

Robert Lamont Belknap, 1929–2014

“It might be fun.” For nearly six decades this phrase, delivered with sparkling eyes and a warm smile, greeted almost any idea or suggestion from Bob Belknap’s students, colleagues, and friends. It encapsulates his unfailing graciousness, open-mindedness, serious playfulness, and generosity of spirit, as well as—in its conditional mood—an appropriate measure of constructive skepticism. Retired from his fifty-three years of teaching (1957–2010) and from his ten years of directing the University Seminars at Columbia University (2000–10), but still very active in the International Dostoevsky Society, our professional associations, and the Whiting Foundation, Bob passed away in his native New York on 17 March 2014, after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife, Dr. Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, three daughters, a stepdaughter, a stepson, three grandsons, four step-grandchildren, and two sisters.

Shortly before this, his Columbia University colleagues Deborah Martinsen, Cathy Popkin, and Irina Reyfman had presented him a volume of essays by three generations of Russianists: *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Belknap*, published by Academic Studies Press in 2014. The contributions foreground pedagogy, and this is appropriate, for Bob devoted his broad learning and radiant intelligence to the betterment of his university, serving twice as dean and also as chair of several programs (including Literature Humanities). His 1977 volume, *Tradition and Innovation, General Education and the Reintegration of the University*, coauthored with Richard Kuhns, outlined his vision of a university with disciplines in dialogue with each other. His sense of how a scholarly community might function was at once idealistic, practical, and intellectually rigorous. He was quick to encourage interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching, and practiced them himself, but he was no less quick to remind us of the difference between a textbook engagement with another discipline and a monographic one.

Bob Belknap’s own engagement with literary and intellectual history was not just monographic but archival. He took part in one of the earliest American academic exchanges with the Soviet Union and worked indefatigably in the Leningrad and Moscow archives, mining the wealth of material and insights that he brought to bear in his two books and many articles. He knew not just the literary works and the unpublished documents pertaining to them but also the periodicals in which they first appeared, and he wrote a memorably useful survey article in 1997 on Russian journals of the 1840s–80s on the basis of this research.

Bob’s first book, *The Structure of “The Brothers Karamazov”* (1967) was published in Europe, by Mouton, as were the books of many American Slavists at that time, and, as a consequence, it did not receive the broad attention it deserved. It was the first American monograph devoted entirely to one work of Russian literature (Ralph Matlaw’s 1957 study was really more of an extended article), and it drew on Bob’s superbly broad and deep literary education, first from Princeton University, where he majored in English and Latin, then from the University of Paris and Columbia, where he earned not only his PhD but also a Russian Institute Certificate in Area Studies. Unpretentious and unjargonated, like all of his writing, it drew on his exposure to Anglo-American New Criticism, Russian formalism, French explication de texte, classicists’ awareness of rhetoric, and his own experience in teaching the great books, but it did so in such a way that it anticipated subsequent developments in the not-yet-developed approaches of narratology and reader-response theory, well before these became fashionable in the American academy. Such chapters as “The Ways in Which

the Inherent Relationships Shape the Reader's Experience," "Parallels between Chronological and Inherent Connections," and "Parallels between the Narrative and the Plot Structures" remain unsurpassed in their clarity and sophistication. While Bob did not intend the book to be a full-scale interpretation (a preface to the 1989 Northwestern University Press republication explains why, with characteristic modesty), such chapters as "*The Nadryv*" and "Divine Grace" have demonstrably changed the way the novel may be understood. His reading neglects none of the novel's darkness, even as it shows, with rare freshness and lack of dogma, how Fedor Dostoevskii strived to make it an instrument of active grace.

Bob's next book, *The Genesis of "The Brothers Karamazov": The Aesthetics, Ideology, and Psychology of Text Making* (1990), integrated a series of conference papers in a study not just of the sources and genesis of the novel, although this is, arguably, our most focused and comprehensive scholarly overview of what and how Dostoevskii read. Rather, it takes an unfashionable topic (genesis, authorial intent), provocatively foregrounds it with playfully old-fashioned chapter titles, and then turns it into an intricate analysis of how Dostoevskii used his sources (reading, notebooks, prior writings, contemporary debates) to shape his text, his characters, and reader response to the text. What seems to start out as *Quellenforschung* becomes highly sophisticated *Ideologiekritik* and rhetorical analysis, without, however, ever failing to ground them in textual detail and pattern.

We will have one more opportunity to witness the workings of this brilliant humanist in action. Just as Bob's second book expanded on his first in range of reference and theoretical implication, so his forthcoming third book, on literary plots, will incorporate a greater range of texts, genres, and literary periods. For those of us who were privileged to hear Bob's dazzling conference presentations, take part in his effervescently dialogic seminars, and engage in all-night symposia at his apartment, it will be a measure of consolation for a career that ended all too soon.

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Karl D. Kramer, 1934–2014

A specialist on Anton Chekhov who shared with his subject a great feel for irony and a very wry sense of humor, Karl Kramer also had that which, according to Chekhov, was a sine qua non for a successful and interesting life: talent. He had talent as a scholar, talent as a teacher, talent as a leader, and talent as a friend. His colleagues, his former students, and all who knew him are deeply mourning his loss.

Karl was a true northwesterner. Born and raised in Seattle, Karl earned all his degrees—BA (English, 1955), MA (comparative literature, 1957), and PhD (comparative literature, 1964)—at the University of Washington. As a participant in one of the first Cold War academic exchanges in the Soviet Union, Karl attended Moscow State University as a doctoral candidate in 1959–60. He left Seattle for his initial academic appointments at Northwestern University (1961–65) and later the University of Michigan (1965–70), where he received tenure. But by 1970 he was back at the University of Washington, where he would teach jointly in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Department of Comparative Literature until his retirement in 1999. For ten years—from 1988 to 1998—Karl chaired the Slavic department. Some of these were tumultuous years, as when the department, quite inexplicably, was