

ON ARTHURIAN WOMEN  
ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF MAUREEN FRIES

EDITED BY

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## From Holocaust Survivor to Arthurian Scholar

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I had the good fortune to be first introduced to both Arthurian and Tristan studies when I was an undergraduate at Manchester University at a time when Professor Eugène Vinaver was the Head of Department there and Dr. Frederick Whitehead and T.B.W. Reid were two of the lecturers teaching medieval French language and literature.

But it was quite by chance that I was to begin my studies at Manchester University at the beginning of October 1945. I was born in Düsseldorf, Germany, on July 20, 1927 to where my father, Abrascha Bogdanow, born in Smolewitsch near Minsk had emigrated at the age of eighteen in 1903 to escape from the then pogroms against the Jewish people in Russia, not foreseeing the fate that 30 years later with the advent of Hitler was to befall the Jewish people in Germany and subsequently in the whole of occupied Europe.

Though I was aware from the age of five of the growing anti-semitism in Germany, my most vivid memories of the Holocaust are the events that were to lead up to my arrival in Great Britain in an unaccompanied 'Kindertransport' ('children's transport') on June 27, 1939.<sup>1</sup> The events to which I am referring and which are as vivid in my mind now as if they had taken place yesterday were those of November 9, 1938. On the afternoon of that day, throughout the whole of Germany, the great majority of Jewish men and boys were taken to concentration camps. My father and uncle who lived at that time in the same village, Affaltrach near Heilbronn, were taken, together with all the other Jewish men living in that village to Dachau concentration camp. An eighteen-year-old cousin of mine who lived in another part of Germany was taken that day to Buchenwald where he was exterminated within a month.

This was, however, only the beginning of that day of terror. According to 'history' textbooks that night, the so-called 'Kristallnacht' (the 'night of broken glass') only synagogues were burnt down and Jewish shops broken into. In reality it was far, far worse. That night, which I shall never forget,

when only women and children were at home, the Germans with their pickaxes broke into all the Jewish homes (they knew exactly where the Jewish people lived, for previously all Jewish people had to register as Jewish). They hacked down the front door, they hacked out the windows and window frames, they hacked holes in the walls. Not a piece of furniture was left standing, not a cup nor a saucer was left whole. The following day all Jewish children, including of course myself, were by decree expelled from the German state schools. And as all Jewish teachers had the previous day been taken to concentration camps, Jewish children were left without schooling. And shortly after, by a further decree, while the men and boys were still in the concentration camps, the remaining Jewish people were segregated into 'Judenhäuser' ('Jew houses'). Towns and villages where no Jewish people were left bore at their entrance the sign 'Judenfrei' ('free of Jews').

But within ten days of the news of the events of November 9 coming to London, both Houses of Parliament voted unanimously to bring up to ten thousand unaccompanied Jewish children to Great Britain. British families who had never seen or heard of the children previously volunteered spontaneously to open their homes to them. As soon as my mother heard of this generous offer, she immediately put my name down, for although it was hard for her to part with her only child, she knew that if she were to save my life, she would have to part with me. It is with the deepest sense of gratitude that I shall always remember the wonderful Quaker family, Mr. and Mrs. H.A. Clement (who at that time lived in Haughton Green near Manchester), who took me into their home and looked after me with the same loving care they gave their own children.<sup>2</sup> Almost from the day after my arrival, Mr. and Mrs. Clement began preparing me for the entrance examinations to Fairfield High School for Girls. I remained at that school until I was sixteen, when in order to earn my living, I began work first in Stalybridge Public Library and subsequently in Kingsmoor School, Glossop, both near Manchester. But as I was anxious to obtain a degree, I began studying in my own time for the external London Intermediate B.A., frequently getting up at five in the morning. Then one day, in December 1944, when for some reason I had to go to see Mrs. Pogmore at the Refugee Children's Movement in Brazenose Street, Manchester, and I told her that I was working in my spare time for an External London Degree, she suggested that I should sit for the Entrance Scholarship examinations to Manchester University. And so it came about, that on V.E. Day, May 8, 1945, I sat for the first of the five papers of the Entrance Scholarship examinations. I was very lucky and was awarded the Alice and Edith Hamer Entrance Scholarship and the William

Hulme Bursary as well as the Ashburne Hall Scholarship. And with the exception later of a year as a Research Studentship holder at Westfield College, London, a year in Paris as a French Government Scholar and a year at Liverpool University as a Leverhulme Research Fellow, I was to remain at Manchester University for the rest of my life, first as an undergraduate, then as a postgraduate student, and then on the staff. For through good fortune, the very year in which I completed my doctorate under the direction of Professor Vinaver and Dr. Whitehead, there was a vacancy on the staff in the French Department. After first being an Assistant Lecturer, then a Lecturer and subsequently Reader, I was given a Personal Chair. Following my retirement I was made an Emeritus Professor for life.

