Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies (LLIDS)
ISSN: 2457-0044

Memory, Space, and Exile in Vladimir Nabokov's "A Guide to Berlin"

Marianne Cotugno

"What indeed! How can I demonstrate to him that I have glimpsed somebody's future recollection?"

So declares the exile-narrator at the end of Vladimir Nabokov's "A Guide to Berlin."[1] The speaker has just finished celebrating daily life in Berlin to a bar companion, who dismisses his observations, declaring the city boring and expensive. The paradox, "future recollection," expresses the narrator's belief that he will be remembered by a boy in the bar. The moment memorialized in this sentence follows the narrator's production of an exile's guide to Berlin; he maps geographical and social space in unusual ways that resist other efforts to define that space. The speaker's description of Berlin highlights, and works against, the German state's effort to produce space - to organize physical and social structures in society. The conflict between an individual's experience of space and its other, large-scale attempts to create and regulate experience, occurs throughout Nabokov's works, illustrates the exile's imaginative power to transcend collective efforts to control everyday life. This fiction appears during a period that includes the rise of the Soviet Union, the development of the Nazi regime, and the emergence of capitalism as a dominant social force in the United States.

Nabokov's own status as an exile seemed to energize and drive him. Even when he came to the United States, no longer under the threat of communism or Nazism, Nabokov could not bring himself to settle completely. Despite becoming a US citizen, he and his wife, Véra, never purchased a home in part because Nabokov felt he lost his one true home when he was forced to leave Russia. Nabokov's personal embrace of his exile status may help explain why the exile frequently occupies a powerful position in his fiction. Rather than being a site of marginalization, the exile status empowers the individual.

This power is connected with memory. Like Faulkner, Joyce, and many twentieth century authors, Nabokov expresses an interest in the workings and effects of memory; he offers a unique sense of the relationship between memory, space, and time. In works as diverse as *The Gift*, *Lolita*, *Pnin*, *Ada,* and his autobiography, *Speak, Memory,* Nabokov writes about having the sense of something in the present as it will be remembered. For example, in *Lolita* Humbert Humbert reflects, "So there was Charlotte swimming on with dutiful awkwardness (she was a very mediocre mermaid), but not without a certain solemn pleasure (for was not her merman by

[1]Maxim Shrayer notes the story was published in Russian as *Putevoditel' po Berlinu* in *The Rudder,* a leading emigre newspaper, on December 24, 1925 (78).

her side?); and as I watched, with the stark lucidity of a future recollection (you know-trying to see things as you will remember having seen them)" (86). Humbert's remarks overturn a common definition of memory as the present retrieval of past events, and thus disrupt typical temporal associations of memory. The quote, specifically the phrase "trying to see things as you will remember having seen them," draws attention to the effort Humbert makes creating this memory. In Nabokov's fiction, in the hands of the exile, future recollection, as well as other forms of memory, are a source of power for the individual, a means of constituting one's sense of self, or a means of resisting the organizing and often homogenizing powers of the state.

The line from "A Guide to Berlin" that opens this article raises several issues present throughout Nabokov's fiction relevant to the rhetoric of exile: everyday life and how it will be remembered; memory as voluntary or involuntary; and memory as art rather than merely recalled experience. Memory often appears to be the product of a deliberate and artistic act, an attempt to constitute identity, as it is at the end of "A Guide to Berlin." But it can also be an involuntary response, as it is at times for Luzhin in *The Defense* when being in a physical space triggers his remembrance of a childhood event. Regardless of whether memory is voluntary or involuntary, imagined or real, these experiences all function as a means of making sense of the world. As one critic notes, "The classical art of memory was not about mere remembering. It also was about organizing knowledge-of giving priority to some things, while consigning others to oblivion" (Hutton 381). Memory's connection to the impulse to order suggests why an interest in the production of memory emerges from the desire to organize experience on both large-scale and individual levels.

Marcel Proust's and Henri Bergson's treatments of memory provide an important cultural context for Nabokov. Proust is well known for the concept of involuntary memory, epitomized in the *madeleine* incident in *A la recherche du temps perde*. After eating a pastry soaked in tea, Marcel, Proust's narrator, recalls eating the same pastry as a child, causing a flood of memories to return to him. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson presents two forms of memory, the first, habit-memory, and the second, pure memory. The past is:

> …stored up…under two extreme forms: on the one hand, motor mechanisms which make use of it; on the other, personal memory-images which picture all past events with their outline, their color and their place in time…The first, conquered by effort, remains dependent upon our will; the second, entirely spontaneous, is as capricious in reproducing as it is faithful in preserving (Bergson 88).

