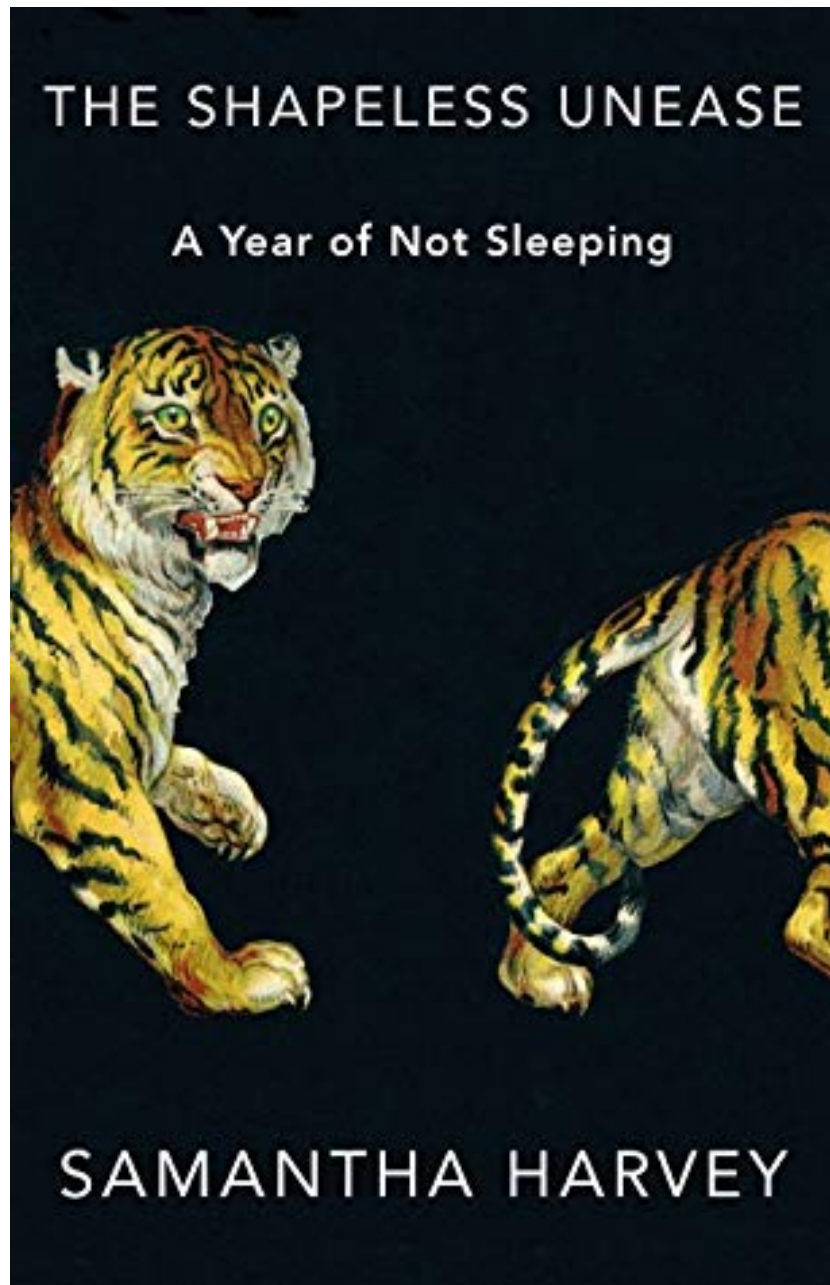


The Shapeless Unease: A Year of Not Sleeping Book PDF Download



By:
Samantha Harvey

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Fatma

is, as its subtitle puts it, about its author's year of not sleeping. But to say that this book is about insomnia

is, as its subtitle puts it, about its author's year of not sleeping. But to say that this book is about insomnia is to miss the soil that that insomnia grows in: the anxiety, the existential panic, the sheer exhaustion with life.

It has no structure as such, but is more so fluid in its movement from one subject to the other.

Because the book so inextricably follows her states of being and trains of thought, it reads as particularly organic in its layout, lending its writing a distinct feeling of being unfiltered and spur-of-the-moment. And this is not even to mention

"Beauty" almost feels like the wrong word to use here, given the searing intimacy of Harvey's account, but her writing really is just exquisite.

â€”that is, it's not superficial or flowery for the sake of being flowery, but actually gives you a more intimate sense of Harvey's experiences.

Highly recommend giving it a chance when it comes out on

Varsha Ravi (between.bookends)

Where do I even begin with The Shapeless Unease. Itâ€™s an amalgamation of personal memoir, essays, snippets of fiction that have been birthed from the authorâ€™s period of extreme sleep deprivation. One would assume the complete lack of such a fundamental need would result in something hazy and confused, but instead, itâ€™s the polar opposite. Harveyâ€™s musings, that span grief, death, philosophy and more are startlingly clear, profound, moving and deeply insightful.

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Harvey's insomnia takes root after the sudden, untimely demise of her cousin whose body wasn't found until a few days after. What begins as a meditation on grief, gradually unravels, and touches on various other topics ranging from personal anecdotes and incidents from Harvey's childhood to philosophical musings and the nature of creativity. The narrative is dotted with stunning aphorisms like, "fiction is the laundering of experience into the offshore haven of words". There are phrases of such well-worded truths, "elf the mind is a cacophony, the subconscious is silent theatre; here are the players from the conscious mind, the fears, the desires, the ought and ought-not, but they are whittled down to a core cast and they re-emerge in costume."

