

ZARA PATRICIA ZADDY 1921-2011

Dr Zara P. Zaddy died suddenly in Lancaster on 14 January 2011, at the age of 89, while still very much engaged in the teaching of Old French. Despite having officially retired some 25 years previously, she remained a very active and enthusiastic teacher in Lancaster University, continuing to deliver classes in Old French on a voluntary basis, even after Medieval French was no longer part of the French Department curriculum. The International Arthurian Society has lost one of its longest-serving members, and one of its most colourful characters.

Zara was born in Simla (India) on 8 November 1921, where she lived till about the age of five, and where she first acquired her enduring love of all the colours, scents, and sounds of the natural world. She then moved to Wellingborough, in Northamptonshire, where she was brought up by an uncle and aunt, attending school first at St Barnabas then at the Wellingborough High School for Girls (now part of Wrenn School), and completing her secondary school examinations in 1940, shortly after the outbreak of the war. After a false start in science at Oxford from 1940-42 (at the Society of Oxford-Home Students, to be known later as St Anne's), Zara served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, which was eventually to become the Women's Royal Army Corps. In 1946 she enrolled in Westfield College, London, graduating with a First Class Honours Degree in French in 1950, having spent the session 1948-49 at the University of Lyon. She then embarked on postgraduate work in Paris, which was to result many years later in the award of her Ph.D. on "Chrétien de Troyes: Exponent and Critic of the Courtly Way of Love" (Birkbeck College, 1983). After a short spell in Manchester, Zara spent most of her academic career in two universities, Glasgow (1959-74) and Lancaster (1974 till her death). She will be remembered as a dedicated teacher, as a Chrétien scholar, as a combative colleague, and as a caring and loyal friend.*



At Glasgow and Lancaster, Zara was an inspired and inspiring University teacher, relentlessly seeking the highest standards. If she demanded much from her students, it was primarily because she demanded so much of herself. While she complained of the constant narrowing of their cultural horizons, she never put the blame on them, but always on the educational system that had let them down. To her teaching she brought an incomparable expertise, energy and enthusiasm. She made ancient texts come alive, demonstrating that all literature, no matter when or where it was written, reveals to us in artistic form, among many other things, what it is to be human. She was distrustful of ready-made judgements and received opinion, of the prejudices that can mar judgements, and of broad generalisations that leave out all the awkward but interesting points of detail. For these reasons, she made students engage with the text, reflect on the text, and at all times return to the text. Like all great teachers, she could see beyond her own particular discipline. She taught much more than Old French, since she tried at all times to make students question everything, to help them see the value of making sense of the words on the page, to assess the evidence, and to

come up with conclusions that were based on meticulous documentation. Long before “transferable skills” had come into vogue, Zara was already fostering them in every class she undertook. That said, what her students will probably remember with most affection is the clipped, military brusqueness of her usual mode of expression, whether it was being applied to changing a class hour at short notice (“Change of plan: on parade tomorrow at fifteen hundred hours”), or asking someone to inform the class that a prescribed text had arrived in the University bookshop (“Tell the troops that Roland has come”).

Verba volant, scripta manent. While Zara’s published work covers both epic and romance, and the interaction between the two, the main focus of her research was on the works of Chrétien de Troyes and their cultural context (excluding the unfinished *Conte du Graal*). Her natural curiosity and sharp eye for the unusual resulted in some lively articles on topics as diverse as the localisation of the heart (see *BBIAS*, XII, 1960, 72), the definition of sleep (*Med. Aev*, 34, 1965: 129-30), or “les castors ichthyophages” (see *BBIAS*, XLIV, 1992, 572). She will be remembered above all for her monograph on Chrétien de Troyes, *Chrétien Studies: Problems of Form and Meaning in Erec, Yvain, Cligés and the Charrete*, University of Glasgow Press, 1973. Probably the most original aspects of this study concern, firstly, the interpretation of the motivation of Erec’s travels with Enide after she accuses him of *recreatise* (it is forcibly argued that it is wounded pride and not a torturing doubt that underlies Erec’s behaviour); and secondly, with regard to *Yvain*, the interpretation of Yvain’s exploits after his estrangement from Laudine (it is argued that these exploits do not reflect a conscious attempt on Yvain’s part to rehabilitate himself in his own and in Laudine’s eyes; rather they depict Yvain’s despair and guilt at having broken his promise, and his own sense of worthlessness even at the moment of reconciliation). This monograph was widely and favourably reviewed. Even when, inevitably, reservations were expressed, tribute was paid to the close scrutiny of the texts that underpinned the study, to the absolute clarity with which the evidence was presented, and to the author’s concern (in her own words) to “pay more regard to what [Chrétien’s] texts actually say than to what critics commonly feel should be said there” (*Chrétien Studies*, viii). In putting forward some of these arguments Zara was well aware that she was taking on much of the then Establishment in Arthurian studies. As D. D. R. Owen put it (*FS*, 30, 1976: 182-83), “many are the distinguished skulls cracked as [ZPZ] passes.”

As a colleague and friend, Zara aroused very varied reactions. Some could find her brusque, too frank, even a little intimidating. To many, however, she proved a generous and totally loyal friend, her many acts of generosity rarely reaching the public domain. She was caring in her attitude, particularly towards the uncle and aunt who had brought her up, to students in Lancaster or Glasgow facing financial or emotional difficulties, and to colleagues (active or retired) in need of support or advice. Zara was all of these things, and that is how we shall remember her. “Oi nos defalt la leial compaignie.”

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