Proust's involuntary memory and Bergson's pure memory are both spontaneous mnemonic experiences, privileged over more deliberate efforts to recall the past.

Nabokov's fiction demonstrates a dynamic relationship to memory in response to cultural changes in the twentieth century. For many of his characters, the loss of homeland, specifically pre-revolutionary Russia, represents the greatest cultural change. He anticipates the work of Pierre Nora, who argues that the social and technological advances, which contributed to the growth of totalitarianism and capitalism in the world, have also changed our understanding of, and relationship to, memory. Nora's discussion in the introduction to *Realms of Memory* separates people's relationship to memory in terms of a premodern and modern age. The modern age is characterized by "the acceleration of history," which is "[a]n increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and

everything may disappear; these indicate a rupture of equilibrium" (7). For Nabokov, the rupture occurred when he was forced to leave Russia. Nora expresses nostalgia for a kind of memory, particularly, collective memory which he sees as gone, part of the premodern era. He asserts, "We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (7). Nora's "it" is this collective sense or experience of memory.

According to Nora, in lieu of real memory, we have *lieux de memoire,* which "fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness" that "originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives" (12). Nora seems to be asserting that we have lost the ability to experience the kind of memory valued by Proust and Bergson. Like Nora, Nabokov questions spontaneous memory, but does so because he believes there must be some mechanism for representing the mnemonic image. Nabokov's fiction argues that this mechanism, art, arises in response to other efforts to organize and regulate experience.

Part of experience is a sense of the past or history. Rather than one preserving the other, memory and history become opposed terms, according to Nora, who defines history as the way modern societies organize the past (8). Nabokov shares Nora's view that history is not absolute, but instead is subject to manipulation, especially by totalitarian governments. Nabokov explains:

> We should define, should we not, what we mean by "history." If "history" means a "written account of events"…then let us inquire *who* actually, what scribes, what secretaries, took it down and how qualified they were for the job. I am inclined to guess that a big part of "history"…has been modified by mediocre writers and prejudiced observers. We know that police states (*e.g.,* the Soviets) have actually snipped out and destroyed such past events in old books as did not conform to the falsehoods of the present. But even the most talented and conscientious historian may err. In other words, I do not believe that "history" exists apart from the historian (*Strong Opinions* 138).

Nabokov recognizes that history can be defined in multiple ways, and is neither indisputable nor disinterested. History is the creation of those who write it. Nabokov's preferred sense of history is personal; it is not something to be recorded by one for the purposes of all. History, in Nora's view, acts to eradicate memory. "Memory is life," and is constantly changing, subject to remembering and forgetting; "history, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (Nora 3). Therefore, memory binds us to the present, and history connects us to the past. According to Nora, "Memory, insofar that it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic, responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection" (8). Nora's description suggests that memory is fragmentary and living, responding to the stimuli that surround it. These stimuli, in Nabokov's fiction, are large-scale efforts to regulate experience.

The struggle between the state and individual can be understood through the conceptual triad describing spatial experience that Henri Lefebvre offers in *The Production of Space*. The German state's efforts exemplify representations of space, the theoretical and practical divisions of space, such as urban planning, as well as rules and prohibitions governing experience. Typically, spatial practice, which includes people's daily routines, the seemingly logical ways of

doing things, reinforces the goals expressed through representations of space. However, the narrator shows the conflict between individual behavior and the state, creating what Lefebvre calls representational space (Lefebvre 33, 38-39).

Memory sites respond to the modern age, characterized by the "the acceleration of history," which is "an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear–these indicate a rupture of equilibrium" (Nora 1). *Lieux de memoire* call attention to deliberate efforts to preserve what has disappeared from everyday experience. In "A Guide to Berlin," the narrator attempts to preserve the joy and beauty he experiences in daily life through his guide and his effort to share that vision with his companion.

