

A black and white portrait of Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy. She is shown from the chest up, wearing round glasses and a dark jacket over a dark top. Her hair is dark and curly. She is looking slightly to the right of the frame with a thoughtful expression. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on her face and glasses, and deep shadows on the left side of her face and neck. The background is out of focus, showing some indistinct shapes and light tones.

Photograph by
David A. Goldfarb
(London, 2001)

**Catharine Theimer
Nepomnyashchy**

(1951–2015)

Catharine Nepomnyashchy, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Russian Literature and Culture, Barnard College, died on March 21, 2015. She is survived by her daughter, Olga Nepomnyashchy; her mother, Jo-Anne Theimer; and her brother, James Theimer, and sister-in-law, Sunnie Noellert.

Cathy Nepomnyashchy was a brilliant scholar, thinker, teacher, mentor, and administrator. Her intellectual energy was a force of nature. She was an agent of change in the institutions and programs she served, the scholarly fields she pursued, and no less in the hearts and minds of the many people she knew.

A native of New Jersey, Cathy Nepomnyashchy earned her B.A. in Russian literature and B.A. and M.A. degrees in French literature at Brown. She went on for her doctorate in Russian literature in the Department of Slavic Languages at Columbia. She joined the faculty at Barnard College in 1987.

Cathy Nepomnyashchy was a masterful teacher and a curricular visionary. Her regular repertory included all periods of Russian literature and all forms of Russian culture, including popular culture. She collaborated in the classroom with colleagues in history, political science, and human rights. She masterminded interdisciplinary and cross-cultural courses. She taught online courses. In summer 2014 she cotaught a Columbia Global Programs course on Post-Socialist Cities in which students visited Berlin, Moscow, Ulan-Bator, and Beijing, traveling part of the way via the Trans-Siberian Railway. Her seminars in Soviet and post-Soviet literature and culture were essential to the Columbia graduate program. And she especially loved introducing undergraduates to the work of Vladimir Nabokov. In addition to being a superb writer herself, Cathy Nepomnyashchy had a special gift for teaching others to write lucid prose. And she was known not just on campus but in the Slavic field at large as a loyal mentor who forged lasting bonds and who never let students give up on what they aspired to.

In addition to chairing the Barnard Slavic Department, Cathy Nepomnyashchy served as director of the Harriman Institute from 2001 to 2009. She drew academics, writers, chiefs of state, ambassadors, public intellectuals, conceptual artists, dancers, and others into action at the Harriman. She broadened the geopolitical range of the institute to include Central Asia and Georgia, and she made it a center of interdisciplinary inquiry. She was a wonderfully creative administrator.

The recipient of the AATSEEL Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Profession (2011) and the Harriman Institute Alumna of the Year award (2013), Cathy Nepomnyashchy had been honored for her achievements in the field.

As a scholar, Cathy Nepomnyashchy's range was broad. She published on Pushkin, on great writers of the Soviet period, on émigré Russian writers, on women writers, on Jane Austen in Russia, on ballet, and on popular culture and new media. She is known especially for her work on Abram Tertz (Andrei Sinyavsky): *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime*, which appeared in English in

1995 and in Russian translation in 2003; and a translation with Slava Yastremski of Tertz's *Strolls with Pushkin*. She coedited *Under the Skies of My Africa: Alexander Pushkin and Blackness*, a volume that inspired an editorial by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in which he asked, "Was the father of Russian lit a brother?" *Mapping the Feminine: Russian Women and Cultural Difference*, another coedited volume, was a landmark in the study of writings by and about women. In each of her books she put a feature of Russian literary life into play in a way that expanded the horizons of our field.

For the past few years Cathy Nepomnyashchy had been at work on a book manuscript, "Nabokov and His Enemies: Terms of Engagement." In it she explores how Nabokov capitalized on writers and thinkers whom he took pleasure in trashing—among them Sigmund Freud, Jane Austen, Agatha Christie, Boris Pasternak, and Edmund Wilson. This leads her to "suggest a way of rethinking authorial agency in the construction of literary texts." In Cathy Nepomnyashchy, Vladimir Nabokov met his match. This project played to her many strengths: her literary sensibility, her erudition, her critical sophistication, her penetrating intellect, and her delight in the mysteries of the human psyche.

