

Silent Love

**The Annotation and
Interpretation of Nabokov's
*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight***





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For Wytske, Julian, Olivia, and Isabel.

O learn to read what silent love has writ.

—William Shakespeare

Table of Contents

	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
CHAPTER 1	Introduction	1
CHAPTER 2	Annotations	8
CHAPTER 3	Motifs: Narrative	76
CHAPTER 4	Motifs: Identities	109
CHAPTER 5	Motifs: Death and Beyond	161
CHAPTER 6	Conclusion	173
	<i>Works Cited</i>	195
	<i>Index</i>	213

Acknowledgments

When I first read Nabokov's novels I was so perplexed by their perfection that I had the impression that they would resist critical inspection, like a brilliant glittering so copious that it is impossible to study its facets. But I soon discovered that a large body of scholarly criticism on Nabokov's prose had been written, and these studies opened doors that I thought were not even there.

I met many authors of these admirable works during the first Nabokov Conference in Nice, held in 1991, and in subsequent years I received, although I had hardly any credentials to show, much support for my endeavors to find my own way in the labyrinth of Nabokov's art. The encouragement I received from, among others, Gennady Barabtarlo, Brian Boyd, Maurice Couturier, D. Barton Johnson, Stephen Parker, Pekka Tammi, and Leona Toker I still regard as invaluable.

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The book is dedicated to our grandchildren and I hope that their listening to my simple tales will stimulate them in the years to come to find their way to the many marvelous stories written by novelists like Vladimir Nabokov.

Introduction

1

CHAPTER

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight is a novel shaped as a biography about the novelist Sebastian Knight, written by his half-brother V. after Sebastian dies in 1936 at the age of thirty-six when V. is thirty years old. After V.'s mother (the last surviving parent) died in 1922, there were only two chance meetings between the brothers who had drifted apart. V. tries to compensate for this hiatus by writing Sebastian's biography. He discovers that Sebastian's life took a tragic turn when he left his lovely and devoted partner Clare after being caught in the web of a femme fatale, Nina, who wound up ruining his life.

Nabokov began writing this novel in December 1938 and completed it in January of the next year, while living with his wife, Véra, and their son, Dmitri, in Paris. Their apartment was on 8 Rue de Saigon, near the Place d'Étoile. Because the apartment had only one room, the bathroom served as Nabokov's study (Boyd, VNRV 492–496). It was the first novel Nabokov wrote in English, and it was published in the United States two years after its completion, in December 1941 (Boyd, VNAY 40). In England the first edition appeared in 1945 (Juliar 164–165). In the years following the writing of *Sebastian Knight* Nabokov wrote the novella *The Enchanter*, as well as the stories “Ultima Thule” and “Solus Rex,” all written again in Russian. In the years preceding *Sebastian Knight*, he wrote *The Gift*, his great Russian novel, completed in 1938 (Boyd, VNRV 446).

Nabokov lamented the transition from the Russian to the English language until his death in 1977. Despite his excellent command of the English language—Nabokov is regarded as one of the greatest stylists of the twentieth century writing in English—the loss of his mother tongue

was perhaps worse than his exile from Russian soil. But Nabokov had no choice: writing in Russian for a disintegrating émigré community had no future. As Simon Karlinsky writes, “the most important ingredient that a thriving literature needs—readers—was in short supply.” And the Western world from the 1930s on “came to regard the existence of an exiled Russian literature in its midst with a mixture of hostility and studied indifference” (*Bitter Air of Exile* 6). Moreover, being married to a Jewish woman, Nabokov and his family had to leave Continental Europe and flee to the United States in the spring of 1940.

The years that preceded the writing of *Sebastian Knight* were exceedingly stressful for Nabokov. The impending war was of course a perilous threat; as a Jewess Véra Nabokov lost her job in Berlin in 1936. The following year Nabokov had an extramarital affair with Irina Guadanini, which ended only after it had culminated in a grim crisis in the Nabokovs’ marriage. In 1939 his mother died, and although she was impoverished Nabokov had hardly been able to support her or even to attend her funeral in Prague.

Sebastian Knight’s life shows many parallels with that of his creator. Both were born in St. Petersburg in 1899 into a wealthy, cultured, and British-oriented family. Both had a Swiss governess and both fled from revolutionary Russia. They studied at Trinity College in Cambridge, became novelists, and switched from Russian to English. They had stable relationships with their partners, which, in Nabokov’s case, was severely tested and, in Sebastian’s case, ended with the interference of an enchantress. Even Sebastian’s first love recalls that of Nabokov. And, as will be discussed, Clare resembles Véra in many ways, while Nina shares her main quality as a femme fatale with Irina Guadanini.

