

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS J. THOMAS SHAW

Joseph Thomas (Tom) Shaw, professor emeritus of Slavic languages at UW-Madison, died on April 4, 2011 in Madison of a continuing illness. As many on this campus, as well as nationally and internationally, will know, Tom Shaw was the closest thing to a patriarch figure the department in Madison has known and was the doyen of Pushkin studies in North America for half a century. He also played key roles in the founding and early running of the *Slavic and East European Journal* (*SEEJ*).

Tom was born in 1919 in Ashland City, Tennessee. At the height of the Depression and despite significant financial obstacles, he enrolled at Austin Peay (then a two-year normal school) in Clarksville, Tennessee. He graduated from Austin Peay's two-year program in 1938 and completed a bachelor's and master's degree at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Like many of his generation, Tom Shaw saw his graduate work interrupted by World War II. As he would later write, with his usual matter-of-factness, "The Navy decided there was need for me to learn Russian. So they sent me to their language school [the Navy Oriental Languages School, then at the University of Colorado] to take the intensive Russian language course." With this training, fairly unique for its time, Tom was then deployed to the U.S. Navy Aerological Station at Khabarovsk, USSR, where he was instrumental in providing weather information in the war with Japan and the Korean War. He continued in the active and inactive naval reserve until his retirement at the rank of captain. Tom was also active in local and church affairs.

At the end of World War II, Tom returned to graduate studies, enrolling at Harvard University. He studied both English and Russian literature, a comparative framework that would interest him in the years ahead, and wrote his thesis on the verse tale in Byron and Lermontov. He received his Ph.D. in 1950.

In 1949 Tom began his teaching career at Indiana University, remaining there on its faculty until 1961. He was then hired to be department chair at the UW-Madison, where he built the program into one with a top-tier reputation in the Slavic field. In time, Tom became an internationally recognized Pushkin scholar and the founder and long-time editor of the *Slavic and East European Journal*. The fact that Tom consistently demanded high scholarly standards of successful submissions to the journal helped establish the discipline of Slavic studies as it was emerging from the post-Sputnik era.

Tom Shaw is probably best known in the West for his three-volume annotated translation of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, first published in 1963. However, Pushkinists in Russia have long recognized him for his scholarly articles on various aspects of the poet's work and for his studies of Pushkin's rhyme. In an interview, he explained that his are "the only rhyme dictionaries and the only concordances of the poetry of Pushkin ever to have appeared anywhere." Since his retirement 21 years ago, Tom published or republished 23 volumes, including three published in Moscow in Russian translation. His last work, *Pushkin's Rhyming: A Comparative Study*, was published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 2010.

The *Pushkin Encyclopedia* lists the accomplishments of 24 great scholars of the work of Alexander Pushkin; all but Tom Shaw were Russian. In 1992, Tom was elected "honorary president in perpetuum" of the American Pushkin Society. On a more informal note, for decades Tom supported his students and the department in myriad unselfish and inspiring ways: he worked tirelessly with his dissertators, spending countless hours going over their formulations to strengthen their scholarly rigor and objectivity; he fulfilled numerous administrative posts — departmental chair, associate dean of the Graduate School — cheerfully

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and with subtle good judgment; he taught his way, focusing on demonstrated knowledge rather than opinion and avoiding undue speculation (what he termed the “critical” as opposed to the “scholarly”); and he constantly gave of himself, including a substantial portion of his estate, to promote Russian and Pushkin studies on campus and nationally. Perhaps Tom’s finest scholarly piece — and it is clearly by his scholarly work that he would most like to be remembered — is his 1977 article, first appearing in *SEEJ*, on the “confusion” of parables in “The Stationmaster” (“‘The Stationmaster’ and the New Testament Parable”). His greatest discovery, on the other hand was a sonnet (“Mniszek’s sonnet”) “buried” in the text of Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* — something that native Russian scholars had passed over for more than one hundred fifty years.

Tom Shaw was also a lifetime member of the central American professional societies in his field: the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), and the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS). As mentioned, he was editor for its first fourteen years of the *Slavic and East European Journal*. AATSEEL honored him in 1991 for “distinguished contribution to the profession.” Finally, for more than four decades, Tom Shaw’s profile has appeared in a variety of Who’s Who publications, including “Who’s Who in American Education,” “Who’s Who in America” and “Who’s Who in the World.” Tom is one of the few people about whom it can be said with complete sincerity: he was a gentleman and a scholar.

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