

Introduction

Like Athena, Nina Moiseevna Perlina arrived in the United States in 1974 as an already accomplished scholar. After completing the A. I. Herzen Pedagogical Institute in 1961 with an M.A. and M.A.T. in Russian and German, she worked as a senior research fellow at the Dostoevsky Museum in Leningrad from 1969 until 1974. In 1970, she joined the renowned group of scholars already working on the thirty-volume academy edition of Dostoevsky's complete collected works. She contributed more than fifty pages of meticulously researched annotation and commentary for several of Dostoevsky's early works. She also contributed an extensive introduction and commentary to the published memoirs of S. Kovalevskaia and A. G. Dostoevskaia, with A. S. Dolinin as editor (1964).

After arriving in the United States, Professor Perlina was accepted by the graduate program at Brown University. Under the mentorship of Victor Terras, she completed her dissertation and received her doctoral degree after only two years. The fruit of this labor ultimately became her highly influential book *Varieties of Poetic Utterance: Quotation in the Brothers Karamazov* (1985), a magisterial application of Bakhtin's theories to Dostoevsky's last novel. Professor Perlina continued her work on Dostoevsky, broadening it to include studies of Herzen's writings and their importance for Dostoevsky. But Professor Perlina's protean interests and erudition also led her to write about such writers as Gogol, Pushkin, Bulgakov, Kharmis, Auerbach, Vico, Bakhtin, and Martin Buber, and to investigate such topics as the Siege of Leningrad, the culturology of N. P. Antsyferov, and the myth of the maternal and life-giving nature of the October Revolution. Her groundbreaking archival research on Freidenberg's unpublished papers in Oxford and her tireless research in Russia resulted in a remarkable biography and penetrating analysis of Ol'ga Mikhailovna Freidenberg's innovative treatment of ancient folklore, cultural history, and historical aesthetics. Her acknowledgment of debt to numerous scholars, both colleagues

and former students,¹ is fully reciprocated by her interlocutors, who, after engaging in a true intellectual dialogue and exchange of knowledge, depart with a deep sense of gratitude and enlightenment. It is quite fitting that she herself characterizes her work with others as a “symposium,” not strictly in the sense of a formal scholarly exchange, but as an occasion for the convivial, free exchange of ideas. The pleasures of laughter and play are always mixed with the serious exploration of scholarly matters.

Professor Perlina’s teaching is enriched by the same rigorous research, thoroughness, and creativity that sustain her published writings. She is as at home and effective in an undergraduate class on advanced grammar and stylistics as she is in a graduate seminar on the poetic image of the city in Russian literature. Professor Perlina is an almost inexhaustible source of information about nearly every aspect of Russian and Soviet literature, culture, and history, which she generously shares with her students.²

Although it is hard to imagine what she was like as a teacher in a Russian village school,³ Professor Perlina’s work in the university classroom is distinguished by remarkable sensitivity and openness to bold and complex ideas, even when they are wrong. On the one hand, she is better than most teachers at understanding what a student has to say; on the other hand, she carefully crafts her response so as to encourage her students to see the consequences of a particular inter-

¹ Although she thanks several people for “Englishing her English,” an anecdote communicated by Arlene Forman says much about Professor Perlina’s command of English academic vocabulary: “from the outset Nina would astound me by her knowledge of rather arcane English vocabulary. We used to bet on whether or not I could find a given word in the dictionary, and I, as a native speaker, would often be brought up short by the words she had learned by reading. Of course, I should not have been surprised. As a child, upon hearing the word “dantist,” Nina immediately assumed that it could only mean a “Dante scholar.”

² As John Bartle puts it, “She also knows all the right places to send her students, whether it is to find an allusion only hinted at in the text or an obscure source, found only in a dusty archive somewhere. From Kant to Pascal to Bakhtin, from Pushkin to Gogol to Dostoevsky, from the myth of Petersburg to the city itself, Nina is a fount of information, inspiration, and ideas.”

³ After completing her degree she was assigned to teach in a small village school in Belojarka (which she aptly renamed “Belodyrka”). Perhaps the only noteworthy fact about this village was that it was located on the same road that Dostoevsky traveled to Siberian exile.

pretation, often leading them to new and unexpected ways to understand a text; and on the third hand, she gently and tactfully also corrects the flaws in a student's line of thought.⁴ When an undergraduate at Rutgers, who called herself "Ptichka," once complained about how difficult and dark Russian literature was, Professor Perlina responded with characteristic sympathy, and vernacular humor: "My dear, university is not Dunkin' Donuts."

Few teachers devote more of their own life to their students. Professor Perlina's legendary generosity extends beyond the classroom into her home, where her students and colleagues regularly enjoy her hospitality. Food for thought is always complemented by the marvels of her culinary skills,⁵ and she has sustained more than one domestically challenged colleague through many an Indiana evening.

Professor Perlina is much loved and respected by her many students, colleagues, and friends. She has perfect pitch when it comes to identifying a *podlets*, and defends her friends ferociously against the injustices and hypocrisies that are often a part of academic life. May this *Festschrift* serve as a tribute to her erudition, her loyal friendship, and the varieties of her influence on scholarship in her field. Поздравляем!

⁴ As part of her pedagogical arsenal, Professor Perlina's "three-handed" approach not only transcends the binaries that curtail polyphony, but also encourages students to engage in a productive and memorable play of ideas.

⁵ One talent she apparently acquired only after she arrived in the United States was her ability to cook. Arlene Forman reports that "once when Jan Kasic, then a Brown graduate student, paid [Nina's] parents a visit, they were eager to know how Nina was doing in the U.S. They were very happy to hear that Nina was doing well, had a roommate, was writing her dissertation, improving her English, etc. When asked about her cooking skills, Jan waxed eloquent about that as well. At which point her mother pointed out that her Nina couldn't melt cheese on bread without burning it, so who was this person that Kasic knew?"