

## Lotte Motz †

August 16th 1922 – December 24th 1997

Lotte Motz, née Edlis, was born in Vienna, where she also attended school, but at the time of the Nazi takeover she was forced to leave the Gymnasium along with other Jewish students. In 1941, with her mother and two younger brothers, she was able to escape to America. She adapted quickly to her new circumstances and always considered herself American, even though she was to spend long periods of time outside the country. While completing High School and attending college at night she worked at various odd jobs. Afterwards she became a full-time student at Hunter College, City University of New York, where, in 1949, she graduated with honours and a BA in German. She also wrote short stories and poetry, which appeared in the college literary publication. She then did a year of graduate work at Stanford University, and completed her graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin, where she obtained a Ph.D. in German in 1958. In 1959 she married Hans Motz, an eminent physicist at Oxford University, who likewise was originally from Vienna. She moved to Oxford in 1959 and even though she found the city beautiful, her desire to teach became increasingly frustrated and she disliked the role of faculty wife.

In 1971 she returned to America with her daughter Anna and obtained an academic position in the German Department at Brooklyn College. It was then that her scholarly career began. Later she taught German at Hunter College. When, in 1983, she became ill with a lung condition, she had to give up teaching. She returned to Oxford where Anna was now an undergraduate, and continued with her scholarly activities.

Lotte Motz's field was Icelandic and Germanic mythology and religion, but in recent years her research spanned a much vaster field, covering most of Indo-European religion. In her four books and approximately fifty papers she became increasingly dedicated to exploring the role of female mythological figures, and no one has written more fully or inspiringly on Germanic giantesses. Two of her

books, namely *The Beauty and the Hag* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1993) and her most ambitious work, *The Faces of the Goddess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), were dedicated to examining the female in mythology, the former in its Germanic background, the latter in various archaic cultures, challenging the notion of a unitary mother goddess archetype. Her second major interest was in the relations between gods — or families of gods — in Germanic religion, with their function and cult in respect to the social strata. She was probably the first scholar in our field to take a serious step past the Three-Function-Theory developed by Georges Dumézil nearly four decades ago. These views were developed in her third book, *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1996) and in one of her last articles on "The Germanic Thunderweapon" (Saga Book 24, October 1997). Her research in this direction was sadly interrupted by her death, and it is left to others to take up the often provocative thoughts she has presented us with.

At the time of her death she had just completed another paper, had collected material for several more, and was full of new ideas. Her productivity was especially impressive since her scholarly career began relatively late in life and despite her phobia regarding electronic gadgets, especially computers. All her work was typed out on her old portable non-electric typewriter.

Lotte was a true scholar in her desire to find the truth. She was not afraid to take unpopular views if that was what the evidence warranted. She was rich in creative insights and original thoughts and frequently challenged generally accepted notions. She could also drive the editors of her books and papers to tears with her generosity regarding merely formal details and the enthusiasm in which she tried to include new material right up to the date of publication. Her scholarship received international acclaim; she presented numerous papers at international conferences and gave seminars and lectures at various universities including New York, London and Vienna. Her unusual gift as a lecturer, full of wit, enthusiasm and the insight in the human nature of her audience, drew full lecture halls. She was also a gifted and poetic writer with the ability to move people with words.

Lotte Motz was an exceedingly kind and generous person. She had a great capacity for friendship and loyalty. She enjoyed company, in which she was animated, witty and fun. She was also an idealist with a strong sense of justice and she had the courage to act on her convictions.

It is perhaps surprising for those of us who knew her only in the years during her illness, that Lotte Motz had a passionate love of nature. She had always been physically active, enjoying skiing, hiking, swimming and even climbing in New England. Her illness was therefore especially difficult, but she accepted it with grace and courage. She maintained her household and continued to write papers, and lecture and travel, even though this was often a struggle. In the early hours of 24th December, 1997, after having seen her family, she died, unexpectedly and peacefully, in her sleep.

Lotte herself had said that she wanted the words of Chaucer, describing the Clerk of Oxenforde, to be on her gravestone, as they so fitted her and her desire for truth:

*And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.*

*Herbert Edlis, Anna Motz, Rudolf Simek*