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Fiona Tolhurst, bottom right; Evelyn Meyer, back to the camera; Molly Martin and Richard Sévère, top right; Barney Haney, top left; Joseph M. Sullivan, middle left; K.S. Whetter, bottom left: at the IAS conference at Würzburg University, 2017. Photo courtesy of David F. Johnson.

Dr. Fiona Tolhurst died unexpectedly on 21 December 2021; she was 53. The death of a good friend or respected teacher or fine scholar is always hard, and Fiona was all of these things—and was these things to an extraordinarily wide range of people. But Fiona's death has hit many of us especially hard for coming when it did: in the midst of an ongoing global pandemic that complicates or negates conference travel, many Arthurians have been looking forward with more than usual enthusiasm to the days when we can all see one another again at a Branch meeting or Kalamazoo conference or the International Arthurian Congress. Suddenly, there is a conspicuous

absence in our Arthurian fellowship, an absence that echoes and enforces the poignant lament for lost fellowship spoken by Malory's King Arthur: 'nevyr shall I se you agayne holé togydirs!'

Fiona Tolhurst pursued her undergraduate English literature degree at Rice University, graduating Magna cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa (1990); it was also at Rice that Fiona met her life-long love and husband, Christoph Neuendorf. From Rice, Fiona proceeded to a Mellon Fellowship and Princeton for her graduate training (earning her M.A. in 1994 and Ph.D. in 1995), eventually pursuing a Ph.D. thesis under the direction of the noted medievalist and Chaucerian John Fleming on what Fleming initially jokingly referred to as 'the trash literature of the Middle Ages': Arthurian literature. (Fleming's remark encapsulates what was, for much of the twentieth century, the dominant scholarly attitude towards romance and Arthurian literature, but Fleming was very supportive of Fiona and they worked well together.) After her Ph.D., Dr. Tolhurst worked one year at Texas A&M before taking up a tenure-track position at Alfred University, becoming one of the youngest female faculty members to achieve Full Professor. Fed up with American politics, Fiona and Christoph leapt at the chance to move to Switzerland for several years, where he worked in finance and she taught and continued her scholarship. When Christoph and Fiona returned to North America, Fiona secured a permanent position at Florida Gulf Coast University, where she was recently promoted (for the second time in her career) to Full Professor. At the time of her death, Fiona was Chair of the Department of Language and Literature at Florida Gulf Coast University.

As a scholar, Fiona had many interests and published widely. She was a recognized authority on Geoffrey of Monmouth, particularly feminist approaches to Geoffrey, a topic on which she wrote numerous articles and book chapters as well as two monographs (see especially the commissioned chapter on 'Geoffrey and Gender: The Works of Geoffrey of Monmouth as Medieval "Feminism,"' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, edited by Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith [Brill, 2020], pp. 341–68; *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Female Kingship* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2013]; and *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of the Arthurian Legend* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2012]). She also edited an important special collection of *Arthuriana* (8.4 [1998]) devoted to theoretical approaches to Geoffrey, a collection that she put together remarkably early in her career. She then co-edited a book of essays in memory of Maureen Fries (*On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, edited by Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst [Scriptorium Press, 2001]), and also published articles emphasizing the extent of C.S. Lewis' Arthurian interests (including 'Beyond the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis as Closet Arthurian,' *Arthuriana* 22. 4 [2012]: 140–66). Throughout her career she also consistently worked on medieval women, particularly

Eleanor of Aquitaine (including ‘Catty Queen Consort, Lioness in Winter and Loyal Queen Mother: Images of Eleanor of Aquitaine in Film’, in *Medieval Women on Film: Essays on Gender, Cinema and History*, edited by Kevin J. Harty [McFarland, 2020], pp. 163–81) and Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe (e.g., ‘Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe as Contemporary Cult Figures’, in *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Gail Ashton [Bloomsbury, 2015], pp. 187–99). Additionally, Fiona worked regularly on both Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* and the Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*, frequently but not exclusively with an eye on Guenevere or Gaynour in these texts. Here, again, she initiated and co-edited a special journal issue devoted to reassessing the Stanzaic *Morte* (*Arthuriana* 28.3 [2018]), and her own work on this poem won her the 2019 James Randall Leader Prize from the North American Branch of the International Arthurian Society for the best article published on an Arthurian topic in 2018: ‘Standing Up for the Stanzaic-poet: Artistry, Characterization, and Narration in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’ (*Arthuriana* 28.3 [2018]: 85–113). The publications mentioned here, of course, comprise only a select list of Fiona’s greatest hits—she published consistently and to consistently high quality—but these titles give a good sense of the range and influence of her work.

Fiona’s remarkable scholarly output, however, was by no means achieved at the expense of her students. On the contrary, throughout her career Fiona was a dedicated teacher whose academic rigour and inspiring teaching repeatedly won her teaching awards. It has been my honour to team-teach several classes with Fiona, both at Acadia and at Florida Gulf Coast, but the learning, enthusiasm and care she showed her students will be no surprise to anyone who met her at a conference. Fiona had an ability to make whomever she spoke with feel as if she were genuinely interested in what that person was doing—because she *was* genuinely interested. Arthurian scholars as a group are particularly welcoming and supportive, but even by our standards Fiona stood out. Like Elspeth Kennedy (whom she did not know) and Maureen Fries and Bonnie Wheeler (both of whom she knew and was consciously emulating), Fiona took care as she moved through the academic ranks to be as welcoming as possible to her junior colleagues, offering interest in and support for their work. If I may be permitted some hearsay, several now-established members of the profession have written to me in the past weeks to say how fondly they remember Fiona and how welcome Fiona made them feel when she spoke with them when they were graduate students at what was, for them, an early-career conference. Fiona made everyone feel welcome and knowledgeable. In all of these ways, Fiona Tolhurst was one of the best of us.

As students of literature we study words, but words fail me. For the last several years Fiona Tolhurst has been my writing partner and I am pleased to report that most of what we have been working on is or soon will be in

production, meaning we can look forward to hearing her voice and honoring her academic legacy for some time to come. This forthcoming work is some consolation; but we will all miss that fantastic smile, that sharp wit, and her keen mind. One of the great surprises of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* is that the villain Mordred kills Gawayne only to pause and offer a moving threnody to the fallen hero. It is no surprise to say of Fiona that she, like Gawayne, ‘was makles one molde, . . . the gracioseste gome that vndire God lyffede; / . . . And þe hendeste in hawle vndire heuen riche.’

ACADIA UNIVERSITY

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