These efforts in fiction parallel the very real threat Nabokov experienced from the communists and the Nazis. The state's presence may be indirect, as in "A Guide to Berlin," or cruelly present, as in *Bend Sinister*. Characters cannot merely flee these dangers, but must work within and against state-building efforts; they must produce alternative spaces that often function as memory sites, connections to a real or imagined past that helps constitute them as individuals. These alternative spaces become necessary when the individual senses one's world being encroached upon or even destroyed. Nora could be describing the situation of Russian émigrés living in exile in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s when he asserts, "The defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de memoire*-that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away" (12). Nabokov's fiction captures the émigré's sense of endangerment and near extinction as an exile as well as a struggle to preserve the self. In "A Guide to Berlin," the narrator's guide and revelation or realization is a kind of "commemorative vigilance."

The story opens with an unnamed narrator announcing he will tell his "usual pot companion" (155) what he finds "important" (155) to daily life in Berlin.[2] Initially, this piece seems to be a narrative of spatial practice, something that traces the typical routine of an exile in Berlin. We are made aware of his status as an exile in Berlin through details in the text, particularly when the narrator references his memories of St. Petersburg eighteen years earlier (157). What emerges from the narrative are representational spaces that function as memory sites, as the speaker imagines a counter-narrative about the networks of Berlin, represented by the story's five sections: The Pipes, The Streetcar, Work, Eden, and The Pub, where both men sit and drink. The narrator creates a private network using the markers of a public and state effort to organize space. He transforms state attempts to organize society into objects of contemplation and aesthetic pleasure.

The story is not a typical traveler's guide, but "a Russian exile's tour of Berlin," created with specific criteria in mind (Shrayer 76). In some sense, a survival guide, the narration illustrates how he sees beauty and order in the mundane routine of his life. The story highlights

[2]Several critics have responded to this piece, noting its significance in the Nabokov oeuvre. Brian Boyd notes that "this story, apparently so unprepossessing, marks the boldest advance yet in Nabokov's art"(250). Maxim Shrayer has looked at this piece for "its insistence on guiding the reader through narrative space" (75). Another critic sees this story as demonstrating a debt to Flaubert, and illustrating Nabokov's interest in representing minutiae (Naumann 11). Explaining Nabokov's interest in the particulars of life, Julian Connolly asserts that the story is "Nabokov's most comprehensive statement about the value of remaining receptive to the everyday flow of life and of establishing channels of communication with external others" (27).

the transformative power of imagination and art as well as the relationship between space and memory, embodied in *lieux de memoire*. The speaker sees places like The Streetcar and Eden as vestiges of a lost, or soon to be lost, memory, and attempts to preserve them through his narration. Both are part of a shared collective experience of the sort that Nora sees as being eliminated by modern society. Later in the story, the narrator's failure to get his friend to see the beauty of daily life in Berlin reinforces Nora's contention about the loss of shared collective appreciation.

The speaker offers a definition of literary creation that helps understand how he uses the power of art to produce representational spaces that function as *lieux de memoire*:

> I think that here lies the sense of literary creation: to portray ordinary objects as they will be reflected in the kindly mirrors of future times; to find in the objects around us the fragrant tenderness that only posterity will discern and appreciate in the far-off times when every trifle of our plain everyday life will become exquisite and festive in its own right: the times when a man who might put on the most ordinary jacket of today will be dressed up for an elegant masquerade (157).

The narrator's explanation links space and memory, because he envisions the role of the artist as someone who imagines how the future will remember the past. The artist *produces* memory. The use of the word ordinary indicates that the stuff of art comes from the everyday. The narrator also recognizes that most people do not view their daily lives as beautiful, because "only posterity will discern and appreciate" what the narrator sees as the "tenderness" in life. People have to be removed from their circumstances, not immersed in them, to appreciate the beauty of their surroundings. These lines suggest that one means of appreciating everyday life is to approach the world with an artist's mind, which the speaker's exile status facilitates.

In the first section, The Pipes, the narrator describes pipes stacked outside of his house, waiting to be lowered into the ground. He calls them the "street's iron entrails," (155) which little boys run up and down and crawl through. Comparing the pipes to internal organs indicates the importance of the pipes to the street, and by extension to the life of the city. These pipes will become part of an underground network, which perhaps will transport water or sewage throughout the city. The image also indicates that Berlin is a work in process, subject to the forces that Nora sees as creating the need for *lieux de memoire*. The boys' use of the pipes shows the disjunction between their literal or intended function, water distribution or sewage disposal, and their symbolic function as a site of play. The pipes are metonymic for a network that organizes society. Here they are not used for the purpose for which they are designed, that is, part of the machinery of spatial practice. The boys and the narrator turn the pipes into representational space by creating an alternate use for them.

