

learns, for example, that a romantic liaison between Nabokov's aristocratic great-grandmother and grandfather is a "neat reversal of the story of *Lolita*: the man marries the daughter to continue . . . to be her mother's lover." In addition to literary cryptography, Field has skillfully recreated scenes from the author's peripatetic life: the privileged Petersburg childhood; struggles in Berlin during the 1920s, when Nabokov tutored by day and wrote by night, soon establishing himself, under the pen name Sirin, as a leading Russian author; teaching days at Wellesley, where, despite his strictness, he became something of a romantic idol among the students.

Nabokov's outspokenness on matters literary and political often served him ill: The president of Wellesley took a dim view of his anti-Soviet remarks, and Nabokov's pronouncements upon such writers as Boris Pasternak and Alexander Pushkin created tensions with his erstwhile friend Edmund Wilson, arguably the most powerful American critic of this century. Wilson's cool opinion of Nabokov's work may have delayed his apotheosis until the mid-1960s. Only then, says Field, did sporadic praise escalate "to the contention, beginning with an article by Eliot Fremont-Smith in the *New York Times*, that Nabokov was the world's greatest living writer."

**JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY  
AND THE LANGUAGE  
OF LEARNING**

by Robert DeMaria, Jr.  
Univ. of N.C., 1986  
303 pp. \$25

An awesome one-man feat, the *Dictionary* of Samuel Johnson (1709-84) has frequently baffled even his most devoted admirers. In 1755, English critic Thomas Edwards complained that the 114,000 quotations used to define its 40,000 words added up to a "needless" and "intolerable" number. DeMaria, a professor of English at Vassar, disagrees. Far from superfluous, Johnson's pluckings from authors as diverse as Ovid and Isaac Newton were intended to be, as he himself said, "useful to some other end than the illustration of a word."

To reveal the scope of Johnson's ambition, DeMaria arranges the *Dictionary's* large and seemingly unrelated body of quotations into an encyclopedic compendium of 18th-century learning and values. Throughout the *Dictionary*, says DeMaria, Johnson strives to show that each field of knowledge, be it language or education, exists

to lead man to an understanding of his subservience to God. Enjoining his readers to accept the limits of earthly knowledge, he invokes John Milton's words, "be *lowly* wise." While extolling the virtues of the next life, Johnson also suggests how to live well in this one. The maintenance of a "proper intellectual polity"—a balanced attention to sacred and profane matters—promises, according to Robert South, "serenity and complacency upon the whole soul." As for money, the *via media* is best attained by earning what James Thomson called "an elegant *sufficiency*."

As we learn from biographer James Boswell, Johnson derived more than monetary reward from the "muddling work" of lexicography. For a man who believed that life was virtually synonymous with work, the *Dictionary*, DeMaria says, provided "a way of knowing where the time went and of seeing that it was not wasted."

**THE CITY AS  
A WORK OF ART**  
**London, Paris, Vienna**  
by Donald J. Olsen  
Yale, 1986  
341 pp. \$35

The 19th century was the best of times for urban architecture. Many of the older cities throughout Europe were transformed into imperial capitals, lavish and ornate symbols of the power and wealth of emerging nation-states.

According to Olsen, a Vassar historian, Paris and Vienna underwent the most dramatic and beneficial changes, but he begins his three-city study with John Nash's design of London's single boulevard, Regent Street. Linking two royal palaces, it was intended by Nash to combine "the functions of a triumphal way with that of a street devoted to the luxury retail trade." This brief burst of monumentalism was followed, from 1850 on, by more prosaic planning goals, including drains and sewers for improved sanitation, and by a drift toward "suburban coziness," as architects and builders catered to the English demand for private homes with small gardens.

Paris received a massive face-lift at midcentury. Baron Haussmann's urban renewal plan razed old landmarks, removed workers' quarters to the suburbs, and introduced the city's *grands boulevards*, where all levels of French society mingled in pursuit of pleasure and commerce.

In Vienna, the development of the Ringstrasse was an assertion of imperial order that defied the historical reality of the rapidly dissolving Haps-