Surprisingly, it was the relationship with his brother Sergey that Nabokov singled out in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, a reference as clear as its purport was enigmatic: “For various reasons I find it inordinately hard to speak about my . . . brother [Sergey]. That twisted quest for Sebastian Knight . . . , with its glories and self-made combinations, is really nothing in comparison to the task I balked in the first version of this memoir and am faced with now” (257). The two Nabokov brothers were not close (although much closer than Sebastian and V.) and Sergey’s homosexuality did not help to make their contact more intimate. Perhaps the uneasiness Nabokov felt toward his brother was unduly influenced by Nabokov’s inability to look at homosexuality without any disapproval.

V. frequently states that the responsibility to make his biography as scrupulously reliable as possible weighs heavily on him. Despite his efforts, he seems to be the worst biographer imaginable as far as objectivity is concerned. In *The Gift* Nabokov presented a portrait of Nikolay Chernyshevsky that differed radically from conventional biographies; a legitimate choice, Nabokov said, because “at least the plain truth of documents is on my side. That, and only that, is what I would ask of my biographer—plain facts” (SO 156). Documents can consist of letters, journals, diaries, archives, recorded testimonies, and interviews. In V.’s biography, only one single document is presented: Sebastian’s last letter, and as this is translated by V. from Russian into English (with momentous consequences as will be discussed) it can be said that even this piece of evidence is not authentic.

As V.’s book is, rather, a report of the way he has composed the work and the efforts this entailed, it can also be regarded as V.’s autobiography. V. seems to endorse André Maurois’s opinion “that the main subject of any biography is ‘the medium of the biographer’s own feelings’” (qtd. in Hermione Lee 134).

David Rampton has written that V. is a “somewhat pompous fool” and many of V.’s actions do not contradict this (70). According to Page Stegner he is “not only unreliable, but a little mad as well” (71). V.’s rash hunt after the femme fatale—a doubly passionate pursuit, first as a biographer but soon as a budding lover—takes much of his time but is, from V.’s point of view, rather ludicrous. V. wishes to “see her at all costs” because he “wants to ask her a certain question—one question only” (159). This question appears to be whether she knew that “Sebastian was one of the most remarkable writers of his time” (172). But all the time V. knew that the answer would be an affirmative one. During his second visit to Nina he asks her if her friend knows “that Sebastian Knight is dead? Madame Lecerf closed her dark velvety eyes in a silent ‘yes’” (153). As V. suggests in the next sentence, she must have learned about Sebastian’s death from the obituaries in the papers. Of course Sebastian’s death could be of interest for the papers only because he is a writer, which means that the necrologies would have focused exclusively on his literary achievements. There seems to be no need at all to remind Nina of Sebastian’s prestige as a novelist.

The novel has many such farcical episodes. It begins with a digression on a lady-diarist who collected the details of the day’s weather and

ends with the incredible story that V. travels for twenty weary hours to visit not his brother but a complete stranger.

Nabokov wrote that for the composition of his chess problems he used as a strategy “deceit, to the point of diabolism, and originality, verging upon the grotesque” (*Speak, Memory* 289). The better the spectators are diverted, the better the puppet master can plot the real story.

Despite its playfulness *Sebastian Knight* strikes the reader by its earnestness: one feels that something serious is going on which is unfathomable. This is due to the novel’s unusual richness and subdued emotionality. “Never before,” writes Brian Boyd, “had [Nabokov] packed such a complex structure into such a small space with such seeming ease” (VNRY 496). “Tightly constructed,” says Charles Nicol, “*Sebastian Knight* is more congenially designed for rereading than any novel I know” (85).

If Nina ruins Sebastian’s life, he, at least, recognizes her type and is aware of the misfortunes she brings about. How different is Clare’s lot. She is spurned in a cruel way, without any clemency. This seems completely out of Sebastian’s character, as he constantly instructs himself to pay attention to people who cannot command it: cloakroom ladies, beggars, cabmen. One can agree with Anthony Olcott that “the author, functioning behind his narrator,” fashions “a more complete story than that [of which] the narrator, and the careless reader, is aware” (107). Lucy Léon Noel, with whom Nabokov discussed the text to improve the English, called this story the “true ‘inner story’” that she sensed is concealed in the novel (215). This inner story may reflect in Nabokov’s words “things which he really felt at the time of writing” so difficult to recognize when conveyed by a “faintly absurd character” (*Sebastian Knight* 112).

