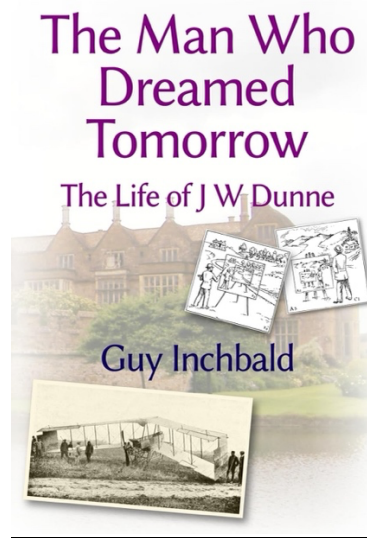


David Potter

*THE MAN WHO DREAMED TOMORROW:
THE LIFE OF J W DUNNE*
BY GUY INCHBALD



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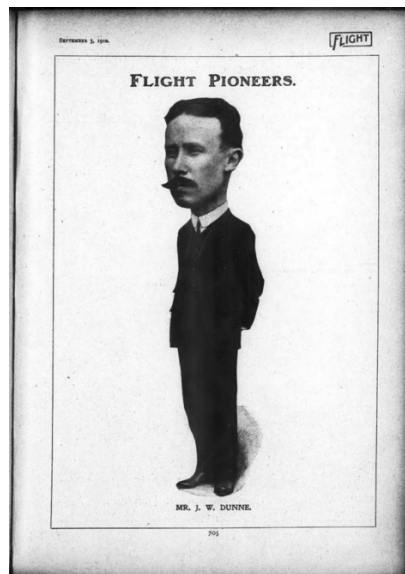
“Dinsdale was a loony, but he was a happy loony.”
– *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, Series 2,
Episode 1, “Face the Press” (1969–1974)

Introduction

By the time Nabokov was writing time fiction in Switzerland, premonitory dreams were the stuff of esotericism and the paranormal. A little earlier in the century, in Dunne’s time, premonitory dreams were still sometimes a topic of scholarly discussion. This was the intellectual climate into which John William Dunne dove headfirst, tally-hoeing all the way.

In hindsight it's easy to recognize Dunne as one of the most influential English writers of the twentieth century. The mere fact that Vladimir Nabokov tumbled happily down his rabbit hole circa 1964—sixteen years after Dunne's death and nine since his final book—is enough to prove that.¹ Nabokov read two of Dunne's books in October 1964: *An Experiment with Time* (1927) and *The Serial Universe* (1934). He started keeping his own dream diary on October 14, following Dunne's exact instructions.

Nabokov's diary was published as *Insomniac Dreams* in 2017 alongside rich and evocative analysis by Gennady Barabtarlo. Prior to that, it had only been accessible in the Berg collection at the NYPL. That's also where the 140-odd-card 'Notes for *The Texture of Time*' still resides (although it's my firm hope that'll be published at some point too). That's where Nabokov's reading notes to Dunne have ended up: four dedicated cards, and prominent mentions on at least another three that I've noticed. These have never been published.²



Flight, No. 88 (No. 36, Vol. 11), September 3, 1910, p. 705.

An Experiment with Time argues that we literally see cut-up flashes of our own futures when we fall asleep, and gives striking examples from its author's own life. It was extremely popular. For a while it seemed that as soon as a publication brought him up, letters sections were flooded with people writing in with their own examples (including philosophers like John Alexander Gunn and E. H. Carr). Books on dreams and dream interpretation were in vogue all

¹ Dunne corresponded with a lot of other important literary figures as well, including J. B. Priestley, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and John Buchan. At some point I'd like to see a full collection of these letters.

² What needs to happen to these cards, I think, is they hire someone to splice them together into something like Barthes' aphoristic *The Pleasure of The Text* (1973), but with time philosophy. There's more than ten years' worth of notes here—some reading notes, some draft material—spanning from 1957-1968. They are never going to be edited into one fluid essay, do you may as well lean into a more episodic structure from the outset.

over Europe at the turn of the century, as was spiritism in general. Dunne represents the exact midpoint between that genre and popular physics, which was more fashionable by the 1920s. This was a dream book for intellectuals as well, and it wasn't by Freud (for whom Dunne had nothing but criticisms).

Nabokov was unusually well-positioned to like what Dunne was offering, and he did. There's nothing but nice things on these cards. Sometimes he even singles out a certain passage as particularly good, like he does this one from *The Serial Universe*:

‘[D]eterminism’ is ‘non-suited’. Not only has it no case to present: *it never had a case*. Classical science involves, employs and asserts the contrary view the view of every observer as an external potential interferer with an otherwise determinate universe. We need no microscopic ‘Uncertainty Principle’ to assist us there. The determinist bogey that alleged offspring of classical science was never even conceived, and the birth certificate signed by the materialist was a fake.³

Nabokov's mother Elena had an affinity for the supernatural, and a corresponding sensitivity to it. She passed both on to her son. There's a nice bit about this in Andrew Field:

Nabokov has confessed that he is subject to what he calls the embarrassing qualms of superstition and that he can even be haunted obsessively by a dream or a coincidence. His mother, though far from alone in the Nabokov family in this respect, had these experiences, and it is not too much to say that her belief in the workings of the supernatural was one of the dominant, though not dominating, characteristics of her personality. She frequently would experience the true pre-visionary glimpse of a future event or feeling that one has been in a certain place before, the *déjà vu*, that phenomenon and term which Nabokov commiserates is so badly misunderstood and misused by journalists. One scarcely knows whether to consider such a gift or propensity as genetic or cultivated; like *auditio colorée*, it was recognized and cherished between mother and son. [...] Mother and son seem to have (or want to have) an innate ability to perceive

³ J. W. Dunne, *The Serial Universe* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 71.

things which science and reason cannot explain (**—I try to keep an open mind on these things**, says Nabokov the unnatural scientist).⁴

Nabokov reckoned he'd had a few premonitory dreams throughout his life, especially when someone close was about to die:

Nabokov experienced the *déjà vu* sensation in regard to the death of one brother and a prophetic coincidence in regard to the death of another. Shortly after the news of Sergei Vladimirovich's death in a Nazi concentration camp reached him, Nabokov had a dream about a concentration camp. A few hours before he received the cable informing him of Kirill Vladimirovich's death, Nabokov purchased a black scarf. [...] Nabokov's sister Elena Vladimirovna told me that a medium had predicted her father's death shortly before the murder.⁵

Who he was, and why should you care

J. W. Dunne the person simply hasn't been part of the historical record in any serious way up until now, because a) he was extremely private, and b) primary sources about his life have been few and far between. Inchbald struggled with this himself at first:

When I embarked on this biography, a good few years ago now, precious little was known about John William Dunne beyond his own writings and a few short essays. Despite much digging in archives and libraries, [...] I began to flounder in the vacuum of hard information. [...] I was contemplating giving up when everything changed.⁶

The turning-point came when the Science Museum in London acquired Dunne's papers in 2015, comprising more than 20,000 items including business documents, book drafts,

⁴ The commiseration Field refers to here is in Nabokov's expansive corrections to an earlier draft. His complaint is that *déjà vu* is often confused with a more premonitory experience like the ones in Dunne, and also that Andrew is confusing it too. The difference between premonitions and *déjà vu* is that one is a recognition of the past, and the other of the future.

