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## NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

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RUFUS WELLINGTON MATHEWSON, JR., 1918–1978

Rufus W. Mathewson, Jr. died of cancer on August 2, 1978, at his summer home in Brooklin, Maine, in the midst of his family. Mathewson made a notable contribution to Slavic studies, both as the author of a classic work, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, and as a teacher who played a major role in shaping the intellectual outlook of a younger generation of Slavists. Born on November 21, 1918, in Germantown, Pennsylvania, Mathewson belonged to the generation who came of age in the years immediately preceding World War II. He liked to tell his students that his generation had been provided with a welcome clarity of moral choice because of the threat of fascism. Indeed, his wife believes that his years of service in the U.S. Navy from December 11, 1941 until January 5, 1946—during which he saw action at Guadalcanal—constituted the most important formative influence on his life.

Mathewson, whose keen clarity of mind and forcefulness of thought impressed everyone who knew him, had been an undergraduate in the celebrated history and literature program at Harvard College where he studied with F. O. Matthiessen and Harry Levin among others. His field of concentration was French history and literature. Although his selection of Malraux as the subject of his honors thesis reflected the political radicalism of his college years, it also signaled the interest in the “human condition” that was to become a leitmotif of his writing and teaching. France, the French language, and French literature, were always to remain among his first intellectual loves; they were never fully displaced by Russian literature, in spite of the deep response that the great Russian prose tradition drew from him.

It was also at Harvard that Mathewson began his study of Russian with Ernest Simmons, a study that continued during his service in the navy. He was a member of the first group of students to complete the program of the Russian Institute at Columbia University and he went on to receive his Ph.D. under the direction of Ernest Simmons. *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, his Columbia dissertation, follows the approach to Russian literature propagated by Simmons at the Russian Institute in that Mathewson takes as his subject the radical tradition in Russian literature and its force in shaping the literature of the Soviet period. But the work extends Simmons’s reading of literature as social and political texts by plumbing it for the deeper philosophical and literary questions that lay beyond Simmons’s range of interests. This humanistic reading of the Russian tradition was strengthened by the addition of chapters on Siniavsky, Solzhenitsyn, and Pasternak to the second edition of the book.

As professor of Russian literature at Columbia University, Mathewson had a large hand in shaping a program that was to become a major force in the training of a new generation of Slavists to fill the expanding positions in Russian studies in American universities. Mathewson believed strongly that his students’ energies should be directed toward major authors and important topics. He believed in his students’ capacities to contribute something of value to the mainstream. He was disdainful of the trivial and obscure topics encouraged for dissertations in certain Slavic programs. Perhaps a disproportionate share of the monographs published in the field in the last fifteen years had their genesis in a dissertation directed by Rufus Mathewson or influenced by him in some important way. Mathewson himself published little after *The Positive Hero* (although he did publish a number of influential articles on Chekhov) and it often seemed that he gave energies to his students that ought to have been spent in the recording of his own keen and wide-ranging insights into Russian literature. The very loftiness and impeccability of his standards, the intellectual “perfect

pitch" that his students so profited from, seemed to be an impediment to his own writing. Nevertheless, his respect within the field grew and an appearance by Mathewson on a panel at a professional meeting was an event that drew a large audience.

Mathewson did not live to reach his sixtieth birthday and the sense of loss occasioned by his untimely death is made keener by the knowledge that he was not able to finish a number of projects that had engaged his interest. In recent years he had been working toward a book on Chekhov's short stories. He also had in mind a major study on the idea of the pastoral, and his dislike of shibboleths was to have found expression in an essay on Pushkin, which was to challenge the high opinion of Pushkin's work that is traditional in Russian culture.

Mathewson relished the bawdy, the irreverent, and the iconoclastic. His manner was predominantly incisive and wry, even occasionally querulous. At the same time he had a distinctly religious sensibility. One of the texts he cared about most was William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. His own complete lack of pretentiousness enabled him to speak of great things with simplicity. He was available to his friends and students in the complete fullness of his own struggle with the question of how one is to live, and of his own struggle with the problem of mortality. Although he was a reticent and even shy man, many of his friends recall luminous moments in which he spoke to their needs generously and out of his own concern and wisdom.

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#### ROBERT AUTY, 1914–1978

Robert Auty, British scholar of international distinction and professor of comparative Slavonic philology at the University of Oxford, died on August 18, 1978 at the age of sixty-three.

Born in Rotherham on October 10, 1914, he was educated at Rotherham Grammar School, at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and at Münster University.

Recipient of M.A. (Cantab and Oxon) and Dr. Phil. (Münster) degrees, Robert Auty was a man of vast knowledge and unusual intellectual flexibility. He studied and taught several subjects at Cambridge, London, and Oxford, and served with devotion and distinction in innumerable educational, political, scholarly, editorial, and administrative capacities both at home and abroad. He was a Fellow of Brazenose College at Oxford since 1965, and constantly crisscrossed the continent and the oceans because of his involvement in virtually all important international activities within the discipline of Slavistics and comparative philology. He was secretary and vice-president of L'Association internationale des langues et littératures slaves, member and vice-president of the International Committee of Slavists, vice-president of the Fédération internationale des langues et littératures modernes, chairman of the Modern Humanities Research Association, member of the governing body of the Great Britain Eastern Europe Centre, head of the Department of Languages and Literatures, London School of Slavonic Studies, and so forth. Among his many editorial offices, probably the most important was that of editor of the prestigious *Oxford Slavonic Papers* from 1968 until his death.

Although he frequently had to put aside his personal scholarly research, along with a number of articles and translations, he left behind works which have served, and will serve, many generations of Slavists, especially his *Handbook of Old Church Slavonic* (published since 1959 in several editions) and his *An Introduction to Russian History*.