The literature, culture, and society of Russia and its neighboring lands were not just a field of study for Cathy Nepomnyashchy. She lived and breathed this world. Together with Nadezhda Azghikina, a Russian journalist and dear friend, she published an eyewitness account of the 1991 coup in Moscow, *Three Days in August*. (It appeared in Russian in 2014.) Cathy Nepomnyashchy traveled extensively. She was an astute observer of the societies and cultures she visited. Cathy Nepomnyashchy took joy in sharing these experiences with her traveling companions—her husband, Vyacheslav Nepomnyashchy, who died in 2011; and their beloved daughter, Olga, now sixteen, who accompanied her mother on her recent trip across Siberia.

Cathy Nepomnyashchy's colleagues, students, and friends in the Columbia and Barnard Slavic departments and Harriman Institute cherish her memory. We are extraordinarily proud of the legacy she leaves behind.

We remembered Cathy Nepomnyashchy at a memorial on October 2, 2015.

A website that houses Cathy Nepomnyashchy's writings and celebrates her life and work has been set up by her former students Ani Kokobobo and Emma Lieber. Please see <http://www.cathynepomnyashchy.com>. If you would like to post a tribute on that site, please send it to cathynepomnyashchytribute@gmail.com.

A fund at Barnard College has been established that will support student and faculty initiatives in the area of Cathy Nepomnyashchy's work. To make a gift to the Cathy Nepomnyashchy Fund, please either mail a check made payable to Barnard College to the Barnard College Development Office, 3009 Broadway, New York, NY 10027 (be sure to include a note that references the Fund by name), or visit barnard.edu/gift and enter the Fund name as the designation.

In Memoriam



Gene Sosin
(1921–2015)

Gene Sosin, a member of the Russian Institute's second graduating class in 1949, died peacefully on May 6, 2015, of pneumonia. He was 93. For over thirty years Sosin was a key executive of Radio Liberty, the U.S. government-supported shortwave radio station that broadcast to the Soviet Union in Russian and the major languages of the national minorities. His book *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty* (Penn State University Press, 1999), in the words of historian Richard Pipes, was "the first authoritative account of an institution that played a major role in undermining Soviet authority and paving the road to its collapse."

Sosin prefaces his story of Radio Liberty by describing how he met his wife, Gloria, a WAC veteran, at Columbia in Ernest J. Simmons's Dostoevsky seminar and how the young married couple subsequently moved to Munich as members of the Harvard University Refugee Interview Project. The Russian Institute's Philip E. Mosely had strongly recommended them for the team responsible for interviewing displaced persons from the Soviet Union who remained in the West after the war. The project became famous as a pioneering research model that assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet system. Gloria published an account of the project and their experiences in that group of twenty-five Harvard and Columbia graduate students as *Red Letter Year—Munich 1950–1951* (Kalita Press, 2004).

In 1952 Sosin joined the staff of Radio Liberty, which was preparing to inaugurate broadcasts the following year. He was instrumental in making Radio Liberty the most powerful and popular Western station, reaching millions of Soviet listeners. Before retiring in 1985, Sosin helped direct programming and policy in

several positions: head of the New York division, senior adviser to the director of Radio Liberty at the headquarters in Munich, and, after the merger with Radio Free Europe in the mid-1970s, director of broadcast publishing.

Sosin received his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1958, with a dissertation on the role of professional theaters and drama for children in Soviet education. He lectured frequently on university campuses throughout the United States about the activity of Radio Liberty; underground Russian *anekdoty* (political jokes); and *magnitizdat*—the clandestine tape recording of songs by Soviet dissident bards, including Okudzhava, Galich, and Vysotsky. *Dissent in the USSR*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1975, includes a chapter by Sosin on *magnitizdat*.

In the post-Soviet era, Gene and Gloria were invited by Radio Liberty to take part in the fortieth anniversary of its birth, which was celebrated in Moscow in the Central House of Writers, with Gorbachev and other prominent figures present. His speech at the event was broadcast by Radio Liberty and excerpted in the daily *Segodnya*.

In his essay "Moscow and the Hudson," Sosin reminisces on his long Columbia career, beginning as a Columbia College student (Class of '41) who was a member of the Varsity Show, winner of limerick contests for Chock full o'Nuts, and student of Japanese prior to enlisting in the Navy in 1942 (published in *Columbia Magazine* (Winter 2008–09)). He returned to Columbia for graduate studies on the GI Bill and enrolled in the new Russian Institute.

Gene Sosin valued his Russian/Harriman Institute ties and was a frequent visitor to Harriman events. He will be missed.