

## William Harkins, 1921–2014

Bill Harkins was a kindly man, a scholar who followed the inclinations of his heart and his keen aesthetic sense as well as his intellectual curiosity. Unassuming—some would have said “shy”—and never above doing yeoman service for his students and his field, he played a formative role in the evolution of Slavic studies in the United States during its most vibrant period.

William Edward Harkins was born in State College, Pennsylvania, and went on to study at Pennsylvania State University, earning his BA in philosophy with highest honors in 1942. After graduation, he joined the war effort, serving for three years as an officer in the supply corps of the U.S. Navy Reserve. In 1945, he began his graduate studies in Columbia University’s Department of Slavic Languages, which would remain his home base throughout his professional life. In 1946, he completed his MA essay, “The Dramatic Technique of Anton Chekhov,” but he soon moved beyond just Russian literature. In 1946–47, he taught English at Charles University in Prague and went on to write his doctoral dissertation, *The Russian Folk Epos in Czech Literature, 1800–1900* (King’s Crown Press, 1951). Having taught for one year at Penn State and two years at Columbia before receiving his doctorate, Harkins was hired as an assistant professor in 1958 and moved up through the ranks to full professor, in 1964, and professor emeritus, in 1990. In the course of his decades at Columbia, Harkins served in a gamut of administrative positions of the sort that are necessary but often underappreciated, including chairing the Council for Research in the Humanities and serving in the University Senate, on the administrative committee of the Bakhmeteff Archive, and on the Committee on Instruction. Most notably, Harkins served three stints as chair of the Department of Slavic Languages and was first associate director and then director of the Russian (now Harriman) Institute. Beyond Columbia, Harkins served the Slavic field at large: he was treasurer of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (now ASEES), president of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages, president of the Masaryk Institute, and chairman of the American Committee of Slavists.

It is the rare scholar who while following his own drummer also devotes time to his students’ needs, but this was very much in Harkins’s vein. Having learned Czech himself, he wrote *A Modern Czech Grammar* (Columbia University Press, 1953) to give a leg up to those who came after him, and, as a one-time graduate student who had to take the Columbia Slavic department’s grueling comprehensive exam, I can testify that Harkins’s *Dictionary of Russian Literature* (Philosophical Library, 1956) was an exceptional resource. We also cannot forget his role in disseminating Slavic studies to the American intellectual public. As a pioneering figure in Czech studies in the United States, Harkins’s scholarship and translations helped make authors like Karel Čapek, Karel Hynek Mácha, Vladimír Páral, and Zdeněk Urbánek available to American readers.

I personally owe an immense debt of gratitude to Bill Harkins. He was there at virtually all the major turning points in my graduate career and then later as a colleague and a friend. His role in my scholarly life is all the more remarkable in that our periods of interest were widely divergent, with the telling exception of Aleksandr Pushkin, who provided the leitmotif for many of our conversations ranging over decades. But indeed Harkins had been there on my long-awaited very first day of studying Russian. He was there in the guise of the course textbook, the modestly titled *Introductory Russian Grammar*, written with Galina Stilman (Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1964). While its methodology has fallen out of favor, I still consider it one of the finest Russian textbooks for English speakers ever written (and am gratified to see that it

still gets a full five stars on Amazon.com). In a very real sense, Bill Harkins taught me and my generation of Russianists how to talk.

In my case, moreover, he taught me not only how to talk Russian but, more than any of my other teachers, how to write English. Just as his textbook was there for me when I began studying Russian as an undergraduate, so Harkins himself was when I began my graduate career. I was privileged to take the Slavic department proseminar with him. The course has throughout its history challenged students to test theory against practice by addressing weekly different schools of literary theory and writing a series of papers, each from a different theoretical point of view, on the same text. Harkins chose Pushkin's *The Gypsies*, which certainly inspired my interest in Pushkin's narrative poems, as it did decades-long discussions with Harkins about how I really would have preferred to spend the semester on *The Bronze Horseman*. Harkins merely told us to write a paper on *The Gypsies*, which we all dutifully did. In the class in which the papers were given back, he announced that only one of us had gotten the assignment "right." What was getting it "right"? Well, for starters, it had an interesting way into the poem rather than a bland explication de texte. The rest was harder. The turning point for me came with a little extra help from a friend who taught writing—and could actually read Harkins's handwriting better than I could. After going carefully through his comments on one of my papers with my friend and finally taking in that it actually made a difference why one sentence came before another in terms of building an argument, I felt that my attitude toward writing had been changed for the better for life thanks to his careful attention to the details of my writing. It is a legacy I continue to pass on to my own students.

