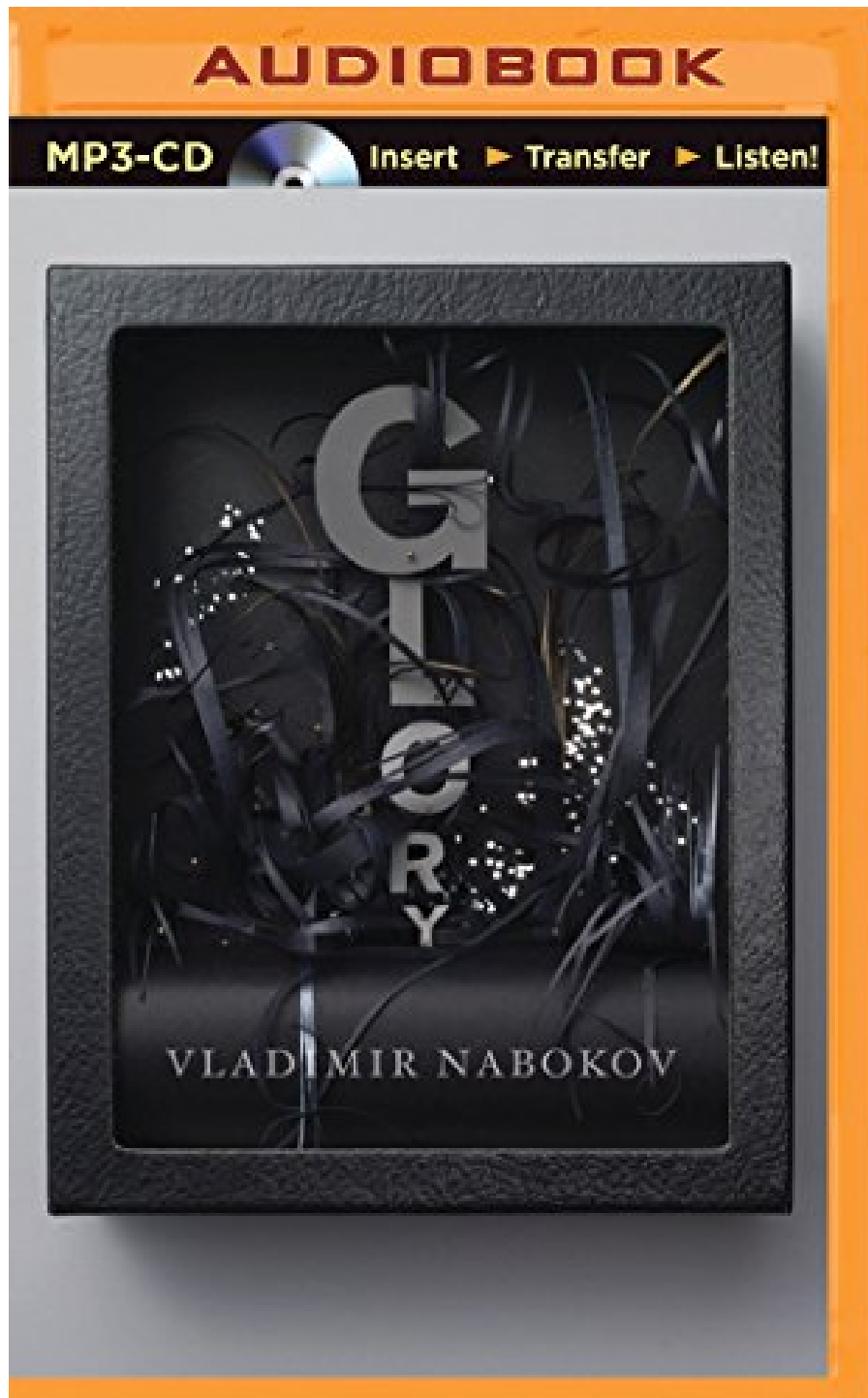


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Review

He did us all an honour by electing to use, and transform, our language. Anthony Burgess Nabokov can move you to laughter in the way that masters can - to laughter that is near to tears. The Guardian

Language Notes

Text: English, Russian (translation)

From the Inside Flap

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Most helpful customer reviews

32 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

The Most Ironic Title in Literature

By Gio

Edelweiss? Noble White, the shy alpine flower that so quickly vanishes after spring. Are we readers to look for meaning in Nabokov's choice of the name Martin Edelweiss for his focal character? A good deal is said about the name early in the book, and we're reminded of it at crucial moments throughout. Just a few pages of Nabokov's so-carefully-crafted prose inclines this reader to suppose that nothing in "Glory" is merely incidental, that every detail is laden with pertinence. Whatever else one says about this novel, the first fact is that it's gloriously written. Every sentence snaps the reader's mind into focus. Every description is a poem in itself. Every characterization is a full dramatic portrait of individual flesh and blood.

