



Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time by Vladimir Nabokov

Vladimir Nabokov , Gennady Barabtarlo (Editor)

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Nabokov's dream diary, published for the first time--and placed in biographical and literary context

On October 14th, 1964, Vladimir Nabokov, a lifelong insomniac, began a curious experiment. Over the next eighty days, immediately upon waking, he wrote down his dreams, following the instructions he found in *An Experiment with Time* by the British philosopher John Dunne. The purpose was to test the theory that time may go in reverse, so that, paradoxically, a later event may generate an earlier dream. The result--published here for the first time--is a fascinating diary in which Nabokov recorded sixty-four dreams (and subsequent daytime episodes) on 118 index cards, which afford a rare glimpse of the artist at his most private. More than an odd biographical footnote, the experiment grew out of Nabokov's passionate interest in the mystery of time, which influenced many of his novels, including the late masterpiece *Invitation of a Beulah*.

Insomniac Dreams, edited by leading Nabokov authority Gennady Barabtarlo, presents the text of Nabokov's dream experiment, illustrated with a selection of his original index cards, and provides rich annotations and analysis that put them in the context of his life and writings. The book also includes previously unpublished records of Nabokov's dreams from his letters and notebooks and shows important connections between his fiction and private writings on dreams and time.

Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time by Vladimir Nabokov Details

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From Reader Review *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time* by Vladimir Nabokov for online ebook

Owlseyes says

<https://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/1...>

kerrycat says

Ugh. Almost a DNF. Not what I was expecting, although with VN it isn't a good idea to have expectations. I hate to say it, but his dreams (and his wife's) were really boring. I'm glad it was short enough to push my way through, hoping there would be something better as I went on. Didn't happen.

Maria says

It was interesting to find out more about Nabokov. And some ideas about time and space were thought-provoking.

For true fans of Nabokov.

Kim Zinkowski says

MAKES ME VERY INTERESTED IN READING MUCH MORE NABOKOV.

Brent Legault says

Not quite enough Nabokov here for my taste (but a starving man will take any crumbs he's given.) And its padded out and fattened up with excerpts from the all the brilliant novels I have already read and reread. But this book is needed, no doubt, by any Nabokov nut!

Johanna says

I was most intrigued when I found out that fairly recently a book had been published on the dreams of a genius mind, my latest literary obsession, Vladimir Nabokov. I could not help wondering whether Henry James' little piece of wisdom ("Tell a dream, lose a reader.") would hold true, or whether it could be proven wrong, or whether, which I deemed most likely, this would be the exception to prove the rule.

'*Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time* by Vladimir Nabokov', is more than an edited collection of Nabokov's dream diary. The book consists of five parts. In the first part, Gennady Barabtarlo provides his

reader with an introduction into John W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time* and how it inspired Nabokov to attempt this experiment himself in 1964, following Dunne's strict instructions. With his theory of serial time, Dunne attempts to explain phenomena like precognition and déjà-vu through a detachment of time from space, of the mental from the physical. According to Dunne, the unconscious mind may travel along the timeline separate from the body, which is why one may dream of things that have not yet happened, as a kind of memory of the future.

The second part is an edited collection of the dreams that Nabokov scribbled onto his beloved index cards for the purpose of this experiment, enriched here and there with short comments, observations or translations by Barabtarlo and eventually followed by part three, a collection of even more of Nabokov's dreams, which were recorded prior to and after the experiment, in his journals, memoirs or letters to his wife. The fourth part is a similar collection of dreams, however this time they are fictional dreams. Neatly sorted into categories, Barabtarlo quotes most if not all fictional dreams to be found in Nabokov's novels and continues to elaborate on how Nabokov processed this fascination with time and dreams in his work, especially his post-experiment novels, in the fifth and last part.

To me, this book seemed like a unique hybrid between a philosophical essay, a literary study, a partial biography and fantastic conspiracy theory, uncovering mindblowing coincidents and obscure connections which might make one doubt, for a second, whether one really doubts the possibility of precognition. Most of all, this read stimulated my mind and my perception of time, however flawed and incorrect Dunne's theory may be. The workings of time will never cease to mesmerise me (and I bet I'm not alone in this) and reading *Insomniac Dreams* has been nourishment for my curious if sometimes idle brain.