From my first term as an undergraduate at Manchester University I was introduced to Medieval French language and literature by both Frederick Whitehead and T.W. Reid, Eugène Vinaver at that time having extended his interests from the Tristan legend to Malory and Racine as well as Flaubert. Frederick Whitehead aroused our interest not only in the Old French epic through his stimulating lectures on the *Chanson de Roland*, but also in the Arthurian legend, tracing the development of the legend from Gildas onwards down to the thirteenth-century prose romances. But perhaps what aroused my interest most of all was the announcement at the end of 1945 of Eugène Vinaver's identification of a previously unknown manuscript of the *Suite du Merlin*, the Cambridge codex, and two years later, in 1947, the publication of Vinaver's first edition of the *Works of Sir Thomas Malory* where in his Introduction he traces the French sources underlying Malory's works and deals with the technique of editing medieval texts. It was perhaps this more than anything else which decided me to choose for my first research degree, a Manchester Master of Arts, a subject that involved editing a text. The text suggested to me by Frederick Whitehead was the portion of the *Queste del Saint Graal* of MS B.N. fr. 343 which differed from the *Vulgate* version and the exact nature of which was at that time highly disputed. For the sections of MS 343 distinct from the *Vulgate Queste* are not only identical with the corresponding portions of the Portuguese *Demanda do Santo Graal* (first published in its complete form by Augusto Magne, in 1944), but also large portions of the *Queste del Saint Graal* incorporated into the numerous manuscripts of the Second Version of the Prose *Tristan*. Hence my research on the MS 343 *Queste* led me to examine Tristan manuscripts in various libraries, including the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. There I had the good fortune to meet M. Jacques Monfrin, who at that time was a librarian in the Manuscript Department. He not only encouraged me from then on

in my research, but subsequently when I was preparing an edition of the complete *Post-Vulgate Queste—Mort Artu*, of which the MS 343 fragment represented an important section, suggested that the work should be proposed for inclusion in the series of the *Société des Anciens Textes Français*.<sup>3</sup>

I soon realised that the MS 343 *Queste* could not be studied in isolation and in my doctorate thesis I extended my research to the whole of the cycle of which the Post-Vulgate *Queste—Mort Artu* (formerly referred to as the 'pseudo-Robert de Boron' *Queste Mort Artu*) formed the third part.<sup>4</sup> The scholars who had previously dealt with this cycle had assumed that as in the Vulgate Cycle, the *Suite du Merlin* was originally followed by a complete version of the Prose *Lancelot*. But in the course of my research I identified in two manuscripts, B.N. fr. 112 and B.N. fr. 12599, sections of a narrative which now enables us to understand how the Post-Vulgate writer was able to bridge the chronological gap between the end of the *Suite du Merlin* and the beginning of the *Queste* without incorporating the whole of the Vulgate *Lancelot*: he selected from the latter certain relevant incidents which he combined with material derived from the First Version of the Prose *Tristan* and his own inventions.<sup>5</sup>

Since my completion of the edition of the Post-Vulgate *Queste—Mort Artu* my interest in the editing of Arthurian romance texts has not ceased: I am now engaged, in collaboration with a colleague from Manchester University, Mrs. Anne Berrie, she also a pupil of Eugène Vinaver and F. Whitehead, in an edition of the Vulgate *Queste* based on a manuscript unknown to Pauphilet.<sup>6</sup> This new edition is for the Lettres Gothiques series under the direction of M. Michel Zink, who, like Mme Geneviève Hasenohr (the *Commissaire responsable* for the SATF series since the death of Jacques Monfrin) encourages me greatly in my research work, for which I am most grateful.

But the two people who during their lifetime encouraged me perhaps most were my father and mother whose courage is for me a continual inspiration. How they survived the Holocaust is a miracle. My father was temporarily released from Dachau at the beginning of February 1939, but despite every effort, like so many other Jewish people, he and my mother were unable to get out of Germany prior to the outbreak of war in September 1939. And so in the middle of June 1941 my father, after first being taken to the prison in Heilbronn, was transferred on October 8, 1941 to the concentration camp Wülzburg near Weissenburg in Bavaria, where he was to remain until liberated by the Allied Forces on April 26, 1945. What my father suffered there was comparable to what he had suffered in Dachau. He

was beaten, so much so that not only his back and arms were black and blue, but one of his eardrums burst. In addition to being beaten, he and the other inmates suffered constant hunger. And when the Allied troops were at last approaching, the sufferings of the inmates of Wülzburg did not cease: the German guards wishing to hide their misdeeds decided to march the prisoners out of Wülzburg, although they were all in such a weakened condition that they could hardly stand. On the forced march, my father was left lying for dead in a ditch, and it was only thanks to the kindness of an unknown American soldier that he did not die there. That unknown American soldier, to whom I shall always be grateful, picked my father up out of the ditch and took him to an American military hospital.

