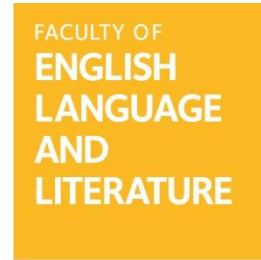


Spotlight

The e-newsletter for English Faculty Alumni



MAY 2018

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Welcome!

Welcome to *Spotlight*, the Faculty of English Language & Literature's alumni e-newsletter.

As I write this, spring is finally starting to settle in, with fresh growth and blossom appearing on the shrubs outside the Faculty office windows and colourful bulbs brightening patches of grass around the St Cross Building. New developments are also underway within the Faculty; we have begun to work towards Athena SWAN certification, encouraging us to look at how we promote and encourage equality and diversity within the staff and student bodies. We are constantly involved in recruiting new members of academic and research staff, and are currently expanding our outreach activities to encourage applications from a broader range of students (more on this in a future issue), so this is particularly timely for us and will have obvious benefits in helping us address potential barriers to entry.

New developments are constantly taking place within the Faculty's numerous research projects, which together cover an incredible range of topics. In this issue we hear more about Dr Elizabeth Solopova's project to create a new edition of the Wycliffite Bible; Dr Sally Frampton's 'Mind-Boggling Medical History' game, designed to challenge preconceptions about history and show how ideas in medicine change for a variety of reasons; and the links between Medievalism and contemporary fantasy literature. Aspects of Professor Dan Wakelin's research have been on display in the Bodleian Library's recent 'Designing English' exhibition, which showed a selection of early English manuscripts, with an accompanying display of fascinating modern reinterpretations of medieval books.

We are also very interested in finding out where our alumni go once they leave us, and so we have prepared a graduate destinations survey, for which you will find a link further down this newsletter. Please do complete it, whether you matriculated in 1935 or 2015. (Yes, we do still have readers who matriculated over 80 years ago!)

On a perhaps more prosaic note, there has been a lot of interest in the updated data protection legislation (GDPR) which will come into force later this year. One of the ways this will impact us is that we will need your consent to keep in contact with you. If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter or other news from us in the future, please send an email to alumni@english.ox.ac.uk. We are also very interested in finding out where our alumni go once they leave us, and so we have prepared a graduate destinations survey, for which you will find a link further down this newsletter. Please do complete it, whether you matriculated in 1935 or 2015. (Yes, we do still have readers who matriculated over 80 years ago!)

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Spotlight on Research

'of making manye bokis is noon ende': Editing the Wycliffite Bible



In þe bigynnyng was þe word... Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 1,1 f. 82r.

Readers of the first issue of Spotlight in August 2016 might remember a mention of the 'Towards a New Edition of the Wycliffite Bible' project, which is led by Dr Elizabeth Solopova and also involves Professor Anne Hudson and a postdoctoral research assistant, Daniel Sawyer (me). The project's goal is to begin re-editing the Wycliffite Bible (WB). This late-fourteenth century text, probably originating in Oxford, is the first complete translation of the Bible into English. It's also the longest Middle English text and, by manuscript survival, the most successful

English text before print. These last two facts go a long way to explaining why a new edition is needed and why the task is a big one! But what does working on this project mean, in a practical, day-to-day sense?

There are around 250 manuscript witnesses in total. A central core of these are, we think, most likely to be the key witnesses. Accessing the key manuscripts which are in Oxford is usually easy enough, but to read those which are elsewhere we've assembled a substantial library of facsimiles. A few manuscripts have been digitised and made available online in public facsimiles—from within Oxford itself, Christ Church and the Bodleian have put up [Christ Church MS 145](#), for instance—and in some cases we have access to restricted digital facsimiles or sets of photographs, some of which we will be making publicly available. For other manuscripts we're relying on our own photographs, digitised microfilms or, in extremis, physical microfilms. (To me, spooling up a microfilm in an analogue microfilm reader feels more archaic than opening a medieval manuscript—after all, a 600-year-old manuscript works, physically speaking, just like a book published in 2017!) Using these resources we've successfully collated the texts offered by most of our central witnesses.

While facsimiles are a great help, we do need to handle the manuscripts: some features of their construction can only be studied in person, and even the text itself isn't always clear in photographs. The largest single concentration of copies is in Oxford, conveniently, but there are still many elsewhere, so the three of us have begun a series of research trips. Indeed, I'm writing this in a B&B on a wet and blustery evening in Dublin, where I've been consulting the manuscript copies of the Wycliffite Bible in Trinity College, which range from a copy which probably predates 1400 to an unusual Elizabethan manuscript of the New Testament: one of Shakespeare's contemporaries was apparently willing to hand-copy a Bible translation which originated two centuries earlier. It's a privilege to work on a topic which requires research travel like this, and there's a certain excitement to be had in throwing a ruler, a magnifying glass and a few books in a bag and setting out for a foreign library. Or at least that's what I tell myself when awaiting a bus to the airport in the small hours of the morning. But we are also (I promise) thinking hard about how to make these trips as efficient as possible, and we hope that our findings will permanently advance scholarship.

