

Nina M. Perlina

Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Born in Leningrad (now once again St. Petersburg), Nina Perlina has, like many other natives of Peter's city, a deep and personal sense both of its fateful history and (in Pushkin's words) its "strict, harmonious beauty." In addition, her academic life and work have been closely intertwined with the history and culture of her homeland and her city. She spent her earliest childhood in her native city, where she endured, along with her family, the brutal three-year siege of the city by Nazi forces in World War II. She later received her higher education there, studying at the prestigious Herzen Pedagogical Institute. Perhaps even more importantly, she also absorbed, from her family, associates, and the very city itself, the essential Russian, and more specifically Petersburg, cultural and intellectual traditions, which managed to survive all attempts to suppress them. Her ties to Petersburg and its literary traditions were deepened through her appointment as a senior research fellow at the then newly established Dostoevsky Museum and her affiliation with the group at Pushkinsky Dom (Pushkin House, the principal national literary archive), which was tasked with preparing the first scholarly edition of the complete works and letters of the great Russian novelist Fedor Dostoevsky. The edition, for which Professor Perlina prepared texts and commentaries for several works, still stands as a landmark of Russian literary scholarship, all the more noteworthy in that Dostoevsky and his work were generally viewed with official disfavor during the Soviet period.

In 1973 Professor Perlina emigrated to the United States, where she became an associate of the Russian Research Center (now the Davis Center) at Harvard University. She also completed a Ph.D. in Russian language and literature at Brown University, where, as one of her fellow graduate students at the time recalls, her native command of Russian and her erudition in Russian literature and culture made her in many ways a mentor to other students. Subsequently, she taught Russian language and literature at Macalester College and Rutgers University, as well as holding a Mellon Fellowship at Cornell University and a fellowship at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. In 1986 she joined the faculty of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Indiana University as an associate professor, becoming full professor in 1993, and has played a crucial role ever since in the department's Russian literature and language programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. She has also established herself as a major figure in an impressive range of scholarly areas.

Professor Perlina's scholarly career began with close study of Dostoevsky and much of her later work has grown from that initial interest. In her first book and in numerous articles and contributions to collections, she has explored the multifaceted connections of Dostoevsky's novels with prior literary discourse and with their cultural ambience. Since any modern understanding of Dostoevsky's significance draws on the fundamental insights of Mikhail Bakhtin, Professor Perlina has also explored in depth the legacy of one of the most original and profound thinkers of the twentieth century, whose work intersects

the fields of philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and literary, religious, and cultural studies. In a series of articles published in North America, Western Europe, and Russia, she has been at the forefront of the ongoing elucidation of the origins and implications of some of Bakhtin's central concepts, as well as participating on a continuing basis in research projects and serial publications devoted to Bakhtin and his legacy. Bakhtin's interest in the emergence and significance of various literary genres in part led to Professor Perlina's exploration of other theorists of such issues, particularly the work of the Leningrad classicist Olga Friedenberg (a cousin and devoted correspondent of the poet and novelist Boris Pasternak), culminating in the first full intellectual biography of Friedenberg. Finally, Professor Perlina's ties to her native city came full circle in her *Writing the Siege of Leningrad* (co-edited and translated with Professor Cynthia Simmons of Boston College), a collection of contemporary accounts, diaries, and memoirs of the siege by women who experienced it directly. The volume is particularly noteworthy for its extensive use of archival sources, in many cases restoring material that had been deleted or distorted when texts were published during the Stalinist period and later.

Throughout her career, Professor Perlina has generously shared her extraordinary erudition and range of interests with students of all levels, not only guiding them through the essentials of Russian literature and culture and the often fearsome complexities of advanced Russian syntax, but also offering advanced courses on such subjects as Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, and twentieth-century Russian literature, as well as seminars on Bakhtin, Russian criticism and literary theory, and the mythology and poetics of the city, particularly St. Petersburg, in Russian literature and culture. Her ability to draw on a vast store of texts, all magically and perpetually at her fingertips, and to elucidate their intricate connections to the cultural context that is an integral part of her lived experience, has inspired students for over three decades. For both students and colleagues, Professor Perlina has been and will continue to be an invaluable resource, for whom any question, be it seemingly trivial or bafflingly recondite, provides an occasion to impart (with unfailing warmth and grace!) not only some of her extensive knowledge of Russian culture but also her infectious enthusiasm for it. It comes as no surprise that many of Professor Perlina's students, both undergraduate and graduate, have themselves gone on to become specialists in Russian literature.

Although Professor Perlina will no longer be engaged in the daily routines of academic instruction, she intends to continue her explorations of Russian literature and culture and to share them with colleagues both here at Indiana and throughout the world. While Bloomington will be her home for the foreseeable future, she plans to maintain her very active schedule of scholarly and personal travel to places of cultural significance, in particular to her first home, St. Petersburg.

Andrew R. Durkin