

Boundary-Crossings in *Glory* and *Transparent Things**

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Boundary-crossing is one of the central themes in Nabokov's work. A natural assumption is that it originated in the author's own expatriation. In many of his works, the protagonist is an exile, some of whom try to or actually cross the border to some forbidden country, and some are even enforced to do it. His first novel, *Mary* (R1926/E1970), ends when the protagonist starts to doze in a train from Berlin, thinking how to cross the frontier into France "without any passport" (114). In the last novel, *Look at the Harlequins!* (1976), the protagonist, an exile from Russia, makes a trip to the USSR by a false passport like a secret agent to see his daughter. Not a few boundary-crossings of various kinds are seen between these two novels. Among them, this paper treats *Glory* (R1932/E1971) and *Transparent Things* (1972 *TT*). By comparing these two novels through this theme, we could find how they are closely related with each other, and shed light on some multi-leveled crossings in Nabokov's works.

How They Cross Borders

The theme of crossing borders is most direct and important in *Glory*. At the end of the novel, Martin, the protagonist, takes up the challenge of border-crossing and he never returns to the world to which he has belonged. According to his explanation to a friend, it is just to cross illegally into Russia from Latvia by foot, stay for twenty-four hours, and then walk back again. Some people around Martin understand his challenge risking his life to prove he can attain "a high deed" (204). On another level, it is an adventure into the forbidden "Zoorland," a fictional country that he created with his cousin, Sonia. Besides, it is also to wander in a watercolor, along the winding path into the forest within it, which was drawn by his grandmother in her youth and was on the wall above his crib. Martin, who habitually imagines himself stepping into the picture before falling asleep in the nursery every night, notices the resemblance between the watercolor and the illustration in the book which his mother reads to him. The illustration shows a boy in a nightshirt going from bed to the picture of the winding path

disappearing into the depth of the woods. In the early part of the novel, the reader is told what to expect of Martin and the watercolor. As one of the switches in time, his recollection in his youth--an example of Nabokov's future recollection--is suddenly glimpsed as an insertion in the paragraph: "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, into which his whole life had turned" (5). This is the first suggestion in the novel that Martin will get into the picture, and at the end of the novel, the reader knows that the premonition has come true as it has been expected. In Martin's last exploit are three different versions of trespassing: crossing a border illegally, invading fictitious Zoorland and returning to a fantasy in childhood.

As Nabokov writes in the foreword, the essence of the novel is in "the echoing and linking of minor events, in back-and-forth switches, which produce an illusion of impetus" (xiv). He reaches the last fatal challenge after experiencing a few dangerous, but comparatively small, adventures--escaping from a drunken man with a pistol in his hand, returning safely from the cliff--as well as a few failures in fulfilling his wishes. He believes he found the place of which lights he saw from the night train in his childhood but then he is told that it is the wrong place; he cannot win Sonia's love. These two failures are related: Sonia declines his proposal to live with him in the place, Moligniac, while he still believed it to be the place in his childhood memory. After her rejection, he leaves the place and learns of his mistake about the place, and then also knows of her betrayal. Just after learning his Molignac is the wrong place, he finds a feuilleton entitled "Zoorland" in the newspaper. Much of it is exactly what Martin and Sonia thought up by themselves about a cruel fictitious country, and apparently she has told it to the author, whom Martin suspected to be her boyfriend. His own failure and her betrayal pushes Martin to the last true exploit, which includes the crossing of the border to forbidden Zoorland. As he is not talented as a writer, he cannot take back his Zoorland, except but by "actually" going into it.

Martin does not reappear to the "real" world of the novel, and Darwin, his friend, goes to Martin's mother to break the news. At the end of the novel, Darwin fulfills two prefigured roles: he is going to bring a message from Martin for the mailman, as Martin has written and roughly deleted in the letter to his mother, while imagining the mailman walking across the snow; the place where Darwin is walking resembles the picture on the wall above Martin's crib. Darwin has had

nothing to do with Martin's fantasy, but he and the "real" part of the novel, for which he is representative, are merging with the fantasy that has been suggested to exist behind it.

