



The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (New Directions Paperbook)

By Vladimir Nabokov

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Nabokov's first novel in English, one of his greatest and most overlooked, with a new Introduction by Michael Dirda.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Nabokov's first novel in English, was completed in Paris in 1938, first published by New Directions in 1941, reissued in 1959 to wide critical acclaim and now relaunched again, with an appreciative introduction by Pulitzer-Prize winning critic Michael Dirda.

This, the narrator tells us, is the real life of famous author Sebastian Knight, the inside story. After Knight's death, his half-brother sets out to penetrate the mystery of the famous English novelist's life, but he is impeded by the false, the distorted, the irrelevant. Yet the search proves to be a story quite as intriguing as any of Sebastian Knight's own books, as baffling, and, in the end, as uniquely rewarding. On one level, this literary detective story has pungent points to make about the role of the artist in a society basically hostile to the creative spirit. On another, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* probes the essential problem of the ambiguity of human identity: Just who was Sebastian Knight?

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The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (New Directions Paperbook) By Vladimir Nabokov Bibliography

- Rank: #164831 in Books
- Brand: Brand: New Directions
- Published on: 2008-07-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .70" w x 5.20" l, .54 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 224 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"I am very happy that you liked that little book," wrote Vladimir Nabokov to Edmund Wilson in 1941. "As I think I told you, I wrote it five years ago, in Paris, on the implement called *bidet* as a writing desk--because we lived in one room and I had to use our small bathroom as a study." The book in question was *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. And despite its humble origins, Nabokov's first novel in English showed him to be in absolute command of his adopted language.

Like many of the author's later triumphs, this one revolves around a question of identity. The late Sebastian Knight, we discover, was a transplanted Russian novelist whose taste for linguistic trickery bears a certain resemblance to Nabokov's. Now his half-brother is attempting to reconstruct the existence of this elusive figure. As he readily admits, the raw material isn't exactly the stuff of melodrama: "Sebastian's life, though far from being dull, lacked the terrific vigour of his literary style." But even the most mundane facts prove difficult for the narrator to nail down. He does, on the other hand, describe Sebastian's creative processes in exquisite and accurate detail:

His struggle with words was usually painful and this for two reasons. One was the common one with writers of his type: the bridging of the abyss lying between expression and thought; the maddening feeling that the right words, the only words are awaiting you on the opposite bank in the misty distance, and the shudderings of the still unclothed thought clamouring for them on this side of the abyss.

Sebastian's real life--or anybody's, for that matter--refuses to yield up a verbal equivalent. Still, the narrator manages a kind of fraternal fusion with his subject on the book's final page, which suggests a fluid and very Nabokovian view of identity itself. For this reason, and for the splendors of its prose, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is a necessary read. It's also safe to say that it's the very best novel ever written on a bidet.
--James Marcus

Review

Novel by Vladimir Nabokov, published in 1941. It was his first prose narrative in English. The work, which is a satire of literary biography and scholarship, purports to be the true biography of a great writer, the late and neglected Sebastian Knight; it is written by his half brother, V., in response to another biographer's belittling analysis of Sebastian. Before long, however, V.'s "biography" turns into a mystery story, as he searches for the true facts about Sebastian among Sebastian's acquaintances. Himself a mediocre writer, V. eventually has a crisis of identity and his search for the real Sebastian becomes a search for himself. -- *The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*

From the Inside Flap

"Nabokov writes prose the only way it should be written, that is, ecstatically." -- John Updike
The *Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is a perversely magical literary detective story -- subtle, intricate, leading to a tantalizing climax -- about the mysterious life of a famous writer. Many people knew things about Sebastian Knight as a distinguished novelist, but probably fewer than a dozen knew of the two love affairs that so profoundly influenced his career, the second one in such a disastrous way. After Knight's death, his half brother sets out to penetrate the enigma of his life, starting with a few scanty clues in the novelist's private papers. His search proves to be a story as intriguing as any of his subject's own novels, as baffling,

and, in the end, as uniquely rewarding.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Bingham:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. As we know that book is very important for people. The book *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (New Directions Paperback) seemed to be making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It is very advantages for you. The reserve *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (New Directions Paperback) is not only giving you much more new information but also to get your friend when you sense bored. You can spend your own personal spend time to read your reserve. Try to make relationship with all the book *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (New Directions Paperback). You never really feel lose out for everything in case you read some books.

Gloria Eller:

The reason? Because this *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (New Directions Paperback) is an unordinary book that the inside of the e-book waiting for you to snap that but latter it will jolt you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who also write the book in such awesome way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book possess such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking means. So , still want to delay having that book? If I have been you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

Edward Stevenson:

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Ian Hall:

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