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In December 1917, Vaslav Nijinsky, the most famous male dancer in the Western world, moved into a Swiss villa with his wife and three-year-old daughter and started to go insane. This diary, which he kept in four notebooks over six weeks, is the only sustained, on-the-spot account we have by a major artist of the experience of entering psychosis. Nijinsky's diary was first published in 1936, in a heavily bowdlerized version that omitted almost half of his text. The present edition, translated by Kyril FitzLyon, is the first complete version in English, and the first version in any language to include the fourth notebook, written at the very edge of psychosis. It contains Nijinsky's last lucid thoughts - on God, sex, war, and the nature of the universe, as well as on his own broken life.

The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky Details

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From Reader Review The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky for online ebook

Sharon Barrow Wilfong says

Nijinsky is a fascinating character. In the first twenty years of the 20th century he rose to become the world's greatest dancer. Then at the age of 29, he came crashing down into a world of insanity.

Diagnosed with schizophrenia, Nijinsky spent the last thirty years of his life in and out of insane asylums.

In 1919 Nijinsky kept a diary. The original version is a heavily bowdlerized publication that his wife, Romala edited. This edition by Joan Acocella is unexpurgated and quite wild.

It is not easy to read because Nijinsky rambles all over the place. His mind is obviously scrambled. But there are glimpses of his heart and his suffering and also of his history, giving hints as to what triggers in his life may have sent him over into his own mental chaos.

Ms. Acocella gives an excellent introduction that helps clarify much of the book and also gives invaluable background which will enhance the understanding and appreciation of the reader.

Jan Cornelis says

What a strange document! We meet a man who is transitioning to another world, going on about how is in god, is god or has to do what god tells him. Who speaks a lot about dead, that is terrifying him, or is not. Nijinski is speaking about money for which he doesn't care most of the times but shows dozens of reasons to have it.

On the other hand we meet a man for the senses. Loving and caring, searching for connections with temporally clear visions on how people act.

So, what I learned from this book is to look in a more open way to people. Because even when the coherence in someone's story seems to be gone and they seem to be departed to another reality, their is found beauty inside.

Melissa Crady says

Nijinsky's thoughts seem so jumbled and contradicting. I felt confused a lot by his frequent terms of "feeling" and "love". It made me feel sad as it came across to me that he didn't really know what either really meant and didn't use them in proper context or he would contradict himself by saying he loved someone but then say he didn't.

I'm quite fascinated by Nijinsky and just recently started really learning about him but one common thread seems to be that people thought he was stupid, and I found it to be quite the opposite. By the way he writes I can see how people would think that however his writing just seems like he doesn't know the correct words to properly express what he wants to say. From the footnotes on some of the pages it was obvious that he misused words or used different terms and languages. It could simply be a case of miscommunication by not

sticking to a static language.

In any case this view into his mind was a wonderful read, though it left me with more questions than answers and more curiosities that have yet to be satisfied so I shall continue my research. I wished to learn more about his relationship with Diaghilev. For someone who was in a physical relationship which affected him professionally for so long, Nijinsky seems to be mostly indifferent to it.

Eva Stachniak says

This is a heart breaking insight into the few weeks of Vaslav Nijinsky's life, just before he succumbed to a mental breakdown. His brilliance is evident, but so is his loneliness and fear. A moving testimony by one of the greatest artists of our times.

Robin says

This book has no logical reasoning whatsoever. It is deeply contradictory. Highly naive. It is repetitive. Anti-science even. It is signed, in the end, by 'God & Nijinsky'. And yet, it is absolutely beautiful.

The diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky are the diaries of a genius -perhaps the best dancer who ever lived- who increasingly suffers from psychosis, presumably schizophrenia. The book was meant to be published by Nijinsky, but it does not seem as if that stopped him from penning down every single honest thought. It reads not as parts of a book but as one long stream of consciousness. There are descriptions of his personal life, reflections on art, on philosophy, on faith, on vegetarianism but most of all: on love. Nijinsky is obviously a sensitive and empathetic soul, who constantly cries tears for the world around him. He stresses the point that he has no political preference, his only 'preference' is that people should be kind and loving to each other.