Meanwhile, we're also involved in prototyping work for our open-access digital edition of the Wycliffite Bible. This digital edition will be designed to expand over time, and so allow us and others to carry forward the task of re-editing the whole Wycliffite Bible beyond the end of our project, in a less intense but (we hope) much longer-term way. Project members from the university's IT Services have designed a provisional interface for the digital edition and we have a prototype version of just two chapters available at <https://wycliffite-bible.english.ox.ac.uk>.

Finally, we have secured a substantial grant from Oxford's John Fell Fund for a closely-related year-long research project on the Wycliffite Old Testament Lectionary. The Lectionary is a valuable, underexamined text, and deserves an edition in its own right. It's also closely related to the Wycliffite Bible, and we suspect that the process of editing it might reveal more about the Wycliffite Bible's text at a very early stage in the translation process. Cosima Gillhammer has joined us to carry out this adjacent editorial work.

Dr Daniel Sawyer
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Mindboggling Medical History

- 1. Eating too many bananas makes you grow more body hair by increasing the level of potassium.**
- 2. Maggots are used in hospitals to clean infected wounds.**
- 3. Excessive cycling can cause permanent damage to the muscles in the face.***

Look at the statements above. What do you think when you see them? Do they refer to current medical ideas? Are they medical practices from the past? Or are the theories mentioned entirely fictional?

These are just some of the weird and wonderful statements we put to people who play Mind-Boggling Medical



History, a game developed by myself and colleagues, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Mind-Boggling Medical History is an educational game which is designed to challenge preconceptions about history and show how ideas in medicine change for a variety of reasons. From floating kidneys and wandering wombs to transplanted heads and dogs who detect diseases, the game challenges players to look at a series of statements and decide which concern current medical practice, which are based on historical ideas or practices no longer used, and which we have... well... just made up! Players can choose from a number of rounds related to different medical

themes, including 'sex and reproduction', 'animals', 'mind' and 'treatment'. We have produced both a physical card pack, available to those working in education, nursing, public engagement and museums, as well as an online version that is freely available to all (<https://mbmh.web.ox.ac.uk/home>).

Developed in collaboration with the Royal College of Nursing, and drawing on the interdisciplinary work of 'Constructing Scientific Communities', the larger project to which I'm attached (headed up by Professor of English Literature, Sally Shuttleworth), Mind-Boggling Medical History has been created with museum visitors, school students, and university nursing and medical students in mind. Accompanying lesson plans and learning resources for use with GCSE History and BSc Nursing students are available to download for free on our website. The game is intended to show players how historical theories can prompt questions about current understandings of medicine, the need for health and medical practitioners to stay up-to-date in their field, and the impact that changes in medical knowledge can have on patient care. We decided to develop the game into a more sophisticated resource after playing it with museum visitors at a series of public engagement events. We found that the game sparked fascinating conversations about how medical ideas transform. Statements relating to phrenology, for example, (the nineteenth-century theory that skull shape could tell you about brain shape and this in turn could tell you about a person's personality) often generated discussion between players about modern day neuroscience. Not everyone agrees with our decisions about how we judge what is historical and what is contemporary in the game. However this is precisely what we hope that Mind-Boggling Medical History will do: get people thinking about medicine in its past and present contexts and show that the differences between the two are not always clear or straightforward. Faced with tobacco enemas, heroin-laced medicines and an enthusiastic reliance on smelling urine to diagnose disease, it can sometimes be difficult to see beyond our own incredulity at how illness was treated at different points in the past, and to instead consider why certain theories and practices emerge when they do.

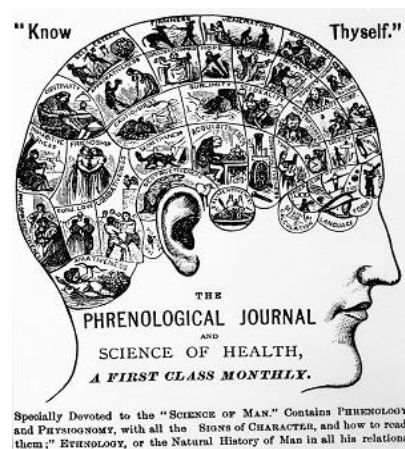


Image credit: Wellcome Collection

Through Mind-Boggling Medical History we hope to encourage users to look more closely at how ideas change in medicine, how they can often come in and out of fashion (think leeches!) and how modern-day medicine can equally play host to bizarre and unexpected ideas and treatments. The inclusion of the 'fictional' category adds a further twist to the game, showing how it is not always easy to distinguish fact from fiction when it comes to medicine. Novels like Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain* or Alexis Arnaudus Gilliland's *Revolution in Rosinante* are some of examples of the literature that inspired our fictional category, which features medical ideas or practices which, as far as we know, no-one has thought to be true in real life. When paired with past and present medical facts however, truth can truly seem stranger than fiction.