⁵ Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), pp. 87-88.

⁶ Guy Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow: The Life of J W Dunne* (North Haven: Steelpillow via Lulu.com, 2023), p. vii.

unpublished screenplays, and personal correspondence. “Dunne had kept almost everything,” beams Inchbald: “Such a wealth poured forth from his seemingly endless boxfuls that it transformed my struggle into one of trying to keep the book short.”⁷ The struggle must have been very real indeed, since the volume that’s eventuated is a certainly on the bulky side.

Marina Grishakova, Stephen Blackwell, and Brian Boyd had all discussed Nabokov’s interest in Dunne before Barabtarlo, but nowhere near as in depth. The publication of the diary saw a brief spike in interest, so we had review-essays by Michael Wood, Andrea Pitzer, Zoran Kuzmanovich, Olga Voronina, and also me.⁸ Looking back over those, it’s obvious none of us has read much further than *An Experiment with Time*. Information about J. W. Dunne’s life was so scarce in 2017 that when some people spouting such gross inaccuracies as this:

He started his career and made his fortune as an aeronautical engineer in the early twentieth century. Speculative science became his main activity once he’d accrued enough wealth to quit the day-job.⁹

“[T]he sparseness of the public record [has] caused a great many myths to grow up around Dunne over the years,” Inchbald explains, “in desperate attempts to fill in the gaps and find something—anything—to say.”¹⁰ Having obviously fallen into this exact trap myself, I know exactly what he means.

I’d read a few more Dunnes by the time I got my hands on Inchbald’s biography, and I’d grown fond of him. It wasn’t all that hard to win *me* over, in other words; not every Nabokovian will be as easily charmed (although no serious reader will find nothing). Dunne

⁷ Ibid, p. vii.

⁸ Marina Grishakova, *The Models of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov’s Fiction: Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2012), pp. 249-271; Stephen Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel: Nabokov’s Art and the World of Science* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), pp. 160-161; Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 487-488; Michael Wood, “Counting the Butterflies” in *The New York Review of Books*. (May 10, 2017); Andrea Pitzer, “‘But Maybe?’: Immortality, Time, and Nabokov’s Dream Diary,” in *Los Angeles Review of Books* (4 December 2017); Zoran Kuzmanovich, [Review of *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time by Vladimir Nabokov edited by Gene Barabtarlo*].in *Nabokov Studies*. Volume 15 (2017); Olga Voronina, “The Outskirts of Dreamland: Gennady Barabtarlo’s *Insomniac Dreams*” in *Nabokov Online Journal*. Vol. 13 (2019).

⁹ David Potter, “Nabokov in Dreamland” in *Sydney Review of Books* (July 26, 2018). Dunne made little profit from his aeronautical work, actually, driven instead by patriotism and the thrill of invention. He was born into comfortable upper-middle circumstances like Nabokov was, and he worked for his living. He only “quit the day-job” because of poor health in 1916, at which point he spent a decade as a professional angler. One can read all about that, and Ian’s experiments with new kinds of translucent fly, in the beautifully-written *Sunshine and the Dry Fly* (1924), which appeared three years before the first time book. The way Dunne writes water is soulful and exciting, I really miss it in the time books.

¹⁰ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, p. vii.

had so many strange and varied careers over the years—soldier, aeronautical engineer, professional fly-fisherman, time theorist, children’s writer—that his biographer needs to cater to multiple readerships at once. You might think it was the specialized time philosophy that’d be the hardest slog for casual readers, but actually it’s the aeronautical section (and that comes first).

This is two books, actually, and it’s divided as such. Book I is called ‘Soldier and Aeronaut’, and Book II is called ‘Gentleman Philosopher’: ‘The Plane Years’ and ‘The Time Years’, effectively, or thereabouts. One bleeds into the other, though: there’s time stuff in the first half and plane stuff in the second. Whatever you do, you don’t want to miss out on Dunne’s childhood, or his stint as a mounted soldier during the Boer War. That section reads like the David Lean picture that never was, except here the hero is struck down by crippling exotic fevers every few minutes and has full-on ecstatic visions on the back of his horse.

Inchbald pored through boxes and boxes of uncatalogued material to put this book together: the man’s an archaeologist, and he’s restored personhood to a myth. Three-quarters of a century have passed since Dunne died, and so far Inchbald is the first and only person to try and write a book about him. This is a lot of knowledge to get down, people. Think of this as a kind of two-part ‘Domesday Book’ of all things J. W. Dunne, like Brian Boyd’s are for Nabokov. One gets the sense that much of what’s here is here because Inchbald feels an urgent duty to record what he knows for posterity. First things first, then: ‘John William Dunne’ never went by John William Dunne. His father’s name was John as well, so they called the younger John ‘Ian’ around the house to avoid mix-ups. It stuck, so I’ll use it too. Ian’s father was General John Hart Dunne K.C.B. (1835–1924), incidentally, who fought in several major nineteenth-century campaigns including Crimea; he wrote a rollicking book about his career called *From Calcutta to Peking* (1862).

Visions and fever-dreams

On the surface Ian Dunne was a fairly normal guy, but in his head he was a prophet on a mission from his God. The essential feverishness to Dunne’s life and work certainly isn’t lost on Inchbald:

His constant battles with illnesses and fevers surely arose from the diseases he caught while in South Africa. But what is curious about his fevers is the way they so often

coincided with extraordinary dreams and visions. [...] Altered and detached states of consciousness brought on by his recurrent fevers could at least in part have been responsible for keeping his adult dreams and visions going. [...] The conclusion seems natural that the correspondences with his visions were no coincidence; this chain of overwork and resultant recurrence of fever was what repeatedly drove down his mental focus and put his brain into the physical state which made it receptive to his prophetic dreams and visions.¹¹

Up until now, the only reliable information we've had about Ian's real life has been those slim details mentioned in his own books. For those who haven't read the posthumous treatise-cum-memoir *Intrusions?* (1955)—(which is most people)—perhaps the biggest bombshell is going to be Ian's ecstatic visions. Sometimes he got them in his sleep, and they gave him weird and vivid dreams. Like a real-life Nabokov character, Dunne made arrangements for this book to be published a decade after his death—(his widow jumped the gun a bit after seven; her full name and title was the Honorable Cicely Marion Violet Joan Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes). Usually it was a choir of voices calling out to him, urging him to notice certain details, but eventually they grew into recurring dreams about visitations by angels, and then by God himself. He was convinced the dreams were real, and they were telling him to write these books.