The book is written as a kind of chant of love and God. It is written as if by a child, but a brilliant and depressed child. Throughout the writing the profound sadness of Nijinsky is present all the time and it makes one want to hug the man and tell him everything will be alright.

Then for the psychosis. Nijinsky knows that people think he is sick, but he claims in the diary that he just claims to be sick. However, he describes on almost every page how God talks to him and tells him to do or don't do certain things. Not in a way that your average religious person does, but in a way that elevates him to be almost Christlike, in his experience. He does not have mere opinions on things, he has the truth, because his ideas come from God. He wants to go to bed, but does not, because God tells him not to. He wants to comfort his wife, but God tells him not to. And in the end, he almost jumps off a cliff as well as almost freezes to death laying in the snow, because God tells him to. He sees blood in the snow, of which he later realizes that it is not actually there.

Still, there also seem to be pages of clear thinking, not bothered too much by schizophrenia, where he describes things of his personal and professional life.

Putting aside all of the psychosis and the personal parts, what remains is a sort of manifesto of love. And, if nothing else, it deserves to be read for just that reason.

Karin says

Quite possibly THE most fascinating book I have ever read, and ever will read. This book is literally the diary of one of the greatest ballet legends as he takes a nose-dive into insanity. It's not just written to mimic madness; it actually is raw madness. This is definitely not a family-friendly book. It's kind of hard to read because his thought process is so random, and it's very candid and sometimes kind of gross. The diary covers the last few months of his life, during which his wife has him start seeing a psychologist, and then go to an asylum where he later dies. It's kind of a love it or hate it book.

There really isn't much of a story line, it's mostly just Nijinsky's rambling thoughts and ideas about dance, God, bodily functions, future plans to get rich, debating his sanity, etc. Buried in the randomness there are actually some pretty brilliant insights. I read it for a psychology class presentation on Schizophrenia, and pulled from the text to exemplify certain trademark thought processes in people with Schizophrenia.

I didn't finish reading it before I had to take it back, but getting immersed in it was making me feel like I was going crazy too, so I was ok with leaving the rest unread :)

Haruka says

He is simply beautiful in every way. He makes me sad and he makes me happy. He makes me think about everything and he makes me think about nothing. One of the most beautiful things one can read is a pure genuine, bare and bold person's diary. Which is precisely what this is. His personal writing describes why human beings are endlessly beautiful, and that there is nothing more impacting than purity and genuineness. Why this is not a full five stars rating is for no other reason that it simply doesn't feel like a book, or something period, to hail. It simply is what it is, and that is all there needs to be. So to me, there is not really a significant difference between five and four stars, I love books that I've rated four and five just as much, but in different ways obviously. Some books I feel like saying they are a five to me, and for some books I don't feel like it. But it has nothing to do with superiority in any kind of way just because they are a five to me over a four. Had the rating system been more complex, what I am saying would make sense. Beautiful, genuine, pure, as it should be.

Tony Gualtieri says

This extremely moving diary was written as Nijinsky struggled with symptoms of schizophrenia in the spring of 1919. It's a painfully honest book. Throughout the text Nijinsky struggles with the horrors of the First World War, his acrimonious relationship with his ex-lover Diaghilev [who had spitefully fired him from Ballets Russes after Nijinsky married a Hungarian woman on a South American tour], his revulsion at eating meat, his deteriorating marriage, and the delusions that increasingly clouded his thoughts. It's heartbreaking for the reader to feel Nijinsky's mind fragmenting even as he proclaims his love for humanity and desire to atone for past failings. At the same time, there are passages of piercing lucidity where he discusses his career, dance, art, and his feelings about life and death. A complex and unforgettable work.