As alternative spaces, they also become objects associated with aesthetic pleasure. The narrator delights in a correspondence between a name, "Otto," written in the snow on pipes laid in the street, and the physical appearance of "the silent layer of snow upon that pipe with its two orifices and its tacit tunnel" (156). Using both alliteration and assonance, the sentence is beautiful, poetic prose. The image of the pipe mimics the shape of the name's letters, something that the narrator, if not the name's writer, notices. The reader, nor the narrator, know who Otto is, but this does not matter. The name functions as an object of contemplation.

Like the pipes, the narrator's next point of focus, the streetcar, creates a network. If the pipes represent an underground system of transportation, the streetcar represents an above ground one. Nabokov knew Berlin's streetcars very well, because they provided him with transportation between his many pupils. As a means of transportation, the streetcar is a social space in the sense that a corner and marketplace are "terms of everyday discourse [that] serve to distinguish, but not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general to describe a social space. They correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute" (Lefebvre 16). Yet, the streetcar, like the pipes, causes the narrator to talk about something other than its intended use as transportation.

As representations of space, both the pipes and the streetcar represent attempts by the state to organize and order society. They also produce social space, by helping constitute people's identities through the social relations forged through that space. The narrator transforms these public networks, with utilitarian value, into a private network with aesthetic worth. Utility and aesthetics do not need to be opposed or mutually exclusive. The narrator's description of the streetcar does precisely what he defines as literary creation—note things others probably would overlook or find uninteresting. He describes both the physical space, the concrete characteristics of the streetcar, and social space, the relationship between the conductor, the passengers, and even the sometimes unsteady streetcar itself. In describing the routine he observes, the speaker calls attention to what Lefebvre calls spatial practice, the usually overlooked, but habitual behaviors that provide glue to existence. These behaviors constitute a spatial economy, which encourages and validates certain relationships between people in a space (Lefebvre 56). The streetcar runs a regular route every day. The physical space of the car encourages people to be physically close to one another, perhaps challenging one's sense of personal space. People who regularly ride specific routes at specific times may become familiar with each other, so the streetcar becomes a place to socialize. The passengers come to know each other in a particular context, so that they might fail to recognize each other if they passed on the street.

Rather than merely being the person who takes the speaker's money and gives him a ticket, the conductor becomes an object of contemplation for the narrator. His movements are described in great detail:

> The conductor who gives out tickets has very unusual hands. They work as nimbly as those of a pianist, but instead of being limp, sweaty, and soft-nailed, the ticketman's hands are so coarse that when you are pouring change into his palm and happen to touch that palm, which seems to have developed a harsh chitinous crust, you feel a kind of moral discomfort…I watch him with curiosity as he clamps the ticket with his broad black fingernail and punches it in two places, rummages in his leather purse, scoops up coins to make change, immediately slaps the purse shut, and yanks the bell cord, or, with a shove of his thumb throws open the special little window in the forward door to hand tickets to people on the front platform (156).

This passage provides another example of how the narrator discovers the aesthetic in the utilitarian. The use of "chitinous," which usually describes a hard coating on insects, illustrates how the narrator uses a functional or technical term from entomology to describe an aesthetic experience. The fluidity and skill of the conductor's movement is reflected in the prose that describes him. Using active verbs ("clamps," "rummages," "scoops," "slaps," "yanks," and "throws") creates the sense of a seamless, nearly simultaneous action. In the narrator's

description, this conductor, perhaps overlooked by most of his passengers, seems to be an artist of the mundane.

As a group, conductors symbolize both the state's increasing responsibility for its citizens, and the state's intervention in their quality of life. Conductors' work lives in Germany were improved by electrification of the trams and by the efforts of the German Empire's social welfare program. Typically, streetcar drivers were former horse-drawn tram drivers, whose workweeks then could be ninety hours long without vacation or health benefits. After the turn of the century, electric streetcar drivers had fewer work hours, and received health insurance, pensions, and death benefits (McKay 229, 33). Although the conductor can be viewed as representative of state action and ideology, the narrator appropriates him just as he does the pipes; he is interested in the conductor's aesthetic quality, rather than his utilitarian value.

