



# The Amnesiac

*Sam Taylor*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# The Amnesiac

*Sam Taylor*

**The Amnesiac** Sam Taylor

**A gripping literary thriller from an exciting new voice in fiction**

Hailed as 'one to watch' by the UK's *Telegraph*, Sam Taylor is one of the most imaginative and innovative young writers at work today. With *The Amnesiac*, his United States debut, he incorporates a murder mystery and a forgotten manuscript into an exhilarating and intelligent novel. When twenty-nine-year-old James Purdew returns to England from his home in Amsterdam, it is to discover what happened during three earlier years of his life that he cannot recall. What he finds, in an old house with a tragic history, is a nineteenth-century manuscript that begins to seem less and less like a work of fiction—and more like the key to his own lost past. Memory and amnesia, fiction and reality, destiny and randomness, heaven and hell—all converge to form an engrossing gothic story that is sure to appeal to fans of Carlos Ruiz Zafon's *The Shadow of the Wind*.

## The Amnesiac Details

Date : Published July 1st 2008 by Penguin Books (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9780143113409

Author : Sam Taylor

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Novels

 [Download The Amnesiac ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Amnesiac ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Amnesiac Sam Taylor**

---

## From Reader Review The Amnesiac for online ebook

### Lisa says

I got the feeling, as I read this, that I was supposed to think it was The Coolest Book Ever - impossibly clever, stunningly original, blah blah blah. And for the first two thirds, I was sufficiently dazzled by the tight pacing, crisp prose, ominous overtones, and all of the hairpin twists and turns in the plot. But then it devolves into murky psychology, bizarre scenarios that seem shoehorned in for no good reason, and an ending that's not nearly as much of a shocker as it would like to believe. I'll keep an eye on this author - he shows a lot of promise. But I'm not signing on the dotted line just yet.

---

### Emma Kaufmann says

This is a deeply disconcerting book that really penetrates your psyche and will stay with you for weeks. It is about a man who has lost three years of his life and tries to find out what happened. It has a very original format and is basically a detective story written backwards ...and only at the end do we find out what crime was committed. Utterly brilliant!

---

### Maggie says

Fittingly, I have no recollection of where I heard about The Amnesiac, and I only have the haziest remembrance of purchasing it. Weirdly, it's as if the little sucker just magically \*appeared!\* on my bookshelf, where it then sat, gathering dust for ages. And it may have continued to gather dust for quite some time to come, however I spent a lot of time on the road this holiday season and the book I had been reading just wasn't doing it for me. I needed something else, something readable, something fun and something preferably in paperback.

Enter The Amnesiac.:

After breaking his leg on the stairs of his Amsterdam apartment, James Purdew suddenly finds he has time to do something he hasn't done in a long time: think. And as tends to be the case, the more he thinks, the more trouble he finds. His life in Amsterdam starts to fall apart as James becomes increasingly obsessed with three years of his life that have become lost to his memory, those being the years he spent as a college student in the town of H. An avid journaler, James has three journals detailing his life during those missing years, but, for some reason, those journals are locked up in a black safe he keeps under his bed, and he has no idea where the key could be. Clearly, something very bad happened in H., something he once chose to forget, but something he is now hell-bent on remembering.

In an attempt to unlock the mystery of those missing years, James must become the detective of his own mystery. He returns to the British town of H., gets a job fixing up the crumbling remnants of the house where he once lived, and starts unearthing clues to who he was and what happened to him there. The deeper James digs, the stranger things get, as the plot takes a bit of a Gothic turn, where suddenly a 19th century manuscript becomes a key to unlocking the mystery of James' own past.

To paraphrase the blurb on the back of the book, The Amnesiac is described as a time travel book without a time machine, a science fiction book without the aliens, and a murder mystery without the murder. This

description is pretty apt, and is a large part of why I liked it so much, despite the fact that it wasn't the most original premise for a book. (At times, the plot felt quite similar to films like *Vanilla Sky* and *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind*.) But even if similar stories have been told before, Taylor sprinkled heavy references to Borges, Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Freudian psychology, Heaven and Hell, and Descartes' solipsistic brand of philosophy (i.e.: "I think, therefore I am.") into his story, using them as clues that continued to keep me thinking and guessing until the end. In *The Amnesiac*, Taylor has created something more original and intelligent than your average dimestore mystery novel, while still managing to craft a tale that was a whole lot of fun to read.