My favorite anecdote about Harkins also dates back to my grad student days. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, only recently expelled from the USSR, came to Columbia University to do research while Harkins was director of the Russian Institute. I was writing my MA essay on Solzhenitsyn, as was my fellow graduate student John Kohan (later *Time* magazine's Moscow bureau chief). Solzhenitsyn was an international celebrity and there was a thrill about the whole business. He spent most of his time holed up in the library in the International Affairs Building, where students hovered to catch a glimpse. At some point, however, he came upstairs for a meeting with Harkins. John and I sat outside the director's office. While we could not be flies on the wall, and only really succeeded in catching a glimpse of Solzhenitsyn's dazzling blue eyes when he finally departed, Harkins did his level best to convince him to meet with his two earnest graduate students. Unfortunately, the author had bigger ideas about venue and audience and left for Washington in good haste. However, Harkins did vouchsafe us the name of his hotel, and John and I struggled through the night to craft a letter to leave for him in desperate hope of an answer that, of course, never came. It was characteristic of Harkins that he did his best for his students, and I will always appreciate the Pushkinian epistolary twist to the whole story.

It a testimony to Harkins's love of beauty that his interests lay beyond the word and beyond Slavic. He was a serious collector of Japanese prints, and since the mid-1970s he donated more than 150 of them to the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State University. He also served twice as president of the Japanese Art Society of America (formerly the Ukiyo-e Society). As I was preparing these remarks, I was pleased to come across a letter by Harkins in the April 28, 1977, issue of the *New York Review of Books*, with a reply by Nicolas Nabokov, the composer and cousin of Vladimir Nabokov, under the title "Tea with Plums." While still disagreeing with Harkins about the legend that *razvesistaia kliukva*, "a branchy cranberry," was coined by Alexander Dumas, *père*, Nabokov expresses great admiration for Harkins's scholarship and for the evolution of Slavic studies in the United States. Most irresistible, however, is the coming together of the wonderful images of "tea with plums" and "branchy cran-

berry” which certainly would have appealed to Harkins’s fine sense of language. It is a lovely, if whimsical, tribute.

William E. Harkins is survived by his longtime companion, Hideo Kidokoro, as well as by his brother, John W. Harkins; two nieces, Mary Ann Williams and Rebecca Candelario; and many cousins, grandnieces, and grandnephews.

Columbia University has established the Harkins Colloquium, to be run by graduate students in celebration of intellectual diversity. Information on donating and participating in this initiative may be found on the Harriman Institute website, at [harriman.columbia.edu/news/william-e-harkins-1921–2014](http://harriman.columbia.edu/news/william-e-harkins-1921–2014) (last accessed November 1, 2014).

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## George L. Kline, 1921–2014

The Slavist community has recently lost one of its most eminent and widely admired elders, George L. Kline, Milton C. Nahm Professor Emeritus of Bryn Mawr College. He passed away on October 21, 2014, at age ninety-three, some six months following the death of his beloved wife, Virginia. Despite somewhat precarious health in the later years of his life, Professor Kline continued a very active scholarly career to the end. As little as two weeks before he passed away, he was still engaged in detailed correspondence with longtime colleagues, consulting with them about work currently under way as well as his plans for future projects. Lauded for his wide-ranging contributions to philosophy, the study of Russian and Soviet philosophy and religious thought, and the appreciation of Russian literature, above all poetry, as well as for his exemplary translations of Russian poetry and prose, he also served as an extraordinarily generous mentor to successive generations of younger scholars who sought his guidance. His skills as an editor in multiple languages were legendary. He was elected president of the Hegel Society of America (1984–86) and president of the Metaphysical Society of America (1985–86). In 1999, he received an award from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (now ASEES) for Distinguished Contributions to Slavic Studies.

George Kline was born on March 3, 1921, in Galesburg, Illinois. He attended Boston University for three years (1938–41) but then interrupted his education to serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II as a navigator in B-24s, for which he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. After the war, he completed his undergraduate education with honors at Columbia College (1947), followed by graduate degrees at Columbia University (MA, 1948; PhD, 1950).

During a professional career extending over sixty-five years, beginning with his earliest publications in 1949, Kline published well over three hundred articles, chapters in anthologies, encyclopedia entries, book reviews, and review articles, plus translations. He authored two monographs and edited or coedited six anthologies. He taught philosophy at Columbia University from 1950 to 1952 and was a visiting assistant professor at the University of Chicago from 1952 to 1953. It was at Chicago that he first taught his legendary course on “Russian Ethical and Social Theory,” which he was subsequently to teach many times over the course of his career. He returned to teach at Columbia from 1953 to 1959 and then joined the faculty of Bryn Mawr College in 1959. For the first four years there, he taught in both the philosophy and the Russian departments before settling in philosophy, where he became a full professor in 1966