at the motivations of their lost compadre.

In this conclusion, Nabby is uncompromising, and many readers will either respect this narrative gamble or hate it. I was not sold by it, but understand his motivation in trying it.

What struck me most about Martin was his blind spots, more than his knowledge and his wise insights. In crafting him, it is apparent that Nabokov did, too, although, at times, I wondered if the author shared some of those same gaps.

In Martin Edelweiss, we have the kind of pampered, sensitive aristocratic youth whose poetic soul is refined and cultivated enough to feel and drink in the beauty of a photograph or a sunset or the smells of a seashore, but who is absolutely clueless to the suffering that led to the Revolution that caused his family's flight from Russia. Indeed, nowhere in the book does the coddled Martin ever exhibit any political awareness, apart from some vague outrage mainly based on the exile of his family. And at the end, when he stages a political act, it is not done to avenge any specific outrage against the Russian aristocratic class, but is simply a poorly conceived personal act of validation. It seems like something on his bucket list, rather than something arising from true outrage or passion or an informed sense of justice. But this may be the point. Martin is young.

The book was problematic for me, and, I will admit, a bit of a slog at times. But the good parts, and the writing, carried me through. I would recommend it to those who have tackled Nabby's main corpus, rather

than to those who are engaging him for the first time.

(KevinR@Ky, 2016)

Inderjit Sanghera says

‘Glory’ slightly precedes Nabokov’s ‘golden period’ (stretching from ‘Despair’ in 1937 to ‘Pale Fire’ in 1962), a period iridescent with the glow of Nabokov’s genius, but whose brightness and beauty flickers only intermittently in comparison to the incomparable beauty of his greatest works.

The story follows Martin Edelweiss, a sensitive yet strange young man, and his experiences as an emigre firstly in Cambridge and later in Berlin and various other locations around Europe. Nabokov himself admitted that it was some time before he grew used to acclimatised America and was able to coherently recreate it within his novels, and in many ways ‘Glory’ reads like an incipient writer trying to make sense of and recreate the world around him-and for a writer as original as Nabokov this leads to many beautiful passages and quotes;

“The crickets kept crepitating; from time to time came a sweet whiff of burning juniper, and above a black alpestrine steppe, above the silken sea, the enormous, all engulfing sky, dove gray with stars, made one’s head spin, and suddenly Martin again experienced a feeling he had known on more than one occasion as a child: an unbearable intensification of all his senses, a magical and demanding impulse, the presence of something for which alone it was worth living.”

Indeed it is Nabokov’s ability to take delight in the world, in its limitless sounds and smells, the child-like glee of delighting in every moment which sets him above other writers-he will never be an explore of human psychology like Proust, but instead Nabokov explores the miracle of consciousness. The secondary characters within the novel are perhaps the most ‘human’ (in the positive sense) of all Nabokov’s novels. There are no outright brutes or rogues-Martin himself may often display a kind of aloofness which we often see in Nabokov’s male protagonists (with the exception of Pnin) but is essentially a kind, if high individualistic, character. The coquettish Sonia can be seen as being somewhat heartless and Martin’s friend, Darwin, descends into a vague kind of vapidty by the end of the novel, yet one senses that it is the peripheral characters, such as the Russophile Archibald Moon, or Martin’s mother Sofia, whose inner lives make the greatest impression on the reader. However, Nabokov’s cruel characters often serve a moral purpose, like Humber or Hermann, are Nabokov’s attempts to upend the reader via cruel and capricious characters whose outward ‘charms’ often mask the monstrous personality lurking within-the ‘moral’ of Glory lies within Martin’s desire to achieve a great ‘deed’, something which will allow him to transcend the everyday and achieve something glorious.

Adam Floridia says

3.5 stars. Review pending.

I left that whole "Review pending" thing up there for a reason, or, more accurately a sort of disclaimer. You see, as I'm reading I'm also generally putting together a very rough outline of my to-be-written review. Unfortunately, when I wait even a week to write said review and read even a single other book in that time, I

completely forget what I would have written. So this is one of those: a review half-salvaged from the fog of a full week's passing.

What *do* I know? I know that the sole purpose of this book "lay in stressing the thrill and the glamour that [a] young expatriate finds in the most ordinary pleasures as well as in the seemingly meaningless adventures in life" (x). Of course, I know that because it's in the introduction written by Nabokov--which reminds me, I also know that I really enjoy Nabokov's introductions to his own books, never lacking a shot or two at Freud/a psychoanalytic approach to the work.