Sebastian Knight raises a number of questions so compelling that they not only demand attention but also require an answer:

Why does Sebastian’s father challenge Palchin? Why should a man, happily remarried for many years and the father of two boys, fight a duel in 1913 to defend the honor of a former wife who left him in 1904 and who died in 1909?

Why do Sebastian and Clare drift apart after Sebastian’s trip to Germany in 1926? (This occurs only two years after Sebastian first met Clare and three years before he is to meet Nina Rechnoy.) And why does V. discuss their sexual relationship as a reason for this estrangement?

Why after his return from Blaubeurg is Sebastian called “mad,” even though he is perfectly able to continue “with the writing of *Lost Property*, his easiest book”?

Why doesn’t Sebastian give a proper explanation for his callous treatment of Clare and why does V. not attempt to give such an explanation?

Why did Nabokov write in *Speak, Memory* (257): “For various reasons I find it inordinately hard to speak about my other brother. That twisted quest for Sebastian Knight . . . is really nothing in comparison to the task I . . . am faced with now”?

Much of the language Nabokov used has an additional, connotative meaning due to etymological, historical, cultural, or linguistic values. Nabokov’s work is also extremely rich in literary references and allusions: to authors, their works or their characters, or to well-known passages or felicitous phrases. Nabokov seldom used such references solely to adorn the text; in most cases they carry a meaning that contributes to the ideas and perspectives he wished to intimate. For this reason, the deciphering of these references seems quintessential. References that, as Barbara Wyllie writes, look “frustratingly opaque” may become “astonishingly revelatory” (150). For Brian Boyd “the real motivation to exhaustive annotation is the expectation that there will be rich interpretive payoffs” (“*Lolita*: What We Know” 215). However, among the many volumes devoted to Nabokov’s work, the number of books that are predominantly annotative is still limited. Carl R. Proffer and Alfred Appel Jr. annotated *Lolita*, and Gennady Barabtarlo *Pnin*. This state of affairs is understandable, since Nabokov’s wide erudition and his expert knowledge of the natural world make it very difficult to trace all his references, or to do so with confidence. (It has been said that due to the rapid increase of printed books, John Milton was one of the last men of letters who could have read all the literature of the Western world. Occasionally one gets the impression that Nabokov escapes this rule.) Brian Boyd, who published the first installment of his meticulous “Annotations to *Ada*” in 1993 in *The Nabokovian* (but at that time he already had “a copious file of glosses to *Ada*” [9]), had by 2013 proceeded halfway through the 589 pages of the Vintage edition he uses.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight has several advantages: it is much shorter and less allusive than *Ada*. Moreover, it has already been annotated to some extent. The edition by The Library of America has

notes by Brian Boyd, pages 675–680; the German Rowohlt edition is annotated by Dieter E. Zimmer, pages 282–299; and the French edition of the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* has annotations by Maurice Couturier, pages 1543–1559. In addition, numerous articles and book chapters have been published on *Sebastian Knight* in which many mysterious matters are clarified.

As this book was being written, there was a time when it looked as if most of the references of interest had been covered. However, after resuming the annotation, one begins to appreciate Nabokov's contention that "a book is like a trunk tightly packed with things. At the customs an official's hand plunges perfunctorily into it. But he who seeks treasures examines every thread" (*Lectures on Literature* 89). What makes a work by Nabokov so very intriguing is not only the affluent erudition hidden in references and allusions, but perhaps even more the way in which these are woven into many complex motifs, all interlaced and dovetailed. Looking at an expensive, precious carpet might give so much pleasure that one forgets to pay attention to its design, patterns, figures, ornaments, and coloration. But if one begins to study them one does not know where to begin or when to stop. One can repeat about Nabokov's work what has been said of Milton's opus, that "almost any word . . . could be shown to be a key word: it is a work of that degree of intellectual concentration" (Carey and Fowler 436).

Annotating a work by Nabokov is never simple. An exclusive reference has to be recognized as such and has to be identified. A general one, for example, a mention of *Hamlet* is not easy to evaluate because one has to find out what in *Hamlet* might justify this reference. In such cases the annotation needs interpretational guidance. Then, the annotator may be influenced by "his individual culture" and "his personal taste" (Couturier "Annotating vs. Interpreting" 11). But it would have been a grave mistake to limit the annotations to those that endorse the reading presented in chapter 6. In order to explore the referential wealth of the novel, my main aim was to annotate the text in a way that does most justice to the wide erudition and compositional craft invested in it.