He also thought he'd found incontrovertible mathematical proof of the material existence of Heaven: it's all folded away into higher dimensions of time (“within cells interlinked within cells interlinked”, perhaps). He thought this despite barely knowing a lick of mathematics. Inchbald explains:

His mathematics remained very basic schoolkid stuff, with a veneer of advanced buzzwords. He would occasionally show his calculations to someone who would check that the maths was consistent within itself, but of course that says nothing about whether it was appropriate to anything else or not, so when he accepted their thumbs-up as endorsing his theory he was making a big mistake. [...] With respect to Serialism, he was often believed to be an expert mathematician, philosopher or physicist, and he himself had high opinions of his own abilities in the first two of these. But in fact he

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 468-469.

was almost wholly incompetent in all of them; on the slightest technical matter he relied on friendly experts to put him straight. Opinions differed widely on whether his diagrams and explanations were clear or unintelligible; the latter forming the majority view.¹²

“At some point he sought out a tutor,” says Inchbald. “Very little could be done for him.”¹³

It’s all too easy to laugh at Dunne when he’s at his haughtiest, and his near-complete ineptitude in almost every field about which he writes with complete conviction. But he had a truly brilliant imagination, and as a reader you can watch it kick in sometimes when he’s completely out of his depth on something. You’ll be just about to dismiss him completely, and then all of a sudden he’ll pull some inspired nugget of insight completely out of nowhere, and you never think about time the same way ever again. His lack of formal training as anything other than a soldier gave him an outsider’s eye on everything, and he used it to his advantage.

What’s a Serial Universe?

Relativity and quantum theory had elevated the observer to an indispensable lynchpin by Dunne wrote *The Serial Universe* (1932), and he was an early adopter. This book extrapolates a complex and hierarchical multidimensional cosmos out of the proleptical dreams of its predecessor.

He would say this, obviously, but Inchbald has a point when he says that Dunne’s multiversal serial otherworlds don’t look at all outlandish compared to where quantum theory would go next:

Quantum theory has since added more endless regresses to its portfolio of hypotheses including, according to one popular version known as the parallel world theory, cascading showers of entire parallel Universes [sic].¹⁴

At one point I asked Inchbald whether Dunne might have pre-empted Hugh Everett’s many-worlds interpretation. His response was so good it’s worth reproducing:

¹² Guy Inchbald, email correspondence, 18 December, 2022.

¹³ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, p. 372.

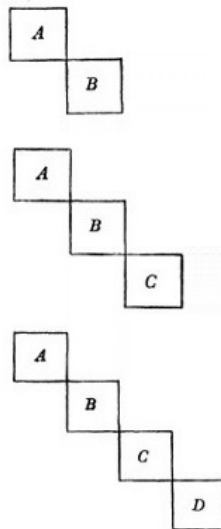
¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 379.

These many-worlds ideas, be they ancient myths and fairy tales or modern quantum wrangling, place all their worlds on the same solidly physical, if parallel, level of reality; we only perceive differences because we are stuck in one of them. Dunne's model is essentially a metaphysical plurality of levels; only the base level is physical, above that they are more like an ascending stack of purgatories or heavens.¹⁵

The serial chain of observers Dunne only touched on in *An Experiment with Time* exploded outwards into quantum otherspace, to serial time in serial worlds.

On the regresses

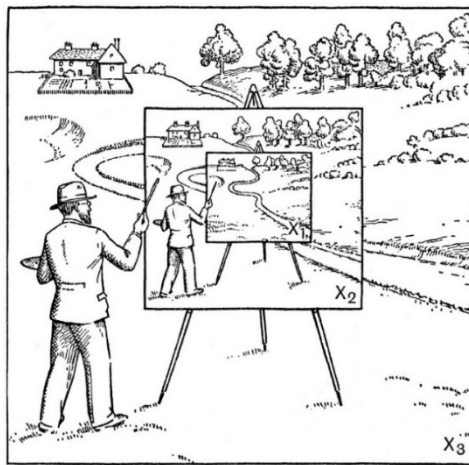
The whole serial universe thing's only possible because of an infinite regress of serial observers, the foundation of Dunne's Serialism. He produced a simple progressive tablature to help demonstrate:



J. W. Dunne, *The Serial Universe*. London: Faber & Faber, 1934, pp. 47–48.

¹⁵ Guy Inchbald, email correspondence, 26 May, 2024. The next bit of his answer was good too, if tangential. Sticking it here for the same reason: “Another related and popular scheme is cyclical time, in which some motif repeats over and over with theme and variations; some of these concern only the protagonist or situation in a limited time frame, others an entire cyclical Universe. All can give a kind of pseudo-parallelism (Physicists Archibald Wheeler and Richard Feynman once speculated on a version of this). Some wilder speculations allow the protagonist's self, or even body, to step between cycles. Often, careless authors – or their readers – muddle up which of these ideas are or are not Dunne's, attributing to him memes which are not his; Nabokov has been at pains to avoid that one!”

Nabokov copied these out exactly as pictured on a card about *The Serial Universe* dated October 1964 (the same month he started keeping the diary).¹⁶ Each square represents a discreet observable universe, each with its own auctorial observer. The job of every single one of them is to keep an eye on the one below him. A “now” becomes a kind of draping of our mind’s eye over two or three frames at once in some variation of past, present, and future. Consciousness becomes a slope of perspective across serial dimensions, which is precisely what’s depicted in Dunne’s famous painter diagram in the same book:



J. W. Dunne, *The Serial Universe*. London: Faber & Faber, 1934, p. 30.

This isn't just a map of Dunne's spacetime: it's a cross-section of its flow as well. Think of it like what we're seeing here is the same as in the tablature but from a different angle. We view the whole thing from the same level as our painter-observers, here, peering down the vertices with a straight line-of-sight into several other universes.