I bought this book because I had been curious to get a glimpse of the most private and personal part of this genius mind, but it was Gennady Barabtarlo's loving dedication, his diligent research and compilation, as well as his own humorous writing, that entertained me most. Indeed I feel like I've gotten to know a more intimate side of Nabokov, which I could not have any other way. Especially his issues with insomnia, the thoughts that came to his mind while he was waiting for sleep to relieve (or deprive) him of his consciousness, and the not so extraordinary nature of his dreams made me realise one thing above all: This singular genius was a human just like me, troubled by nightmares and insecurities, indulging in simple pleasures, longing for affection, caring about the people dear to him. In reality, people can build their empires and pull up their walls, but in our dreams, we're all the same – vulnerable.

Kathrin says

I received a free copy via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

'*Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time* by Vladimir Nabokov' was an interesting read that fulfilled my expectations in most cases but failed other times.

Looking back at the non-fiction books I read (only 35 since 2012), they are either amazing or a fail. There seems to be no middle ground. However, this book was though to rate. It consists of five parts - an explanation of the theory (*An Experiment with Time* by John Dunne), followed by the dream journal and extracts of Nabokov's works and letters that also fit the description. Truth be told, I was curious to see how the book will be and I had high expectations.

When I first started reading it, my aim was to get to know the author better. I've got this notion for a while

now that I want to read more Russian literature. Nabokov is an author I encounter a lot on my hunt for new books but I haven't read any of his works.

I love to know more about an author before I pick up the book because I believe this to be a possibility to see more in a book than just the story. I definitely learned a lot about Nabokov - seriously, I don't want to publish a dream journal. Dreams are in my book a rather personal topic that I wouldn't want to share with everyone but it's certainly a chance to see a new side to a person. Barabtarlo did an awesome job to flesh out the rather short diary entries with explanations from Nabokov's life. He seems to be an authority when it comes to Nabokov - it certainly takes a lot of time and effort to embed Nabokov's experiment into a bigger picture.

Having said that, I expected to enjoy this read although I haven't read a single Nabokov book. This might be true for the first half of the book but then, instead of dream journal entries, extracts from Nabokov's works were used as examples. Honestly, this was tedious to read because if you don't know a book and there's a random extract there's only that much you can understand without being frustrated. This was a let-down that I feel sorry for because the book could have been great if I either had known his works or Barabtarlo had spent some time explaining the context.

I never expected to convince me to believe Dunne's theory. The first part of the book did a decent job of explaining the theory but I remain unconvinced. Dreams and their meaning is a subject I like to think about although I never tried to see my dreams as the image of something that already happened because time can be reversed. Sorry, this was a little too much but I don't mind because I never expected it to be otherwise.

I love that they included pictures of the original index cards Nabokov used to write down his dreams. In fact, I believe the whole experiment to be quite fascinating although I can't imagine writing down whatever I remember about a dream first thing in the morning. Maybe this gets easier with practice.

All in all, the book is easy to read and interesting (maybe more so if you are actually interested in the theory of Dunne's thinking), it offers a great insight into Nabokov's life (mainly in the 1960s) but I missed the big picture. I remember liking the first half but the last part was rather dull as there was just information after information and I had no clue what to do with it.

Cameron says

55 cards containing what Nabokov and his wife remembered about their dreams may seem like a very flimsy excuse to write a book, and in some ways it is, but it's always important to remember that *everything* Nabokov wrote (journal entries, letters, dreams) reads as though it was always intended for publication (in most cases it probably was). This is no exception, and even the very notion of Vladimir and Véra trying out this experiment with dreams and time, based on the writings of J.W. Dunne, has a very Nabokovian gait to it. Nabokov's wit still seeps through these cards, and the compiler Barabtarlo creatively pads out the rest with an informative introduction, and two sections where he has pulled out writings on dreams and time from Nabokov's novels and short stories (without which, Barabtarlo himself admits, the book would have been "so much leaner in substance and plot"). An interest for fans of Nabokov, but not those who want to better understand dreams and time, as there is no conclusion to the experiment (our experimenter seems to get bored and then forget about the whole thing). But then again it's hard to imagine a more Nabokovian ending.

Aveugle Vogel says

"Oxford cards"

Megan Henriksen says

I would only pick up this book if you have a great interest in Nabokov and his work or you have a great interest in the study and meaning of dreams (and preferably, both are true). I had a mild interest in both topics, and I was barely able to get through the relatively short book.