The narrator's nostalgic comment about how the streetcar will "vanish," and then be remembered echoes Nora's arguments about how we respond to what he calls the "acceleration of history." The passage states:

> Some eccentric Berlin writer in the twenties of the twenty-first century, wishing to portray our time, will go to a museum of technological history and locate a hundred-year-old streetcar, yellow, uncouth, with old-fashioned curved seats, and in a museum of old costumes dig up a black, shiny-buttoned conductor's uniform. Then he will go home and compile a description of Berlin streets in bygone days. Everything, every trifle, will be valuable and meaningful: the conductor's purse, the advertisement over the window, that peculiar jolting motion which our great-grandchildren will perhaps imagine–everything will be ennobled and justified by its age (157).

The speaker seems aware of the same forces of technological progress that concern Nora. In talking about future responses to the streetcar, this passage illustrates the belief that people come to regard as quaint and intriguing what would otherwise be the most mundane aspects of life once these things are old. The Berlin writer wishes to reproduce space precisely and accurately; "compile" sounds emotionless and mechanical. The narrator seems more artistic and appreciative in his observations. Though this future writer will see nobility in what people today see as an unremarkable part of their routine, the speaker, when describing these same things, expresses the "tenderness" he associates with literary creation.

Additionally, in calling attention to the development of the streetcar from the horse-drawn tram, and the streetcar's eventual demise, the narrative alludes to a poorly studied, but important history, in which Berlin played a significant role. This aspect of spatial experience can best be described as representations of space, which includes the work of city planners, scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and bureaucrats. The narrator, like Nabokov, who lived in the city during the time portrayed in the story, witnesses Berlin's part in a technological revolution in urban transit. Berlin was an overcrowded city, and the need for mass transit was obvious to its inhabitants.[3] The development from tram to streetcar represents a major technological shift from horse-power to electricity, facilitated by the development of the dynamo

[3] Werner von Siemens of Siemens and Halske of Berlin was an innovator in the late nineteenth century. In 1879, Siemens built a small electric line to carry visitors around the Berlin Industrial Exhibition, so that over five months, 86,000 people rode the line (McKay 37).

in the 1870s, which provided cheap current (McKay 36). Germany electrified its trams most rapidly in Europe, and paved the way for additional innovation (75). About half of all the electric lines in all of Europe were found in Germany (73). Yet, even after the development of electric streetcars, horse-powered trams continued to be used in Berlin at the turn of the century, due to the incredible demand for mass transit.[4] Understanding this history helps the reader better appreciate the social and cultural significance of the streetcar in Germany as an instrument of ordering space, but it does not explain the tram's and its conductor's aesthetic appeal for the narrator.

While traveling on the streetcar, the narrator observes another image of Berlin as a work in progress:

> At an intersection the pavement has been torn up next to the track; by turns, four workmen are pounding an iron stake with mallets; the first one strikes, and the second is already lowering his mallet with a sweeping, accurate swing; the second mallet crashes down and is rising skyward as the third and then the fourth bang down in rhythmical succession. I listen to their unhurried clanging, like four repeated notes of an iron carillon (157).

The city of Berlin, like many cities in Europe at this time, is being remade. These men, like the conductor, are state workers, and they also perform their task with the same dexterity. The narrator's prose conveys the effortlessness and rhythm of their actions, as he hears music in their labor, like the bells of a carillon.

As the city workers represent the state's ability to shape domestic space, the Berlin Zoo, the most important zoo in Europe,[5] testifies to the state's ability to conquer and organize international space. A sign of imperial conquest and domination, zoos frequently displayed non-native animals trapped during colonial expeditions. Establishing zoos was a means of advancing an ambitious, prosperous, and strong national identity. Describing their purpose, the narrator explains, "Every large city has its own, man-made Eden on earth" (159). Eden calls to mind the mythic place associated with the Christian bible, which was supposedly a place of perfect beauty and harmony prior to the "fall" associated with the story of Adam and Eve. For some, Eden symbolizes a lost paradise. It might be an apt metaphor for exiles for whom their lost homeland represents a kind of lost paradise. The speaker laments, "The only sad part is that this artificial Eden is all behind bars," but notes that without these, "the very first dingo would savage me" (158). The necessity of constraints emphasizes that this is not the natural state of things, which the narrator recognizes. These trapped animals, prizes of colonialism, represent dangers that the state must control. This image of trapped beauty resonates with exiles' sense of their existence. Émigrés left their homelands for a variety of reasons—some were forced by circumstances that made it impossible for them to remain, others felt that in leaving their homeland, they might find a better life for themselves and their families. Some searched for a kind of Eden – a world before the "fall" of whatever forced them to leave. The bars that cage émigrés in their new lands are figurative but just as powerful: economic squalor, language barriers, and prejudice. What