After skimming some other reviews of this book, it seems as if many folks didn't like it as much as I did, complaining that the ending wasn't very satisfying and that Taylor was a little heavy-handed with the references to Borges and Freud. And those are complaints that I can certainly understand. *The Amnesiac* is hardly a perfect novel. However, I thoroughly loved it, warts and all. While reading, I, like James, became a detective - underlining clues, scribbling in the margins, and working the story over in my mind long after finishing it.

In short, I can't remember the last time I had so much fun reading a book. I'm not sure whether or not I fell in love with *The Amnesiac*, but I certainly thought about it a lot when it wasn't around.

---

### **Natalie Y says**

Quite similar to Kafka's *The Trial*, *The Amnesiac* is indeed written the same gothic fashion with an interesting meld of existential philosophy from Descartes and the like. The plot is somewhat onerous although the writing style is simple. All in all an average read for me.

---

### **Jake Zavracky says**

Loved this one, I was sucked right in by it. It freaked me out, played with my mind a bit - had a surreal quality to it which I'm always a sucker for. I thought it was remarkably similar to Jonathan Coe's "The House of Sleep" which I had coincidentally just finished; I wasn't looking to read a similar book. It actually had some similar elements to Jonathan Barne's "The Somnambulist" as well. All three deal with dreams, memories, and all three read fast.....

Highly recommended unless you're not given easily to suspending your disbelief, in which case why are you reading fiction in the first place?

---

### **Ajit says**

I read a brief review that was critical; this sort of book has been done before. So I added the book mentioned to my list. But I still liked this one. Seems a bit like the movie *Memento*, though without the anxiety. A bit of a mystery like *Calamity Physics* (but a bit shorter). Nice book and I recommend it for those interested in fiction about memory.

---

## Becky says

what an odd book. it's kind of like a detective story crossed with a gothic novel, both borgesian and kafkaesque (yeah, i'm evidently now one of those douchebags who uses adjectives based on authors' names) with a strong dose of "eternal sunshine of the spotless mind." note, however, that even if all of those references appeal to you, you might not be crazy about this novel, which somehow adds up to less than the sum of its parts. it's about an english guy who realizes, after he turns 30, that there's a three-year period of his life of which he remembers nothing, and he goes about attempting to gather clues regarding what happened. as such, the book meanders fuzzily through flashbacks, discovered manuscripts, and philosophical meditations. some of the ponderings on the nature of memory i found to be interesting -- the author really nails that feeling where you're not quite sure if something you remember really happened or if it was part of a dream or something you read once. and there's a pleasantly creepy atmosphere of surrealism. but taylor's prose is, well, prosaic and boring, and the themes are overworked. honestly, i'm also more than a little annoyed that i still can't figure out what happened at the end, or who the hell was narrating the thing. overall, somewhat interesting but not a book i'd recommend.

---

## Sophia says

This book can be summed up by something James says after many pages:

"Someone should write a true-to-life detective story...an existential mystery in which the answer is not to be found, clear and logical, at the book's end, but only to be glimpsed, or half-grasped, at various moments during its narrative; to be sensed throughout, like a nagging tune that you cannot quite remember, but never defined, never seen whole; to sift its shape and position and meaning with each passing day; to be sometimes forgotten completely, other times obsessed over, but never truly understood; not to be something walked towards but endlessly around."

As it was, I never stopped being frustrated with this novel. I was frustrated with the main character, who seemed like a dull, vapid teenager instead of 30 years old. I was frustrated by the endless descriptions of mystery jigsaw pieces which were never fully explained or had nothing to do with the story. I found the whole thing to be a self-absorbed, aimless trek through the mind of a not-very-interesting character.