But there's a catch: the world you see is not the world you're in, it's the world you were *just* in. Same thing applies for your body: it belongs to another you, the you from just a moment ago, and it's *your* job to watch him so he doesn't disappear. Your real body, meanwhile, is tucked unseen behind you, in the same square of the tablature, and there's a bloke one level up watching you too. At the moment of death, our consciousness simply gets transferred into the next available version of ourselves somewhere further along the chain. I've wondered idly to myself if something like this isn't happening when reality itself appears to card-trick a pistol Van's pressed against his temple into a harmless pocket-comb at the last possible second (or

¹⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, "Notes on Various Subjects." Notecard. Box 2. Vladimir Nabokov Archive. Berg Collection. New York Public Library, New York.

just a moment after). Van describes a kind of “forking” of reality at such moments, and it happens more than once:

Van sealed the letter, found his Thunderbolt pistol in the place he had visualized, introduced one cartridge into the magazine and translated it into its chamber. Then, standing before a closet mirror, he put the automatic to his head, at the point of the pterion, and pressed the comfortably concaved trigger. Nothing happened—or perhaps everything happened, and his destiny simply forked at that instant, as it probably does sometimes at night, especially in a strange bed, at stages of great happiness or great desolation, when we happen to die in our sleep, but continue our normal existence, with no perceptible break in the faked serialization, on the following, neatly prepared morning, with a spurious past discreetly but firmly attached behind. Anyway, what he held in his right hand was no longer a pistol but a pocket comb which he passed through his hair at the temples.¹⁷

One wonders if he might not have actually died in his original universe, only to be flung instantaneously across a metaphysical plurality of levels into another universe. Everything’s pretty much the same in the new one, except in this time he didn’t shoot himself.

Dunne’s serial frames iterate at a constant rate, with a kind of world-generating pulsebeat. Collectively the spiralling frame-trains all form something like the block universe of William James’s *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). And just like in James, Dunne’s time doesn’t flow like water: it’s jerky and juddery, like analogue film projection, and “it does not recede steadily: it goes back in a series of *jumps*.”¹⁸ Each frame is only subtly different from the one before and the one after, and it’s all one long tracking shot: a trippy, multi-coloured P.O.V. of a hapless space-explorer’s multiversal traversals like Dave Bowman’s in Kubrick’s *2001* (1968), or, just as notably, in Arthur C. Clarke’s novel. That’s what happens to us when we die, says Dunne—that’s what it triggers. This is why Dunne ended up arguing death is impossible, and why his later books had names like *The New Immortality* (1938) and *Nothing Dies* (1940).

Some characters see their own chain of serial aspects at certain moments. Not all that long after Dunne’s only explicit mention name-check in *Ada* (1969)—pedantically explaining the precognitive flavor of “reverse memory”—Van writes of having “forerunners or echoes of

¹⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969) (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 445.

¹⁸ J. W. Dunne, *Nothing Dies* (1941) (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 14.

the agonizing dreams of regret when series of receding Adas faded away in silent reproach”.¹⁹ It’s a similar story when Lucette drowns much later in the book:

Approaching death, Lucette decides it would be proper to inform a series of receding Lucettes—telling them to pass it on in a trick-crystal regression—that what death amounted to was only a more complete assortment of the infinite fraction of solitude.²⁰

We don’t know that Nabokov read those later books, but I agree with Barabtarlo: he would have known their titles.²¹ There’s evidence in the Berg that Nabokov consulted the *Journal for the Society of Psychological Research* while working on *Pale Fire* (1962), which carried reviews of nearly all of Dunne’s time books.²²

Aeronautical hijinks

This particular reader enjoyed the aeronautical hijinks of Book I a great deal, although there’s certainly a lot of them. There was one particular episode that won me over: a lively retelling of the flight testing at Crystal Palace circa 1904. The whole place sounds like it was an amusement park for aeronauts back then. There was “a large launching platform over a small lake in the palace grounds”, explains Inchbald:

It comprised a pair of stout wooden rails, raised high at one end, down which a flat-bottomed boat fitted with skids would slide. Shaped with an uplifted section at the exit like a ski-jump, it flung the boat out over the shallow waters of the lake. An aeronaut would go along for the ride and paddle it back to dry land afterwards. [...] Various

¹⁹ Nabokov, *Ada*, p. 361.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

²¹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time by Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Gennady Barabtarlo (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 6-7.

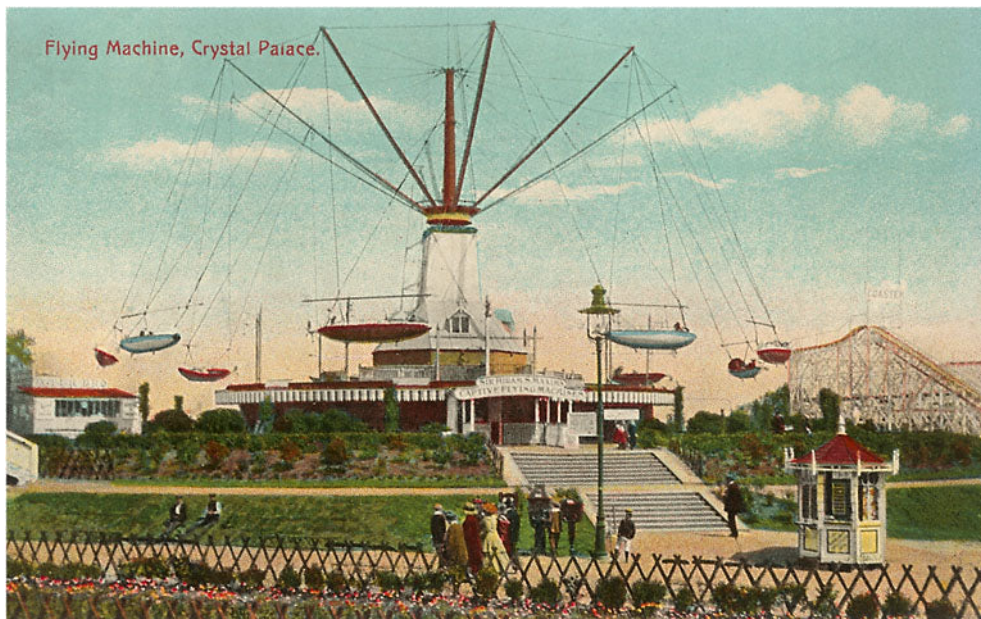
²² Nabokov, “Notes on Various Subjects.” Reviews of Dunne’s books: S. G. Soal, [Review of An Experiment with Time] in *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. 24, No. 438 (October 1927), pp. 119-123; G. N. W. Tyrell, [Review of An Experiment with Time] in *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. 28, No. 507 (July 1934), pp. 270-274; H. F. S., [Review of The Serial Universe] in *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. 29, No. 513 (March 1935), pp. 42-43; K. L., [Review of Nothing Dies] in *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. 32, No. 576-577 (June-July 1941), pp. 87-88; G. F. Dalton, [Review of Intrusions?] in *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, Vol. 38 No. 686 (December 1955), pp. 187-188.

arrangements of wings could be fitted to the boat, to see how each fared and how far it would get before hitting the water.²³

As if ski-jumping plane-boats weren't fun enough, Ian's colleague Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim (1840-1916)—inventor of the first automatic machine gun, incidentally—conceived something even more outrageous:

Maxim had built a large fairground ride in the form of a giant merry-go-round set with “flying boats.” Above these, he hoped to hang tethered aeroplanes which would fly outwards and upwards when the contraption spun. They would not be occupied but would add to the spectacle.²⁴

This sounds like a prototype for what would eventually become known as the Captive Flying Machine, an instantly recognizable fairground ride Maxim originally intended for the Earl's Court exhibition of 1904.