TT is also a novel about boundaries, and about seeing through and passing through them (Johnson 732). All the things are seen and narrated by the narrator who is in the world after death. We see the process of digestion in the protagonist's stomach, the whole history of a pencil left in the drawer, the figure of a traveler who stayed at a hotel room around one hundred years ago transparently seen through the belongings of the occupant now. *TT* is a novel that focuses on trespassing by words the boundaries between life and death, between spaces, times, or reality and writing. In the novel, the protagonist also fulfills the prefigured roles and crosses the multi-leveled boundaries at the end. We can find in the novel some important influences from *Glory*, and it is natural if we examine the chronology. While writing *TT*, Nabokov spent almost four months in translating *Glory* into English (Boyd 577-80). The similarity between the two novels has almost been ignored probably because they possess contrasting moods: *Glory* seems basically positive while *TT* seems negative; the world of Martin is full of young dreams and disappointments while that of Hugh, even at the same age, feelings of vainness. *TT* gives us the feeling we have after some gorgeous feat is over. *Glory* seems at first glance realistic and straightforward; *TT*, in which ghosts freely see through times and spaces, looks strange and weird, and far from realistic. Martin is, as the author admits, "the kindest, uprightest, and most touching of all young men" (x). Hugh, from a certain viewpoint, is also kind enough (look at his attitude toward Armande), upright (during their courtship), touching (in his efforts to search for his past, his goodness to be cheated by his wife), but he lacks something to attract the reader, which somehow certainly belongs to Martin. Hugh also has his unique character, having had a special talent in calculation, and according to his diary, even the unbelievable ability of levitation. On the other hand, as Armande mistakenly pronounces, he is "You Person," anonymous everyone. Martin chooses to risk his life to accomplish a high deed, the most important thing in his life, but Hugh dies a passive death, just because he cannot escape from a fire. Martin disappears during an extraordinary adventure like a secret agent, but Hugh experiences the pang of the maneuver when he is moving into his new being, which everyone must at the end of life.

Hugh's life is even more patterned than that of Martin, full of coincidences and prefigured clues. Hugh's death is fated from the beginning of the novel, where

Hugh, who has just died, is moving toward the dead people, who have been waiting for him. Following the pattern in his life, Hugh succeeds in some small challenges, which can be compared with Martin's. As Martin challenges gravity on the cliff, Hugh tries to win over or cheat gravity. He invents some tennis--Martin's favorite sport--stroke which, when successful, nobody can return, for the ball hardly rises above the ground; he tries to follow Armande and her admirers to the cable car, which was at first too hard a climb for him, but after giving up a few times, he accomplishes it. His challenges can be compared with Martin's climbing over a cliff, for his stroke cheats gravity and climbing is a challenge both to himself and gravity, and he wins over both. Hugh's challenges and success are concluded in a fairy-tale hue, which reminds us of another fairy-tale in Martin's nursery: "A fairy-tale element seemed to imbue with its Gothic rose water all attempts to scale the battlements of her dragon" (51). As for courtship, Hugh seems more successful than Martin. As the rewards for his efforts to catch up with the athletes to the cable, Hugh is allowed an unsuccessful intercourse and afterwards, a miracle-like kiss, which makes Armande to decide to marry Hugh. The kiss seems like to complete the other kiss to Sonia, which is unfortunately interruptedⁱ.

The Majestic

In *Glory*, the theme of fulfilling the prefigured clues is related with some different worlds--Zoorland, the watercolor hung on the wall above his crib and the fairy tale read by his mother in his nursery, which exist in parallel with the actual world of Martin's life. Moreover, something which cannot be precisely defined also leads Martin to some adventures. We repeatedly find the power of it in the shape of the hotel Majestic. When the hotel appears before him in the first summer in Switzerland, it looks very ordinary. Then, in the winter of that year, the hotel appears to somehow lure him.

