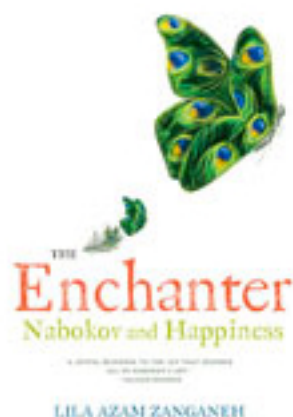


# Slate



## *The Enchanter*, by Lila Azam Zanganeh

Too many people think of Nabokov as grave and difficult, as opposed to playful and pleasurable. Call me crazy, but I find reading *Pale Fire* one of literature's—one of life's—pure pleasures. The coherence of language, patterned like the coloration of butterfly wings, is exhilarating. What I like most about Lila Azam Zanganeh's *The Enchanter: Nabokov and Happiness* is that she succeeds in capturing the peculiar kind of delight in Nabokov that lights up the neural pleasure zones.

One of my favorite passages is one in which she conjures up Nabokov speaking happily about his summer vacation butterfly-hunting trips: "I spent a summer in Utah, an untapped paradise of lepidopteral foray: I would walk a dozen miles a day along mountain ridges ... the excitement of chasing butterflies as vivid as that of inventing creatures at my writing desk."

I say "conjures up" because Zanganeh never interviewed Nabokov—he died before she was born. She's just remarkably good at communicating his delight. The passage sounds as if it *could be* Nabokov, who did in fact embark regularly on summer vacation butterfly hunts. Zanganeh makes the key V.N. connection: between the visually intoxicating array of butterfly wing patterns he found in the wild and those he created on the page with words. Butterfly hunting as an allegory of writing, or vice versa.

—Ron Rosenbaum, "Spectator" columnist and author, most recently, of *How the End Begins*