What my mother suffered at the hands of the Germans was equally horrendous. At first, almost immediately after my father was incarcerated in Heilbronn, my mother had to undertake forced labor. She was forced to go from place to place, being put in sole charge of Jewish old people's homes. Each morning and evening the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) arrived at the homes to make sure my mother had not attempted to escape. The stay in each home was for my mother of only short duration, for after a few weeks the old people from the various homes were deported by the Germans to Theresienstadt and other death camps. The deportation of the old, many of whom could not walk, was horrendous. My mother could never forget what she saw. Those from the old people's home in Eschenau, for instance, being too frail to walk to the nearest railway station, were thrown one on top of the other into horse-drawn farmers' carts used for carrying manure. And when there were no more old people's homes left, my mother was taken by the Gestapo to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on September 26, 1943. Her first thought when she arrived in Belsen was, as she told me later, that she would never get out of there alive. There were rows and rows of barbed wire surrounding the camp. The way in and the ground around the barracks where the inmates were 'housed' was thick mud. My mother's bed was a wooden plank, her pillows were her shoes, her bedcover was her coat. By November it was bitter cold and snowing. The snow and rain came through the slats in the barrack walls. And there were rats who came out each night and jumped on the inmates. The food, as in the successive camps where my father was, was no more than a starvation diet: a piece of bread and water in the morning, some watery soup at midday and nothing more. And morning and evening the inmates had to stand in the freezing cold for roll call. But the deprivation was nothing compared with the constant anxiety as to when one's last day would come. For fifty Polish Jewish doctors and

their wives, and children, including a baby born a few days earlier in the barrack where my mother was housed, that last day came in the middle of October 1943. The gas chambers were being built at the time, but not yet functioning. So these doctors and their wives and children, were stood up against a ditch and shot in cold blood by the German guards.

On January 29, 1944 my mother and some other women, how they were selected she never knew, were packed into cattle trucks and moved on. After a journey lasting three days and three nights, they arrived in France and were incarcerated in the camp set up in Vittel by the German occupation army. From there almost daily transports were going back East to the death camps. Many of the inmates in despair took their own lives. I cannot even attempt to describe what my mother must have felt, but what distressed her even more than her own suffering, was the sight of one of these transports going East. It was a number of cattle wagons, and through the slats could be seen the terrified faces of small children. The German occupying forces had emptied the French Jewish orphanages and were deporting the children to the death camps.

Liberation for my mother was to come on October 23, 1944. But it was not without a struggle that Vittel and the camp were liberated by the Allies. It had been taken once by the Allies and then was retaken by the Germans, but finally the camp was liberated. By that time, the German prison guards, attempting to hide their identity, had removed their uniforms. It was August 1947, at the end of my second year as an undergraduate at Manchester University, when I saw my parents again for the first time. I had a visa to visit them for just ten days. They were living by then in a displaced person's camp in Bavaria, and there they told me something of what they had gone through; but they only revealed to me a fraction of what they had suffered, for they did not wish to distress me. My father never recovered sufficiently to make the journey to England, but after his death my mother came to live with me. Her years in England, as she always said, were the happiest years of her life: it was the first time in her life she felt free and without fear. And her greatest joy was to see the happiness my research work gave me.

Thank you, Allied Expeditionary Forces, for liberating my mother and father from the Nazi death camps and vanquishing the most vicious regime that the world has ever known. And thank you, Great Britain, for giving me refuge in 1939. Without that generous action, for which I shall always be deeply grateful, instead of becoming a scholar of Arthurian romance, I would undoubtedly have been one of the six million Jewish people exterminated by the Nazis, most of them in gas chambers.