Martin passed through the woods into the clearing from which, the previous summer, he used to descend to the local Majestic. He could see it far below, with a straight column of rose-colored smoke coming out of a chimney. What was it about that hotel that lured him so strongly, why must he again hasten there, when in the summer all he had found there had been a bevy of raucous, angular English flappers? But there was no doubt that it beckoned to him: the reflected sunlight in its windows flashed a silent sign of invitation. Martin was even frightened by such enigmatic intrusion, such abstruse

insistence. He had seen that signal before, displayed by some detail of the landscape. There he must go down: it would be wrong to ignore such blandishments. (75)

In the second summer at Henry's lodge, when Martin clings to the rock after sliding down to the middle of the cliff, he thinks that he has found the reason why he was so attracted to the local hotel last summer.

With an effort glancing over his shoulder, he saw under his heels a prodigious precipice, a sun-illuminated abyss with, in its depths, several outdistanced firs running in panic after the descending forest, and still further down the steep meadows and the tiny, ivory white hotel. "So that's what its message was," thought Martin with a superstitious shiver. "I'll fall, I'll perish, that's what it's watching for. That--that--" It was equally terrifying to look down the precipice or up the vertical cliff above him. (85)

However, he reaches the safe place so that what he has feared as the prefiguring message from the hotel does not become realized. Later, Martin challenges with free will the same situation that he had once survived with no other choice, and succeeds in it more daringly.

This reminded him that before he left he had an account with his conscience to settle. . . .When it tapered to an end he looked down over his shoulder and saw, under his very heels, the sunny precipice and at the bottom of it the porcelain hotel. "There," said Martin to the little white thing, "lump it!" and fighting dizziness, began to move the way he had come. . . . Upon safely reaching the platform, Martin grunted with joy, and in the same purposeful way, with a stern sense of duty fulfilled, climbed down scree and heather, found the right path and descended toward the Majestic--to see what it would have to say. (169-70)

Then at the garden of the hotel, Martin is introduced to Gruzinov by his wife. Finally, Martin is to have the message from the hotel through Gruzinov, but at this point, he does not know it and he is "loath to dissipate so soon the treasure" he has "brought down from the mountaintop" (170). But by the end of their meeting, Martin has decided to talk with Gruzinov for the information of illegal border-crossing.

As Rowe points out, the Majestic appears in the second chapter in *TT*. Kronig, who was the manager of the Ascot when Hugh visited it eight years ago, is said to have moved to Fantastic in Blur, which Hugh mistakenly recalls as Majestic in Chur: "'He died last year,' added the girl . . . abolishing whatever interest a

photochrome of the Majestic in Chur" (4). Moreover, we come across it again as the modifiers of Hugh in the same page in order to insist its existence as "had not his melancholy stoop belied every inch of his fantastic majesty" (4). It appears twice as an instant illusion of language, a mistakenly recalled name and then a kind of transferred epithet. It suggests that the theme of the message from the other-world in *Glory* also makes undertones in *TT*.

In *Glory*, the tricky narrative of the Majestic is not apparent at a glance, but once we notice it, as if it narrated in advance *TT*, it rather ostentatiously shows its privileged narrating status which trespasses the boundaries of times and spaces. While Martin is skiing toward the hotel, before we (and he) notice, he slides into the dream of skiing in his room in Cambridge:

The firm surface began whistling delightfully under his skis as Martin sped down the slope faster and faster. And how many times afterwards, sleeping in his chilly Cambridge room, he dream-spied like that and suddenly, in a stunning explosion of snow, fell and awakened. Everything was as usual. He could hear the clock ticking in the adjacent parlor. (75)