[4]In 1895, horse trams carried 164 million passengers; in 1901, electric trams carried 330 million (McKay 81).

[5]The Berlin Zoo opened on August 1, 1844 about one and a half miles west of Berlin. Under the direction of Heinrich Bodinus, the zoo gained great prestige in the late nineteenth century (Kisling 95).

distinguishes the animals behind bars, from the émigrés, is the ability for the individual to transcend his figurative bars through art, which is precisely what the narrator does.[6]

Just as the narrator celebrates the appearance and actions of the conductor, he praises tortoises he sees at the Berlin Aquarium[7] in descriptive, unusual terms:

> Oh, do not omit to watch the giant tortoises being fed. These ponderous, ancient corneous cupolas were brought from the Galapagos Islands. With a decrepit kind of circumspection, a wrinkly flat head and two totally useless paws emerge in slow motion from under the two-hundred-pound dome. And with its thick spongy tongue, suggesting somehow that of a cacological idiot slackly vomiting his monstrous speech, the turtle sticks its head into a heap of wet vegetables and messily munches their leaves. But that dome above it–ah, that dome, that ageless, well-rubbed, dull bronze, that splendid burden of time…(158-159).

The narrator's use of "corneous," a biological term used to describe a horny feature, echoes his earlier use of chitinous when describing the conductor's hands. A cupola is more apt to be used to label an architectural feature, but here functions as a metonym for the tortoise. The description seems to obscure what is being described, suggesting the importance of the aesthetic over the functional use of language. But why does the tortoise interest the narrator? The tortoise is an ancient animal, which can live for a hundred years. Earlier, the narrator noted developments in technology that caused the trolley to be obsolete, and will cause the streetcar to be as well. Unlike them, the tortoise seems unaffected by the passage of time. The narrator might also see a kindred spirit in the tortoise. Both are exiles in Berlin, and both are trapped; the bars that keep the tortoise are just more obvious than those that restrain the émigré.

After the narrator finishes his rhapsodic description of the tortoise, the drinking companion says, "'That's a very poor guide…Who cares about how you took a streetcar and went to the Berlin Aquarium?'" (159). Offering no response, the narrative continues to describe what the narrator observes in the bar. Despite his dismissiveness, the listener becomes intrigued by something that has caught the narrator's eye, asking, "'What do you see down there?'"(159). The story continues with the narrator, while describing his surroundings, noting the little boy, sitting in another room, down a passageway from the bar itself:

> There, under the mirror, the child still sits alone. But he is now looking our way. From there he can see the inside of the tavern–the green island of the billiard table, the ivory ball he is forbidden to touch, the metallic gloss of the bar, a pair of fat truckers at one table and the two of us at another…Yet there is one thing I know. Whatever happens to him in life, he will always remember the picture he saw every day of his childhood from the little room where he was fed his soup.

[6]The comparison I make here seems especially appropriate when you know that in the late nineteenth century, zoos exhibited people as well as animals. Hagenbeck, of the Hamburg Zoo, had much to do with encouraging this vogue, by bringing a tour of African tribesmen and their animals throughout Europe. On October 6, 1878, 62,000 people visited the Berlin Zoo to see a group of Nubians from Sudan, along with their animals (Zuckerman 55-56).

[7]The Berlin Aquarium mentioned here is actually the second Berlin Aquarium. The first was established in 1869 and was in direct competition with the Zoo. It became known as the best aquarium in the world, but was shut down at the turn of the century. The Berlin Zoo soon proposed to build another Berlin Aquarium. A large building housed a Terranium and Insectarium on its upper floors and an Aquarium on its lower floor. It lasted for almost 30 years, destroyed by a direct hit from a bomb on November 23, 1943 (Zuckerman 56-57).