Martin Edelweiss is a frivolous young man embedded among Russian emigres utterly trivialized by the Bolshevik Revolution, about which we hear only frivolous rumors and reports in ephemeral newsprint. The

only position Martin's querulous society seems to take toward the momentous events in their homeland is to wish they hadn't happened, but make no mistake, this a novel about the Revolution, seen through a lens of irrelevance. This is also a novel about the meaning of being Russian, though Nabokov conveys his meaning through the subtlest indirection. There's no ambiguity whatsoever about the ending of the novel. The meaning is as clear as plasma and as ominous as a drum-roll to a prisoner awaiting execution, but I do not choose to pre-empt anyone's reading excitement by declaring the obvious.

At the same time, "Glory" is a coming-of-age novel, similar to other such novels about young men going off to college. Scott Fitzgerald's "This Side of Paradise" and E.M. Forster's "The Longest Journey" might offer interesting comparisons. In all three, a sensitive young man confronts the tawdriness of the intellectual life, slips into depression over his own mediocrity, falls hopelessly in love with a disdainful beauty while at the same time exploring lust with more accessible lasses, and wrestles with the identity of a seemingly more well-prepared friend. Martin, however, isn't a titan waiting to be awakened to his own worth at the end of the novel. Nabokov takes pain to show us that Martin is NOT a poet, not a budding genius of any sort, just a modestly intelligent everyman of no particular bent. In fact, Martin's only talent seems to be at tennis. Like a young George Orwell, Martin stumbles into a brief romance with the simple life of honest toil, dwelling incognito for a 'chapter' in a wine-growing village in southern France. But, like most of Martin's experiences, this pastoral interlude sinks quickly into the chasm of memory. Above all, this is a novel about memory. It begins with Martin's memories of childhood. Martin's perceptions are all foreshadowed, and his actions are all predetermined, by his memories. Even the passing moment is no more than a memory.

Martin doesn't tell his story in the first person. Nabokov clings to Martin's shoulder like a personal daemon, or to be blunt, like a 19th C omniscient narrator. When suddenly, in the last chapter, the novelist shifts his perch to another shoulder, it's both a brilliant literary trick and a lucid statement of Martin's fate.

"Glory" is a translation from Russian of an early novel by a writer who went on to create far more famous books in English. Perhaps that explains why it's less widely read than the Forster or Fitzgerald novels mentioned above. It's the best book of the three by far, and proves beyond a doubt that Nabokov could write traditional narrative as brilliantly as the more idiosyncratic interior surrealism for which he is famous.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Glorious!

By Jerry Clyde Phillips

I always pick up one of the "Russian" novels by Nabokov with a certain thrill of anticipation. Not only is the reader about to be thrust into the Russian emigre population that moved into the large European cities following the Revolution of 1917, but is also to me made party to the evolving literary genius of the young Nabokov.

In this book, which the author describes as soaring "to the heights of purity and melancholy that I have only attained in the much later *Invitation to a Beheading*," he deals with the themes of alienation and the romantic musings which accompany the lives of the lonely and unspectacular individuals who make their way through this world. For Martin Edelweiss, the main character of the book, life has become a series of romantic possibilities: "a necklace of lights" seen from a train in the French night, the woman who throws a brief glance in his direction, footpaths dissolving into a forest - all these become possible "gallant feats," if only in his mind.

Although Nabokov downplays the similarity between the background of Martin and his own, there is a great deal in this book that is autobiographical. The author's years of emigre life in various European cities, his university days at Cambridge, and his period of manual labor in the south of France all find their way into this novel. Perhaps because of the author's emotional involvement with the book, *Glory* brings to life a softer Nabokov, one who is content to let the book follow its own winding path and who refrains from interjecting the tautness of his earlier efforts.

As a stylist, Nabokov is incomparable and to read one of his books is an experience of sheer wonder. If this book does not rank with his highest achievements, it certainly demonstrates a more mature author at work, one who is on the brink of greatness.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Young man's choice between conformity and individualism

By lamon@ameritech.net

I wanted to read fairly short, impressive book during my winter break/holidays. So, Nabokov came to my mind. I picked up "Glory" and I was taken from the moment I started reading. Book about young Martin Edelweiss, of Swiss and Russian heritage, follows his quiet life from his early childhood to his life of the grown up, young man. His parents divorce during his childhood, and Martin's father dies soon afterwards. Martin's mother re-marries to his uncle who sends young Martin to the Cambridge University. Here, Martin acquires new friends and even falls in love with Sonia, ruthless daughter of the Russian emigre editor. Sonia seems to enjoy seducing young man but is ever so easy in discarding them in order to avoid long term commitment. Martin is no exception. And after college days are over, Martin decides to travel around Europe: England, Switzerland, Germany. His uncle/stepfather is concerned about Martin's lack of desire to find suitable position in order to ensure steady flow of income. And while Martin's friends are building their careers in journalism, writing and other "honorable" professions, he seems to rather enjoy doing manual labor in order to find his true self. Until one day - he goes away. Forever.

Very powerful novel. It made me Nabokov's fan in a matter of moment.

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