



Lectures on Don Quixote

Vladimir Nabokov , Fredson Bowers (Editor) , Guy Davenport (Foreword) , Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (Contributor) , Samuel Putnam (Contributor)

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A master teacher and critic as well as a novelist, Nabokov created a fastidiously shaped series of lectures based on a chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the Spanish classic, recording his insights as he proceeded. Since his teaching methods relied heavily on quotation from the author under discussion, this summary consisted in part of his own narrative and in part of quotations from the Putnam translation.

Rejecting the common interpretation of *Don Quixote* as a warm satire, Nabokov perceives the work as a catalog of cruelty through which the gaunt knight passes, retaining both honor and innocence. Along with Lectures on Literature and Lectures on Russian Literature, this book allows the reader access to one of the truly original literary thinkers of our era as he focuses his eye on the masterworks of Western literature.

Edited and with a Preface by Fredson Bowers; photographs.

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From Reader Review Lectures on Don Quixote for online ebook

Deena says

Edith Grossman's translation is wondrous. Having stuck with this tome until the end (that's not meant to be a spoiler), I finally understand why this book is the ultimate classic and considered the invention of the modern novel. And it is just so damn funny! (and sad).

Danny says

A work of breathtaking arrogance and misunderstanding, made even less tolerable by Guy Davenport's mindless and sycophantic forward. Nabokov is less interested in carefully examining Cervantes's novel than in using his text as a means of generating charming (cough, cough, awkwardly belletristic) critiques of Don Quixote. I found myself cringing at every turn, as I watched Nabokov gleefully failing to understand Cervantes chapter after chapter, belittling the Spaniard with a smugness so extravagant and persistent I felt physically sick. Nabokov laboriously copied out lengthy chapter-by-chapter summaries, summaries which the editor included in this volume's appendix. This only makes Nabokov's blindness of the book's merits all the more embarrassing. At the end of the day, I forgive Nabokov for these lecture notes, as he did not intend to have them published. They were posthumously published by somebody else. It's not, also, as if Nabokov's notes are wholly deprived of critical insight, but the tone is so insufferable and the insights so minimal (he appears interested only in showing off his capacity to devise "dazzling" phrases) that I think these notes are among the most embarrassing things he ever wrote. Nabokov thought he was writing some Harvard lecture notes that would demolish Don Quixote's allegedly ill-earned reputation for students and colleagues alike; instead, he only succeeded in demonstrating how blinded a man could be by his immense literary vanity.

Some days ago, I asked a professor of mine what he thought of Nabokov's book. He said Nabokov was just jealous. As he would've had to have understood Cervantes to be jealous of him, I disagree. Nabokov's notes show few signs of genuine comprehension. It's surprising, as his other lecture series are quite strong.

10001010001 says

Maybe a better time to review this is after reading *the Order of Things*.
The comparison of Don Quixote with Jesus Christ and King Lear is ingenious.

Megan says

I liked reading Nabokov's critique more than I enjoyed the actual book(s) of Don Quixote! Now cue the songs from the play stuck in my head for the next day.

Clint says

This was a big disappointment. I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't a sourpuss Nabokov being extremely arrogant and edgy in trying to belittle a battleship of a classic. Which needless to say is exactly what this was. In this collection of lecture papers slapped together by the editor, we find a guy who really doesn't like Don Quixote finding himself in the position of having to teach it at Harvard, and desperately looking around for ways to present it, grabbing at straws ("pegs," he calls them, from which to hang his narrative theory) that will give him a way to meet the university's requirements and at the same time show that he is a clever, witty, biting, penetrating, modern-minded critic. You can tell he revels in what he likes to think of as "tearing the book apart." Maybe because the critic who sees everything as a cliché has itself become a cliché, but I just don't find Nabokov as informative or amusing as he seems to want to be found. His little jibes at Americans, movie-goers, etc., just sound like the pretentious crap you'd hear from modern-day university freshmen. Not recommended for fans of Don Quixote, but maybe for people that are looking for a reason not to read it, this is what's called for.

