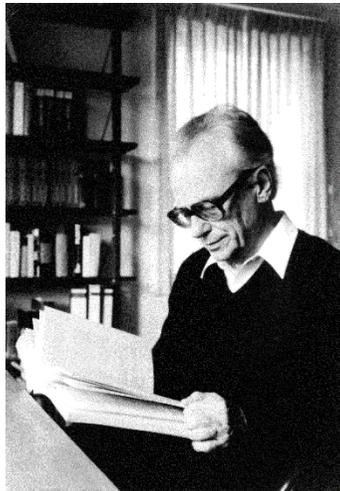


In Memory of Professor Jurij Striedter (1926-2016): The Happiest Days of My Life

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My memories of Professor Jurij Striedter coincide with the most brilliant period of my life as a student of Russian and Slavic literatures at Harvard from 1981 through 1985. It was a mythological age in which all my teachers were god-like heroes of Slavic languages and literatures — Vsevolod Setchkarev, Horace Lunt, Donald Fanger, Bayara Aroutunova. There were also younger faculty members, such as Stanislaw Baranczak, George Grabowicz, Vladimir Alexandrov, Olga Yokoyama, and so on, who were somewhat closer to ordinary human beings, such as myself. I was overwhelmed and, at the same time, very much excited, feeling like an adventurer who had strayed into a wonderland inhabited by deities and demigods. Among these figures towers, in my mental landscape, Professor Jurij Striedter, whose academic guidance was so crucial that, to this day, when I am nearing the age of retirement from the University of Tokyo, I feel very much indebted to him and even now catch myself striving after his model as a literary scholar: to be thorough in research, to be enthusiastic in commitment, to be rigorous like a German, to be “zadushevnyi” like a Russian, and to be positive like an

American.

The first course I took with Professor Striedter was a graduate seminar devoted to “Skazka.” It was a kind of baptism by fiery scholarship. At the beginning of the semester, we were given an impossible mission: to compile a bibliography on the literary fairy tale in Russian literature. This was 1981, when computer technology was nowhere near as developed as it is today and there were no electronic databases. The first thing that incoming graduate students had to do was learn to navigate the card catalogs and get themselves oriented in the labyrinthine Slavic sections of the Widener stacks. It is true that it was a physically exhausting experience, but it was also a rewarding introduction into Slavic philology and scholarly training by Professor Striedter.

Later, when I took Professor Striedter’s course on Slavic structuralism and formalism, my admiration for him only deepened. I loved his European erudition, overwhelmingly eloquent torrents of German-like English, marked with occasional German umlauts, and the rare combination of systematic thinking and fascination with concrete details. I think everyone in the course felt the same way. If I’m not mistaken, among the attendees was Svetlana Boym, who passed away so early.

Then, in my third year as a graduate student in GSAS, I had the great honor of being a TA for Professor Striedter’s course on Tolstoy. And when it rains it pours: in my fourth year, I was so lucky that I was given another chance to work as a TA, this time in Professor Donald Fanger’s course on Dostoevsky. Can you imagine how incredibly difficult it is for a Japanese student whose command of Russian was far from near-native — to say nothing of his English — to read and teach *Tolstoevsky* in English! Looking back, however, from where I am today, I now realize that it was the greatest fortune of my life that I was given a chance to tackle these two literary giants under the guidance of the two scholarly giants. After these experiences, I realized, there were no Russian writers whom I should be afraid of.

I know that I was a poor teaching assistant, with my bookish Russian and clumsy English, but Professor Striedter was always encouraging, treating me just like any other student of his. I am proud that I had the chance to study under the guidance of a mentor of such a caliber, and feel ashamed that I didn’t finish my dissertation at Harvard. At the end of my fourth year, I was invited to teach at the University of Tokyo as a tenure-track professor. I didn’t even apply for the post. All I had to do was say yes or no. I said yes, left Harvard for Tokyo, and parted from my advisor. His strong influence, however, remains to this day. To borrow a phrase that he used when discussing the heritage of the

Czech structuralists and Russian formalists, Professor Striedter was a true adventurer of literary studies who “believed in the necessity and possibility of [his] adventure and pursued it *with scholarly and human dignity*.” (*Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value*, Harvard University Press, 1989, p.10). “Scholarly and human dignity” — these words can certainly be applied to the author himself.

*This text was read by Professor Donald Fanger at the Jurij Striedter Memorial held at Harvard University on Friday, 31 March 2017.