## NOTES

- 1 I shall never be able to forget what my parents went through. It is a miracle how they survived the Holocaust. My cousin who also came to England in a children's transport three weeks before me, never saw her parents again. In 1941 they were deported to Riga and, as we found out since, every one on that transport was shot in cold blood on arrival. In 1999, there was in London a reunion of the 'Kindertransport' children, most of us now in our late sixties and seventies, to mark the 60th anniversary of our arrival in Great Britain. Most of the people at the reunion (quite a number of whom now live in the USA) do not know to this day where their parents found their end. The unspeakable atrocities committed by the Germans must never be forgotten. They could have refused, but they did not.
- 2 The wonderful lady Mrs. Clement, who took me into her family when I came to England in June 1939 will be 95 in 2001. She is a widow now and lives in the South of England, but we have remained in close contact. We speak on the telephone almost every week; and her four children too are in constant contact with me. When one of her daughters was a little girl of seven, she said to me: 'our mother said: "You are our sister."' And to this day I have remained their sister. And when my own mother died in 1978, all the Clement family came to her funeral in Manchester.
- 3 *La version Post-Vulgate de la Queste del Saint Graal et de la Mort Artu. Troisième partie du Roman du Graal*, ed. Fanni Bogdanow, Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris: Picard, tome I, 599 pp; II, 601 pp.; IV, 1, 324 pp., 1991; tome III, 806 pp., 2000). Tome IV, 2 to appear in 2001.  
Prior to the identification of the Rawlinson D 874 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the MS 343 fragment was the only French manuscript of the latter portion of the Post-Vulgate *Queste*. The Oxford codex forms the basis of this section of my SATF edition as it is more complete than the MS 343 fragment (cf. my 'A newly discovered manuscript of the Post-Vulgate', *French Studies Bulletin* 16 (1985): 4-6; F.B. 'A newly discovered manuscript of the Post-Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* and its place in the manuscript tradition of the Post-Vulgate,' in *Studia in honorem prof. de Riquier* (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1991), vol. 4, pp. 347-70.
- 4 Fanni Bogdanow, *The Romance of the Grail. A study of the structure and genesis of a thirteenth-century Arthurian prose romance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, Barnes & Noble, 1966), XI and 308 pp.
- 5 *La Folie Lancelot, a hitherto unidentified portion of the Suite du Merlin contained in mss. B.N. fr. 112 and 12599*, ed. Fanni Bogdanow (*Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, 109), Tübingen, 1965, LXIII and 323 pp.. Cf. my 'The importance of the Bologna and Imola fragments for the reconstruction of the Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 80 (1998): 33-64; my 'L'importance des fragments de Bologna et d'Imola pour la reconstruction de la Post-Vulgate', in *Textos Medievais Portugueses e suas Fontes, Matéria da Bretanha e Cantigas com notação musical*, ed. Heitor

Megale and Haquira Osakabe, *Humanitas*, Publicações FFLCH/USP, Universidade de São Paulo, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas (1999): 17-55; my 'The Madrid *Tercero Libro de don Lançarote* (ms. 9611) and its relationship to the *Post-Vulgate Roman du Graal Post-Vulgate* in the light of a hitherto unknown French source of one of the incidents of the *Tercero Libro*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 76 (1999): 441-52.

6 Cf. my 'A Little Known Codex, Bancroft MS. 73, and its Place in the Manuscript Tradition of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Arthuriana* 6.1 (Spring, 1996): 1-21.

## Valerie Lagorio

MARTIN B. SHICHTMAN

Arnaut Daniel, a poet of twelfth-century Provence, described himself, in perhaps his most famous lyric, as one 'q'amas l'aura, / E chatz la lebre ab lo bou / E nadi contra suberna' [who gathers the wind / and hunts the hare with the ox / and swims against the incoming tide].<sup>1</sup> For Arnaut Daniel, greatness resided in doing things the hard way, in bringing intelligence, tenacity, wit, and elegance to tasks lesser individuals would find daunting, if not impossible. For Arnaut Daniel, the only projects worth taking on were those fraught with risk. In the current, hyper-professional academic environment, where little matters more than resume lines, it is difficult even to imagine Valerie Lagorio's career trajectory accounting for success and recognition. But the current, hyper-professional academic environment rarely produces personalities like Valerie Lagorio. In fact, it rarely produces either scholars or teachers of her ability.

Hula-dancer, opera singer, executive secretary, disk-jockey, military intelligence operative, accordion-player, sherry drinker, ukulele-picker, 'unclaimed treasure': when Valerie Lagorio emerged from Stanford University at the age of 39—a non-traditional student, if there ever was one—having just finished a dissertation with R. W. Ackerman on Joseph of Arimathea, 'the patron saint of morticians and a nice Jewish boy,' she would have us know, Arthurian studies ceased to be your father's Camelot. As Lagorio made her mark on Arthurian studies, a good number of its fathers—and some mothers, too—would be less than pleased. In a period of just 4 1/2 years, Lagorio completed both her college degree and her Ph.D., clearly a no-nonsense player, and for the next 37 years she has, even while adhering to many of the traditions of her profession, chipped away—sometimes sledgehammered away—at its pretensions. Her victories are bright and shining tributes to her wit, her brilliance, and her determination. Her losses are too.

In 1975, Valerie Lagorio shared with Gayatri Spivak the distinction of being the first women promoted to the rank of full professor in the English Department at the University of Iowa. Her writings have dominated two separate areas of medieval studies, mysticism—Christine Rose, in a recent