

## Maurice Friedberg, 1929–2014

Maurice Friedberg, who died on 15 August 2014 in Washington, D.C., aged 84, belonged to the generation of scholars who, following World War II, established Slavic and Russian studies as a major campus discipline in the United States and had a notable impact on government policy toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War. A Polish-born Holocaust survivor and lifelong opponent of political tyranny of every hue, Maurice believed that novels and poems matter because they exalt the human spirit and help us make sense of ourselves and the society we live in, and this is the approach he adopted when studying and teaching the literatures of Russia and eastern Europe. By the same token, all those who banned or falsified literary texts were, for him, beneath contempt and fair game for the crusading public intellectual, which is precisely who he was. As head of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in 1975–2000 and a one-time director of its Russian and East European Center, he enjoyed a prominent national presence in the academic and wider worlds and was frequently interviewed by the media about U.S.-Soviet relations, the dissident movement in the USSR, Poland, and elsewhere, and a plethora of other current-affairs topics. He was a Fulbright Scholar (1965–66), a Guggenheim Fellow (twice, in 1971 and 1981), and a Senior Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities (1990–91). In the course of his four decades as a professor and scholar, he accrued numerous other awards and honors, several of them at institutions overseas.

Maurice's investigations covered Russian and Soviet literature, cultural transactions and transfers between the western, Slavic, and Jewish worlds, the ideological competition between the Soviet Union and the United States, and the history and methodologies of literary translation. *Russian Classics in Soviet Jackets* (Columbia University Press, 1962) was a meticulously structured, statistically rich study, which showed how the Russian canon had been put in the service of the Soviet regime's ideological priorities and obsessions. *A Decade of Euphoria: Western Literature in Post-Stalin Russia, 1954–1964* (Indiana University Press, 1977) became a standard work on the subject as soon as it was published. It was an assigned text in Russian and comparative literature programs across the English-speaking world—I recall poring over it myself as a student. The book also, incidentally, brought down on its author the ire of Soviet propagandists, for it demonstrated that government censors had systematically bowdlerized the works of foreign writers, quite without a by-your-leave or even knowledge on their part. Some of the American novelists whose works he discussed severed relations with their Soviet publishers, which pleased Maurice no end.

A combative personality, he enjoyed his long-distance give-and-take with ideological opponents from behind the Berlin Wall and liked to show visitors his collection of Soviet newspaper cuttings in which he was labeled a warmongering reactionary. He was especially proud of being described as a “Mr. Nozdrev from Illinois” (a reference to the Nikolai Gogol' character who liked to tell tall tales) in a 1983 book by Albert Beliaev, a Central Committee apparatchik who did his agitprop best to prove that Maurice was in the employ of U.S. intelligence services, which had charged him with a cloak-and-dagger mission to bring down socialist realism. With a reputation such as this, it is no surprise that Maurice was able to visit Moscow only after perestroika got rolling, for he had been persona non grata across the Soviet bloc—testimony to his effectiveness as an investigative scholar of communist cultural repression.

He was a wonderfully supportive mentor to his dissertation advisees and junior faculty and a scintillating presence in the classroom, where he inspired many students to choose Russian studies as their field of specialization. As a very young and callow assistant professor in the 1980s, I benefited tremendously from his guidance, as did quite a few others among my contemporaries on the Illinois campus. He was also an excellent dancer who on one memorable departmental occasion performed the mazurka to the strains of KC and the Sunshine Band (as this detail indicates, the festivities in question occurred when disco still ruled).

That much-used phrase “larger than life” was eminently applicable to Maurice. Effortlessly switching from language to language—Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, French, German, Yiddish—he was the life of the party or the seminar. He carried with him an inexhaustible and constantly updated trove of political jokes—he was even suspected of inventing some of them himself—which he joyfully shared with faculty and students and indeed anyone he engaged in conversation, be it in between sessions at an academic conference, at the dinner table, or during a flight. Some of his interlocutors were notables in the affairs of state: he was a frequent visitor to Washington, D.C., where he sat on a number of committees and enjoyed mixing with the high and mighty. As Maurice had it, it was he who told President Ronald Reagan, in the Oval Office no less, the story of the Russian houseguest whom his village host suspected of amorous designs on the lady of the *izba*: “Доверяй, но проверяй”—trust, but verify. This phrase, delivered in an atrocious Russian accent by the chief executive to all who would listen, became a leitmotif of the warming relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Maurice had the knack of speaking to a fellow Slavist or a lay person about his research interests in exactly the same terms and tone, an ability few members of the academy possess. The thousands of students he taught at Illinois and, before that, at Hunter College of the City University of New York and at Indiana University, and his colleagues across the country and abroad will always remember him for his intellect, warmth, good humor, and compassion for those who fight against political and cultural oppression.

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 September 2014

## Richard Peace, 1933–2013

With the death of Richard Peace, on 5 December 2013, the United Kingdom, and the English-speaking world more widely, has lost one of its leading Slavists of the post-war generation. Widely known as the author of monographs on Fedor Dostoevskii, Nikolai Gogol', Anton Chekhov, Ivan Turgenev, and Lev Tolstoi, Richard also wrote numerous articles and contributions to books on the classics of Russian literature and was a frequent conference participant, both at home and abroad, until long after his official retirement in 1994.

Richard was a Yorkshireman. He began to teach himself Russian at school at Ilkley, but, like many British Slavists and successful writers of his generation, he was to study the language intensively during his period of compulsory military service in the early 1950s. He graduated in French and Russian in 1957 from Keble College, Oxford. A period of postgraduate study followed, whereupon, in 1962, he was appointed to a lectureship in Russian in the English Department at the University of Bristol under Professor Henry Gifford, with whose encouragement and support he built up honors and joint honors programs in Russian studies and laid the foundations for the depart-