Alex Diaz says

I am a biography fanatic, and seeing as Nijinsky is one of the most famous and influential dancers of all time, I figured this would be a pretty rewarding read. What I didn't anticipate was how uncomfortable I would feel while reading it. This diary captures Nijinsky's descent into madness over the course of one month, and between Nijinsky's unfortunate love of repetition and his insistence that he is God, much of it reads like a compendium of Gertrude Stein's "what-would-i-say" posts (out of context, hilarious, in context, devastating). This book represents to me the dangers of fame when dealing with one's humanity, and the further dangers of repressing one's homosexual tendencies through marriage. Either way, this book hit me in a place I didn't realize I had, and I almost wish I hadn't read it because it makes me hesitant about the road ahead, as both an artist, a gay man, and a human being. Definitely not a book for the weak of heart (or stomach).

Overall Rating: Devastating, but fascinating. A train wreck of human frailty and the cruelties of fame.

Jale says

Dansta Tanrı'nın eli diye bir şey olsaydı bunun muhatabı olacak Nijinsky'nin günlüğü. Van Gogh gibi deli olmadıysa, sadece "farklı" olduğunu anlatma çabası içindeki satırlar, aynı zamanda sanat dünyasının acımasızlığı, adaletsizliğini ve çarpık düzenini de yansıtıyor. Bir hümanist ve düşüncece anarhist olan Nijinsky'nin dünyanın anlama çabasına da tanıklık etme şansını buluyoruz.

Katriina ❁ says

[**I am full of life, and therefore I suffer**]

is a quote out of this book, but so is

[**I am no turkey with feathers of steel. I am a turkey with feathers of God**]

or, my all-time-favourite, as I spent all of my life convinced that Dostoevsky was a stick and got really enlightened:

[**Dostoevsky is no stick.**]

No, really. I find it easy to make fun of some of these lines in Nijinsky's diary, but I'm actually overwhelmed with the sheer genius of this man. Already quite early Nijinsky himself admitted that „people will say Nijinsky pretends to be mad.“. However, it is hard to pretend you're mad, and it's even harder to pretend to be mad and have people believe you. Plus, it's now a wide-known fact that Nijinsky was „mad“, a schizophrenic, and this book is quite an evidence.

They say there's a very thin line between being a genius and being a madman, and Nijinsky has crossed it.

Nijinsky has been undeniably a master of ballet; very few have been able to dance in the way Nijinsky does. Most unfortunately, I was not alive when he was, so I never got the chance to actually see him. Now, admittedly, I'm not exactly the kind of woman to go and see a ballet show every other week, but I do appreciate it and have actually been dancing ballet in the past.

I had heard of Nijinsky long before I knew he suffered from schizophrenia because as a young girl taking ballet classes, my teacher would be so happy about being able to teach some boys and would call them “my little Nijinskys”.

But there seems to be a thing with ballet and madness. There's this movie, *Black Swan* – which I've admittedly never seen – and there's Nijinsky's diary. There's the fact that I, a former ballet dancer, suffer from schizoaffective disorder too. Schizoaffective disorder is like a schizophrenia-&-bipolar-disorder crossover, so within the 7 years since my first outbreak I have suffered a lot of psychoses, delusions, grandiosity thoughts, hallucinations and the like. I'm skilled at being mentally disordered, one could nastily say, and I recognised myself a surprising lot in this book. Some of the lines sound as if you'd taken them right out of my very own psychosis-diary, which I had and have to keep from time to time. It's surprising how many parallel lines there are. I'm just throwing that in because that's one of the reasons I liked this book so much.

I read the unabridged diary, and I had been searching for an unabridged copy costing less than 88€ for a long, long while. Just after I found and purchased it a wonderful, amazing person had send me a PDF version and when I opened it it, turned out that about 40% of the book were missing.