> He will remember the billiard table and the careless evening visitor who used to draw back his sharp white elbow and hit the ball with his cue, and the blue-gray cigar smoke, and the din of voices, and my empty right sleeve and scarred face, and his father behind the bar, filling a mug for me from the tap (159-160).

This passage is not voiced; we are inside the narrator's mind. The speaker imagines how a detailed snapshot of life inside the tavern will be recalled by the boy. This epiphany is a product of the artistic exercise the previous sections, his guide to Berlin, represent. The narrator knows he will be remembered by the boy. Although the reader does not learn the narrator's name, the text provides more details about his physical appearance, which suggests something more about his identity, too. The speaker mentions his "empty right sleeve and his scarred face." He is not merely an outsider because he is an émigré, but because he is physically different. Although the story does not explain the cause for his disfigurement, the story's time period suggests that the narrator could be a veteran, and perhaps his injuries are war wounds. Nora describes *lieux de memoire* as fragmentary; because of his injuries, the narrator can be considered not quite whole too. Therefore, he exists as a living *lieux de memoire*, a reminder of a lost past. His lack of physical wholeness parallels his lack of a complete identity. The German state views their efforts to refashion the physical structures of society as a means of restoring German pride, but the narrator reminds those who see him that the state cannot entirely obliterate the remnants of the past.

Although the narrator shared his "guide" with his companion, he does not share this vision. The story concludes: "What indeed! How can I demonstrate to him that I have glimpsed somebody's future recollection?"(160). The phrase "What indeed!" responds to the companion's question, expressing frustration that his drinking partner, and the internal audience for his narrative about Berlin, cannot appreciate the world as he sees and describes it. Without this appreciation, no epiphany is possible.

Although the story's final moment marks an apparent triumph for the speaker, and the story celebrates his ability to see beauty in the everyday, the story does seem naïve in a number of ways. The story carries the reader along in its lyrical treatment of Berlin life, but much is absent from the narrator's vision. More significantly, his friend's failure to share his view represents a fundamental problem—what good is an artistic vision of the world if it cannot be transmitted and shared?

"A Guide to Berlin" shows the triumph of the individual, artistic mind in response to German state-building strategy following the disaster of World War I. Alluding to changes in the city brought about by the war, the story demonstrates the conflict between the ways the state attempts to organize social and physical space, for example, through the establishment of new transportation systems,[8] and how individuals experience that space. Rather than being oppressive, this clash becomes a source of power and self-preservation for the émigré narrator. The story represents Nabokov's developing interest in how the individual subject, frequently an exile, can appropriate space through the imagination as a means of self-preservation in a world that threatens one's sense of self.

[8]For example, Mierzejewski's *The Most Valuable Asset of the Reich: A History of the German National Railway* details the development of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (German National Railway) and its role as an attempt to unite the country.

Works Cited

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. Zone Books, 1988.

Boyd, Brian. *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*. Princeton University Press, 1990.

Connolly, Julian W. *Nabokov's Early Fiction: Patterns of Self and Other*. Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Hutton, P. H. "Mnemonic Schemes in the New History of Memory." *History and Theory*, vol. 36, 1997, pp. 378–391., doi:10.1111/0018-2656.00021.

Kisling, Vernon N. *Zoo and Aquarium History: Ancient Animal Collections to Zoological Gardens*. CRC Press, 2001.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1991.

McKay, John P. *Tramways and Trolleys: The Rise of Urban Mass Transport in Europe*. Princeton University Press, 1976.

Mierzejewksi, Alfred C. The Most Valuable Asset of the Reich: A History of the German National Railway. University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. Vintage International, 1989.

--- *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

--- *Strong Opinions*. Vintage International, 1990.

Naumann, Marina Turkevich. *Blue Evenings in Berlin: Nabokov's Short Stories of the 1920s*. New York University Press, 1978.

Nora, Pierre. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. Columbia University Press, 1996.

Shrayer, Maxim. *The World of Nabokov's Stories*. Literary Modernism Series. University of Texas Press, 1999.

Zuckerman, Solly. *Great Zoos of the World: Their Origins and Significance*. Westview Press, 1980.