



Life as Annotation: Sebastian Knight, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vladimir Nabokov

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Life as Annotation: Sebastian Knight,
Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vladimir Nabokov¹

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Annotation bridges and differentiates the interpenetrating realms of life and art. A literary character may suffer from referential mania, while his author is prey to the obverse; assaulted by references to literature at every step, he is persecuted by the omnipresence of others' words. Nabokov's art demands annotation. Without it, his four-dimensional tic-tac-toe game is invisible and the reader becomes Mr. Goodman failing to recognize the substitution of Hamlet's biography for Sebastian's. But who is Goodman, and what does his name signify? Annotation reveals yet another, personal, layer of dialogue between literature and life, one that Nabokov probably wanted to go undetected by all but one reader.

“His hero's letter may possibly have been a kind of code in which he expressed a few truths about his relations with Clare.”

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight

Nabokov's greatest novels are refractions of his life, as Maria Malikova has shown.² Through annotation the reader can identify Nabokov's mode of transforming life into art, and hence his principles of literary creation.

In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* Nabokov treats his affair with Irina Guadanini through a system of allusions to the myth of the poison damsel and a set of Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories. The novel that begins as Sebastian Knight's biography becomes simultaneously V's autobiography. At the same time, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is written to be precisely NOT Nabokov's autobiography;

¹ This paper is based on Breton Leone-Quick's discovery of the relevance of Hawthorne's "Rappacini's Daughter" to *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and his research into the literature on the Persian princess, written up in his senior thesis for the Russian Department, Wesleyan University, "From Image to Apology: Hawthorne Subtexts in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*," 1997.

² Maria Malikova, *V. Nabokov: Avto-bio-grafiia* (St-Peterburg, 2002).

Sebastian Knight both is and is not Nabokov. As Malikova says of Nabokov's many forms of autobiography, he carefully establishes a tension between invention and reality.³

Like Poe's two William Wilsons, Sebastian Knight and Nabokov are born in the same year in the same place, and share some experiences—they and their families are driven out of Russia by Bolsheviks in 1919, study at Cambridge, have Swiss governesses, and become writers. But differing details establish that Sebastian Knight is a variant of Nabokov—his father dies in a duel, his mother is English and abandons him, and particularly, he becomes an English writer living in London, not a Russian writer living in Berlin.

Brian Boyd writes that "Nabokov has projected onto Sebastian a stylized alternative continuation of his own recent past." Boyd says that because the novel appears "to exclude external referents...Nabokov could touch on his own personal themes: his change of language, his burying of his past with Irina Guadanini."⁴ Rather, the intertexts examined below suggest that Nabokov does use external referents, and does so in order to give fictional form to his affair with Guadanini for the benefit of the only reader he expected to recognize his intentions, his wife. As Malikova points out, the fictionalization of fact gives the writer power over the past, over memory and over his readers. By allusions to Russian *rusalki*, the legend of the poison damsel, and Hawthorne's tales, Nabokov casts Guadanini as a mythical being to explain his passion for her, exonerate himself, and apologize to Vera.

Stacy Schiff writes that Guadanini "had a reputation as a siren." Dominique Desanti quotes Marc Slonim's characterization of Nabokov's relationship with Irina: "Irina Guadanini est un violent, un aveuglant entrainement sensuel";⁵ Mark Aldanov referred to her as "the *femme fatale*, the breaker of hearts."⁶ In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* Paul Rechnoy says of his ex-wife Nina, "you may

³ Maria Malikova, *op. cit.*, 12.

⁴ Brian Boyd, *The Russian Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 501.

⁵ Dominique Desanti, *Vladimir Nabokov* (Paris: Editions Julliard, 1994), 36.

⁶ Stacy Schiff, *Véra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)*, (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 86, 87.

find her in any cheap novel, she's a type, a type";⁷ "I often catch myself thinking that she has never existed" (145). Her status as a real, everyday woman is called into question, leading to the reader's realization that Nina is not merely a fictional type, but a magical being capable of faery enchantment, as will become clear.

