



Claude Monet, *The Highway Bridge*, 1872.
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ward march of progress. Site of a major iron-works, the quaint town of Argenteuil had begun to change long before Monet arrived. But, in his early paintings there, such as *The Promenade along the Seine* (1872), he succeeded in harmonizing rivers, fields, and trees with chimney stacks and railroad bridges. Soon, this balance proved too delicate, and he retreated to small corners of untouched nature and finally to the privacy of his own garden. When he did paint larger subjects again, as in *Argenteuil—The Bank in Flower* (1877), the natural and manmade worlds appeared in stark opposition. Though subtly expressed, Monet's art was a judgment on his times.

LECTURES ON RUSSIAN LITERATURE

by Vladimir Nabokov
edited by Fredson Bowers
Harcourt, 1981
324 pp. \$19.95

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977), novelist, *émigré*, professor, lepidopterist, conducts a brilliant tour through the gallery of Russian literary "greats." Judgmental and aphoristic ("Fancy is fertile only when futile"), he reveals as much about his own artistic crotchets as about the works of his compatriots. Leo Tolstoy, master manipulator of time in prose narrative, and Anton Chekhov, writer of "sad books for humorous people," rank high in his pantheon. So does the comic genius, Nikolay Gogol: "His work, as all great literary achievements, is a phenomenon of language and not one of ideas." Faring less well are Fyodor Dostoyevsky (basically a writer of "mystery stories" that stand up poorly on second reading, says Nabokov) and Maksim Gorky, from whose melodramatic fiction there was "but one step to so-called Soviet literature."

PROGRESS OF STORIES

by Laura Riding
Dial, 1982
380 pp. \$15.95

Lives "as such" are unimportant, muses the author in her preface; the challenge in writing about them is "to let the unimportant remain unimportant." Out of this severe aesthetic, Riding, the versatile American writer (poetry, essays, fiction), has fashioned stories that are icily detached in their observations of human foibles. A woman who cannot out-