Sps says

Somewhat restrained. Less entertaining than the *Lectures* on Russian and English literature. Many of the best bits so far are in the notes, omitted material, and interlined comments. His summaries, especially when he feels Cervantes is being tedious, are wry, as here for Part 2, Chapter 60: "The bandits capture two captains of Spanish infantry and some pilgrims on their way to Rome. Also some women. Usual stuff." (203)

Really through it I'm sort of laying the table for the book to come. Ready now to meet the gentle Don, the half-mad curate, that brutal ducal pair, and Sancho Panza, who "is the grandpa of all tycoons," (140) with the appropriate cutlery.

antes de leer:

Widely available through ILL. To read before, alongside, or after Cervantes?

Ryan says

I'm still slightly obsessed since finishing the Burton Raffel translation of Don Quixote over five months ago. It is just one of those things that I can't stop thinking about. Nabokov systematically tears down everything you ever thought you knew or read about DQ and builds it back anew. A great companion to those who can't get enough of the Don and Sancho.

My favorite quote:

"We should, therefore, imagine Don Quixote and his squire as two little silhouettes ambling in the distance

against an ample flaming sunset, and their two huge black shadows, one of them especially elongated, stretching across the open country of centuries and reaching us here."

meredith says

Nabokov almost totally hates Don Quixote, which comes through here, which is what makes this rambling collection almost totally worthwhile.

Seval Yılmaz Koşar says

Don Quijote Dersleri, Nabokov'un 1951-1952 akademik y?l?n?n bahar döneminde konuk olarak geldi?i Harvard Üniversitesi'nde Don Quijote üzerine verdi?i alt? dersten derlenmi? bir çal??ma. Nabokov, bir yandan Don Quijote'yi yücelten yaz?lar yazm?? ele?tirmenlere cevap verirken öte yandan da modern Don Quijote imaj?n? y?k?yor ve Don Quijote alg?m?z? alt üst ediyor. Edebiyat?n h?rç?n çocu?u Nabokov, roman?n yaz?ld??? dönemin ?spanya's? hakk?nda tarihi ve sosyal arka plan bilgilerini verdikten sonra roman? didik didik ediyor. Don Quijote ile Sancho Panza'n?n ba??ndan geçen talihsiz olaylar? tatlı? ve komik olmaktan ziyade "aptalca, gaddarca ve insanl?kd???" buldu?unu vurgulayan yazar, romana bamba?ka bir aç?dan bakarak roman? "?imdiye kadar yaz?lm?? en ac?mas?z roman" olarak niteliyor. Roman?n ac?mas?z oldu?u konusunda Nabokov'a kat?l?yorum lakin roman?n asl?nda bir rejim, din, ?övalyelik, ?övalye romanslar? ve aristokrasi ele?tirisi/hicvi olmad???n? ileri süren Nabokov'un bu görüşüne kat?lm?yorum. Romana farklı? bir aç?dan bakmak için güzel bir referans kitap bu, meraklılar?na tavsiye ederim. Elimde Nabokov'un Edebiyat Dersleri adlı? kitab? da mevcut. Bu kitapta i?lenen romanlar? her ay bir roman olmak üzere (2018 Ocak ay?ndan itibaren) okuduktan sonra üzerine de cila niyetine Nabokov'un kitab?n? okumay? planlıyorum. Kat?lmak isteyenleri bekleriz.

Barbara Hansen says

No interest in reading a mocking criticism of Don Quijote. From the foreword, the mood of the work is set clear: Nabokov hates Cervantes, thinks him a pretentious prick and wants to tear the book apart. Following up those statements, I could literally hear him sigh as he tried to make sense of Cervante's geography of Spain (who the fucks care anyway) and portrait a really unfair comparison with fellow contemporary William Shakespeare.

I think Nabokov is a superb storyteller and literary critic, however, his patent dislike and excessive snobbery forced me to look for a comprehensive study of Don Quijote elsewhere. Which is a pity. The book is devised in a clever way, much of the commentary is actually on point and constructive, but there's the underlying feeling throughout the whole book of, on the one hand, a hatred for everything and everyone Cervantes created and the way he played out situations and characters. On the other hand, I think it's impossible to miss the respect he has for the novel and its legacy. That tension comes out every other paragraph and interrupts the reading experience. It's like dealing with a grumpy and immature child and I just can't be bothered.

Sorry (s)Noby.