Postcard image of Maxim's Captive Flying Machine at Crystal Palace

[Photographer unknown]

²³ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, pp. 77-78.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 80.

Maxim built one of Dunne's latest triplane designs and tethered it to his invention. It was supposed to be unmanned, but come on: it was never going to be long before someone had a ride. Surprising absolutely no-one, that someone was Dunne:

Dunne [...] rode the contraption as it spun around, clinging to it like a monkey and enjoying himself thoroughly while it was timed at over a hundred miles an hour. He thus claimed to have been the first man ever to attain such a measured speed.²⁵

I was on a crowded train somewhere between Taree and Newcastle when I read that, and had to clap a hand over my mouth to stifle all the laughter. With this one image of Captain John William Dunne (FRAeS) clinging for dear life to a plane tethered to a giant merry-go-round, grinning like a madman, spinning at a truly ludicrous speed and *loving* it, I suddenly *got* the guy. He's a real-life episode of *Ripping Yarns* (1976-1979), or a forgotten Wodehouse story where Wooster scribbles silly little planes on the backs of napkins, builds a few, and crashes them spectacularly.

Such escapades are adorable, obviously. Reading this has made me rediscover all the most wonderful things about the England of the twentieth century. Inchbald's voice is chipper and old-fashioned, and includes much of that dry wit English people are so very good at. What's not to love about historically authentic accounts of good old-fashioned upper-middle-class eccentricity, especially when it's hand-in-hand with liberal smatterings of derring-do. Ian Dunne is the loveable dandy from a slapstick chase-caper comedy whose methods are a bit strange, but still finishes first—they're usually called things like *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* (1965) or *Those Daring Young Men in Their Jaunty Jalopies* (1969)—or at least they used to be.

Neville Shunt

The testing continued, and the methods improved. Six years later, on May 27, 1910, Ian's D.5 becomes the first plane with inherent stability to ever make a decisive flight. Inchbald opens his book with a rousing reconstruction of this landmark event in aeronautical history:

²⁵ Ibid, p. 80.

He suddenly realises that his contraption is headed straight for the hillside, looks down and fiddles frantically. It tips over into a graceful banked turn and its shape, obscured until now by your head-on view, reveals itself to be an arrowhead, with long narrow planes sweeping gracefully backwards from its apex at the bow. The box resolves into a short, boat-shaped nacelle like the body of a bird, extending back to where twin outriggers sprout from it in their turn, each bearing a whirling blade. But, unlike a bird, it has neither head nor tail. It looks, as one wag would put it, like a corner of a shop counter that has been seized by a tornado.²⁶

This is the stuff Biggles books are made of. Inchbald's planes rattle and his engines churn, and various parts come loose or unscrew or fall off in nail-biting ways at dramatically appropriate moments.

After a while you notice how often every single part of one of Inchbald's vessels receive geometrically accurate descriptions. They come thick and fast at times and, while stylistically lush, it can be a slog. What's the deal, one wonders?

Well, there's a wealth of visual material among Dunne's papers, including plans and photographs of most of these planes, but the fees the Science Museum charges for reproductions are more than this humble independent scholar can cover on his own. Inchbald's solution is to blend it all seamlessly into the prose descriptions of every plane. We saw it a little bit already in that decisive flight just now (e.g. "a short, boat-shaped nacelle like the body of a bird", "from its apex at the bow").

I was so irritated I suggested to Guy that maybe he should pull his pencil and ruler out and draw his own for the most important planes. His answer was kind of wonderful. He said he preferred the strange shapes these prose descriptions conjure in the reader's mind, which never read the same way twice. Now I love them: the sheer sport of it, the poetry of describing impossible objects, is what won me over. It started to remind me of a Monty Python sketch. What starts as an Agatha Christie-style parlor room whodunnit quickly veers out of control when you realise every character is obsessively referring everything back to train timetables with incredible attention to detail. A quick example:

Inspector All right, nobody move. I'm Inspector Davis of Scotland Yard.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

- John My word, you were here quickly, inspector.
- Inspector Yeah, I got the 8.55 Pullman Express from King's Cross and missed that bit around Hornchurch.
- Lady It's a very good train.
- Partridge
- [...]
- Tony Damn. All right, I confess I did it. I killed him for his reservation, but you won't take me alive! I'm going to throw myself under the 10.12 from Reading.
- John Don't be a fool, Tony, don't do it, the 10.12 has the new narrow traction bogies, you wouldn't stand a chance.
- Tony Exactly.²⁷

Eventually a helpful voiceover tells us we're watching a hit new play by Neville Shunt, 'It All Happened on The 11.20 from Hainault to Redhill via Horsham and Reigate, Calling at Carshalton Beeches, Malmesbury, Tooting Bec, and Croydon West'. Cut to Shunt tapping away furiously at his typewriter, surrounded by railway paraphernalia, burbling rambunctious train noises like a madman:

Shunt (*typing*) Chuff, chuff, chuffwooooooch, wooooooch! Sssssssss, sssssssss! Diddledum, diddledum, diddlealum. Toot, toot. The train now standing at platform eight, tch, tch, tch, diddledum, diddledum. Chufffff chufffffTff eeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaa Vooooommmmm.²⁸

Guy Inchbald is Neville Shunt, but with planes.

Sometimes it can get a bit abstract:

Ian drew up what he described as a "vortex vessel," a bizarre form of ship propulsion which appears at first sight to work backwards. A propeller drove water forward up an internal duct, then at the bow the water was turned to squirt backwards down the outside

²⁷ Monty Python, *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Complete and Annotated...All The Bits*. Edited by Luke Dempsey (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2012), pp. 447-448.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

of the hull, only to be drawn back in by stern intakes and turned once again to flow forwards through the propeller, creating a circling vortex of water. The idea was that the rearward flow would entrain more of the surrounding water to create a net backwards flow, and hence an overall forward thrust.²⁹

There might be a helpful table of the major aircraft in the appendices, but that's only words as well. If they're anything like me, the somewhat-bamboozled non-specialist reader will spend the greater part of Book I swatting all the partially-hallucinated Gilliam-esque flying-machines buzzing around you like you're the Empire State Building. These are all the planes you're only halfway able to picture from the main text: D.9's, D.10's, D.11's—what did that one look like again? What page was that on? And even if you *do* find your way back to whichever description you're looking for, oh right, those are all abstract, and now all the Verne-Gilliam storybook airships are spiralling even faster, and you just kind of give up.