The book chronicles the notes that Nabokov took on his dream experiments based off of Dunne's work, as well as analyzed Nabokov's writing about dreams to see how they fit into dream philosophy.

I found the dream experiments interesting in premise, but mundane in practice. More interesting was the section on different types of dreams and how Nabokov's writings on dreams in his novels fit into dominating philosophies, but I am frankly not familiar enough with all of Nabokov's work to get out the required enjoyment from this portion.

Overall, I am glad that this book exists for extreme "hard literature" enthusiasts as well as dream experts, but it is one that I will not be reading again.

cypt says

Kaip ir raš? daugelis komentatori? - nelabai lygi knyga, vietomis žiauriai faina, vietomis atsibosta. Bet kaip antrinis šaltinis daugiau sužinot apie Nabokov? - į?gin?. Tie prasišvie?iantys asmeniškumai ir buvo gražiausia.

Apie k? ji - Nabokovas perskait? Dunne'o knyg? (apie j? nebuva? gird?jusi) "Experiment with Time", kur bazin? prielaida - praeities ir ateities ryšiai, tiksliau - kiek mes galima apie vien? ir kit? žinoti. Dunne'as si?lo visk? labai užrašin?ti, o ypa? - sapnus, nuolat savo užrašus skaityti, ir hipotez? tokia, kad galime susapnuoti tai, kas dar tik atsitiks, nes kažkaip (šnd turb?t sakytime, nes?moningai) tai, kas nutiks, žinome. Nabokovas ?m?si t? ir daryti ir kur? laik? (visgi tik apie pusmet? - nebaisiai ilgai) tuos užrašus pild?. Keliskart jo sapnai iš ties? atsikartojo tikrov?je.

Knygoj - pora skyri? ir apie Dunne'?, ir apie Nabokov?, tada jo sapn? korteli? perrašai, tada - ištraukos apie sapnus iš jo roman?. Man labiausiai patiko kortel?s, ta?iau buvo savotiškai žavinga ir tas ištraukas skaityti - atrodo, daugum? jo roman? skai?iau ir atsimenu, bet kažkaip vis iš naujo ta ypatinga jo proza trenkia ? galv?. Toks labiau gerb?jiškas (nesakau "fan?", atrodo kažkaip nederama prie Nabokovo, o ir šiaip jo fanai/fan?s yra too sophisticated, kad taip pasivadint?) leidinys, ir kaip toks - tikrai vertas d?mesio. Gal tokios ir turi b?t visokios moxlin?s knygos - su tinkamu kiekiu meil?s, gerb?jiškumo, kad tai persiduot? skaitant, ir kuo mažiau "i'm so smart" ?žvalg?, kurios ilgainiui tik ima kelti nuobodul?, visokius nemigos sapnus.

Siobhan says

Insomniac Dreams is an unusual book, one that focuses on dreams and Nabokov in his own words and through Gennady Barabtarlo's commentary and notes. It is the publication of Nabokov's dream diary kept as an experiment to see if later events can influence earlier dreams alongside other of his personal and published writings relating to dreams and commentary on Nabokov in relation to dreams and time. There are images of some of the original notecards Nabokov used for this dream diary and an initial explanation of the book (An Experiment with Time by the British philosopher John Dunne) which inspired the experiment.

Nabokov was testing the theory that dreams can be precognitive and Insomniac Dreams is certainly a fascinating look at how Nabokov recorded this and then how dreams feature in his novels, particularly later ones such as *Invitation of a Small Warrior* or *Invitation of a Small Warrior*. Many of the dreams written down by Nabokov do sound like they could come from his novels and Nabokov scholars and fans will likely find it very interesting to consider the consequences of this experiment in dreams and time. Despite the philosophical connections to the experiment, the book is straightforward and readable to a general reader and the discussion of rereading Nabokov in relation to time not running forwards may spark readers to want to give this a go (or to chart their own dreams, indeed).

Amy says

If you miss reading papers in grad school, this will be a friendly reminder. I enjoyed the section that included dreams from Nabokov and his wife, but other heavy sections made this book a challenging read, both in good ways and bad. Full concentration is needed for continuing clarity while reading. Some of the ideas presented are thought provoking, and an average reader will likely need a dictionary at least once. Be prepared for a scholarly academic text here, more than just dreams by Nabokov.