A particular section that left me lost in thought was Harvey's observations on science and faith. She writes, "I don't see much opposition between science and faith - isn't science just another form of faith - the faith in reason? It struck me once that I can never be faithless, I am always putting my faith in something - be that agnosticism, atheism, violence, kindness, money, cynicism, writing, love, politics, compassion. Faith is a precondition for science, a precondition for everything." She elucidates further, "The more the believer in science holds up reason as the arbiter of all things, the more the reason starts to look like a god being worshipped. Reason is a thing that proves only itself. If you use reason to work out what is valid, you'll find that the only valid things are those you can reach by reason."

Her condition of sleeplessness lands her in a vertiginous state, where the recursive nature of her thoughts loop into one another and play out on the page. There's almost this pervasive quality to her writing, the stream of consciousness style of her narration allowing you to experience her thoughts in the closest way possible. I have quoted Harvey a great deal in this review because sometimes there just isn't a better way to explain than by example. Perhaps I am not earning my keep as a reviewer. But sometimes, when an author is that good, you just need to get out of the way.

Samantha

An absolute triumph. Harvey puts into words so perfectly the intimate terror of anxiety that feels impossible to articulate. I've already put a reminder in my diary to reread this in a year's time, but I doubt I'll need it.

Natalie (CuriousReader)

Review originally published:

When I first stumbled upon *The Shapeless Unease* among upcoming releases, I thought it sounded a bit like Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* which I along with most everyone I know loved. But while both books tackle sleep-problems and span a year, their resemblance ends there. Samantha Harvey's *The Shapeless Unease* is a memoir of one year where she struggles with sleep and through this experience, she writes not about

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struggles with sleep and through this experience, she writes not about sleep so much as everything else. As she puts it herself at one point, sleep like money is something that you only really think about when you have too little of it. Sleep then, to the insomniac, becomes the prism through which you see and move in the world – that is a pretty accurate representation of the book as well, sleep becomes the prism through which Harvey experiences, thinks, feels and narrates her life. It is rarely the subject of discussion but at the same time it’s always there, forming everything within the life it’s holding in its grip.

The Shapeless Unease is a memoir told in a stream-of-consciousness style, a literary style which for me has turned out to be kind of a marmite thing. Usually, I find it ends up allowing for too much fragmentation in writing – rather than staying with one thing, dedicating time and effort to dig deeper into it – the writer is allowed to flick from point to point without bothering to get beyond the most surface-level notes. On the other hand, it can at times bring out an authenticity of the truest sensory experience without the cloak of narrative rules, sense of propriety or time. Speaking from the heart, I suppose is the cheesy way of putting it. Harvey’s book is a mixture of both – the good and the bad with the form.

When her writing is at its weakest is when her words almost seem hollow; it’s short snappy phrases and over-written sentences that seem to weigh nothing else but conveying to the reader the emotional state of its creator. It does serve a purpose in reflecting the mind of an insomniac, the way her mind is in fact fragmented because she has not the energy or the sense of presence to keep hold of longer strains of thought or form true order of what she’s narrating. It all ends up being mushy, with deprived thoughts hardly worth printing. As a reader, I felt I could appreciate the technical value in the writing form and what it does to the book – how it tells a story beyond the actual wording, how the shape of the book reflects the story (the shapelessness) it is holding in its covers. But there’s a difference between appreciation for worth and reading enjoyment, in this case it doesn’t work beyond its idea.

On the other hand, when Harvey is at the top of her game she appears to reach beyond the veil – there’s honesty and something akin to a vision, of seeing all the way to the core of things, stripping away the layers of accepted narrative and clichés, commonly accepted truths and comfortable thinking patterns – to reveal something recognisably true. She manages to do this with topics as varied as world politics, identity, death, relationships, writing, sleep, and philosophy. I found myself stopping at the way she writes about anxiety and fear, especially – she writes about the way anxiety, like sleeplessness, reproduces itself in an endless cycle and how worrying about worrying will only worsen the experience but there’s no stopping it. It’s a helpless feeling that she equals to that of her sleeplessness, – the more you want it the less it comes.

Ultimately, she closes the book with questioning her own sense in the world and why she keeps on moving forward, even in the midst of this political and worldly turmoil – how do any of us keep on even when it feels like the sky is falling? Even when it seems everything is going to shit? – What is it that is leaning forward in me now, towards the world? She doesn’t necessarily have the answers, but it’s a notion I can’t help but think we could all do with, in this current state of

the world. Generations before us have struggled, have faced prejudice and hatred and wars and suffering and discrimination and injustice and many struggles beside, weâ€™re not alone in this experience and yet it is our experience now. How do we face it? Why do we keep on leaning in, towards the world, each other, ourselves? It seems a good thing to return to in times of trouble of the external or internal kind. To be reminded of that something which does, against the odds, lean forward towards the world and propels us to â€œswim with, with withâ€•.

Jess Smiley

Sprawling meditations on insomnia, struggle, language, Great Britain, kinship, faith, reason, writing, a bank robbery, ineffable dreams.