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For immediate release:

## **Azar Nafisi, Author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, To Speak at Mondavi Center**

November 6, 2007; Davis, California—**Dr. Azar Nafisi**, author of the best-selling *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, will speak at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** on December 4. The book, an electrifying account of the Islamic revolution in Iran and how the cultural upheaval of that period affected one university professor and her seven female students as they studied classic works of Western literature, will form the basis of a lecture presentation entitled *The Republic of the Imagination*.

The event will begin at 8 pm on December 4 in the Mondavi Center's Jackson Hall on the **UC Davis** campus. Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.ARTS (2787) or online at [MondaviArts.org](http://MondaviArts.org). The event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center's **Distinguished Speakers Series**.

A publishing sensation, Azar Nafisi's national bestseller *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* spent more than two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list. The book has been translated into 32 languages, and has won numerous 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.

Beyond its impressive acclaim, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has been a work that resonates strongly with readers, many of whom undoubtedly saw parts of themselves in Nafisi's book-loving characters. The story finds a university professor and her students reading and discussing works such as **F. Scott Fitzgerald's** *The Great Gatsby* and, of course, **Vladimir Nabokov's** *Lolita*, and finding metaphors for their own lives under the increasingly repressive regime in post-revolutionary Iran. In the process, the characters discover important truths about themselves and their own identities within their changing society.

"I was enthralled and moved by Azar Nafisi's account of how she defied, and helped others to defy, radical Islam's war against women," wrote author and activist **Susan Sontag**. "Her memoir contains important and properly complex reflections about the ravages of theocracy, about thoughtfulness, and about the ordeals of freedom—as well as a stirring account of the pleasures and deepening of consciousness that result from an encounter with great literature and with an inspired teacher."

Born in Iran in 1955, Nafisi was sent to England at the age of 13 to finish her education and ultimately earned a Ph.D in English and American Literature from the **University of Oklahoma**. She returned to Iran in 1979 to find her homeland profoundly changed by the Iranian Revolution, which transformed the country from the monarchy of Shah **Mohammed Reza Pahlavi** to an Islamic republic under the control of the **Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini**.

She took a job teaching English literature at the **University of Tehran**, but was expelled in 1981 for refusing to wear a veil as required of women under Islamic law, and did not resume teaching until 1987. She then worked at various universities—and served as an advocate on behalf of Iranian women and intellectuals—until 1995, when increasing political pressures convinced her that the only way to continue would be to offer informal classes in her own home with a small group of students. It was this experience that formed the basis for the largely autobiographical *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, which Nafisi wrote in the United States after leaving Iran in 1997.

“After teaching literature at three universities in Tehran (and being expelled or resigning in despair from each), Azar Nafisi picked seven of her best students and invited them to come to her home every week to discuss books,” wrote *The Guardian*. “She and her students, all women, began to think of these classes as an escape from the reality of Iran’s totalitarian theocracy; but the picture her book paints is of an escape to a true republic where they are all able to discover another reality—themselves...The charismatic passion in the book is not simply for literature itself but for the kind of inspirational teaching of it which helps students to teach themselves by applying their own intelligence and emotions to what they are reading.”

Today, Nafisi is 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 has held a fellowship at **Oxford University**, teaching and conducting a series of lectures on role of Western literature and culture in post-revolutionary Iran.

Nafisi has written for *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. She is the author of *Anti-Terra: A Critical Study of Vladimir Nabokov’s Novels*. She also has written a 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 (2006). She has published a children’s book, *BiBi and the Green Voice*, and is currently working on two books, *The Republic of the Imagination*, which is about the power of literature to liberate minds and peoples, and *Memory Thief*, a memoir about her mother. Nafisi lives in Washington, D.C.

“Dr. Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is a testament to the power the arts have to reflect our world and transform our lives,” said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center’s executive director. “We look forward to Dr. Nafisi’s discussion of her book and her career.”

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**What:** Dr. Azar Nafisi  
*The Republic of the Imagination*

**When:** Tuesday, December 4 • 8 pm

**Where:** Jackson Hall  
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts  
University of California, Davis

**Admission:** \$40/\$34/\$29 Adults • \$20/\$17/\$14.50 Students & Children

**Tickets/Info:** 530.754.ARTS (2787)

866.754.ARTS (toll-free)

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