



FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE AND LIES

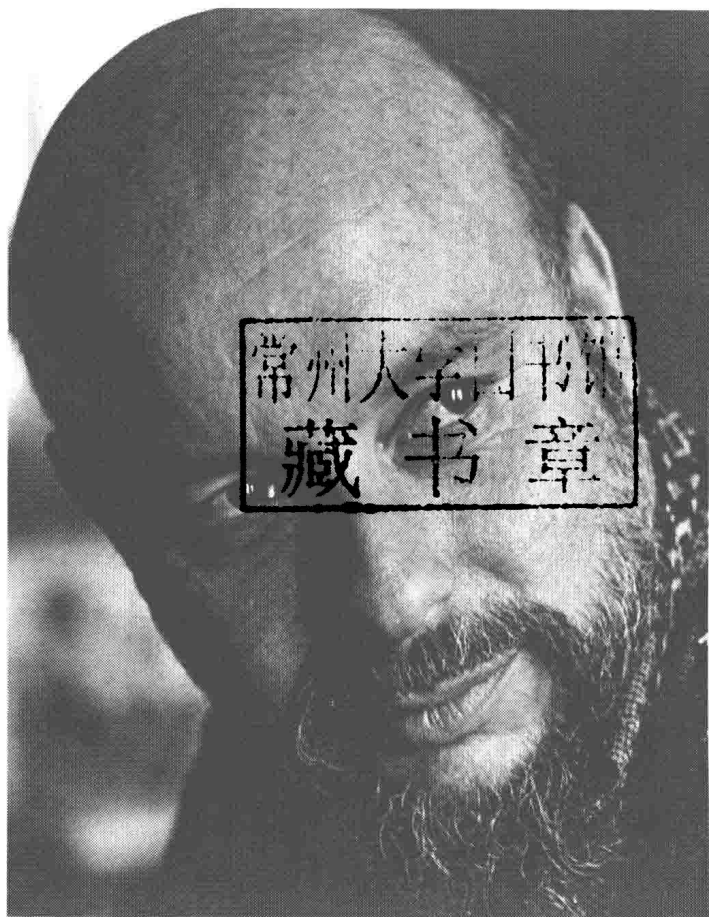
Essays on Russian
Poetry and Music
by Simon Karlinsky

Edited by
Robert P. Hughes,
Thomas A. Koster,
Richard Taruskin

Ars Rossica

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Simon Karlinsky, early 1970s
Photograph by Joseph Zimbrott

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:
A catalog record for this book as available from the Library of Congress.

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ISBN 978-1-61811-158-6

On the cover:
Heinrich Campendonk (1889–1957),
Bayerische Landschaft mit Fuhrwerk (ca. 1918).
Oil on panel.
In Simon Karlinsky's collection, 1946–2009.
© 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Published by Academic Studies Press in 2013.
28 Montfern Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135, USA
press@academicstudiespress.com
www.academicstudiespress.com

Lightning Source UK Ltd
Milton Keynes UK
UKOW031138110613

212072UK00004B/14/P



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Simon Karlinsky, early 1970s
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Ars Rossica

Series Editor — David M. Bethea
(University of Wisconsin-Madison)



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:
A catalog record for this book as available from the Library of Congress.

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ISBN 978-1-61811-158-6

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Preface

Simon Karlinsky (1924–2009) was a prolific and provocative scholar of modern Russian literature, music and, latterly, sexual politics. In this volume we republish a selection of his reviews and essays about poetry and music, leaving aside his even more numerous writings on Russian prose fiction, literary history, and cultural phenomena. As there are over 250 publications to his credit, including a number of full-length books, this represents no more than ten to fifteen percent of his published writing.

Karlinsky taught at the University of California, Berkeley for some thirty years. His path to a scholarly career was anything but direct. An only child, he was born 22 September 1924 in the Russian enclave of the Manchurian city of Harbin, where he received his primary education and developed his tastes for music and literature.¹ The family left for the United States in 1938, after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and the worsening of conditions there. He attended high school and college in Los Angeles before enlisting in the US Army in 1944.² Between 1945 and 1951 he served as a Russian interpreter in occupied Berlin, not only for the Army but, after discharge from the Army, for the American military government and the office of the Control Council for Germany.³ He spent a year (1951–52) in Paris, where he studied musical composition with Arthur Honegger at the École Normale de Musique. Subsequently he returned to Berlin, where from 1952 to 1957 he was employed again as liaison officer and interpreter for the US Berlin Command. During that period he

¹ Consult herein his essay entitled “Russian Culture in Manchuria and the Memoirs of Valery Pereleshin” for personal reminiscences of life in Harbin at that time, In the 1990s, SK wrote an extended memoir of the first fourteen years of his life. It remains unpublished, and is now preserved among the Simon Karlinsky Papers at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

² For his life in Los Angeles, see the opening pages of “In Search of Poplavsky: A Collage” in the present volume.