In some instances the notes in chapter 2 serve only to point out a word or phrase that should not pass unnoticed; in others an explanatory or critical note is presented. In most cases, however, the reader is directed to one of the motifs discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5. This

is because many allusions recur and it would be arbitrary to tag the wider annotation to one of them, as it is their coherence that counts. Equally important, it allows a classification of the motifs according to the overarching themes of the novel: narrative strategies in chapter 3, problems of identity in chapter 4, and death and the hereafter in chapter 5. Chapter 6 argues that part of the information gained by the annotations leads to another than the usual reading of the novel, in which Sebastian is regarded as the victim of Nina's charms. Instead of this a quite different life of Sebastian is presented, a life entirely missed by V. because of his manner always to look at signs matching the prefigured image of his half-brother that V. has in mind. The chapter also discusses how the two readings, the narrator's and the one presented in chapter 6, can coexist.

Nabokov's narrators may be foolish or unreliable, but they are not withholding information. Because of their double role, as character and as the author's agent (see Tammi, *Poetics* 278), they magnanimously offer facts that are incompatible with or even counteract the story they wish to advance. The account of Humbert, *Lolita's* protagonist, which is meant to be an apologia, provides enough damning evidence to make a prosecutor's charge utterly devastating. But such is Nabokov's rhetorical power that readers may still succumb to the narrator's seductive reading. This is true for *Lolita*, but can also be said of *Sebastian Knight*: that readers have observed the foolishness of this novel's narrator does not mean that they distance themselves from the persuasive aplomb and brio with which V. tells his story.

Annotations

2 CHAPTER

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight: See chapter 3, section 18, *The Quest for Corvo* (the relevant chapters and sections are henceforth presented by their numbers only: 3, 18).

The comments below begin with the number of the page referred to; the number after the slash indicates the line.

References are made to *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in the Vintage International edition (New York, 1992).

CHAPTER 1

3/ 1 **Sebastian**: 4, 25 St Sebastian.

3/ 1 **Knight**: Among its various meanings the *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* lists “a man devoted to the service of a lady,” and a chessman “having the power to make an L-shaped move” (645–646). The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it as “Bachelor” or “Young knight serving under another’s banner” (78, 628). 4, 11 *Jekyll and Hyde*.

3/ 20–21 **Olga Olegovna Orlova—an egg-like alliteration**: Because V. starts his biography at the very beginning, with the birth of Sebastian, the “egg-like alliteration” might be a wordplay on the literary term for such an opening: “ab ovo,” a quotation from *The Art of Poetry*, meaning “from the egg.” Here Horace discusses *The Iliad*, which Homer begins *in media res*, “into the midst of a story,” and not with the earliest incident, the birth of Helen of Troy (Horace 402). Helen of Troy was

hatched from a hyacinth-colored egg found by Leda (Graves 1: 206). With Helen of Troy the theme of the femme fatale in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is introduced. The egg-like alliteration is formed by the three Os: O-O-O, which is also the chess notation for castling on the queen side (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 5: 458). 4, 5 Chess.

Andrew Caulton mentions that “the offices of the Tsarist secret police were . . . commonly known as ‘O.O.’s.” He also refers to a Conan Doyle story about a former Russian nihilist and writes that “the nothingness of Nihilism” is suggested by “the triple ‘O’ of Olga’s name.” He then directs the reader to *Look at the Harlequins!*, “which features a KGB agent called Oleg Orlev” (124). This refers to Oleg Igorevich Orlov, “a young poet” who lived in Paris but returned to Soviet Russia where he becomes a publicist (*Look at the Harlequins!*, 216–217). In his annotating of *Sebastian Knight* Caulton sets out to show that this novel is “a narrative of espionage and totalitarian terror” (xii). He sparingly refers to the critical studies on *Sebastian Knight* because, according to Caulton, many of its readers have been “deceived” by the novel’s exterior (Caulton 2). Instead there is a plethora of references to novels and stories by Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, John Le Carré, W. Somerset Maugham, Baroness Orczy, and H. G. Wells. In order to hint at the spy story he assumes is hidden in this novel (with poor Uncle Black in the role of “arch-villain” [117]), much Procrusteanization is needed. (In the three examples presented here, three Os are reduced to two; Os are turned into 0s; and a person called a *littérateur* by Nabokov is turned into a KGB agent.) Even then Caulton has to disregard all that cannot be moulded to his end, and as such much if not all of what makes *Sebastian Knight* one of Nabokov’s most moving stories gets lost.

