



## La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams

By Georges Perec

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#### The beguiling, never-before-translated dream diary of Georges Perec

In *La Boutique Obscure* Perec once again revolutionized literary form, creating the world's first "nocturnal autobiography." From 1968 until 1972—the period when he wrote his most well-known works—the beloved French stylist recorded his dreams. But as you might expect, his approach was far from orthodox.

Avoiding the hazy psychoanalysis of most dream journals, he challenged himself to translate his visions and subconscious churning directly into prose. In laying down the nonsensical leaps of the imagination, he finds new ways to express the texture and ambiguity of dreams—those qualities that prove so elusive.

Beyond capturing a universal experience for the first time and being a fine document of literary invention, *La Boutique Obscure* contains the seeds of some of Perec's most famous books. It is also an intimate portrait of one of the great innovators of modern literature.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams By Georges Perec Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“If you let it, the bundled text of dreams provides insight into [Perec's] most influential work ... Daniel Levin Becker rises and meets the challenge of honoring Perec's intuition.”

—*Library Journal* (editor's pick)

“*La Boutique Obscure* ... is a work of considerable breadth and variety, and much of it is good fun, too. Any new bit of Pereciana is welcome, and fans will certainly appreciate and enjoy *La Boutique Obscure*.” —*The Complete Review*

“The book captivates...occasionally Perec's dreaming mind alights on an image that condenses the pathos of an entire life.” —*The Rumpus*

### About the Author

**GEORGES PEREC** (1936-1982) was a French novelist, filmmaker, documentary maker and essayist. In death he remains a member of Oulipo, the workshop of potential literature. He is most famous for the novels *Life: A User's Manual* and *A Void*.

Translator **DANIEL LEVIN BECKER** (b. 1984) is the youngest member of Oulipo, and only the second American to ever be so honored. He is a writer, translator and music critic, and reviews editor of *The Believer*. He is the author *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (Harvard 2012).

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### Preface

Everyone has dreams. Some remember theirs, far fewer recount them, and very few write them down. Why write them down, anyway, knowing you will only sell them out (and no doubt sell yourself out in the process)?

I thought I was recording the dreams I was having; I have realized that it was not long before I began having dreams only in order to write them.

These dreams—overdreamed, overworked, overwritten—what could I then expect of them, if not to make them into texts, a bundle of texts left as an offering at the gates of that “royal road” I still must travel with my eyes open?

Insofar as I have sought some degree of homogeneity in the transcription and then the composition of these dreams, it seems worth giving a few specifications on their typography and formatting:

—a paragraph break corresponds to a change in time, place, feeling, mood, etc., felt as such within the dream;

—the use of italics, which is rare, indicates a particularly striking element of the dream;

—the greater or lesser size of the gap between paragraphs is meant to correspond to the greater or lesser importance of passages that were forgotten or indecipherable upon waking;

—the sign // indicates an intentional omission.

No. 1

May 1968

*The height gauge*

The height gauge (the name escapes me: metronome, perch) where must stay ad. lib. for several hours. Naturally. The armoire (the two hiding places). The rehearsal. Humiliation. ?. Arbitrary power.

A scene with several people. There is a height gauge in the corner. I know I am at risk of having to spend several hours under it; it's an act of bullying rather than real torture, but extremely uncomfortable, because there is nothing holding the top of the gauge and, after a while under it, one might shrink.

Naturally, I am dreaming and I know that I am dreaming, naturally, that I am in a prison camp. It's not really a prison camp, of course, but an image of a prison camp, a dream of a prison camp, a prison-camp metaphor, a prison camp I know only as a familiar image, as though I were ceaselessly dreaming the same dream, as though I never dreamed of anything else, as though I never did anything but dream of this prison camp.

It's clear that the threat of the gauge is enough, at first, to concentrate in itself all the terror of the camp. And then it seems it's not so bad. In any case, I escape the threat; it doesn't come to pass. But it is precisely my avoidance of this threat that most clearly proves the essence of the camp: the only thing that saves me is the indifference of the torturer, his liberty to do or not to do; I am entirely at the mercy of his arbitrary power (in exactly the same way as I am at the mercy of this dream: I know it is only a dream, but I cannot escape it).