That Sebastian will be the victim of such an enchanter is foretold (even before his governess's warning to "be careful, women will adore you" [21]) by his sudden (temporary) disappearance Eastward with Alexis Pan at age seventeen. The Greek god Pan inspired sudden fear in lonely places, arousing inspiration, sexual passion, and *panic* with his music; Alexis Pan's best work is a translation into Russian of Keats' "La belle dame sans merci" (27), in which a faery Lady of the Meads seduces a knight. This is what Nina does to her Knight: after she finally turns him away in 1935, Sebastian becomes "[a] thin mournful and silent figure" (181); in Keats' words, a "knight... alone and palely loitering," "so haggard and so woe begone," forever "in thrall" to her enchantment.⁸ Like Keats' poem, Sebastian himself has been translated from his English world into his Russian one by the Russian siren, the "Rechnoy woman," as Madame le Cerf coyly refers to herself, which means literally, river woman (155).

Sebastian becomes particularly susceptible to faery charms, as well as to Keats' pale kings, Princes and pale warriors, once he is diagnosed with Lehmann's disease. This medically non-existent heart disease appears to be named for Alfred Georg Ludvig Lehmann (1858-1921), a Danish psychologist at Copenhagen University who wrote a treatise on the occult, entitled *Aberglaube und Zauberei* (Superstition and Magic, 1908), in which he discusses magic, witchcraft, dreams, spiritualism and colored hearing. This annotation suggests the supernatural aspect of Sebastian's illness; only after his diagnosis do hints of faery folk from several national traditions begin to appear in his life. He returns from his doctor in Berlin to meet Clare at the German seaside resort, where both independently expect to find "a German gnome" (Clare, 86) or a "brownie" (Sebastian, 87) in the beech-wood. From then on Sebastian becomes obsessed by an "acute sense of mortality" (102). V, explicitly disavowing any sexual cause

⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (Vintage, 1992), 144. Page numbers in the text refer to this edition.

⁸ John Keats, *Selected Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 166-7.

of Sebastian's restlessness, speculates that "being dissatisfied with things in general, he might have been dissatisfied with the color of his romance too" (104). Only then is Sebastian sent by his doctor to Blauberg. When Sebastian dines with V in a Russian restaurant in Paris a week later, after he has met Nina in Blauberg, Sebastian has a boil on the back of his neck patched with a pink plaster (105), suggesting a physical manifestation of his betrayal of Clare analogous to the psoriasis that afflicted Nabokov under the stress of his affair.⁹

While Nina has attributes of a *rusalka*—her "river" surname, cold hands, and parallel to the parodic "naiad" priest in the scene connecting her with her initial-sake, Natasha Rosanov—Nina herself suggests another mythical source for her magical powers. At her place in the country, Nina tells V that "all flowers except pinks and daffodils withered if I touched them...There used to be a Persian princess like me. She blighted the Palace Gardens" (164). We have been wondering about the Anglo-Persian dictionary on Sebastian's shelf since chapter four (39); five chapters later we learn that Clare was "taking a course in Eastern languages, of all things" (80) when she met first Sebastian, and so we assume it belongs to her. But the dictionary leads from English to Persian, with no Persian-English return trip available on the shelf. Sebastian may need it to scout the route ahead into the unknown, the aborted journey East with Alexis Pan that is finally realized in Sebastian's pursuit of the Persian princess.

The Persian princess that Nina refers to belongs to the topos of the Poison Damsel. The noted orientalist Nicholas Penzer traces this legend from India through its appearance in the twelfth-century *Secretum Secretorum*, a compendium purporting to collect Aristotle's communications to Alexander the Great, which was translated from Arabic into Latin and Hebrew in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, respectively, and widely read in the Middle Ages, reappearing in the *Gesta Romanorum* (end of thirteenth century-beginning of fourteenth).¹⁰ In the best-known instance of the tale, Aristotle warns

⁹ Brian Boyd, *op. cit.*, 437.