Not a great deal happens in the novel. I was about to classify it as a bildungsroman but realized it is lacking *the* key criterion: the character has to demonstrate psychological/moral growth. Martin does not. Not at all. He is a Romantic at the outset and remains a Romantic as he sets off on his final Romantic journey. Is there a term for a coming-of-age story wherein the protagonist doesn't so much "come-of-age" as he does...well...simply age?

Martin has a poetic sensibility, a transcendentalist spirit, an ability to experience the sublime amidst the mundane. For example, an evening outdoors might suddenly elicit in him "an unbearable intensification of all his senses, a magical and demanding impulse, the presence of something for which alone it was worth living" (20). Of course, this feeling is fleeting, for were it not, it would not be sublime. Martin realizes "how very, very hard it was to capture happiness" (47-8). This leads him to romanticize things. Things like the past, the present, the future. To say he is imaginative is a bit of an understatement: not only does he often ignore reality—like the central plot point of his chasing a girl who clearly has no interest in him—but he goes so far as to construct his own reality—like climax through conclusion of his self-prescribed mission. In this, I could not agree more with Nabokov's above assessment of the sole purpose of the book. If that is the purpose, then it succeeds marvelously.

However, it is difficult not to question that purpose. Yes, I am envious of Martin's sensitive nature, his ability to seemingly experience things more deeply, more profoundly, to be touched by the truly simple pleasures of life. Nevertheless, I feel that any reader must question whether this is ultimately a positive trait or fatal flaw for young Martin. For even Martin "was made aware again and again of the presence of some malevolent force obstinately trying to convince him that life was not at all the happy easy thing he had imagined" (102). That force is reality. The reality that to enter the adult world and have a stable income, one must work; the reality that a girl's constant and unquestionable rejections mean it's time to move on; the reality that when adventurously climbing a cliff for no reason, one might fall to his death (no spoiler—that doesn't actually happen); the reality that losing/risking one's life for a purposeless journey devoid of any meaning or merit other than what one's fanciful imagination has infused in it is just plain stupid. If Martin is to be envied for his Romantic sensibilities, then he is also to be pitied for his inability to escape from them. For when it becomes "hard to separate fancy from fact," one must ask himself whether a more prosaic existence might be preferable (120).

Finally, I know that I just adore Nabokov's prose--it may bring me closer than anything else to the sublime.

Quotations I Liked:

"Thus in early childhood Martin failed to become familiar with something that subsequently, through the prismatic wave of memory, might have added an extra enchantment to his life" (4).

"It was then that Martin understood for the first time that human life flowed in zigzags" (9)

"She was twenty-five, her name was Alla, and she wrote poetry: three things, one would think, that were

bound to make a woman fascinating" (29)

MJ Nicholls says

Early Nabokov, brimming with bountiful lyrical light-fantastic tripping across Russia, Germany, and England, as the hero bumbles into his Cambridge education and chases an indifferent Teutonic vamp for too long. One of the more nostalgic, sincere novels from a pen that became sourer, more acerbic, and esoteric with time.

R. says

A Dream Comes True

I read this because I had a dream that I read this. But the book I read in my dream was much smaller, palm-sized, like one of those toy New Testaments, those prizes for scripture-memorization that one can win on a rainy morning in Sunday school if one raises their hand soon enough, catches the teacher's eye.

Mikimbizii says

A long time ago Ivan, a dear stranger who has a lovely blog - Nabokolia, asked me to write a small piece on Nabokov. Being a master procrastinator it took me ages to finally finish this little piece of, let's say, gentle lunacy. Job, life and other trivia interfered and then today, I paused between three deadlines and decided to finish what I had meant to do more than two years ago.

Where do I begin? "In Luga? Kaluga? Ladoga? Where, when?" I have devoured fiendishly, ravenously nearly all his works. I have already written treacly, trembling reviews for many. I have swooned and re-swooned in a loop over *Ada*, over *Speak Memory*. My spine has tingled over *Pale Fire* and *Bend Sinister*, and I have been lost in a mist of exquisite prose in *Look at the Harlequins*, *Sounds*, *Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Transparent Things*. I can go on....

Glory – One of Nabokov's transcendent little works did not do any of the above - but it touched the silkiest cobwebs of my madness – releasing a flock of hummingbirds.

This is not my favourite Nabokov. It didn't have quite the 'gripping' element that you find in *Lolita*. But there was something about *Glory*, something like a languid blossoming, a fragrant tenderness of things lost. As you seep slowly into the story (you have to be a patient reader) you discover the sweetest shades of pain, the fragile, breakable things that can reside in a rare human heart and the mad, poignant beauty of an absurdly and determinedly held ideal.