* 1) Fictional 2) Present 3) Past

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Fantasy, Medievalism and Oxford English

The actual world of 2017 has seemed strange and difficult for many people all across the planet. And, perhaps consequently, the fantasy genre – medieval fantasy in particular – has become an increasingly popular means of escape from the quotidian across many different media. The world's biggest TV show, *Game of Thrones*, is set in a medievalised universe, its different cultures drawing on real-world societies of the Middle Ages; the show's depictions of power-politics, violence, religion, and economics are all profoundly shaped by the medieval past. The History Channel's *Vikings* TV show continues apace, now having reached the discovery and settlement of Iceland. Some of 2017's biggest movie box-office blockbusters were in the fantasy genre: *Thor: Ragnarok*, a tale of the Old Norse gods, among them. Philip Pullman's much-anticipated new novel, *La Belle Sauvage*, heralded the start of a new trilogy, set, like *His Dark Materials*, in an alternative, if not exactly medieval, Oxford. Is fantasy, including medieval fantasy, mere escapism, or does it offer a new, if strangely defamiliarised, perspective on our own times?

Oxford – and the English Faculty in particular – has a strong historical relationship with medievalist fantasy. J. R. R. Tolkien, subject of a huge new exhibition at the Bodleian this coming summer, did not invent medieval fantasy in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, for nineteenth-century writers such as William Morris had already dreamed up fantasy medieval worlds in order to explore the implications of industrialisation and urbanisation. In his academic role, Tolkien, along with his friend C. S. Lewis, advocated an English Faculty syllabus that foregrounded medieval literature. This emphasis would have a powerful shaping effect on generations of writers who read English at Oxford, their imaginations fired by the texts they studied in depth, as well as the medieval architecture, the honey-coloured stone and soaring spires amidst which they worked.

Alan Garner, Susan Cooper, and Diana Wynne Jones were among those English students of the 50s and 60s. Garner's Alderley Edge in Cheshire is the setting for a titanic struggle between Celtic, Norse and English mythic figures in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomrath*. Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence is set in Buckinghamshire, Cornwall and Wales, calling on Arthurian, Anglo-Saxon and Welsh tradition. Diana Wynne Jones' stories, such as *Fire and Hemlock*, or *Eight Days of Luke*, are set in familiar towns and villages where the supernatural – the fairy world, the Norse gods – makes itself known as an – at first rather low-key – but ultimately terrifying, intrusion into normality. Wynne Jones' best-known story, thanks to the much-loved Studio Ghibli film, is *Howl's Moving Castle*, which is set in a lightly medievalised Europe and calls upon fairy- and folk-tale tropes.



Later fantasy writers find that they must always take Tolkien into account. Authors borrow his characters and create new ones from them. So, Smaug from *The Hobbit* has hatched a myriad of dragon-successors, ranging from Ursula Le Guin's majestic creatures in the *Earthsea* trilogy to the altogether more tractable beasts in Cressida Cowell's *How to Tame Your Dragon*. Other authors choose to write against Tolkien: the American Hugo award winner, N. K. Jemisin, who riffs on mythology and geology in her remarkable trilogies, *The Inheritance Trilogy* and *The Broken Earth*, features women of colour as her complex and courageous heroes. George R. R. Martin, author of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the unfinished book series on which *Game of Thrones* is based, raises the intriguing question: 'What was Aragorn's tax policy?', pointedly moving away from Tolkien's vagueness about the pragmatic details of world-building to investigate the effects of international credit squeezes, global cooling and disruption of continent-wide trading practices in his medievalised universe. In his *New Crobruzon* trilogy of the early 2000s, China Miéville abandons the preindustrial cultures of Middle Earth for the construction of a teeming, politically sophisticated city. New Crobruzon is anchored in a world populated with creatures from global myth and folklore, from the Indonesia garuda-bird to the Northern English grindylow; within it Miéville explores themes as various as revolutionary politics, gangsterism, techniques of social control and substance addiction.