The intensity of the thing is strangely appropriate to the subject. Ian lived his life at a furious pace: dogged, dizzy, brilliant, and sometimes a little bit dumb. The ideas came so quickly when he wrote *An Experiment with Time*, he gave himself RSI trying to keep up:

His Blick typewriter had a print wheel with all the characters arrayed around it, rather than the usual system of a separate, slim bar for each key with just a couple of characters apiece, and the impact needed to drive the solidly-made wheel jarred up his arms noticeably with each strike. The heavy pounding he had given it in drafting and re-drafting his time book [...] caused permanent nerve damage.³⁰

The reverse-image we get here is a Blakean J. W. Dunne, perched like Giambologna's colossus at his comically under-sized typewriter (a Blick), model planes hanging from the ceiling, thundering away like a man possessed, making plane noises like a crazy person as he drafts and redrafts a new fabric for the known universe...

Dunne (typing) Whirr, whirr, whirrwhoooooosh, whooooosh! Neeeeaaaaaw, neeeeeaaaaaw! Zzzzzzzzt, zzzzzzzzt, zzzzzzzzt. Brrap, brrap. Up and

²⁹ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 344.

away, old chap—let’s see if she’ll take to the skies. Tchowww, tchowww,
zzzzzzzzt, zzzzzzzzzt. Whirrrrrrrroooooofffffaaaaa SWOOSHHHHHHH!

And the crashes... they’re spectacular. It’s amazing he lived. And Ian was a sickly man, too. At first his doctor said he couldn’t fly at all, and he ignored it. Then they said, okay fine, but only fly your planes in a straight line. He ignored that too.

As a consequence, Dunne would never be allowed to obtain a full pilot’s certificate, despite accumulating many hours in test flying and interpreting the prescribed “straight line” with a degree of liberalism equalled only by the non-Euclidean geometer.³¹

At one point he decided to test out how many lead weights he’d have to put in the back of a D.5 until it lost its natural stability and crashed. Guess what happened...

He discovered the limit on 12 August, while flying fifty or so feet up (estimates differ). The machine stalled and “pancaked” to earth, as he put it, “bursting like a shell all around me.” Astonishingly, he walked from the wreck unhurt.³²

It’s not like it only happened once, either. Ian crashed planes so much that at one point Inchbald notes it was “becoming a recurring theme”:

Dunne would continue to crash them at the syndicate’s expense [...], sometimes merely damaging them and sometimes writing them off completely, until he had worked his way through some three aeroplanes in at least four serious crashes. [...] Eventually the last of the wrecks would vanish into the fog of the looming war.³³

There’s a muted poignancy to the fact that every forty pages or so in the first book, at least one professional acquaintance of Dunne’s takes a plane out for testing and never comes back. These men are highly professional, so they always keep calm and carry on. With a clear crisis brewing in Europe which would eventually turn into WWI, they didn’t do much stopping

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 162-163.

³² *Ibid*, p. 194.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 212.

to clear their emotional wreckage. Being a test pilot was a dangerous job in the early twentieth century, and the people who did this were objectively brave: mad, too, but brave. Echoes of Evelyn Waugh and W. Somerset Maugham, here...

Flummery

As far back as his earliest known experiments with small “cane, paper, and elastic” models, Ian did things in whatever order his ideas came to him. He liked to test and tinker on the fly. So the diagrams and algebra of his time books don’t make a lot of sense, or at least not conventional sense. They’re more like working notes to himself, snap-shotted cross-sections of larger structures in imaginary time.

While his underlying ideas are very often elegant and inspired, his expansive proofs and labyrinthine diagrams are exactly the opposite. He also has a few anxious tics in his writing:

[W]henver he tried to convince the reader of an important argument, his natural flow and lyricism fell away and what remained was an impenetrable word salad. The reader who needed no elaboration could happily skip over it, but for others it made his rational explanations more and more obscure and unfathomable with every twist and turn intended to clarify and reinforce.³⁴

Of course what resulted was chapters and chapters of virtually impenetrable pseudo-math, pseudo-science, pseudo-*everything*, really, where all a bewildered reader can really do is shake their head and watch him explain things to oblivion. This is the shadow side of the parts of Dunne that usually get excerpted in things: the beautifully-written poetry of the mind. Van bemoans precisely this dichotomy of popular science books in *Ada*:

There is an awful moment in popular books on cosmic theories (that breezily begin with plain straightforward chatty paragraphs) when there suddenly start to sprout mathematical formulas, which immediately blind one’s brain.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid, p. 23.

³⁵ Nabokov, *Ada*, p. 161.

One wonders if Nabokov might not have had Dunne in mind, here, because he's nailed it.

Ian is constantly talking about the "man-in-the-street" in his time books, so much so that Nabokov made a note about it. "It is never entirely safe to laugh at the metaphysics of the 'man-in-the-street'", he says at one point: "Moreover, the man-in-the-street is, all said and done. *Homo sapiens*—and the original discoverer of Time."³⁶ What he doesn't say is that he's so interested in what the man-in-the-street thinks because he *is* one. At the time he was taken at face value, though, as the genius multi-hyphenate polymath he appeared to be.

Even Ian's critics tended to give him too much credit. Sir Frederick Lanchester, a fellow of the Royal Society, described Dunne's work as "flummery"—(there's a new favourite word)—and accused him of being a "mountebank". Even he gives Dunne more credit than is due mathematically and scientifically. "The charge of deceiving mountebank is [...] obviously misplaced" says Inchbald:

Dunne's sincerity cannot be doubted. One might rather suggest that Lanchester could not believe in such depths of innocent blindness in his old colleague, to his own mathematical ignorance. Instead, he assumed a sufficient degree of understanding on Dunne's part, where it was not in fact present.³⁷

He's right. It hardly mattered that Dunne barely knew anything about that which he spoke. He wrote with the passion of a prophet, with the absolute conviction one only finds in the depths of innocent blindness. He became a kind of 'Emanuel Swedenborg' to the twentieth century literati, guiding you through a metaphysical plurality of levels.

H. G. Wells

Inchbald's reconstruction of the five-decade friendship between Ian Dunne and H. G. Wells is first-rate stuff. Drawing on a mountain of archival material from the Dunne papers in London, this is a detailed and emotionally nuanced account of a deep creative dialogue between two major influences on Nabokov's work: one from his maturity and one from his youth.

³⁶ J. W. Dunne, *An Experiment with Time*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 130.

³⁷ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, p. 385.