¹⁰ N. M. Penzer, *Poison Damsels* (London: Kegan Paul, 2002), 18-21, quotes *The Ocean of Story*, being C.H. Tawney's translation of Somadeva's *Katha sarit sagara* (or Ocean of streams of story), edited with introduction, fresh explanatory notes and terminal essay, Somadeva Bhatta, 11th century; trans. (Tawney, Charles

Alexander: “Remember what happened when the King of India sent thee rich gifts, and among them a beautiful maiden whom they had fed on poison until she was of the nature of a snake, and...had I not found by proof that she would be killing thee by her embrace and by her perspiration, she would surely have killed thee” (Penzer, 22). In some versions of poison-damsel tales, a mere look from a poison-damsel is fatal (Penzer, 29); she can also cause death by her kiss, her bite, or her breath. Penzer records only one Persian version of the tale, in the “Burzo-nameh” (Penzer, 17n). In tales of death by glance, due to errors in translation, there is a confusion between damsels who have precious stones in their eyes (gemmam) and those who have a double pupil (geminam) (Penzer, 37-8).

Nina has both versions of the attributes of the damsel who can harm with her gaze, the dangerous gem and the odd pupils. Since Nina is aware that she is a poison damsel, she directs her gaze at V’s mouth, never to his eyes: “She had a funny manner of looking at you intently—not into your eyes though, but at the lower part of your face” (153). She has strange pupils, “queer velvety eyes with that iris placed slightly higher than usual” (170), and she warns V of “the big sharp [sapphire (152)] ring on [her] middle finger” (150)—these attributes of the poison damsel might destroy her victim prematurely, before she has time to seduce him. That Nina is a composite of sensually alluring sirens (who seduce by singing) explains V’s *panic* when Nina goes to put on some music: “‘No, not that, for God’s sake!’ I cried. ‘No? I thought a little music might soothe you’” (156).

So far, the sources of Nina’s enchantment span Greece (Pan), England (Keats’ Belle Dame), Russia (the *rusalka*-naiad), and Persia via Europe (the Poison-Damsel). Through these allusions, our understanding of Nina develops from her husband’s characterization of her as a mere cocotte into Nabokov’s version of the mythical fatal woman. The Persian theme culminates in an allusion to jasmine, a flower that probably originated in the Middle East, which provides the oils for a scent widely used in the making of perfume.¹¹ The nectar of

Henry, ed. Penzer, Norman Mosley. London, Priv. Print. for subscribers only by C. J. Sawyer, 1924-1928, 10 vols., v. 5).

¹¹ In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov associates jasmine with his first erotic love for Valentina Shulgina and the motif continues to be associated with eros through *Ada*. See Priscilla Meyer, “Carmencita: Blok’s Delmas, Nabokov’s Shulgina: The

some species is poisonous, although its dried roots are used in medicinal preparations as a sedative. The flower appears in Dr. Starov's telephone number, JASMIN 61-93 (194), along with the numbers of Sebastian's death year, with the 6 moved from the end to the beginning. The Persian origin of the word jasmine, YASSAMAN, means "never wilts" or "lives forever." Nina kills flowers and is part of Sebastian's journey toward death, but he, like the jasmine, lives forever. After 1936 not only does he continue to be "laughingly alive in five novels," he is re-embodied in V, who has resisted Nina's siren call. Just as G. Abeson, dead at the beginning of *The Prismatic Bezel*, is resurrected as Nosebag by the end of it, Sebastian's final 6 becomes the first 6, reversing physical death.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight is equally about Nabokov's transformation into an English-language writer, which demanded an Anglophone cultural frame of reference. The poison-damsel topos appears opportunely in an American source: Beatrice, the heroine of Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "Rappacini's Daughter," contributes to Nabokov's characterization of Nina, as shown in the (unpublished) work of Breton Leone-Quick.

Leona Toker is one of only two scholars to have discussed the relationship of Nabokov's work to Hawthorne's. She notes many affinities to Hawthorne that she sees developing in Nabokov's American work; one of these is the theme of guilt, which she understands as general survivor guilt.¹² But Nabokov's references are always highly specific; here the theme of sexual guilt or mistreatment of a beloved woman governs the selection of Hawthorne's tales. In "Rappacini's Daughter," Beatrice's touch appears to kill flowers as Nina's does in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*; several others of Hawthorne's best tales also allude to men's secret sins, as does his famous novel of adultery, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). This collective Hawthornian subtext comprises "Rappacini's Daughter" and three tales written between 1835 and 1844, collected in the two volumes of *Mosses From an Old Manse*: "Young Goodman Brown" (1835); "The Birthmark" (1843); "Rappacini's Daughter" (1844) in volume I; and

Evolution of Eros in Nabokov's Work", ed. Lazar Fleishman, Stanford University Press, forthcoming May 2007.