³ An episode from his life in Berlin is recounted in S. Karli [Simon Karlinsky], “My Most Durable Translation,” *New Yorker*, 10 October 1959.

continued his studies under Boris Blacher at what was then the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik, and several of his scores were performed. He remained deeply involved in music and dance throughout his life, and the music of Chaikovsky and Stravinsky drew his particular admiration. But he ultimately decided against a composer's career, and he came to regard that phase of his life as a closed book. To one of us, who was pestering him for a peek at his scores, he finally wrote, drolly but emphatically:

As for my compositions, I'm sure you don't want to see them. As the quotation goes, "that was in another country, and besides, the wench is dead." There was a cantata which Gérard Souzay was to sing in Berlin, but the concert was cancelled. Later on, an American baritone wanted to do it, but that concert was also cancelled. Ergo, one can't fight fate.⁴

And that is when his early love of literature (Russian, French, English, and in time German and Polish) came to the fore. Karlinsky received a BA degree from the University of California, Berkeley in 1960, an MA from Harvard University in 1961, and a PhD in Slavic Languages and Literatures from UC Berkeley in 1964, where he was immediately appointed to the faculty and rapidly rose to the rank of full professor by 1967. He was twice awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship. At Berkeley, he taught with great panache a wide variety of courses and seminars, including advanced language and stylistics, surveys of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian literature, Russian Romanticism, Russian Modernism, and the history of the Russian theater and drama, as well as single-author courses on Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoi, and Chekhov. He retired in 1991.

Karlinsky's career as a publishing scholar was extraordinary. His first, pioneering book (his revised dissertation, written under the direction of G. P. Struve) was on Marina Tsvetaeva and appeared in 1966. This study was the product of indefatigable research into Tsvetaeva's biography and spectacular close reading of her wildly idiosyncratic poetry. Karlinsky's work became the cornerstone for future Tsvetaeva studies well before her

⁴ Simon Karlinsky to Richard Taruskin, 28 August 1985, in the editor's possession. The quotation is from Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*:

Friar Barnardine. Thou hast committed—
Barabas. Fornication? But that
 Was in another country, and besides
 The wench is dead.

renown either in the West or in Soviet Russia. He published a second book on Tsvetaeva in 1985, now taking full advantage of the mass of research and analysis inspired by his initial study.

To be reckoned among Karlinsky's most valuable contributions, widely read inside and outside the profession, is his now-standard edition of the selected letters of Anton Chekhov (1973). He collaborated closely on the translations, and his erudite, scintillating introduction and annotations to the letters comprise a virtual critical biography of the writer whom he considered an exemplary human being.

Other volumes under Karlinsky's editorship were signposts in the English-language reception of Russian émigré literature, a phenomenon that he knew at first hand. He coedited a two-volume issue of the journal *TriQuarterly* in 1974 devoted to Russian literature and culture in the West, which was republished in 1977 as *The Bitter Air of Exile: Russian Writers in the West, 1922–1972*. His editorial work was decisive and his contributions therein included introductions, articles, commentary, and translations. The commanding figure for him was Vladimir Nabokov (long before his fame as an English novelist), about whom Karlinsky wrote frequently and discerningly. His edition of the Russian writer's correspondence with the American critic Edmund Wilson, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940–1971* (1979; German expanded edition, 1995; revised and expanded, *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, 2001), was widely hailed.

Meanwhile, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol* had been published in 1976 and had provoked a storm of controversy over its assertion of the reflection of repressed homosexuality in the writer's life and work. This study signaled a series of articles, reviews, translations, and conference appearances on the role of sexuality in art, homosexual themes, and queer theory that were at the time almost unprecedented in the study of Russian literature and culture. Karlinsky's writings on the subject appeared primarily in the leading gay outlets, but his concerns were echoed across the board. He was particularly active in exploring the hidden and not-so-hidden lives of some Russian cultural figures who happened to be homosexual.⁵ He played a leading role in promoting or defending the reputa-

⁵ For one example among several, see Simon Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture: The Impact of the October Revolution," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 347–64, 552–59.

tions of outstanding gay figures such as the émigré poet Valery Pereleshin and the persecuted Soviet poet Gennady Trifonov, along with Mikhail Kuzmin, Sergei Diaghilev, and Pyotr Chaikovsky. At the same time, he worked to combat what he described in *Christopher Street* as the “self-imposed brainwashing ... in the [American] gay movement” in the 1970s. Subjects that he addressed included the virulently homophobic nature in the practice of Marxist-Leninist ideology, to which a number of Western gay liberationists then subscribed and which, Karlinsky pointed out, had given rise to genocidal terror in the Soviet Union and China.

