

Books

Lectures on Literature
By Vladimir Nabokov
Harcourt Brace, \$19.95

"All satisfied with their seats? OK. No talking, no smoking, no knitting, no newspaper reading, no sleeping, and for God's sake take notes."

This, John Updike tells us in the introduction to *Lectures on Literature*, was the way in which Vladimir Nabokov began every course he taught at Cornell during the late 40s and early 50s. Anyone wishing to take on this collection of his classroom lectures would do well to take heed.

A book to curl up with as the stereo blares and the rain goes pitter-patter on the roof, this ain't. You can't really get around the fact that when all is said and done, the author of *Lolita* and *Pale Fire* was also a professor of literature. And you know what they're like.

On the other hand, *Lectures on Literature* is probably easier to take bound between covers than it would be coming through a large hall filled with note-taking adolescents sullenly slumped in chairs.

For those who care about such things, the book is beautifully bound, printed on expensive paper with wide margins. Beauty doesn't come free, of course, and the price hits Nixon-memoir levels at \$19.95.

While everyone can appreciate the texture of the book, the content is something else again. It's difficult to imagine anyone walking away from it without a feeling of respect for both author and editor, but it's also difficult to imagine any amateur lover of literature really relaxing with it.

In the end, the twilight zone

feeling of an impending pop quiz is too pronounced.

The chapters consist of reconstructed lectures on Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson. The editing by Fredson Bowers, who was assisted by Nabokov's widow, is masterful. None of the lectures were preserved in final form — some had to be reconstructed from little more than the memories of students and some scribbled notes, while other passages were already in the form of typed transcripts.

Taken all together, the lectures are a bit overwhelming. It's quite possible that most readers, particularly the undergraduate sort, will emerge more impressed than they are informed.

It becomes apparent that for Nabokov, literature meant more than diversion or edification — for him, it meant immersion in a world created by the writer, a world separate from real life, but to be taken nearly as seriously.

In keeping with this view of the author as world-creator, the chapter on Dickens' *Bleak House* turns out to be among the most readable.

With Dickens, Nabokov concentrates on the way the novelist builds a structure of interlocking themes. There is, however, also an overriding concern with matters of style. It's interesting to note that in spite of Nabokov's Russian background and the fact that he was often working with translation, there is still an overriding concern with matters of style.

The rhythm and patterns of speech are appreciated, as is the use of metaphor and crafted phrasing.

"The subject may be crude and repulsive," says Nabokov of *Madame Bovary*. "Its expression is artistically modulated and balanced. This is style. This is art. This is the only thing that

really matters in books."

Style and art were inherent in Nabokov's works. Both are present in *Lectures on Literature*. It's possible that if Nabokov had been around to do

the final editing on this posthumous collection, both would have achieved more of a conclusive triumph over classroom dryness.

By Mike Rust

It isn't everyday somebody asks your opinion ... and then listens

During this month, Lane Transit District is holding a series of public workshops . . . The purpose of these workshops is simple: We'd like to hear your ideas for making bus service in Eugene-Springfield even better than it is today . . . It's an opportunity to work with LTD: and to make the bus system work for you.

This is an open invitation . . . everybody is welcome. Bring your family . . . or a friend. And let's work together for an effective mass transit program in Eugene-Springfield.

Northeast Eugene Sector

Date: 2/10/81 Place: Campbell Center, 155 High Street.
Time: 12:30-2:30 pm

Date: 2/11/81 Place: Cal Young Junior High Cafeteria,
2555 Gilham Road. Time: 7-9 pm

Thurston Sector

Date: 2/26/81 Place: Thurston Middle School, 6300
Thurston Rd. Time: 3-5 pm

Date: 2/26/81 Place: Thurston High School, 333 N. 58th.
Time: 7-9 pm

Southeast Eugene Sector

Date: 2/19/81 Place: Amazon Community Center, 2700
Hilyard. Time: 1-3 pm

Date: 2/19/81 Place: Roosevelt Junior High Library, 24th
& Hilyard. Time: 7-9 pm

Bethel/Danebo Sector

Date: 2/25/81 Place: Petersen Park Barn, 870 Bertzen.
Time: 1-3 pm

Date: 2/25/81 Place: Petersen Park Barn, 870 Bertzen.
Time: 7:30-9:30 pm

Springfield Sector

Date: 2/11/81 Place: Farwest Federal, 1570 Mohawk.
Time: 7-9 pm

Date: 2/12/81 Place: Willamalane Senior Center, "C" &
Water. Time: 1:30-3:30 pm

Southwest Eugene Sector

Date: 2/18/81 Place: Eugene Public Library, 13th &
Olive. Time: 1-3 pm

Date: 2/18/81 Place: Eugene Public Library, 13th &
Olive. Time: 7-9 pm

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take the bus.**

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Staffbox, Thursday Revue. Deadline is a week prior to publication; please put all info in my WOODEN STAFF BOX next to the bulletin board. Thanks to a patient production staff who got through all the hoops, and to Kirk Knighton, still sulking and nursing his bottle of maple syrup . . . one last note: thanks also, Jimi at the Truckstop for the surprise.

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