4/ 11 cabs: 3, 4 Cars.

4/ 30–5/ 2 that his father was killed in the duel he fought in 1913; as a matter of fact . . . could not cope: For more on the duel, see the comment on 11/ 10–16. The concurrence of the bullet wound and the cold makes it difficult to say whether Sebastian’s father died because of his involvement in a woman’s cause (without the wound the cold could have been coped with easily) or because of his illness (without the cold he would have recovered from his wound). This forebodes the uncertainty surrounding

Sebastian's death: that it is either due to a woman or to his heart condition.

5/ 24 **train**: 3, 22 Trains.

6/ 13 **her cold white fingers**: Madame Lecerf also has cold hands: 156/ 13 and 163/ 23.

7/ 1 **umbrella**: 3, 3 Canes.

7/ 2 **one day it occurred to her . . . never heart from her lips**: This suggests that Sebastian's mother told her husband her reason for divorcing him (although without revealing the name of her new lover). This contrasts with her son's behavior, who most likely did not offer Clare any explanation at all as he "stopped talking to" her (108).

7/ 5–7 **as suddenly as a raindrop starts to slide tipwards down a syringe leaf. That upward jerk of the forsaken leaf**: Cf. "the relieved leaf unbent" (*Speak, Memory* 217). See also the final lines of the poem "The Rain Has Flown": "Downward a leaf inclines its tip / and drops from its tip a pearl" (*Poems and Problems* 19). Maurice Couturier in his annotations for the Pléiade edition (1544) glosses this passage as an "[é]cho d'un passage de Du côté de chez Swann." See Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (178): "a stray drop or two, lingering in the hollow of a leaf, would run down and hang glistening from the point of it until suddenly they splashed." Cf. also "To bend as doth a slender blade of grass / Tipped with a raindrop" (William Wordsworth [*The Prelude* VIII] 705). For more drop references in *Sebastian Knight*, see the "dew-drop" (48), the "suspended raindrops" (66), the trickling "[r]ain drops" (190) and the "ghost-like snowflake" (190).

7/ 6 **syringa**: The common name of this plant is lilac. It is the first allusion to the color violet and its purple variants. 4, 6 Colors.

7/ 13–14 **(the waxed moustache of ten minutes to two)**: Cf. "yet / Stands the church clock at ten to three?" ("The Old Vicarage, Granchester" by

Rupert Brooke [72]). Nabokov's moustache resembles a "V," an unusual shape for a moustache unless waxed in a Hercule Poirot or Salvador Dali style.

7/ 15–16 **window with its fuddled fly between muslin and pane:** Cf. "a stray butterfly was fluttering its wings as it struggled between the curtain and the window-pane" (Turgenev, *Smoke* 145). The butterfly's position is like that of the novel's hero, Grigory Litvinov, who is captured by his desire for Irina and bound by his engagement to marry Tatyana.

7/ 17 **blotting-pad:** More blotting-pads can be seen on the desk of Mr. Goodman and on that of the manager of the Beaumont hotel (55, 122).

8/ 5–8 **polished panels . . . embossed leather bind:** Cf. "the embossed leather lining of the compartment walls, their polished panels" (*Speak, Memory* 141).

8/ 8–9 **a man wheeling luggage, the milky globe of a lamp with a pale moth whirling around it:** Cf. "pale moths revolved about a lone lamp" (*Speak, Memory* 146). In *Glory* the protagonist Martin is spoken to by a "porter who was pushing a luggage cart" while "around a milky white arc light swirled pale midges and one ample dark moth with hoary margins" (158).

8/ 10 **the clank of an invisible hammer testing wheels:** Cf. "the tapping of a hammer upon iron" that Anna Karenina hears at a railway station (Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* 117). Cf. also "the noise of a hammer with which a railwayman had remedied some defect on a wheel of a train" (Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* 3: 901).

8/ 12–13 **the blue plush:** Cf. "the blue upholstery" (*Speak, Memory* 141).

8/ 25 **she put on her gloves:** Clare puts on her gloves as soon as she goes outside (71), Silbermann takes off one glove (124), but Sebastian does not take off his gloves when seeing Nina (158). In his dream V. discovers what the black glove on Sebastian's left hand hides (187). 4, 31 V.'s dream.