The second sequence modifies these themes slightly. Two characters (one is without a doubt myself) open an armoire in which two hiding spots have been forged, crammed with deportees' valuables. By "valuables"

I mean any objects that could increase the safety and chances of survival of their owner, be they bare necessities or objects with some exchange value. The first hiding spot contains woolens, countless woolens, old and moth-eaten and drab. The second hole, which contains money, is made of a rocker device: one of the armoire's shelves is hollow inside and its cover lifts up like that of a school desk. But this little stash seems unsound, and I am just activating the mechanism that opens it to take the money out when someone enters. An officer. In an instant we understand that all of this is useless anyway. It also becomes clear that dying and leaving this room are one and the same.

The third sequence could surely, had I not forgotten it completely, have supplied a name for the camp: Treblinka, or Terezienbourg, or Katowice. The performance might have been the *Terezienbourg Requiem* (*Les Temps modernes* 196., no., pp. . . .- . . .). The moral of this faded episode seems to invoke older dreams: we can save ourselves (sometimes) by playing. . . .

No. 2

November 1968

*Tiles*

With a laugh that can be described only as "sardonic," she began to make passes at a stranger, in my presence. I said nothing. She kept it up, so I eventually left the room.

I am in my room with A. and a casual acquaintance, whom I am teaching to play Go. He seems to understand the game, until I realize he thinks he is learning to play bridge. The game actually consists of distributing letter tiles (more like a kind of lotto than a kind of Scrabble).

No. 3

November 1968

*Itinerary*

: known secret maze, doors of chests (round, armored), hallways, very long trek toward the encounter

and then the same path now known to all.

No. 4

December 1968

*Illusion*

I am dreaming

She is beside me

I tell myself I'm dreaming

But the pressure of her hand against mine feels too strong

I wake up

She really is beside me

Delirious joy

I turn on the lights

Light bursts forth for a hundredth of a second then goes out

(a rattling lamp)

I embrace her

(I wake up: I am alone)

No. 5

December 1968

*The dentist*

At the end of a maze of covered walkways, a bit like in a souk, I arrive at a dentist's office.

The dentist is out but her son, a young boy, is there. He asks me to come back later, then changes his mind and tells me his mother will be back any moment.

I leave. I run into a tiny woman, pretty and cheerful. It's the dentist. She leads me to the waiting room. I tell her I don't have time. She opens my mouth very wide and bursts into tears as she tells me that all my teeth are rotten but that it's not worth treating them.

My mouth, open wide, is immense. I have an almost palpable sensation of total rot.

My mouth is so large, and the dentist so small, that I suspect she is going to put her whole head in my mouth.

Later, I run through the shopping mall. I buy a three burner gas stove that costs 26,000 francs and a 103-liter refrigerator.

No. 6

January 1969

*Farewell*

One day, I will tell her I am leaving her. She will call her daughter nearly immediately to say she is not going to Dampierre.

Over the course of the telephone conversation, her pretty face will fall apart.

No. 7

January 1969

*On my old days*

Despite your certainty that you are still young, you must not be so young anymore, since two of your dearest friends are already dead and a third is dying. . .

It was like those Flaubert letters: "We have buried Jules. . ." (or is it Edmond?).

Who were those two dead friends? Wasn't one of them Claude? Régis?

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Patrick Taylor:**

This La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams book is simply not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book is usually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper you read a lot of information you will get. This particular La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams without we comprehend teach the one who examining it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't always be worry La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams can bring if you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams having excellent arrangement in word and also

layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

**Jason Faria:**

Are you kind of stressful person, only have 10 or maybe 15 minute in your day time to upgrading your mind skill or thinking skill possibly analytical thinking? Then you are receiving problem with the book in comparison with can satisfy your short time to read it because all this time you only find book that need more time to be read. La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams can be your answer because it can be read by you actually who have those short free time problems.

**Harry Anderson:**

The book untitled La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams contain a lot of information on the idea. The writer explains your ex idea with easy method. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do definitely not worry, you can easy to read the idea. The book was published by famous author. The author will take you in the new period of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site as well as order it. Have a nice go through.

**Gloria Lentz:**

In this era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability to do something more are more important than other. Do you want to become one among it? It is just simple method to have that. What you need to do is just spending your time almost no but quite enough to enjoy a look at some books. On the list of books in the top collection in your reading list will be La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams. This book which can be qualified as The Hungry Inclines can get you closer in growing to be precious person. By looking upwards and review this e-book you can get many advantages.

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