The narrative of the novel seems naturally straightforward, but like the part quoted, it sometimes becomes very artificial. As seen in the above, when Martin is in danger of falling, he believes that he has found the message from the hotel in the last summer that it would watch him fall and die. He returns to himself in the last summer and notices that he must have received the hidden message, without noticing it, which is the prediction of his death, as a kind of future recollection. Actually, the hotel does not watch him fall, but rather sees him survive the dangerous situation. The next summer, it watches his intentional challenge of trespassing the cornice and his success in it, and Martin goes "toward the Majestic--to see what it would have to say," being clearly aware of the hotel as being something that leads him(170). Then Martin meets Gruzinov, asking the famous secret agent about crossing the boundary to Russia. Gruzinov does not take him seriously, and Martin hates him for treating him like a schoolboy, but Martin is satisfied with the fact that he talked over it with Gruzinov. ". . . never mind, to hell with Gruzzy, Martin's conscience was now clear, he could now pack his things and leave in peace" (178).

Martin's satisfaction partly comes from the fulfillment of the "Gruzzy" theme, though he has not recognized it. When Gruzinov says, "I never eat ice cream, anyway," Martin feels "sometime somewhere the same words ha[ve] been spoken," but does not find out what it is. As Tammi explains (174), it is what Martin hears

in the early dream, expecting to have some message from his dead father: "Then, when at last he fell asleep, he found himself sitting in a classroom with his homework not done, while Lida kept idly scratching her shin as she told him that Georgians did not eat ice cream: '*Gruziny ne edyat morozhenogo*'" (12). When Martin awakes in the dormitory from the dream in which he is speeding down toward the Majestic, he thinks "Good idea to cut Grzhezinsky's lecture" (76). Here we find the "Gruzzzy" theme come together with the Majestic, sending the message from Martin's dead father. Martin thinks of cutting Grzhezinsky's lecture, which shows that he has not prepared for his last challenge, as well as we see the same in that he has not gone to the hotel in his dream but has slid into the reality of his Cambridge room. When Martin decides to depart, the Majestic, the Gruzzzy theme and the message from Martin's dead father, all lead Martin to his last fatal adventure.

The response that Martin expects from his dead father seems to be repeated for Hugh. Martin falls asleep while he tries to listen to a floorboard creak or a knock of some kind, and in the dream he hears Lida say that Georgians do not eat ice cream, the very message from his father, all of which is to be repeated later. Martin remembers the night and his experiment in hearing something in the room where Nelly died a year ago. He hears something drum rapidly and his heart misses a beat before he notices that it is dripping from the washstand onto the linoleum. On the night Hugh strangles his wife, he experiences the same phenomena. The drawer and the floorboards make the creaky sounds; he listens to the pinking of waterdrops on the linoleum under a radiator. Then he feels a double systole, which he thinks is from too much smoking.

In *TT*, Hugh had a nightmare, criticized as being too bravura to be a real dream, in which almost all the prefigured clues in his life--fire, falling, glacier, strangling, a streetgirl, the Italian theme--gather, coming from Hugh's past as well as the author's childhood memory, like the padded and sheeted sill, and the flames made of paper in the shop windows. The falling death which Martin believes to be his ending and fears, does not happen to Martin, but we can see it realized in a different version, Hugh's fatal dream-life.

Fathers and Sons

It is difficult to define the relationship between the protagonist and his father in the two novels. As Rowe thinks, Martin's father seems to prompt his son to death (85), but we cannot find the reason why his father wants to do it. The

"Gruzzzy" motif is fulfilled at the end of the meeting of Gruzinov and Martin, and it makes him leave for the final adventure, which ends with his death; in other words, his disappearance from the world of the novel. By completing the "Gruzzzy" motif, his late father's message is finally indirectly sent to him, and he leaves for the last adventure: Martin's father seems responsible for his death. Martin's father dies when Martin is a boy. After his father dies, Martin and his mother depend on his father's cousin, Henry. His mother gets remarried to Henry, but Martin cannot respect his stepfather. A *Hamlet* allusion can be found in *Glory*, but Henry, a good person in his own way, is not responsible for his cousin's death nor does Martin hate him. Martin cannot be a minor Hamlet, for the relationship between the son and the father was not that positive. When his parents get divorced, Martin feels sorry for his father, because he thinks that his father has left home because he failed in something. It is not made clear why Martin's dead father wants his son to die (Tammi 176).