Gaynor Songer says

I liked Nabokov's lectures on Don Quixote. I don't read or speak Spanish and could not grasp why the work is considered the first modern novel. Nabokov analyzes it in terms of the plot, knight-errant culture, other contemporary writers who were copying Cervantes, and what it was like to be living in the century Cervantes wrote the book. To me this was fascinating. I knew that I would not get all the jokes based specifically on the Spanish language, so I gave up trying to read an English translation. Nabokov opened up a window for me to understand Cervantes.

Jason Furman says

A good accompaniment to Don Quixote, marred only by Nabokov's less-than-complete love for the novel. It is six lectures he gave at Harvard that ranges from more conventional discussion to more novel presentations, like a scorecard that goes through the 40 "battles" in the book, classifies them into different types, and calls each one a win or a loss. Turns out the final score was 20-20.

Nabokov might be right that the novel would have been even better if Don Quixote's final combat was with the false Don Quixote from the false Part Two that wasn't written by Cervantes. Oh well.

Yi?it Yavuz says

Don Quixote, bizde yerle?ik ad?yla Don Ki?ot, roman türünün atas? kabul edilen eser ve birçoklar?nca, “?imdiye kadar yaz?lm?? en büyük roman” kabul ediliyor. Miguel de Cervantes Saavera’n?n eseri, 1605 ve 1615 y?llar?nda iki cilt olarak bas?lm??. Bilindi?i gibi, okudu?u ?övalye romanlar?n?n etkisiyle akl?n? kaybeden ve kendine De Mancha’l? Don Quixote ad?n? lay?k görerek yollarak dü?en ya?l? bir adam?n hikâyesi. Çok bölümlü ve bölümleri birbirinden epey farklı?k gösteren, çok farklı edebi teknikleri içinde bar?nd?ran bir metin. Türkçe çevirisiyle tam ad? “La Mancha’l? Yarat?c? Asilzade Don Quijote” olan eserin bilinen ve sayg?n çevirisi, Roza Hakmen’e ait ve Yap? Kredi Yay?nlar? taraf?ndan yay?mland?.

Don Quixote son derece önemli bir roman olmakla birlikte, ?imdiye dek ülkemizde bu eser üzerine yap?lm?? önemli çal??malar pek yay?nlanmad?. Bu eksiklik, geçen y?l Vladimir Nabokov’un “Don Quixote Dersleri”nin ?leti?im Yay?nlar? yay?nlanmas?yla bir nebze giderildi. Nabokov’un Harvard Üniversitesi’nde misafir okutman olarak bulundu?u dönemde tuttu?u bu notlar hem çok özgün, hem de çok kapsamlı ve önemli.

Dersler 294 sayfa. Bu hacmin ilk 164 sayfas?nda, Cervantes’in eseri ele?tirel analize tabi tutuluyor; kalan k?s?mda ise roman?n 74 bölümü ayr? ayr? özetlenip aç?klan?yor. Genel okura tat verecek nitelikteki birinci bölümdeki analizler ve yarg?lar, hem ince, hem de keskin. ?ikinci bölüm ise Nabokov’un hayranl?k uyand?r?c? çal??kanl???n?n gövde gösterisi adeta; ama daha çok, Don Quijote üzerine edebi ya da akademik bir çal??ma yapanlar?n i?ine yarayacak nitelikte.

Esasen, Nabokov’un La Mancha’l? Yarat?c? Asilzade Don Quijote hakk?ndaki fikirleri, roman?n hayranlar?n? pek mutlu etmeyecek. Nabokov, Don Quijote’nin ?imdiye kadar yaz?lm?? en muhte?em roman

oldu?u kan?s?n? “saçmal?k” olarak nitelendiriyor. Roman? a??r ?ekilde ele?tiriyor. Bu ele?tiriler yer yer, Nabokov’un me?hur Dostoyevski yergilerini dahi gölgede b?rakacak denli sert. ?

Don Quijote'nin ba?ar?s?n?, roman?n kendine özgü de?erinden ziyade d?? merkezli yay?n?m?ndan, yani bas?lmas?ndan hemen sonra birçok dile çevrilmesinden kaynakland??? inanc?nda.

