

Richard Peace 1933-2013

Richard Peace, Emeritus Professor of Russian at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom, died on 5 December 2013 at the age of eighty.

Richard was born in Burley-in-Wharfedale, near Leeds in Yorkshire, and from the age of eleven attended Ilkley Grammar School. He started to teach himself Russian while still at school and, like many British Slavists of his generation, studied the language intensively during his period of National Service. In 1954 he went on to read French and Russian at Keble College Oxford, from which he graduated in 1957. After a period of postgraduate study in Oxford, culminating in 1962 with the award of a B. Litt., he was appointed to the first lectureship in Russian at Bristol, where the subject was being established by the late Professor Henry Gifford under the aegis of the Department of English. Under Richard's leadership a single honours programme in Russian and various joint degree programmes were introduced. In 1975 Richard was appointed to a Chair of Russian at the University of Hull, where he also served from 1982 to 1984 as Dean of the Faculty of Arts. In 1984 he returned to Bristol, to take up the Chair of Russian that had just been created, and there he remained, as Head of Department, until his retirement in 1994.

It was during the first of his two long periods at the University of Bristol that Richard began to produce an important corpus of scholarship in the field of classical Russian literature. His first substantial publication, a dense article on Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*, still seems fresh. There followed a close reading of Dostoevsky's major novels, published by Cambridge University Press (1971), which perhaps remains Richard's best known work and secured his international reputation. Then came a book of similar scale on Gogol, also published by Cambridge (1981), and a study of Chekhov's four main plays, published by Yale University Press (1983). Richard also wrote a monograph on Goncharov's novel *Oblomov* (1991) and a critical study of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1993). He remained active throughout his retirement, publishing an edition of Griboedov's play *Woe from Wit* (1995), lengthy online studies of Turgenev

(2002) and Tolstoy (2010) and numerous articles and invited chapters in books. (A full list of Richard's publications and his online publications themselves can be accessed at <http://eis.bris.ac.uk/~rurap/welcome.htm>.) His standing as a specialist in classical Russian literature was reflected in his appointment in 1995 as a Vice-President of the International Dostoevsky Society and in the award of a D. Litt. by Oxford in 2010.

Richard's scholarship was characterized by close textual analysis, supported by felicitous translation of the passages that he quoted. Richard paid meticulous attention to the precise meaning and nuances of the words his authors used, including the associations suggested to Russian-speakers by the names (forenames and patronymics as well as surnames) that they gave their characters. He peeled away many levels of meaning in a text, revealing its hidden complexity, including paradoxes within it. He did not treat the literary text as an elastic thing whose meaning may vary hugely over time or may legitimately have quite different significance for every individual reader. Nor was he ever tempted by the Bakhtinian approach, which gained many champions among English-speaking Slavists in the late twentieth century and has of course been applied to Dostoevsky: indeed, he explicitly took issue with this approach in an article of 1993. Perhaps his engagement with the literary and intellectual context of the works he examined, as exemplified in an article of 1978 on the subject of such Russian concepts as *volia* and *svoboda*, brought him closer to a historicist approach than to any other.

Richard's typical approach to a literary text was heralded in the subtitle of his monograph on Gogol, with its reference to the place of Gogol's writings in the Russian literary tradition. Here he explored the question of how a writer so apparently uninterested in psychological analysis and so prone to create characters shorn of human qualities could have exerted such exceptional influence on a literature remarkable for its depth of human understanding and compassion. Again, in his discussion of *Oblomov*, he not only drew an interesting distinction between conceptions of character as static and developing, alluding in the process to the contrast between finished and incomplete actions that is embedded in the structure of the Russian verbal system, with its differentiation of perfective and imperfective forms. He also related these conceptions of character to the broad question of the destiny of a backward nation on the periphery of European civilization at a moment in its history when factions in the intelligentsia were anxiously debating the degree to which age-old forms of life should be disturbed by the need for dynamic modernization. His wide-ranging examination of Turgenev's fiction was similarly informed both by

sensitivity to the author's insights into character, on the one hand, and an understanding of the contemporary issues with which Turgenev was concerned, from the role of the nobility to the nature and destiny of the nation, on the other. Richard's approach to the Russian canon paid dividends even when applied to Chekhov the dramatist, whom he placed in a literary tradition more concerned with character, psychology and ideas than with plot. Under Richard's scrutiny, Chekhov's plays, for all the timelessness of the human situations that they present and innovative as they are from the dramatic point of view, fit comfortably into this tradition. These plays too can be better understood when seen in the context of a culture imbued with Oblomovism or when the allusions to other works of literature that they contain, as well as their symbols, stage instructions and dramatic technique, are closely examined.

Nowhere was Richard's characteristic approach to a literary text more rewarding, though, than when applied to Dostoevsky. Indeed, it would seem to be no accident that Dostoevsky was the writer to whom Richard devoted the most sustained attention, in some twenty articles or chapters in books and in an edited casebook on *Crime and Punishment* as well as in his monographs of 1971 on the major novels and 1993 on *Notes from Underground*. For no works of Russian literature yield greater opportunities than does Dostoevsky's fiction to explore psychological complexity and the balances of power in human relationships, to probe levels of meaning and to bring to light debates about aesthetic, moral, social and political matters. At any rate, Richard's approach to a text was nowhere better exemplified than in these studies of Dostoevsky's fiction, which remain fresh, readable, compelling and always illuminating to scholars and university students alike.

Richard will be fondly remembered in the field of Slavonic Studies for many things, besides his impressive corpus of scholarship. From 1977-81 he served as President of the national association of Slavists in the UK (then BUAS, now BASEES) and defended the subject vigorously against those who at that time were intent on its 'rationalisation' in British universities. He contributed significantly to cultural diplomacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, serving for several years as Chair of a committee overseeing the expanding programme of student exchange for which biennial Anglo-Soviet agreements negotiated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and British Council made provision. In this capacity, he visited British undergraduates on placements in Leningrad, Minsk and Voronezh. He also served on boards organized by the British Council to select postgraduates for studentships in the Soviet Union. At Bristol, he will be remembered as

a staunch advocate for his subject in the University, a thoughtful teacher and an amusing companion.

On his retirement Richard returned to Yorkshire and, with a truly Russian attachment to native place, bought a house on the River Wharfe a mere three miles downstream from the town in which he grew up and where he could indulge his passion for angling. Here he settled with Virginia, whom he had married in 1960, enjoying frequent contact with his two daughters, Mary (born in 1967) and Catherine (born in 1969) and his two grandchildren. (A third child, Henry, had tragically died as a result of an accident in 1975.) Throughout his retirement Richard maintained a close link with the department at Bristol, frequently attending its conferences and symposia. It is of some consolation that three weeks before his sudden death he and Virginia had attended and greatly enjoyed a large gathering of present and former colleagues, alumni and current students which was organized in Bristol to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the department he had helped to found.

Derek Offord

University of Bristol