

In Memoriam George Bisztray 1938-2012

Our member, longtime supporter and founder of our sister organization in Canada, the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada (HSAC), passed away on December 19, 2012. Professor George (György) Bisztray joined the AHEA in 1975, among the first members of the fledgling group. He served as Vice-President and as Board Member at various times, in the latter capacity *ex officio* representing the HSAC.

In 1984 he founded the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada as a sister organization to the AHEA and worked closely with us. He hosted several conferences for the AHEA in Canada, particularly in the early years when we met in Canada every third year: 1980, 1983 under AHEA aegis, and in 1986 and 1989 jointly with the HSAC. Even after the HSAC began meeting with the Canadian Association for the Humanities and Social Sciences we held two joint meetings: in 1995 and 2002. Our association with the Canadian group has been fruitful even as we followed different paths which responded to different needs.

Son of the renowned literary historian Gyula Bisztray, Gyuri received his MA in Budapest from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). He left for Norway in 1965 and studied at the U. of Oslo before emigrating to the United States in 1966. He received his PhD from the U. of Minnesota where he also began his teaching career. He also taught at the University of Chicago (1969-1975) before moving to Canada to take a position at the University of Alberta where he taught Comparative Literature. In 1978 he was appointed Chair of Hungarian Studies at the U. of Toronto. Upon the appointment, he was invited to be co-editor of the *Hungarian Studies Review* by Nandor Dreisziger, where he took responsibility for literary submissions. He carried on in this capacity until his retirement from the university in 2004.

Gyuri remained in this position in spite of many obstacles, steering the Chair clear of Hungarian-Canadian politics and committing it to solid scholarship even when this drew attacks. Seeking the best of culture and scholarship, he used language and literature books as well as films from Hungary at a time when the emigre community attacked even cultural contacts with the mother country. In this, we agreed: Hungarian culture without contact with Hungary could not be a healthy and fruitful development. I think his response to the AHEA was partly based on our commitment to view the politics and the culture of Hungary separately, and in the long run he was vindicated. As Judy Young Drache writes in her moving tribute: "However, Gyuri was nothing if not a fighter and gradually, over the years, he managed not only to develop an interested student body for language, literature and film studies but expanded the activities of the chair into public

lectures and literary events, annual conferences and a scholarly association, the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada (HSAC) to run these, also giving space to interested community members as participants." As co-editor of the *Hungarian Studies Review* (formerly the *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* he provided secretarial support for it. He collaborated with other chair holders of "ethnic" chairs at the University of Toronto, thus giving the Hungarian chair support and a wider range of influence.

The position of "Chair" ceased upon Gyuri's retirement, but there is still a program of Hungarian Studies at the University of Toronto. Indeed, it is part of the new Munk School of Global Affairs which raises the program's profile and adds some of the prestige of the Munk School. Hungarian language is still taught (by the faithful Eva Tomory who started under Gyuri's tutelage) and Hungarian history. The *Hungarian Studies Review* still exists through the efforts of Nandor Dreisziger and the HSAC is also flourishing and growing, seeking to promote and encourage young talent in the field – in collaboration with US colleagues from two American sister associations, the American Hungarian Educators Association and the US Hungarian Studies Association.

George Bisztray, literary historian, educator, contributed to Hungarian studies with his publications that include studies on literary theory and history, comparative literature and Hungarian literary relations in/with Canada in journals such as *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*; *Source (Forrás)*; *East European Quarterly* and *Hungarian Studies Review*. His books include *Marxist Models of Literary Relations* (1978); *Hungarian Cultural Presence in North America* (co-editor with N.F. Dreisziger) (1981), and *Hungarian Canadian Literature* (1978). He was a good friend and a great colleague and will be greatly missed.

Enikő Molnár Basa
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