Cervantes hayranlar? bu yorumlar? haks?z ve ölçüsüz bulabilir. Ama kitapta Nabokov’un edebi dedektifli?inin, kab?na s??maz zekâs?n?, e?siz okurlu?unun ve ince mizah?n?n tad?n? ç?karmak laz?m. Nabokov belki her ?eyden fazla olmak üzere, olgulara farklı alg? düzeylerinde yakla?man?n olanaklı? oldu?unu ve gerçe?in ele avuca s??mazl???n? hissettiriyor. Don Quijote’ye ay?rd??? mesai, kitapla ilgili tüm olumsuz yorumlar?na kar??n, Cervantes’in belki de en iyi okurunun Nabokov oldu?unu gösteriyor.

Önce Roza Hakmen çevirisiyle Don Quixote’nin ve ardından Emrah Serdan çevirisiyle “Don Quixote Dersleri”nin okunmas?n? tavsiye ederim.

Alejandro Teruel says

Según una leyenda literaria, cuyo asidero en la realidad desconozco, Nabokov se vio obligado a dar unas clases de pregrado sobre Don Quijote a estudiantes de la Universidad de Harvard y Cornell. Los apuntes de estas clases conforman, en gran medida, la publicación reseñada.

El interés del libro radica en la curiosidad que uno siente por saber qué opina del Quijote un autor como Nabokov, que pareciera, como autor, compartir ciertas afinidades con Cervantes, entre las que destacan un sentido satírico y un amor por los juegos de palabra. Al final, uno se siente profundamente insatisfecho, pues se encuentra con un profesor más bien seco al que no parece atraerle mucho la novela que expone; domina la sensación de un escrito realizado por obligación más que por gusto, y ocasionalmente parece estar más interesado en criticar por criticar, o criticar para *épater la bourgeoisie* --¿sus estudiantes?

La mejor parte del libro es cuando deja de lado su rol de profesor de literatura y propone su propia versión del final del Quijote, cediendo por un momento, al impulso de jugar con el Quijote que ha tocado a tantos autores y novelistas, desde que Alonso Fernández Avellaneda escribió la falsa segunda parte de El Quijote en 1615 hasta nuestros días, pasando por Grahame Green ("Monsignor Quixote"), Jorge Luis Borges ("Pierre Menard, el autor del Quijote"), Iván Goncharov ("Oblomov") y muchas de las destacadas figuras literarias que colaboraron en la dispareja antología "La Cervantiada".

La sensación de aridez intelectual aparece en varias observaciones sobre Nabokov como profesor. En Wikipedia se dice que Nabokov consideraba que "...readers should not merely empathise with characters but that a 'higher' aesthetic enjoyment should be attained, partly by paying great attention to details of style and structure. He detested what he saw as 'general ideas' in novels, and so when teaching Ulysses, for example, he would insist students keep an eye on where the characters were in Dublin (with the aid of a map) rather than teaching the complex Irish history that many critics see as being essential to an understanding of the novel.". En un ensayo titulado

"Nabokov, or Nostalgia", Danilo Kiš escribió que la concepción del según Nabokov es "magnífica, compleja y estéril". Según la misma entrada de Wikipedia sobre Nabobov, el poeta ruso Yevgeny Yevtushenko llegó a decir que, en la prosa de Nabokov, escuchaba "el traqueteo de instrumentos quirúrgicos".

En resumen, si está interesado en crítica literaria sobre el ingenioso hidalgo, hay trabajos muchos más

interesantes y agudos. Si le interesa la reacción de Nabokov al Quijote, échele un vistazo a estas clases, pero hágase un favor, ármese de tolerancia y sáltese el resumen de los capítulos de la obra.

Jamie says

This book was amazing. Nabokov was forced to lecture on Don Quixote in order to teach for a semester at Harvard, but he went into it with a total disdain for the book. So what did he do? He went through it with the finest-toothed comb you could possibly imagine, took copious and meticulous notes, and came out of it with a much greater respect and admiration for Cervantes' work.

I wasn't the hugest fan of DQ when I finished it, either, so I figured I'd take up some scholarly works to see if I could get a better respect. Needless to say, this was absolutely perfect to do that. Obviously, you wouldn't want to read this if you haven't read DQ itself, but I really enjoyed this book.