8/ 25 **bad French:** 3, 23 Transmigration by language.

8/ 25–29 **gloves . . . sugar-coated violets:** W. W. Rowe observes that when “V. meets Clare Bishop . . . there is much ado about one of her gloves and her box of candy,” and that these “echoes of Sebastian’s mother . . . are one suggestion that her spirit . . . helps to promote [Sebastian’s] happiness with Clare” (24).

8/ 28–29 **sugar-coated violets:** Crystallized flowers of the sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) are used in sweets (Podlech 12). 4, 6 Colors.

9/ 2–3 **she roamed all over the South of France, staying for a day or two at small hot provincial towns, rarely visited by tourists:** See the comment on 18/ 7.

9/ 10 **Lehmann’s disease:** Cf. “a rather rare variety of angina pectoris, called by some doctors ‘Lehmann’s disease’” (87). According to Dr. J. D. Quin, such a condition is nonexistent (41). Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, having noticed that the commentary to the Russian translation of *Sebastian Knight* points to the homophonic likeness with Lac Léman (French for Lake Geneva), use this as a starting point for discussing the many devices Nabokov borrowed from the commedia dell’arte for the composition of this novel. 3, 5 Commedia dell’arte.

11/ 10–16 **The duel was fought in a snow-storm. . . . The whole beastly affair lasted three minutes.:** This duel is a brief description of the one Alexander Pushkin had with d’Anthès, with one striking difference (and two minor ones, as d’Anthès is not reported to have lit a cigarette after the duel and there was no snowstorm on the afternoon of January 27, 1837, although there was a fierce wind blowing and there was so much snow in St. Petersburg that the principals used a sleigh to travel to their appointed meeting). The main difference is that Sebastian’s father was wounded after “two shots were exchanged” whereas Pushkin was hit by the first shot. The first shot in the duel with Palchin was fired by Sebastian’s father, who must have been faster at aiming and firing than his adversary. Most likely, Sebastian’s father fired his pistol into the air, because, if he had wished to hit Palchin he would most likely have succeeded as he was not only a “fine soldier” (5) who achieved “military success” in the Japanese

war (6), but also a good shot as he had been engaged in a “fox-hunt” (6) and a “bear-hunt” (8).

Sebastian’s father acted according to his code of honor: the reason for an insulted gentleman, writes Nabokov, to challenge “the insulter to a duel [is] not to kill his man, but on the contrary to force him to fire at him, the insulted one. Exposing himself to the other’s forced fire would . . . [wipe] away the insult” (*Lectures on Russian Literature* 174). That Sebastian’s father fired into the air, knowing that Palchin was not trustworthy as a gentleman (he was a “fool and a cad” and a slanderer to boot [10]), is a heroic deed as he could well have expected that Palchin might try to kill him (as he did). The reason for this duel is extremely curious, as Sebastian’s father is defending the honor of his first wife against the slander by a man whom she preferred as a partner. It looks as if he is defending a sense of honor in the woman’s interest, possibly not valued by the lady herself. This serves to contrast with Sebastian’s behavior many years later, when he leaves Clare without offering her the merest apology—which of course is so puzzling that it needs to be explained (see chapter 6)—although his father’s act was not wasted on him as his feeling toward his father “changed into one of heroic worship when he learnt the reason of his father’s fatal duel” (16).

11/ 11 **frozen brook:** Cf. “Pushkin . . . drove onto the frozen river” (Vitale 273). Most descriptions of Pushkin’s last duel refer to the Commandant’s dacha to indicate the exact spot of the rencontre, which was standing on the bank of the Black River, or Chernaya Rechka in Russian—a narrow water on the Viborg Side of St. Petersburg. (For a contemporary Russian drawing of the locality, see Suasso 308.) The first part of the word *rechka* and the second half of the word *chernaya* combine into *rechnaya*, a word that ominously augurs the name of Mme. Rechnoy, the black femme fatale.

11/ 12 **fell face downwards:** Cf. “*Pouchkine était blessé . . . et resta immobile la face contre la terre.*” This is a citation from a letter by Viscount d’Archiac to Prince P. A. Vyazemsky dated February 1, 1837. D’Archiac was d’Anthès’s second, Konstantin Danzas Pushkin’s. After a duel the seconds were supposed to write a report together, but because d’Archiac could not manage to meet Danzas, he wrote his record in a letter to Vyazemsky. This letter is quoted by Frans Suasso (307). This detail is