

Wednesday, December 5, 2007, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Azar Nafisi



Tom Shocum

The Republic of the Imagination

Presented in association with the Townsend Center's Forum on the Humanities and the Public World.

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Azar Nafisi is best known as the author of the national bestseller *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, which electrified its readers with a compassionate and often harrowing portrait of the Islamic revolution in Iran and how it affected one university professor and her students. Earning high acclaim and an enthusiastic readership, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is an incisive exploration of the transformative powers of fiction in a world of tyranny. The book has spent over 117 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list to date. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has been translated in 32 languages and has won diverse literary awards, including the 2004 Non-fiction Book of the Year Award from Booksense, the Frederic W. Ness Book Award, the 2004 Latifeh Yarsheter Book Award, and an achievement award from the American Immigration Law Foundation, and it was a finalist for the 2004 PEN/Martha Albrand Award for Memoir. In 2006, she won a Persian Golden Lioness Award for literature, presented by the World Academy of Arts, Literature, and Media.

Azar Nafisi is a Visiting Professor and the director of the Dialogue Project at the Foreign Policy Institute of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., where she is a professor of aesthetics, culture and literature, and teaches courses on the relation between culture and politics. She held a fellowship at Oxford University, teaching and conducting a series of lectures on culture and the important role of Western literature and culture in Iran after the revolution in 1979. She taught at the University of Tehran, the Free Islamic University and Allameh Tabatabai before her return to the United States in 1997, earning national respect and international recognition for advocating on behalf of Iran's intellectuals, youth, and especially young women. In 1981, she was expelled from the University of

Tehran for refusing to wear the mandatory Islamic veil and did not resume teaching until 1987.

Azar Nafisi conducted workshops in Iran for women students on the relationship between culture and human rights; the material culled from these workshops formed the basis of a new human rights education curriculum. She has lectured and written extensively in English and Persian on the political implications of literature and culture, as well as the human rights of the Iranian women and girls and the important role they play in the process of change for pluralism and an open society in Iran. She has been consulted on issues related to Iran and human rights both by the policy makers and various human rights organizations in the United States and elsewhere. She is also involved in the promotion of not just literacy, but of reading books with universal literary value.

Azar Nafisi has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Her cover story, "The Veiled Threat: The Iranian Revolution's Woman Problem," published in *The New Republic* (February 22, 1999), has been reprinted into several languages. She is the author of *Anti-Terra: A Critical Study of Vladimir Nabokov's Novels*. She also wrote the new introduction to the Modern Library Classics edition of Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad*, as well as the introduction to Iraj Pezeshkzad's *My Uncle Napoleon*, published by Modern Library (April 2006). She has published a children's book (with illustrator Sophie Benini Pietromarchi), *BiBi and the Green Voice* (in Italy with Adelphi, as *BiBi e la voce verde*). Azar Nafisi is currently working on two books, the first entitled *The Republic of the Imagination*, which is about the power of literature to liberate minds and peoples. The other, *Things I Have Been Silent About*, is a memoir about her mother and is scheduled to be published in 2008. She lives in Washington, D.C.