Through the iridescent moth-wing eyes of Martin Edelweiss we see his world that purls by like a lyrical aside. He is gently obsessed with a watercolour image of winding path through a dense forest which used to hang near his bed as a child. As he grows up, the dream of the forest path becomes a motif, an abstract longing. It comes to represent his home, his Russia from where he had to flee during the revolution, it becomes his dream escape, his dreamscape. Throughout the book we encounter several not-so-rememberable characters but, seen through the compassionate, wondering eyes of Edelweiss, they become unique.

What makes this book so special is how it ends. Or, better put, how the book simply trails away –like a butterfly disappearing into an undergrowth - leaving the reader with a catch in her breath.

Jan-Maat says

Nicely observed novel centred on Russian emigres in Europe between the wars. Unusually for Nabokov much of the action takes place in England.

Not as harsh in tone as earlier novels like *Invitation to a Beheading* or *Laughter in the Dark*, the tone is more similar to later works. Transitional also in that it was written in Russian, he had gone the way of Joseph Conrad and made English his own as a literary tool at this stage in his career.

The central character, a somewhat annoying youth, has an obsessive love for a young woman who is not as interested in him, while he, isolated from his Russian roots hankers after the achievement of some heroic deed which will define for him his place in the world since becoming a tennis playing elective Englishman despite an Oxbridge education for some curious reason does not appeal for him. If it did this would be a different novel, the desire for a certain identity is the issue, this is perhaps a book of the path not taken which made all the difference, Nabokov, sitting at his chessboard imagining an alternative game to the one he was playing.

Seriously I have a proper spoiler: ([view spoiler](#))

Cody says

THIS JUST IN: For all you McCarthy-bros who think that the ‘Mac has the market cornered on depicting landscape, he don’t. As evidence, I submit VVN’s *Glory* for your consideration as the equal, if not superior, of anything by the old coot in that department. Call it Nabokov’s naturalist novel; call it Sally for all I care. The fact of the matter is that while McCarthy does accomplish tremendous things in cataloging flora, it’s just that: cold, emotionless minutiae (I speak of the Southwestern novels; the Tennessean are the lovely exception in almost every way). VVN, meanwhile, treats us to an account of earthly surroundings that sings, by God! Plangent, impossibly-evocative, poetical detailing that places you head-first into the foliage, the vines, flowers, trees, rivers, fissures and mounts of a Europe rendered so exquisitely that I now have an excuse to not go outside for another four months! Rejoice!

VVN would never tread these waters again, never appear so deeply attenuated to Nature (though he was, of course; lepidoptery). The story is fine, great even at points, but the real treasure here is to take in the natural world as seen through the eyes of—and here is the inevitable phrase that is written on the back or inner flap of every book ever written by the man—‘the greatest prose stylist of the 20th century.’ What the f_____ is a ‘prose stylist’ anyway? Why is that appellation always superadded to his already-recognized CV? Has anyone, in the history of the world, ever walked into a book shop and asked the clerk for ‘something by one of the great (any will do) prose stylists of the 20th century’?!? Of course not! Chameleonic, sure. Adaptive, of course. Genre-ist, possibly. But please, publishing houses (whose ear by now I’ve surely bent; whose milkshake I drink up), stop with this ‘prose stylist’ shit. It’s demeaning. It implies surface above substance, and any Nabokov reader will attest that to be the falsest of all advertising.

(Note: Look at me, I'm proselytizin'! I am in the zone—spreading the Gospel, the True Funk, What It Is-What It Was-What It Shall Be! Hallelujah!)

(Ed.—we apologize for the above meandering 'review.' Please bear in mind that its author composed this while in the throes of fever on his sixth-day of illness. We appreciate your patronage and promise to make things right in tomorrow's review of Harry Potter and the Broken Wand of Erectile Dysfunction. Thank you and good night, America.)

Erica Verrillo says

Glory is the comic/tragic tale of a young man whose fantasies of heroism come to replace reality and eventually lead to his downfall. The theme is simple, but because the novel is set between WWI and WWII, Glory might be best described as a somewhat cynical allegory about the plight of the "Lost Generation"—those ex-patriots who retreated to Paris during the 20s and 30s. Martin, our protagonist, while not an American in Paris, most certainly is lost. Having been forced into exile during the Russian Revolution, Martin, who is a highly Europeanized hybrid, finds himself adrift in Europe, wandering from Switzerland, to England, to Germany in an aimless pursuit of what to do with himself. Eventually he falls in love with the sulky, dark-eyed temptress, Sonia. But that, of course, solves nothing. Martin does not know who he is, where he has come from, or where he is going. Falling in love merely heightens his anomie.