We have the same question as for Hugh's father, who seems more clearly and strongly to want his son's death. Whether or not his father causes the fire in which Hugh is killed is another question for the reader. After his father's death, Hugh feels "his father present in every dark corner of solitude" and "the pull of gravity inviting him to join the night and his father" (19). Hugh could not have affection for his father while he was alive, and suffers from remorse after his death. His father does not seem to care for his son after death. From the beginning, in which Hugh seems to come into the world of the dead, to the end, in which Hugh is encouraged to move from the state of being to another, it is Mr. R., not Hugh's dead father, that takes care of him.

As is Luzhin's father, who is a good man, but cannot understand his son, they belong to a group of incapable fathers, unable to understand their son, though being of good-will. When a father lacks the ability to lead his son as Fyodor's father does in *The Gift* (R1952/E1963), a helpless father strangely looks to be spiteful. In *Glory*, Martin's death and his glory make a positive and a negative side, which cannot be separated from each other, and his father can be considered to lead him to glory/death. But in *TT*, we cannot see such a positive aspect in Hugh's struggle in death, and his father looks only spiteful and irresponsible.

A difference between these two novels is the mother's influence over the protagonist. Hugh's mother has died before the story begins, and her presence after death, if any, is slightly suggested by the telegram for Mrs. Parson. On the other hand, Martin's mother has an important role in her son's life. She reads to

small Martin the original story which makes his life pattern, and her mother has drawn the watercolor, drawn as if to be an illustration to the story which her daughter would read to Martin. In *Glory*, the fate of the protagonist is decided by the power from the mother's side.

Death in the Book, Death into the Book

In both novels, the picture or illustration which the protagonist saw in the nursery is significant in his last moment. Martin enters the picture of winding paths leading into the forest; Hugh, encircled by rings of flames, recalls the picture of vegetables whirling around a nightshirted boy. The triumphant vegetables dance around the boy who is trying to awake from the dizziness of dream life, which is the figure of Hugh, troubled by somnambulism in his boyhood. The picture becomes "the incandescence of a book or a box grown completely transparent and hollow" (104). Dying Hugh in the last scene is previewed in Ch. 24:

Human life can be compared to a person dancing in a variety of forms around his own self: thus the vegetables of our first picture book encircled a boy in his dream--green cucumber, blue eggplant, red beet, Potato *père*, Potato *fils*, a girly asparagus, and, oh, many more, their spinning *ronde* going faster and faster and gradually forming a transparent ring of banded colors around a dead person or planet. (93)

The vegetables are a person's life itself in various forms, and in the last scene of Hugh's life, they become like a book or box, in which Hugh has to survive "the mysterious mental maneuver needed to pass from one state of being to another" (104). We are not told how Hugh escapes from the dizzy pangs, as we do not know if the boy in the picture book awakes from the frightening nightmare. *Glory* does not tell the rest of the adventure after Martin disappears, because it has apparently actualized the boy's fantasy as it is. Hugh's adventure is not so evident as Martin's, but he must survive the mysterious maneuver into another state of being, into which he seems to have come in the very beginning of the circular novel. As Mr. R. says, "there is no mirage without a vanishing point."

