

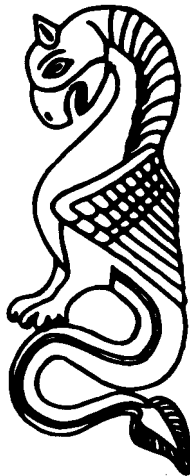
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ELIZABETH SALTER A MEMOIR

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Elizabeth Salter was born Elizabeth Jones in 1925, in the village of Bream, in the Forest of Dean, where her mother was the village schoolmistress. She received her secondary education at the grammar school in nearby Lydney, and went up to Bedford College, in the University of London, in 1943. The College was partly evacuated to Cambridge during the war, and she spent one of her undergraduate years there. After receiving her B.A. degree, with 1st class honours, she went on to do research for the M.A. under the supervision of Phyllis Hodgson. Her subject was the English prose translation by Nicholas Love of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Material derived from and inspired by her dissertation constituted the basis of her journal publication during the early years of her scholarly career, and the whole dissertation was eventually published in revised form in 1974. In 1949 she was appointed to an Assistant Lectureship at King's College in the University of London, and at this time she also held a part-time appointment at Westfield College.

In 1950 she married Christopher Zeeman and removed to Cambridge. Here she held Research Fellowships at Girton College and at Newnham College, was appointed Assistant Lecturer in the University of Cambridge in 1953, and Lecturer in 1957. After her divorce from her first husband she married David Salter in 1960.

During her years in Cambridge, Elizabeth Zeeman contributed very significantly to the development of medieval English studies in the University, through the energy and determination of her work on faculty committees, through her unrivalled brilliance as a lecturer, and her own example as a scholar. She was at this time developing the ideas on Langland and Chaucer which subsequently found expression in her books on *Piers Plowman* and on the *Knight's Tale* and *Clerk's Tale* in 1962. These books first established her as a scholar of international reputation: deeply sensitive to the writing of the two great poets, and exquisitely literate, they also embody a view of the work of literature as the writer's creative engagement with the intractable matter of his experience which is both profoundly original and profoundly stimulating.

In 1963, Elizabeth Salter accepted a visiting appointment at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. In 1964 she returned to take up a Readership at the newly established University of York. To this new and challenging task she brought all her strength of mind and enthusiasm, all her wit and charm, and the high reputation of the growing department of English at York owed much to her inspired teaching. In 1969 she was appointed to a Chair, and she

was the effective moving force behind the creation of the post-graduate Centre for Medieval Studies in the University of York, of which she was appointed the first Director in 1972. These years saw the publication of a number of articles and books, especially on Chaucer and alliterative poetry, and the establishment, in collaboration with Derek Pearsall, her colleague at York, of the series of *York Medieval Texts*. They also saw the maturing of her work on the relationships between medieval literature and the visual arts. Her lectures on this subject were perhaps the pinnacle of her achievement as a teacher, and the memory of them, for anyone who was privileged to be present, whether at Cambridge, York, or at universities or conferences elsewhere in England or abroad, is unforgettable. Her radiant personal beauty and spontaneous warmth of personality, no less than the challenge of her ideas and the deftness of her presentation, combined to create an irresistible impression.

It was during this time too that there was brought to full fruition perhaps her greatest and rarest talent, as a supervisor of postgraduate research. Her name and her reputation brought students from all over England and the world to work with her and her closest colleagues, and the impress of her personality and her scholarship will remain with them wherever they are now scattered in universities at home and abroad. For, combined with her brilliance, even flamboyance, as a lecturer, and her sensitivity as a writer and critic, she was also a meticulous scholar, modest, respectful to her forebears, zealous for the truth and unremitting in her pursuit of it. She communicated this dedication in full measure to her students, and was almost wantonly generous in giving them the results of her own researches. She thought only of the community of scholars and the pursuit of truth, and never of gain to her own personal reputation. Her extraordinary warmth of personality, her spontaneous care and considerateness of others, her generosity of nature, made a bond among all who surrounded her, just as her alarming attractiveness and scandalous gaiety made every meeting seem like the occasion for a party. She was patient where patience was needed, and she had the gift of creating an atmosphere of encouragement, so that all the students that she gathered around her could feel that they had something important to say. Many talents bloomed to an unexpected maturity in the warmth of her approbation.

In 1978, Elizabeth Salter returned to Storrs to accept an appointment as distinguished visiting professor. She always loved America, and had many friends among Americans, to whose natural openness of manner, friendliness, and frank hospitality she responded warmly. All this time, she maintained an unprecedented flow of publication, as if aware that she had little time left. A series of essays and articles, each with enough ideas to supply a book, distilled the scholarly experience of a lifetime. She was also engaged in the writing of a major book, on the contexts, especially the non-English contexts, of Middle English literature, and in the preparation of a collection of studies on literature and the visual arts. Her friends hope to bring these to publication.

Elizabeth Salter died on May 7th, 1980, eighteen months after her first operation for cancer.