¹² Leona Toker, "Nabokov and the Hawthorne Tradition," *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, 32, 1987, 323-349, 347-9.

“Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent” (1843) in volume II. Taken together, these tales about man’s sexual sin and his attempt to conceal or extirpate it suggest that in alluding to them Nabokov is addressing Vera.

In “Rappacini’s Daughter,” a young man, Giovanni Guasconti, arrives in Padua to study and rents a room that looks out on the botanist Rappacini’s garden. He is lured by the sensual attractions of the alleged poison damsel, Beatrice. His father’s friend Baglioni, a professor at the University of Padua and an academic rival of Rappacini, warns Giovanni against Beatrice by telling him the tale of “an Indian prince, who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great...What especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath—richer than a garden of Persian roses.”¹³ At first passionately attracted to Beatrice, Giovanni becomes convinced that she has poisoned him with her breath. He devises a test to determine if he himself has become poisonous by association with her: he breathes on a spider that is spinning a web in his room. The spider promptly dies. In Nabokov’s tale, V too devises a test of his poison damsel that involves a spider, when he says in Nina’s hearing, “she has a spider on her neck” in Russian. The men attempt to determine if they are dealing with a poison damsel, Guasconti through his own contamination, and V, who is in the process of falling under Nina’s spell, by removing her French disguise to reveal her true nature. Hawthorne’s Beatrice dies from the antidote provided by Baglioni and administered by Giovanni; Nina lives on to seduce others, but V finds an antidote that breaks her spell over him. Hawthorne’s character destroys the poison damsel while Nabokov’s merely evades her, but a spider helps both to free themselves from the sensual attractions of the mysterious women who have enthralled them.

Beatrice is identified with the lush, sensual yet poisonous plants. Her father the botanist, while working in his garden, “defended his hands with a pair of thick gloves” (110); Nina describes how Sebastian would drop in and sit “with his hands on the knob of his cane, without

¹³ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Portable Hawthorne*, ed. William C. Spengemann (New York, Penguin, 2005), 106-138, 128. Page numbers in the text for “Rappacini’s Daughter,” “The Birthmark” and “Young Goodman Brown” refer to this edition.

taking off his gloves” (158). The glove motif will come up again in connection with *The Scarlet Letter*; here it suggests protection against deadly, sensual charm. The connection of the botanical garden in “Rappacini’s Daughter” to Nina’s blighted estate is reinforced by the name of the film Sebastian watches three times and V once, “The Enchanted Garden” (182). From V’s point of view, Nina is “[t]he whimsical wanton that ruins a foolish man’s life,” Sebastian’s fate which to some degree might have been Nabokov’s—the loss of Clare leading to his dissolution and death. Nabokov mythologizes Guadanini’s predatory seduction in casting Nina as an eternal irresistible feminine force that evokes sexual desire in a resistant male. V thinks “of making love to that woman” (166) after her hair brushes his cheek. Nina says of herself that she “was not quite the ordinary woman [Sebastian] thought she was—oh, she was something quite different, and she knew a bit more about life and death and people than he thought he knew” (157). Whatever that is, it enables her to tempt him to consider a love affair for what appears to be the first time in his apparently unexciting life.

