



Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time (Routledge Transnational Perspectives on American Literature)

Will Norman

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This book argues that the apparent evasion of history in Vladimir Nabokov's fiction conceals a profound engagement with social, and therefore political, temporalities. While Nabokov scholarship has long assumed the same position as Nabokov himself — that his works exist in a state of historical exceptionalism — this study restores the content, context, and commentary to Nabokovian time by reading his American work alongside the violent upheavals of twentieth-century ideological conflicts in Europe and the United States. This approach explores how the author's characteristic temporal manipulations and distortions function as a defensive dialectic against history, an attempt to salvage fiction for autonomous aesthetics. Tracing Nabokov's understanding of the relationship between history and aesthetics from nineteenth-century Russia through European modernism to the postwar American academy, the book offers detailed contextualized readings of Nabokov's major writings, exploring the tensions, fissures, and failures in Nabokov's attempts to assert aesthetic control over historical time. In reading his response to the rise of totalitarianism, the Holocaust, and Cold War, Norman redresses the commonly-expressed admiration for Nabokov's heroic resistance to history by suggesting the ethical, aesthetic, and political costs of reading and writing in its denial. This book offers a rethinking of Nabokov's location in literary history, the ideological impulses which inform his fiction, and the importance of temporal aesthetics in negotiating the matrices of modernism.

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