Nabokov's father Vladimir Dmitrievich (1870-1922) was friendly with Wells for a while, too, over the course of their respective visits to each other's countries between about 1914 and 1920—and this despite their inherent disagreements over Bolshevism.³⁸ Nabokov met Wells on the first of these when he was fourteen, and recounts their dinner at the Nabokov's house in Saint Petersburg in *Strong Opinions* (1973):

H. G. Wells, a great artist, was my favorite writer when I was a boy. [...] His sociological cogitations can be safely ignored, of course, but his romances and fantasias are superb. There was an awful moment at dinner in our St. Petersburg house one night, when Zinaida Vengerov, his translator, informed Wells, with a toss of her head: "You know, my favorite work of yours is *The Lost World*." "She means the war the Martians lost," said my father quickly.³⁹

He must have made quite an impression on young Vladimir; Boyd notes that he "read avidly the Wells books in his father's library" that winter.⁴⁰

And there's a famous episode in Boyd's biography where Nabokov has a run-in with Wells's son, George. They were both students at Trinity College, Cambridge, and it didn't take the boys long to argue about their fathers' politics. Boyd found this in a letter from Nabokov to his mother dated November 8, 1920, which more or less sums it up:

According to young Wells everything is splendid, and if Ivan Ivanych can't obtain pineapple, it is solely the fault of the blockade... [...]

"On the whole, ye know, it's not bad at all. The workmen are really happy. It was most pathetic to see their children—cheerful little chaps—romping in the school-yards." And so on, and so on.

Kalashnikov and I simply lost our tempers. We went as far as calling all socialists scoundrels. [...]

³⁸ See also Zoran Kuzmanovich, "'The Wellsian Twist' in Nabokov's 'Terra Incognita,'" in *H. G. Wells and All Things Russian*, ed. Galya Diment (London: Anthem Press, 2019), pp. 51–78; Galya Diment, 'Appendix 1: V. D. Nabokov on Visiting H. G. Wells in England in 1916 (From *Iz voiuushchei Anglii*, 41–51)' in *H. G. Wells and All Things Russian*, ed. Galya Diment (London: Anthem Press, 2019), pp. 175–179; and Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (1966) (London: David Campbell, 1999), pp. 198–199.

³⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (1973), (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 103–104.

⁴⁰ Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 178.

...I told him [Wells]: “But so many have been killed, so many souls crippled, oppressed.” ...And the Fabian’s son replied: “And the Cossacks? And the Kishinev pogroms?” Blockhead.⁴¹

It doesn’t sound like they were friends. None of this stopped Nabokov from praising Wells senior as a boyhood favourite. Nabokov had other literary favourite whose politics annoyed him at various points, like when Aleksandr Blok wrote *The Twelve* extolling the mythopoetic magic of the October Revolution. Nabokov didn’t agree, but he still loved Blok. The same was obviously true for Wells.

Wells befriended Ian Dunne much earlier than the Nabokovs, at the turn-of-the-century in a sleepy English village called Sandgate. They met in December of 1901 when Ian was stationed as part of a training company on the outskirts of a town called Sandgate, where Wells was living at the time. The exact details of their first meeting aren’t known, unfortunately. “The habit of the upper classes in those days was to hold private social functions at the drop of a hat,” says Inchbald:

[They] would have been embroiled in the same social circuit that Christmas season. Their meeting would have been almost inevitable, and their common interests in Time and aeronautics would soon have come out in casual conversation.⁴²

Wells became Ian Dunne’s primary intellectual foil for a good while at the turn of the century, much as Wilson was for Nabokov in their earlier days. Ian was only just starting to experiment with small paper spinners, and it didn’t take long for Wells to invite him around to test them in his massive garden. Dunne seems to have been keenly observed by his author-friend, eventually providing much inspiration for the character of Captain Douglas in *Bealby* (1915):

In the darkest secrecy he used to make little models of cane and paper and elastic in the hope that somehow he would find out something about flying. Flying—that dream! He used to go off by himself to lonely places and climb up as high as he could and send these things fluttering earthward. He used to moon over them and muse about them. If

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 178.

⁴² Guy Inchbald, email correspondence, 12 December, 2024.

anyone came upon him suddenly while he was doing these things, he would sit on his model, or pretend it didn't belong to him or clap it into his pocket, whichever was most convenient, and assume the vacuous expression of a well-bred gentleman at leisure.⁴³

Wells was quite vocal in his support of Dunne's time theories in the early days, and wrote a wonderful review of *An Experiment with Time*. The support cooled somewhat as Ian's work took on more and more religious aspects. Wells was an atheist, and although he softened into an agnostic later in life, Ian wasn't keen to cross him about it. He kept almost all mentions of God and faith out of his earlier books, at least insofar as they factored into serialism. The extent of Ian's ecstatic visions, and God's role in them, only came to light much later when *Intrusions?* was published in 1955. At that point both of them were dead.

That only barely scratches the surface. The number of times Wells and Dunne namecheck one another in their work is so high it's surprising so little has been made of their friendship so far. Dunne's just kind of written-off in Michael Sherborne's *H. G. Wells: Another Kind of Life* (2010) as little more than an "aeronautical advisor."⁴⁴ That's kind of like calling Nabokov Edmund Wilson's "Russian-language advisor" ...

Conclusion

I have smaller methodological quibbles with certain aspects of Guy's approach. The Dunne papers aren't fully catalogued yet, so precise referencing isn't always possible. Guy's bibliography is incredible, of course, but I would have liked to have seen more on-the-spot page numbers for all the other sources.

Little niggles pale in comparison to how incredibly thorough, professional, well-researched, and well-presented the book is. *Of course* it's a phonebook, and *of course* it's rough around the edges: Inchbald did this alone, without a publisher, faculty, or editor, self-funded and self-published, sustained only by the drive and content of his own heart. He might be independent, but Inchbald is no amateur. His list of publications to date is varied and impressive, and a decent handful is peer-reviewed. He's written on mathematics and geometry, aeronautical history, and technology, has published his own fiction and children's books, and a

⁴³ H. G. Wells, *Bealby* (London: Methuen & Co., 1915), pp. 204-206.

⁴⁴ Michael Sherborne, *H. G. Wells: Another Kind of Life* (London: Peter Owen, 2010), p. 147, 182, 224. Sherborne reckons Dunne first advised Wells on the book *Anticipations* (1901), but that had already come out by the time these two met.

really solid article for *Mythlore* about Dunne's influence on C. S. Lewis.⁴⁵ In his younger days, Inchbald did a degree in Architecture and Philosophy at Churchill College, Cambridge where—believe it or not—he was tutored by H. G. Wells' grandson, and George's nephew, Martin Wells (whose true passion was cephalopods).⁴⁶

When Inchbald graciously shared an advance draft with me in late 2022, the first place I turned was the bibliography. I immediately started collecting my own digital copies of things that looked most interesting: newspaper articles, book reviews, newsletters, magazines, novels, short stories, essays, book chapters, much of it from the period and hard to pin down. This is easily the most detailed bibliography ever assembled about Dunne without even breaking a sweat. Each section is extensive in its own right: General, Military and Political, Aeronautics, Fishing, Serialism, and Serialism (Literary). The division between those last two is interesting, especially since Nabokov appears in the former rather than the later, in the form of *Insomniac Dreams* (2017), as a study and not a story. Nabokov appears alongside Jung, Schrödinger, Eddington, and Bergson, here, as a serious non-fictional scholar of time: good choice. If I had been building these myself, I would have slipped *Ada* into the literary section. (Although if *I'd* been doing it, that's *all* it would have had in there).