Hawthorne’s novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, recounts a man’s guilt for his adultery. In the novel, the use of a black glove as emblem of his sin and his attempt to confess it suggest that it too is a source for *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Hester Prynne wears a crimson A for her adultery, made evident by the birth of her daughter, but while she is publicly shamed on the scaffold before the townsfolk, the Reverend Dimmesdale’s part in the sin is never revealed. He is another of Hawthorne’s secret sinners: Dimmesdale’s unconfessed adultery torments him so that he wastes away and dies of it. “His nerve seemed absolutely destroyed. His moral force was abased into more than childish weakness. It groveled helpless on the ground, even while his intellectual faculties retained their pristine strength, or had perhaps acquired a morbid energy, which disease only could have given them.”¹⁴ His guilt is manifest physically by “a scarlet token on his naked breast, right over his heart. On that spot...there was...the gnawing and poisonous truth of bodily pain” (130). Shortly before he dies, in an agony of guilt, he goes out at midnight and stands on the town scaffold intending, but failing, to confess his sin. The next day

¹⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, London: Penguin Books, 1983), 139. Page numbers in the text refer to this edition.

his sexton brings him his black glove, saying: "It was found...on the scaffold, where evil-doers are set up to public shame. Satan dropped it there...intending a scurrilous jest against your reverence... A pure hand needs no glove to cover it!" (138). In this context, the horror of Sebastian's "black glove" and "sham" hand hint not only at Sebastian's "uncanny" (188-9) return but at Nabokov's guilt. The extraordinary image of Sebastian's sham hand in V's dream combines the black glove from Hawthorne's novel with the tiny crimson hand of "The Birthmark," where a hand motif again betokens a man's guilt toward a woman.

In "The Birthmark," the alchemist Aylmer is troubled by the one imperfection he finds in his beautiful and angelic wife, Georgiana: a crimson birthmark in the form of a tiny hand on her left cheek. Because he sees it as "the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death" (90), she agrees to let him try to remove it. He isolates Georgiana and begins to subject her to various alchemical influences, testing her progress by handing her a flower, which dies at her touch (96). Finally he gives her a concoction that reduces the birthmark to the faintest rose color, but kills Georgiana. As she dies, she tells Aylmer, "you have rejected the best that earth could offer" (105). The birthmark, "that spectral hand that wrote mortality" (91), links mortal life to the celestial; Aylmer "failed...to find the perfect Future in the present" (105). The tiny pink hands that spill from Sebastian's black glove suggest the multiple tiny deaths Nabokov inflicted on his own wife through his infidelity, affirm his recognition of her as the best that earth could offer, and imply that Nina's poison damselhood, killing a flower by her touch, is caused by his own unforgivable error.

Once V recognizes Nina from her remark about kissing a man because he could write his name upside down, he sees "a tiny pale birth-mark on [Nina's] pale cheek" (170). This birthmark both reveals her to be the *femme fatale* Pahl Pahlich described, and connects her to Sebastian, who "has a small birth-mark visible above his rose-red diaphanous ear" (14). Nabokov uses the combined imagery of the birthmark and hands to bridge the abyss between mortality and eternal life. Sebastian's white moving hand (36), which V imagines when he visits his brother's flat, is paired with Sebastian's black-gloved left hand, which appears in V's "singularly unpleasant dream" (185).

When Sebastian undoes the black glove and pulls it off, “it spilt its only contents—a number of tiny hands, like the front paws of a mouse, mauve-pink and soft” (187). At the public level, the imagery pairs Sebastian’s immortality as a writer (the white hand is his writing hand) with his bodily death in V’s dream (the sham hand in the black glove); but at the private level of the novel directed to Vera, the black glove full of tiny pink hands combines the imagery of the hand-shaped birthmark and Reverend Dimmesdale’s black glove: the image is so appalling because it is a confession of Sebastian’s literally fatal error and Nabokov’s adultery. It implies Nabokov’s recognition that, like Aylmer, Sebastian and he himself are killing their perfectly beautiful and angelic beloveds.

In “The Birthmark,” Hawthorne describes Aylmer’s experiments: “His brightest diamonds were the merest pebbles...in comparison with the inestimable gems which lay hidden beyond his reach” (99); Nabokov uses a similar metaphor but reverses it. When V awakens from the dream, he writes, “I know that the common pebble you find in your fist after having thrust your arm shoulder deep into water, where a jewel seemed to gleam on the sand, is really the coveted gem though it looks like a pebble as it dries in the sun of everyday” (188). Aylmer is misguided in his quest for his wife’s perfection; Nabokov avows that he has perfection at hand.