We find resemblance and difference between *Glory* and *TT* in the act of "editing." Editing is apparent and important in *TT*. When Nabokov wrote *Glory*, he had not written the so called three later masterpieces, *Lolita* (1955), *Pale Fire* (1962) and *Ada* (1969), in all of which the editor's point of view tends to distort the artist's perspective (Payne 67). In *TT*, which was written after *Ada*, we find

the same tendency. Hugh is an editor, and it influences the textual detail. Struggling with insomnia, he thinks of a number of worries which have crept up to him, and proofreads his dream:

. . . that he would have to consult an ophthalmologist sometime next month. He substituted an 'n' for the wrong letter and continued to scan the motley proof into which the blackness of closed vision was now turning. A double systole catapulted him into full consciousness again, and he promised his uncorrected self that he would limit his daily ration of cigarettes to a couple of heartbeats. (78-9)

The double systole comes last as one of the phenomena, which in *Glory* Martin expects to experience as the message from the dead. Hugh's proofreading seems to be connected with the superficial text, and it also relates with something suggested by ghosts.

In Ch. 24, Mr. R. tells how the spirits control the mortals, half revealing, half concealing, and then makes a mysterious explanation of the life after death. Then he gives a direction to the publisher as he did it when he was a writer:

On the printed page the words "likely" and "actually" should be italicized too, at least *slightly*, to indicate a *slight* breath of wind inclining those characters (in the sense of both signs and personae). In fact, we depend on italics to an even greater degree than do, in their arch quaintness, writers of children's books. (92)

Here the secrets of the ghosts' influence are shown as material in the words italicized in the actual printed pages. The materialness is peculiar to *TT*. Like Martin, who disappears in an illustration of the nursery story, Hugh disappears in a book, but in two ways. Hugh is encircled by a band of colorful flames, recalling the boy whirled by dancing vegetables in a child's book. Then "its ultimate vision was incandescence of a book or a box grown completely transparent and hollow," in which Hugh has to endure the incomparable pangs to move on to another life. Now the burning book in the last scene of Hugh's life and the novel appear to be compounded images: the end of the book *TT*, which has narrated Hugh's life; Hugh's death in a book; and his death into the book, which begins with the scene in which Hugh shows himself before the ghosts who seem to welcome him. Martin leaves for the otherworld that has existed in parallel with his life, the other text which is in the beginning of his life and has sometimes secretly appeared in his life; Hugh reappears in the very book which has just burned up while embracing him. However, he comes into the part of the novel which has

hardly been shown to us; in the story of Hugh's life, we are told about the world of the living seen by the dead, but not given the whole view of the dead, as we do not know what Hugh is going to do at the very end of the novel. We see in the image of whirling illustration changing into a flaming book the similarity and difference between *Glory* and *TT*. They both hold a picture book in the nursery in the center of the novel, having the crucial role for the protagonist's boundary-crossing. In *Glory*, the world of the picture book absorbs the protagonist and his whole world. In *TT*, an illustration from a nursery book, that is Hugh's life, burns up around him like a coffin, helping him to move on to another world, which is the book itself, and something still imperceptible for the reader. Hugh's death into the book is still obscure in the transparent world of the dead.

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Note

ⁱ We can hear Sonia's reaction echoing in that of Armande. Cf. ". . . Martin pulled Sonia to him, and, so as not to lose the least part of that moment, he did not close his eyes as he slowly kissed her cool, soft lips, watching the while a reflection of pale light on her cheek, and the quivering of her lowered eyelids: they rose for an instant, revealing a moist, blind glistening, and shut again; little shivers shook her, her lips parted under his, but breaking the spell her hand pushed his face aside, . . ." (*Glory* 135). "A shiver of tenderness rippled her features, as a breeze does a reflection. Her eyelashes were wet, her shoulders shook in his clasp. That moment of soft agony was never to be repeated -- or rather would never be granted the time to come back again after completing the cycle innate in its rhythm; yet that brief vibration in which she dissolved with the sun, the cherry trees, the forgiven landscape, set the tone for his new existence with its sense of "all-is-well" despite her worst moods, her silliest caprices, her harshest demands" (*TT*55).

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