---

## H says

I think what you should know before reading this is this is all about memory and the fallacies of memory, the details of why and how we choose to forget things we obviously don't want to remember.

It gets really philosophical at times (*something that I don't exactly mind but it makes my head spin when it extends for pages*) and brings us deep into the dark depths of a "sinned" soul.

How could we be sure that a memory that no one but us remembers has really happened, or at least went the way we think it did? It's kind of scary when you think about how unreliable memory is, and how hazy it gets with age.

So many strange, unlikely incidents happen that make me doubt the credibility of the narration and make me wonder if they really happened or if it was a figment of the character's imagination. There's also the narrator,

who from the beginning made us believe he was the author (*I mean Sam Taylor*) before he starts to inject himself in the narration -- using "I" and mentioning following and seeing James (*and at the same knowing his innermost thoughts*). So the mystery of the narrator's identity was more interesting to me than the rest of the supposed mystery of James' past.

The ending was a bit of a let down because I kind of pieced together the details over the whole book, but I'd never get a chance to think about them in my mind because Taylor would cleverly toss us around and give us other things to think about. So, I don't really think the mystery of James' past three years (*anybody thinks it's weird to suddenly remember that you have no memory of three years of your life?*) was the purpose of writing this book. Like I said, it's more a philosophical examination of memory...

Note: The author has no reserves to using drama and overwritten prose (*the purpley kind*).

---

### **Kate Bredimus says**

Only two stars because the main character, James, pissed me off. He can't remember three years of his life, and decides to do a little investigating to figure out what happens. But every time that punk gets a clue, instead of following it he decides to go drink beer. I hate him so hard. The story was decent, a little existentialist for my tastes. I did learn what solipism is. Still can't spell it though.

---

### **Manday says**

I feel like the author of this book read a collection of Borges work (particularly things like "Shakespeare's Memories" and the multiple short stories concerning time) and thought "hey, that would make a great novel!! But wait, I can't just write it into a novel and call it my own, that would be plagiarism, so I will twist it and convolute it and see what happens". And then he wrote this book, which, although having some interesting passages in it, overall is nonsensical and ridiculous, and this is coming from a girl who gave *House of Leaves* and *Invitation to a Beheading*, other books that flirt with incoherence, five stars.

There is a very fine art to making the incoherent and random enjoyable to read and more deeply meaningful. Sam Taylor has yet to master that art.

---

### **Oriana says**

**pre:** Found in a rain-wilted box on the curb, and I don't know one single thing about it. Very exciting!

**post:** Holy shit this book is *great*. Given that it is all about amnesia, intentional and unintentional memory suppression, the existence or non-existence of consensus-based reality, the possibility or impossibility of coincidences, etc., I am stunned and delighted that it came to me so anonymous, so unknown. I still know not a thing about Sam Taylor (though I plan to learn more once I finish this review), but for such a book-obsessed nerd like me, that is so refreshing & awesome. To go into a book with no expectations, no popular "wisdom," no snobbery or elitism or pre-hate...well, it's fucking great.

And so rewarding – in this case, anyway. Before I do too much delving, I'd like to let this otherwise not overly meta book give you a description of itself:

*Someone should write a true-to-life detective story, James thought bleakly; an existential mystery in which the answer is not to be found, clear and logical, at the book's end, but only to be glimpsed, or half-grasped, at various moments during its narrative; to be sensed throughout, like a nagging tune that you cannot quite remember, but never defined, never seen whole; to shift its shape and position and meaning with each passing day; to be sometimes forgotten completely, other times obsessed over, but never truly understood; not to be something walked towards but endlessly around.*

I know that might be off-putting, especially for those who had an aversion to, say, *House of Leaves*, so let me assure you that, while this book is tricky, and slippery, and seems always to cycle itself away from the truth, refusing to reveal its secrets, which seem so tantalizingly close to the surface...while all that is true, it is much, much more satisfying than the preceding description would indicate. It has a clear narrative structure, interesting and consistent characters, lots of surprises, and a totally satisfying conclusion. So, to summarize: trickery, yes; obnoxious, no.