The author himself considered his *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (1985), a book that grew out of an admired course in the history of the Russian theater, his greatest achievement. It is the result of monumental research and thinking about the origins and early development of the Russian stage. His colleagues lamented the fact that he never produced a follow-up, for he was a rare connoisseur as well of the plays of Gogol, Ostrovsky, Tolstoi, Chekhov, and the Russian Symbolist and Postsymbolist theater.

A steady stream of articles and reviews in such mainstream media as the *New York Times Book Review*, the *TLS*, and the *Nation*, and in the professional journals, addressed a wide gamut of subjects and personalities. Karlinsky’s interests ranged from saints’ lives and the *Domostroi* to Soviet institutions; from eighteenth-century Russian comic opera to Chaikovsky, Ravel, Diaghilev, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich; from the prose of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, and his revered Chekhov to the novels of Nabokov and Solzhenitsyn. He devoted special attention to Modernist poetry and drama (Gippius, Annensky, Kuzmin, Acmeists, Futurists and Soviet-era poets) and was the enthusiastic champion of such younger émigré poets as Pereleshin and Nikolai Morshen.⁶

Karlinsky had a nuanced command of both Russian and English. He was a master of simultaneous translation, a superb interpreter—and performer—of literary texts. Numerous translations of works by and about

⁶ For lists of his publications, see the bibliography compiled by Molly Molloy, pp. 4–31 of the Festschrift in his honor, *For SK: In Celebration of the Life and Career of Simon Karlinsky*, ed. Michael S. Flier and Robert P. Hughes (Oakland: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994); and the more selective list accompanying Christopher Putney’s entry “Simon Karlinsky” in *Gay and Lesbian Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Tom Pendergast and Sara Pendergast (Detroit: St. James Press, 1998), 201–4.

Russian writers bear his imprint, both acknowledged and silent; his readings of many major texts will endure.

The heyday of Karlinsky's scholarly career coincided with the Cold War and an extended period of stagnation in social, political and cultural life in the Soviet Union, and much of his most valuable work is best understood against that background. His disgust with the restrictive and restricted worldviews, rampant censorship, and hidebound ideologies that were so characteristic of the period (1950s–1980s) is everywhere evident in his published writings.⁷

Karlinsky was in his eighty-fifth year when he died at his home in Kensington, California, on 5 July 2009. He was surrounded in his later years by friends and colleagues, two devoted care-givers, and his beloved companion of thirty-five years, Peter Carleton (whom he was able to marry only in 2008). We offer the present volume as a tribute to the distinguished career of Simon Karlinsky as a teacher and publishing scholar.

The idea for this collection originated in our conversations at and after a conference held in Simon's memory at the University of California, Berkeley in October 2010 (“Freedom from Violence and Lies: A Conference in Celebration of the Life and Work of Simon Karlinsky”).⁸ Several of his colleagues translated articles for the present book, and we are grateful to them for this contribution: Joan Grossman, Olga Raevsky-Hughes, Joachim Klein, Liza Knapp, Hugh McLean, Eric Naiman, and Kevin O'Brien. We also extend our appreciation to the helpful staff of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley for providing us access to the Simon Karlinsky Papers prior to the complete processing of this collection (BANC MSS 2010/177), to Peter Carleton, to David Frick and Irina Paperno of Berkeley's Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, to Sharona Vedol, our editor at Academic Studies Press,

⁷ The reader will occasionally come across a “current,” “new,” or “recent” reference that pertains to a time when the essay first appeared. We have not endeavored to revise all such language, and as noted, this context is well worth understanding and appreciating.

⁸ The title is from Anton Chekhov's letter to Aleksei Pleshcheev, 4 October 1888: “My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love and the most absolute freedom imaginable, freedom from violence and lies, no matter what form the latter two take.” *Letters of Anton Chekhov*, translated from the Russian by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with Simon Karlinsky; selection, commentary, and introduction by Simon Karlinsky (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 109.