

To: Epstein, Jeff[jeevacation@gmail.com]
From: Ed
Sent: Sun 1/20/2013 2:42:36 PM
Subject: Happy Birthday

Hi Jeff

Happy Birthday. Also thanks for the coffee (Jennifer is a superb brewer). In looking back at my class notes, you may be interested in Nabokov's first-day of instructions to the students in Lit 311 on Monday, September 14, 1953, the first day of his day of teaching at Cornell. It was also my first lecture course. After telling us to take (and stay in) numbered seats in the lecture hall (which had about 300 seats), and introducing [REDACTED] Who sat on a chair on stage facing him. as the course assistant, he said what we, readers, needed to read novels was 1) a good memory 2) artistic feelings, and 3) a good dictionary. He then said it was a fatal mistake, though a current trend in academia, to search for historical or social meaning because a great novel is a pure invention by the author, and like nature, a deception. He also warned against identifying with any of the characters/ Instead, he said we should be looking for a tingling in the spine. The author were enchanter, and created their effects by orchestrating details that evoked pictures in our head.

PS. I don't think I ever got through *The Gift*, though, following his instructions, I bathed myself in the details

Best regards

Ed Epstein

www.edwardjayepstein.com