Let's go back a bit. *The Amnesiac* is the story of James, who lives in Amsterdam with Ingrid, but who is haunted not by his memories, but by his *lack* thereof. He can't recall *anything* that happened to him for about three years, not the last three, but some time ago, in college. This drives him to such eventual confusion that he lets Ingrid leave him, and returns to London to figure out his past.

Thick with real and metaphorical labyrinths, clouded windows, and mirrors reflecting mirrors, James's journey back to his past is slippery and very cleverly done. Everything seems at once pre-determined and also too absurd to be continuable. As his fragmented memory begins to reassemble, things get weirder and weirder, then pull back into normalcy, then slip off into absurd dreamworlds, then switch again to comprehensibility. But it is all so carefully controlled, you have full faith in the author's ability to let James (and you) untwist slowly and, eventually, clearly.

I should mention that there are strong correlations to a certain somewhat recent upstate New York movie, also about memory and its insistence on recurring, no matter how hard we try to repress it, and though I was a little bit bothered by this, it was only because it made some of what should have been gasping surprises a little bit predictable. But no matter; Sam Taylor is masterful and brilliant, meshing James's present life in modern-day Amsterdam with a long snippet-ly revealed Victorian murder mystery, with also a longish research paper about an imaginary philosopher, plus of course James's fragmented and splintery distant past and recent past and close and overtaking future. All beautifully counterpointed, intricately woven, creating an eventually terrific and complete whole.

Highly highly recommended.

---

## **Roisin says**

### **Actual rating 2.5 stars .**

The Amnesiac is a hard book to write about. It starts off well, is intriguing and interesting and the writing draws you in. And then about 200 pages in it starts to become....weird. Just plain weird. And the writing loses its shine and you start getting bored, so you force yourself to read it because you can't just stop ANOTHER book halfway through. And then when it ends it all makes sense but it's kind of boring and predictable anyway, despite the fact that you didn't really predict it.

So. I wouldn't recommend reading it.

## Jeffrey says

The Amnesiac begins as a possible existential meditation on loss and loneliness but smoothly slides into a creepy little mystery without ever losing sight of the emotions that haunt and drive the main character, James Purdew. We first meet James after breaking his ankle on a flight of stairs while rushing to answer the telephone which seems to ring with an underlying urgency. Once laid up in plaster James doesn't have much to do but sit alone and ponder life when not spending time with his girlfriend Ingrid. This pondering leads him to become obsessed with a three year period of his life that he cannot seem to remember, and while investigating this lapse, mysterious and intriguing occurrences begin to slowly unfold as flashbacks, possible delusions and a mysterious manuscript guide us along.

All in all I was completely hooked and couldn't put this book down but unfortunately the ending left me feeling a bit frustrated. It's not that it was predictable or anticlimactic, but it does share similar themes that were beautifully realized in a certain Charlie Kaufman film which happens to be one of my favorites. I still however think the journey is pretty fantastic and have no problem giving this book a solid four stars, and if that film wasn't at some point in your Netflix queue I think you will find the ending highly rewarding. Either way though, you will indeed keep turning the pages and wondering who exactly owns the house at 21 Lough Street, what's up with those allergy pills and just who the hell is Malcolm Trewvey anyway.

---

## Collin Shea says

I'm torn between giving this 3 or 4 stars and have chosen 3 only because the author used the word "labyrinth" so many times that it really left me wishing that there were more words to describe such a thing. That being said, this story is definitely one filled with labyrinths and the basic premise reminded me of the "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind", although the overall story is different and in the book, more complicated. It's an amalgamation of multiple genres - part mystery, part sci-fi, part love story, part tale of betrayal, part philosophy - all with a focus on searching for the meaning of existence and individual purpose through memories and dreams and the hope and fear associated with, and/or caused by, them. Even though I was a bit frustrated that the main character took so long to figure out the main "mystery" behind his "amnesia", I thoroughly enjoyed this book and found Sam Taylor's imagination to be unique and thought provoking.

---