

Dr Philippa Semper BA PhD PGCE

Lecturer in Medieval English

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About

My work centres on Old English language and literature and the interaction between text and image in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts; I also write about and teach modern fantasy literature and its relationships with medieval texts.

Feedback and office hours

Office Hours for 2013-14:

Wednesdays 11-12

Fridays 10-11

These hours run until the end of the exam schedule in the summer term.

Please email me to arrange an appointment for feedback on your work or to discuss any other issues.

Qualifications

- BA Hons in English Medieval Studies (University of Exeter)
- PhD in Medieval English (University of Exeter)
- PGCE in Higher Education (University of Greenwich)

Biography

After completing my PhD I tutored in Medieval English at the University of Exeter, and then went to Ireland to teach at University College Dublin for several years. I moved back to the UK when I joined the English Department at the University of Birmingham.

Teaching

I teach and convene all modules on Old English language and literature for the English undergraduate programme, and offer a final-year literature option on 'Fantasy and Fandom'. I also convene and teach the Writing the Region module which focuses on writing from and about the West Midlands. I contribute modules for the [MRes in Medieval Studies \(/postgraduate/courses/combined/english/medieval-studies.aspx\)](/postgraduate/courses/combined/english/medieval-studies.aspx) and the [MA in Medieval Studies \(/postgraduate/courses/taught/history/medieval-studies.aspx\)](/postgraduate/courses/taught/history/medieval-studies.aspx) (Literature Pathway).

Postgraduate supervision

I currently supervise postgraduate students working in the areas of Old English language and literature and Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. This work includes the interpretation of the Old English *Phoenix* (MPhil), the myth of the woman in the water in *Beowulf* (MPhil), the labours of the months in two Anglo-Saxon calendars (MPhil), the uses of landscape in Anglo-Saxon poetry (PhD) and the discourses of knowledge and power in Old English literature (PhD).

I also supervise postgraduates working on fantasy literature, including Susan Cooper (PhD) and C19th vampire literature (MRes).

I welcome enquiries from graduate students wishing to study for Masters and PhD projects on the following: Old English literature, especially the prose of secular learning and poetry containing runes; text-image relationships in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and in later medieval manuscripts of secular texts; modern fantasy literature.

Research

My interests centre on Old English literature and the ways in which it was written, read and understood in the Anglo-Saxon period. Much of my research is interdisciplinary in nature, and examines the relationships between text and image in medieval manuscripts, focusing in particular on medieval diagrams. I am interested in the various reading strategies required by differing forms of visual exposition, and the implications of such strategies for both the production and the use of manuscripts, and am currently working on a book which addresses these issues.

I also work on modern fantasy writing. This has included work on the medievalism of fantasy and modern Arthurian fantasy such as Kevin Crossley Holland's *Arthur* trilogy and the BBC *Merlin*. My work now has a strong focus on the work of Lord Dunsany.

Research groups

I am part of the Medieval English Research Group in the Department of English and lead for the [Centre for the Study of the Middle Ages \(/research/activity/cesma/index.aspx\)](#) in the College of Arts and Law, whose research seminar programme I convene.

Other activities

Conferences

In May 2014 I gave a talk at Hay Festival called 'Who Wants to Live Forever? Mortals, Immortals and the Undead'.

I am currently working with Wolverhampton Art Gallery on a symposium entitled 'Black Country Echoes' (November 2014), at which I will be giving the keynote lecture. In January 2010 I organised the Annual Gender and Medieval Studies Conference on Gender and the Family at Birmingham with Dr Simon Yarrow. I organised 'Identity and Cultural Exchange 600-1600: Contact, Travel and Trade' at Birmingham in 2002 and was also heavily involved in arranging the 'Manuscripts of the West Midlands' conference (Birmingham, April 2003) and the 3rd International Piers Plowman conference (Birmingham, July 2003). I ran the Graduate Medieval Seminar at Birmingham until 2009 and have contributed to seminar series in the Department of History and the Institute for Antiquity and Archaeology.

I have co-ordinated several panels at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds, most recently in 2010, and frequently give papers both there and at other conferences in the UK, Ireland and the US. I am a member of the Teachers of Old English in Britain and Ireland.

E-learning

I have been involved in developing web-based learning materials for the study of medieval languages and literature for some time, and have been involved in the process of selecting and integrating the new iVLE in the University. I also run a [blog to complement my fantasy module \(http://fantasyandfandom.wordpress.com/\)](http://fantasyandfandom.wordpress.com/).

Publications

Conference papers

Recent conference papers include:

'Dream to me now of London: Of other worlds and our own', Keynote Lecture, Fantastic Worlds Symposium, University of Northampton, November 2013

'Leoht, beorht, toht: The sunny skies of Old English poetry', Research Seminar, University of Oxford, October 2013

'Tolkien's Old English: Anglo-Saxon poetry and the creation of a fantastical literary tradition,' Mythopoeic Society Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 2011.

'The hero's charisma : *Beowulf* and the heroic transformations of William Morris,' International Conference on Charisma: After Weber, June 2011.

'Teaching and learning with Byrhtferth in eleventh-century England,' Medieval History Research Seminar, Birmingham, November 2008.

'Representing creation: text and image in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts,' International Medieval Congress, Leeds, July 2008.

'Preosta saltus' or 'what is necessary for priests to know': educating the clergy in eleventh-century England,' International Congress on Medieval Studies, University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo, May 2008.

'Palimpsestic poetry: *carmina figurata*, Hrabanus Maurus and Anglo-Saxon images of the cross,' Leicester Medieval Seminar, February 2008.

'Looking to remember: 'seen text' in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts,' National University of Ireland, Galway, February 2006.

Selected publications

Old English Poetry in Context (Continuum, forthcoming 2014).

'Byð se ealda man ceald and snoflig': Stereotypes and Subversions of the Last Stages of the Life-Cycle in Old English Texts and Anglo-Saxon Contexts.' In *Medieval Lifecycles: Continuity and Change*, ed. Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth (Brepols, 2013).

'My Other World: Historical Reflections and Refractions in Modern Arthurian Fantasy.' In *Medieval Afterlives*, ed. Gail Ashton and Daniel T. Kline (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

'Old English Literature.' In *The English Literature Companion*, ed. Julian Wolfreys, *Palgrave Student Companions Series* (Palgrave, 2010), 65-72., ed. Julian Wolfreys, *Palgrave Student Companions Series* (Palgrave, 2010), 65-72.

'The wonders that they myghte seen or here': Designing and Using Web-based Resources to Teach Medieval Literature.' In *Teaching Chaucer in the University*, ed. Gail Ashton and Louise Sylvester (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

'Doctrine and Diagrams: Maintaining the Order of the World in Anglo-Saxon England.' In *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Paul Cavill (Brewer, 2004) 121-137.

'Going round in circles? Time in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*.' In *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. G. Jaritz and G. Moreno-Riano (Brepols, 2003) 297-308.

Expertise

Anglo-Saxons; Old English literature and Anglo-Saxon manuscripts; scribes and learning; thinking, learning and memory in medieval contexts; Anglo-Saxon images and diagrams; medievalist fantasy, specialising in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien; William Morris's fantasy novels and poetry; the work of Lord Dunsany; song writing and the analysis of lyrics in songs from all periods.

Media experience

I spoke to Patrick Worrell for Channel 4 news about Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*:

<http://bit.ly/1IWOSx2> (<http://bit.ly/1IWOSx2>)

I have also been on local radio to explain the origins of the names of the days of the week.

