



George Economou

September 24, 1934 - May 3, 2019

GEORGE ECONOMOU

Noted American Poet, Literary Translator, Scholar and Educator, died on May 3, 2019, in Philadelphia, PA, at age 84. He is survived by his wife, Rochelle Owens, Poet, Playright. Memorial will be private. Memorial contributions may be made to Reading Is Fundamental, 750 First St., NE, Suite 920, Washington, DC 20002.

George Economou was born on September 24, 1934, in Great Falls, Montana, the second child of Amelia (Ananiadis) Economou and Demetrios George Economou, a businessman and rancher, both of whom were immigrants from Greece. He was educated in the public schools of Great Falls, and graduated from its high school in 1952, after which he attended Colgate University, where he majored in English and graduated cum laude and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in 1956. He earned an MA in English Literature at Columbia University in 1957 and a PhD in English and Comparative Literature in 1967, specializing in Old and Middle English and continental literature. He taught for 41 years, two of which were as an adjunct at Wagner College (1958-60), at the Brooklyn Center of Long Island University (1961-83) and at the University of Oklahoma (1983-2000), where he served as Chair of the Department of English (1983-1990) and Director of Creative Writing (1990-2000). He was appointed twice as Visiting Professor at

Columbia as well as at Hunter College of CUNY. Upon his retirement in 2000, he was appointed Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Oklahoma. He married poet and playwright Rochelle Owens, June 17, 1962. They live in Philadelphia and Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

During his graduate school years uptown New York at Columbia, he became actively involved in the burgeoning new poetry scene in downtown Greenwich Village and the East Village. He was a founding editor of *The Chelsea Review* (1957-60) and co-founding editor of *Trobar* and *Trobar Books* (1960-64) with Robert Kelly, and an active presence in many of the poetry reading venues of the time. Pursuing his lifetime interests as poet and scholar, Economou has published thirteen books of poetry and translations, the latest of which are *Complete Plus*, the *Poetry of C. P. Cavafy in English*, *Ananios of Kleitor*, and *Acts of Love, Ancient Greek Poetry from Aphrodite's Garden*. Most significant of his many publications as a literary critic and scholar of medieval literature are *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, listed in a *Century's Retrospective of History of Ideas Books*, his verse translation of the C-Version of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and the editions of the late Paul Blackburn's translations *Proensa* and the *Poem of the Cid*. Numerous works of his have appeared in anthologies, including translations of Euripides, ancient and Modern Greek poets, and others. Some of his own poems have been translated into Greek, Ukrainian, French and Spanish.

An ACLS Fellow, a Rockefeller Fellow at Bellagio, and honored twice as an NEA Fellow in Poetry, he has lectured and given poetry readings at many universities and literary venues throughout the United States and abroad.

The primary George Economou archive collection is held in the Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Butler Library of Columbia University. Smaller collections are held in the libraries of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Princeton University.

“Ananios of Kleitor is...a kind of ancient-world equivalent of Nabakov’s Pale Fire...an affectionate and humane tribute to the power of poetry to lend new meanings to new readers’ lives across the ages. A wonderful book.” –TLS, The Times Literary Supplement

“Economou’s translations alone establish him as an important literary presence.”—The American Book Review

“Economou’s writing is an unfailing blend of wit, grace, and terseness, Olson/Bauhaus tempered with Pound’s haiku-like deftness and Mediterranean sweet new style.”--Parnassus

Tribute Wall

RH

“ George Economou was a distinguished medievalist who brought to his engagement with literature in several languages the insight and empathy of a fine critical mind working in tandem with a poet's sensitivity to verbal nuances and the ironic response to human foibles (especially those involving sexual desire) that he would characterize as quintessentially Greek (or at least Mediterranean). His excellence as a medievalist owed much to his profound knowledge of both the Classical world (especially its Hellenistic manifestations) and twentieth century European and American literature (especially poetry).

His book, The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature, set a standard in tracing the literary iterations and cultural influence of an allegorical figure who synthesized philosophical, theological, and existential currents running through medieval European civilization. His essays on Dante, Jean de Meun, Chaucer, and Langland mined with a poet's ear the rich relationship between poetic metaphor and social or political preoccupations. His translation of the C Text of Langland's Piers Plowman brought that notoriously difficult and off-putting poem to pulsing and conversational life, equally alert to Langland's intense earnestness and demotic humor.

And even though it's not a strictly medieval or scholarly work, George's amazing masterpiece, Ananios of Kleitor--being the text (mostly in fragments), translation, and exhaustive critical history of a completely fictitious Hellenistic poet--best reveals, I think, all the skills, the imaginative gifts, and the deep comprehension of human experience in all its crazy quilt of aspiration, achievement, folly, and ruination, that made George Economou one of the finest and most admirable medievalists--and human beings--of his generation. He will be greatly missed by all who were fortunate enough to know and love him.

Robert Hanning (a friend for almost 60 years)

Robert W Hanning - June 11, 2019 at 12:02 AM

KA

RWH's comments follow the deplorably self-righteous, self-serving, pompous patterns I observed over several decades. George deserved better.

kayfleming - March 31, 2021 at 07:00 AM

RG

“George was a wonderful mentor to me when I was starting out as a part-time English teacher and fledgling writer at Long Island University in the mid-1970s when he was a much-loved English professor there. I treasure my talks with him, and I learned a lot from him -- as did thousands of his students over the decades. I still have George's books and treasure them. My heartfelt condolences to Rochelle and his loved ones.

Richard Grayson - May 10, 2019 at 11:18 PM