If this sounds somewhat uninspiring as a plot, you are right! There is very little action of note, and even less character development (which, in any event, Nabokov disdained). The appeal of this book is the sheer force of Nabokov's gorgeous writing. His exquisite attention to detail, his amazing insights into states of mind set him above all other writers. Perhaps you think I am overstating, but who else can take you to a river in Cambridge, make you smell the air, see the sky, feel as Martin feels, so deftly, so economically and with such great sensitivity? Nabokov, a synthaesthete, has a chef's awareness of how to spice his novels. A dash of this, a hint of that - he knows which sensations to describe in order to create a harmonious whole. There are passages in this book which I read and re-read, astounded by the clarity, the precision, the sheer beauty of Nabokov's prose.

Glory is a literary delicacy, best savored slowly. Take your time consuming it, and you will be thoroughly satisfied.

Jim Fonseca says

I had never heard of this novel by Nabokov before I saw it in a used book pile. The author tells us in a foreword that this was one of his nine Russian novels, his fifth written in Russian (1932). The Russian title was Podvig, which means roughly "gallant feat or high deed." It's "...a story of a rarity – a person whose 'dreams come true.' " But who needs "...relief from the itch of being!"

In this quasi-autobiographical novel, a young man's family circumstances are such that he's been a world traveler since he was born. He comes of age in St. Petersburg and Yalta. He visits Constantinople and travels by ship from Athens to Marseilles. His family vacations in Biarritz. He lives in Switzerland and Berlin and then goes to school at Cambridge.

His upbringing is equally international. His doting mother reads to him in English rather than in Russian because she "...found Russian fairy tales clumsy, cruel, and squalid, Russian folksongs inane, and Russian riddles idiotic."

His parents separate; then his father dies. He experiences puppy love, then his first serious sexual affair with an older married woman – pragmatism on both sides, rather than love. He eventually falls in love with a young woman who consistently refuses his hand in marriage but never quite turns him away.

Yet he's a golden boy. Bright and athletic. He's a star at tennis and soccer, although he finds he can't leave his Russian ethnicity behind in England. At Cambridge he feels like a foreigner, hanging out with other Russians and feeling that he is a "foreign star" on the team. The bulk of the story is set around 1923.

He loves to travel and he dreams of imaginary expeditions --- foreshadowing this story's tragic ending.

It's Nabokov, so we have great writing. Like Virginia Woolf, there are extensive passages of descriptions of nature. Some passages I liked:

"The crickets kept crepitating; from time to time there came a sweet whiff of burning juniper; and above the black alpestrine steppe, above the silken sea, the enormous, all-engulfing sky, dove-gray with stars, made one's head spin..."

"Martin was one of those people for whom a good book before sleep is something to look forward to all day. Such a person, upon happening to recall, amidst routine occupations, that on his bedside table a book is waiting for him, in perfect safety, feels a surge of inexpressible happiness."

"...he devoted every hour of rain to reading, and soon became familiar with that special smell, the smell of prison libraries, which emanated from Soviet literature."

Good writing and a decent story, but, of course, not the polished Nabokov of later years.

Photo of the author (1899-1977) from famousbirthdays.com

Mientras Leo says

Hasta sus libros menores son obras mayores. Hay que leer a Nabokov
<http://entremontonesdelibros.blogspot...>

Manny says

I was reading *Glory* on the Heathrow to Cambridge bus sometime in 1999, and the guy sitting on the other side of the aisle introduced himself. He was in the middle of writing a PhD on Nabokov and had recently read it himself. We talked about *Glory* for a few minutes (as far as I can recall, we agreed that it was one of the least interesting of the Master's novels), and then we got into Nabokov in general. I said I often wished that I knew more than very basic Russian when I read him, since even that much was generally enough to

show I was missing jokes and allusions. I assumed he must be pretty good.

No, said the guy, he didn't know any Russian. Well, I was surprised, but not nearly as surprised as I was when he almost immediately afterwards revealed that he didn't know French either.

How can you decide you're writing on PhD on Nabokov without knowing French or Russian? To me, it sounded like deciding to write a PhD on General Relativity without knowing calculus, but probably I'm just displaying my ignorance here.