The book itself I read gradually over the course of about a year. It became a constant and reliable friend during long transits by train and air. There's some strange English alchemy to this book's ability to shrink time into nothing on cramped Spirit Airways flights. You enter a totally different world where time and space don't work like they used to, and there's this one old dude who won't stop over-explaining things at his chalkboard. It's the exact mid-point between Wonderland and math class.

Over the course of the last two years or so, I've bugged Guy incessantly with highly-specific questions about aspects of Dunne's life or work not covered in the book (extensive though it is). In every instance, he answered in great detail and with incredible nuance (some of which I've included here). His insights into Dunne's interior life are profound; spiritual, even. Check out this general summing-up of Ian's character towards the end:

⁴⁵ Guy Inchbald, "The Last Serialist: C.S. Lewis and J.W. Dunne" in *Mythlore*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Spring-Summer 2019), pp. 75-88. Inchbald also runs a website devoted to Dunne, which is how I first stumbled upon him and learned of his (then-unpublished) book. It's a wealth of information too, and there's lots of extra detail that had to be shrunk down for the book. Find it here: <https://steelpillow.com/dunne/>.

⁴⁶ His full name was Martin John Wells (1928-2009), son of George's brother Frank. See Alan Findlay and John Messenger, "Obituary: Martin Wells" in *The Guardian* (25 February, 2009).

His intellect was driven by deep passions and obsessions; his cultural beliefs would lead him into complexities and contradictions, under the weight of which his genius was prone to founder in ambivalence [...], in the jostling presence of both a coldly analytical reason alongside an eloquent and lyrical poetry of soul. It is perhaps most evident in his writing style, be it on trout fishing or immortality. One minute he is drawing the reader in with beautifully painted vignettes, the next he is hitting you with dry mathematical formulae. He suggested mischievously [...] that it stemmed from his mix of English and Irish blood. Perhaps this sharper than usual divide between logic and passion had, rather, been whetted by the abrasive stones of incapacity and parental refusals during his formative years.⁴⁷

Guy Inchbald seems to just *get* Ian Dunne. Someone's been visiting someone else's dreams, I think. It's captivating, this unusual synergy between biographer and subject, and there are points where the cross-over seems almost spiritual. Inchbald wades into those strange depths of literary mysticism that English writers feel so at home in: A. E. Waite, Dion Fortune, F. W. Leadbeater, and Dunne himself. Here's an example:

Sometimes he was acutely aware of, and tormented by [...] contradictions, as in his lifelong struggle with his God where the passionate poet in him was a believer but the rational persona was not. It is hard not to see this quest more as a search for the whole person who was himself, than for his God.⁴⁸

This reminds me of something Nabokov says about Fyodor in *The Gift* (1938):

Shy and exacting, living always uphill, spending all his strength in pursuit of the innumerable beings that flashed inside him, as if at dawn in a mythological grove, he could no longer force himself to mix with people either for money or for pleasure, and therefore he was poor and solitary.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, p. 466.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁴⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (1938) (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 81.

With as deft a touch as ever, Zoran Kuzmanovich describes this as “the narrator as chthonic deity bursting or about to burst with figurative life forms and literal blood.”⁵⁰

You could say that Ian Dunne’s “search for the whole person who was himself” began properly at the age of six, when he suffered a major and debilitating childhood accident:

He does not say exactly what happened but only that it was a very bad accident which left him bedridden for the next three years and hobbling about on crutches for another two. For a long time he was not even able to sit up and play with his toys, never mind indulging in other typical childhood activities. [...] There must have been a certain lack of sympathy and understanding in the household surrounding the injured child, for he writes of a deep sense of inferiority engendered by his inability to act normally, and how nobody seemed to want to do anything to alleviate his feelings, even assuming they stopped to think about them. Perhaps they were all simply out of their depth and didn’t know what to do [...].⁵¹

Inchbald reckons this is when the seeds of what eventually grew into Serialism proper were sown. Forced as he was to turn his attentions inward and adopt a life of solitary contemplation at such an unusually young age, these long, lonely years are probably what made Dunne *Dunne*. Inchbald has thoughts:

[It is] likely that those long years caused the growing child’s brain to develop in unusual ways, much as it must have that of the current Dalai Lama, trained in long hours of meditation from the age of four. There is a long and ancient history of seers and prophets coming from the physical and mental wrecks of society. [...] The main difference is that his gift for meditative states was built up carefully by expert lamas, not left to run wild by ignorant nurses.⁵²

The comparison is apt: he did become a kind of lama, however wild and unschooled. Necessity forced young Ian into finding solace wherever he could, even in an idea like a multiplicity of selves watching out for him across serial spacetime. Ian Dunne’s childhood was

⁵⁰ Zoran Kuzmanovich, “‘Just as it was, or a little more perfect’: Notes on Nabokov’s Sources,” *Nabokov Studies*. Vol. 7 (2002/2003), p. 25.

⁵¹ Inchbald, *The Man Who Dreamed Tomorrow*, p. 13.

⁵² Guy Inchbald, email correspondence, 24 November, 2022.

already a more complete assortment of the infinite fractions of solitude than most things, let alone death. (Eat your heart out, Lucette...). What sad, weird comfort it must have been for such a small boy: searching for the whole person that was himself, flashing with innumerable beings, bursting with the figurative life forms and literal blood: an infinity of other little Ians in nested frames of observation, each one its own full universe where everyone is seen, and nobody is lonely...

When important knowledge only exists in self-published titles like this one, long-term survival isn't guaranteed. These books tend to fall completely out of availability without warning. Sometimes even interlibrary loans teams can't help you (although they *will* if a fair enough number of us ask our libraries to buy copies). You only really have a narrow window to grab your own copy of a book like this one, and if you're at all interested in Nabokov and time, I would if I were you. The greatest compliment I can pay Guy as a scholar is that I'm far from finished with his book. My copy is well-thumbed now and brimming with notes. I couldn't possibly mention everything here. This is monumental work.

There needs to be a second edition, and a decent publisher should help. If nothing else, someone should help cover the reproduction costs for the images Inchbald would like to use. Keep the best of the diagrammatic poetry, but there needs to be pictures next time. Give us page-numbers whenever possible. A more detailed cast-of-characters like a glossary, too, for those of us who get our Baden-Powells mixed up with our Twisleton-Wykeham-Fienneses. And I'd love a book of Ian's letters. Let's keep Guy busy.

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