Further details connect Hawthorne’s stories to Nabokov’s hidden apology to Vera, whose name means “faith”: the protagonist of “Young Goodman Brown” goes off into the woods at night, leaving at home his newly-wed wife Faith, who begs him to stay. He thinks, “Poor little Faith, what a wretch I am to leave her on such an errand” (51), words appropriate to Nabokov’s trips to Paris. Hawthorne’s story is a metaphor for Young Goodman Brown’s anguish at his loss of Faith, implying not only his wife but his religious belief, and Nabokov’s allusion to it suggests his bad own faith.

One more tale has bearing on *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, “Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent,” whose mad protagonist, Roderick Elliston, a “once brilliant young man”¹⁵ has left his wife because he becomes obsessed with the serpent/sin in his own and everyone else’s bosoms. After four years, his wife comes from England to seek him

¹⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse* p. 213.

out in America; at the sight of her, his serpent leaves him, and he cries out to her, “forgive! forgive!” She replies, “Oh yes,...The serpent was but a dark fantasy...The past, dismal as it seems, shall fling no gloom upon the future...we must think of it as but an anecdote in our Eternity” (224). With his wife’s forgiveness, Roderick sheds his serpent; on his progress toward death Sebastian writes that he is “fed up...with the patterns of my snake skins (*vypolziny*)” (183) so that he wants to return to the “the obvious and the ordinary” and asks V to burn what we come to realize are Nina’s letters. By crawling out of his snake skins, Nabokov may regain his former, “ordinary” life and perhaps nurture his “brilliance” as Roderick does not. Through the reference to “Egotism,” Nabokov both admits his guilt and expresses gratitude for Vera’s having saved him through her forgiveness, healing the family to live on happily. In contrast, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* imagines the horrifying road not taken: by the end of the novel Sebastian is dead and Clare has “bled to death next to an empty cradle” (99). The extreme images of hand, snakeskin, Clare’s demise, convey the horror of the near-destruction of Nabokov’s family.

Nabokov’s use of the poison damsel myth casts Irina Guadanini (however accurately) as the aggressor, the mythic destroyer of man through lust, the death force that leads Sebastian away from his spiritual soul mate and muse, Clare. Nabokov seems to have seen that by rendering Sebastian Knight’s demise as faery-induced he seems to deny responsibility for his affair; in *Lolita* he thematizes his own ploy—Humbert blames the “deadly little demon” nymphet for his obsession. To complete the analogy, Humbert, adapting to his new American audience, and referring to himself as enchanted by “Annabel Leigh/Lee,” builds his confession on Edgar Allan Poe’s work. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Nabokov had referred to an American writer he held in higher esteem than he held Poe.¹⁶ Hawthorne and Poe import the German supernatural into the American tradition, helping Nabokov include the world of ghostliness,

¹⁶ Hawthorne is not the only American writer referred to in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*; Henry James’ story, “The Real Right Thing,” is also incorporated (See Will Norman, *Nabokovian* 55, Fall 2005, 7-13). James in turn had called Hawthorne the most valuable example of American genius, “...the most beautiful and most eminent representative of a literature” (1879).

ambiguity and the magical that had always been part of his work, from his earliest stories (e. g. “Nezhit’,” 1921).¹⁷ In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, one Hawthorne story revives the tradition of the poison damsel, while the others chart a progression from secret sin to confession to forgiveness, mapping the progression of Nabokov’s affair.¹⁸

If Brian Boyd hadn’t included the Guadanini affair in his biography, and if he and Stacy Schiff hadn’t had access to Guadanini’s letters, the character of Nina would still be enhanced by awareness of the intertext of the Poison Damsel. But without knowledge of the affair, the motive for the Hawthorne material is inscrutable. Nabokov’s biography becomes essential annotation to *The Real Life*; it adds yet another layer of communication to the novel, and includes another still Realer Life. Without this annotation, Nabokov’s implied apology to Vera remains invisible to all others, as he hoped it would.

¹⁷ Priscilla Meyer, *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 26; Alexander Dolinin, *Istinaia zhizn’ pisalelia Sirina* (St. Petersburg, 2004), 327.

¹⁸ See Breton Leone-Quick, *op. cit.*, 8.