I hopped to Wikipedia as I wondered why, and found out that his wife had been – after his death – erasing parts where Nijinsky talked about his homosexual relationships, or wrote of his wife negatively, or wrote about his experiences with „upper-class“ prostitutes etc. etc. etc. And it's such a pity that his wife erased all of this because it depicts Nijinsky's inner controversy and ambivalence so much. If you're heading straight for psychosis, thinking clear and structured isn't always a thing you necessarily do. Neither did Nijinsky.

While he surprisingly managed to – mostly – focus his thoughts on one topic he constantly, he would constantly, constantly, constantly contradict himself in everything he said. One time, he'd hate his wife, the other time he'd love her more than everything. One time he was God, one time he was God in man and one time he wasn't God, but only Nijinsky.

If you're looking for a gripping book, this is not for you and yet, this book is nowhere near boring. If you're looking for a funny read, this is not for you, and yet, there is a few funny phrases. However, they're not funny on intent, they're rather grotesquely, absurdly funny and plain sad when you think about it for a minute or two. This book has no genre; there's no action, no suspense, no character-development, no love stories, no nothing. This book is merely a depiction of a poor mind descending into madness, with all of the sadness and absurdities accompanying it. And yet, I have to rate it 5 stars.

Justin Davis says

It's unfortunate that the other version, published by the University of California Press, I believe, is not listed here (edit: it is listed here! I merely had to change editions (<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1...>)).

It is out-of-print, but secondhand copies are widely available, and it is by far superior, in my opinion, to this newer release.

The version I'm mentioning is translated and edited by Nijinsky's wife, Romola, and just seems far more

delicate, and beautiful. From what little I read of this newer release, it seemed wooden and lifeless in comparison. I hate the need to "rate" books, but my rating is for the University of California Press version, as it is the only of the two I fully read, and is by far my favorite.

A. says

Repetitive, pedantic, contradictory, ecstatic.

I'm overwhelmed with love for these simplistic rants - amazing, cyclical arrogance.

Apparently, all you have to do is chant "god", "meat", "heart", and "blood", and I am won.

Misty says

total freak. you get the feeling the term "free spirit" was coined specifically for him. i had no idea, what a creative force he was. he was a dancer in a truly golden age, when dancers were famous, and real artists. amazing life story.

Jesse says

Reads like a disorienting fusion of high Modernist stream-of-consciousness, Kafka's psychological claustrophobia and the postmodern penchant for shifting personas and unreliable narrators. It could be considered a quite impressive (if impenetrable) literary achievement if stripped of its context-- that is, a record of its author's descent into the schizophrenia from which he would never reemerge. Basically, it's several hundred pages of this type of thing:

"I am the artist who loves shapes and all kinds of beauty. Beauty is not a relative thing. Beauty is God. God is beauty with feeling. Beauty is in feeling. I love beauty because I feel it and therefore understand it. Thinking people write nonsense about beauty. Beauty cannot be discussed. Beauty cannot be criticized. I am no criticism. Criticism is an attempt to be clever. I flaunt my beauty. I feel love for beauty. I am not looking for straight noses. I like straight noses. I like my wife's nose because it has feeling."

I fully expected to get a little ways into the book and have to skim the rest, but I have to say, once I adjusted to the general ebb and flow of Nijinsky's mental associations it became a fascinating read, especially when he'll wander, almost accidentally, into musings of his dancing career and the people associated with it (Diaghilev, Nijinska, his various patrons, etc). To my surprise, I ended up reading the whole thing. Those looking for Nijinsky to provide any kind of extended commentary on his dancing or career will be disappointed, however, because he barely mentions it directly (I'd wager just several pages worth in the entire volume), and the "unexpurgated" part doesn't mean juicy sex details, but rather long digressions on things like bowel movements.

In it's own way quite beautiful, but also ultimately, and inevitably, sad.

"I loved the Ballets Russes. I gave my whole heart to it. I worked like an ox. I lived like a martyr."