Those who followed Tolkien showed how the building of fantasy worlds – often reaching back into the medieval past – unleashed authorial imaginations to tackle the largest and most pressing questions of contemporary human existence. For, like other kinds of fantasy, medievalist fantasy has always been about what is happening

now in the world. To take one example: when Martin began to write *A Song of Ice and Fire* he imagined a huge wall across the north of the continent of Westeros, seven hundred miles long, three hundred feet high, made of ice – and of magical spells. When asked, Martin claimed he was inspired by Hadrian's Wall, but when he began to write his novel sequence, that most definitive of twentieth-century walls, the Berlin Wall, had only just been dismantled. The walls between Israel and Palestine, and the partial wall along the US-Mexican frontier had barely been mooted. The Wall has taken on an imaginative life of its own in contemporary politics, in Donald Trump's election campaigning, or as the invisible wall surrounding fortress Europe, telling desperate refugees in flight from unimaginable horrors that they may not pass through to the safety beyond. Far from whisking us away in retreat from the pressures of contemporary life, fantasy, particular of the medievalist variety, speaks urgently of the world in which we actually live now.

Carolyn Larrington, St John's College and English Faculty

Carolyn Larrington and Stuart Lee will be leading ['Here Be Dragons' – the Oxford Fantasy Literature Summer School](#) in the English Faculty on 11-13 September 2018, during which academics from around the UK will talk about individual authors and other aspects of fantasy literature. Further information about this can be seen below in the Events section, and on our website www.english.ox.ac.uk/.

LitHits

What did you most enjoy reading when you studied English here? Which literary works have stayed with you over the years? The Faculty of English is developing a new project called LitHits that will help connect readers with great literature and is looking to crowdsource the literary "bits" from its alumni and current students. We would love to receive your suggestions! Tell us what you enjoyed reading both as a student here and now. Excerpts can be any length, and can be from any literary texts, genres and periods – novels, short stories, poems, plays. Please tell us: 1) title and author of book; 2) where the excerpt occurs in the text (don't worry if you can't give exact page numbers or chapters, just give us a rough idea); and if you wish tell us why you like the excerpt and what it means to you. Please email your suggestions to: kirsten.shepherd-barr@ell.ox.ac.uk

Spotlight on Students

Daniel Abdalla



I started my DPhil in English literature in 2016. It's difficult to remember the first thread in the memorable cord that would eventually tie me to Oxford, but it was probably the year in school that we read *Great Expectations*. Thinking back through everything I've done from that point, I feel quite fortunate to be enrolled here, especially because for some time this state of affairs seemed truly fantastic.

In 2011, I graduated from Illinois State University with a BA in English and History and a minor in Latin. My undergraduate dissertation was on Kazuo Ishiguro and his usage of nineteenth-century literary tropes through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.

In many ways, this project untied a number of threads that I would pull upon for the next five years: the relationship between education and artistic taste, the possibility of autonomous art, and the centrality of the Victorians to our notions of literature and literary history.

During the time between my BA and my MA, I worked as an Executive Assistant at the Chicago High School for the Arts, which had been founded as long-term fix for the relative lack of diversity in Chicago's arts organizations. Alongside a rigorous academic program, the school facilitated pre-professional fine arts training to students who would not normally be able follow such paths. For me, this meant daily negotiations between the top philanthropists in Chicago's art scene and residents of Chicago's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. This was an often stressful situation, but one that often redeemed itself in the image of both groups sitting side-by-side in

the audience of the school plays.

Before coming to Oxford, I completed my MA in English Literature: 1850-present at King's College London. Because I was still interested in understanding the historical formation of literature, I enrolled in a class considering the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and science. Before taking in this class, I had no idea that it was possible to ask some of the questions that had always implicitly guided my work: on what disciplinary edges have we cut our modern understanding of the literary? To what degree can we generalize about the types of knowledge that literature does and doesn't provide? Is it possible to describe the distinctions between literary and non-literary genres in terms of form?

My thesis answers these questions in the specific milieu of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century English and American literature. I look at the work of Henry James and the authors he patronized: Edith Wharton, Elizabeth Robins, and Henrik Ibsen. By paying particular attention to James and his brother, the eminent psychologist and philosopher William James, I intend to show that the relationship between literature and science at the time was not simply an esoteric debate, but one that had significant consequences for turn-of-the-century thought.

While working on my thesis, I have also spent the last two years as President of the faculty's representative body, English Graduates at Oxford. During my tenure, I have attempted to ease conversation among different members of the faculty. Additionally, I have overseen a website re-haul, changes to examination regulations, and numerous spirited social outings. I hope that bringing together these different parts of the faculty has made a better environment for all of us involved.

Daniel Abdalla, 2nd Year DPhil student

Hannah Simpson



I did my undergraduate degree in English Literature and French at St Hilda's College in Oxford, and then went to the US for two years to do my Masters. I didn't necessarily expect to end up back at Oxford for my PhD, but I soon realised how much the work I saw being done in the Faculty during my undergraduate years has shaped my own research interests. It ended up making sense to come back to the institution where that research is being supported and developed.

The great advantage that I've found to an Oxford DPhil is the sheer range of scholarship going on here. There's such a wide array of not only expertise but also strong interdisciplinary work in the English Faculty, and organisations like TORCH (The Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities) make it so easy to engage with the other faculties in the university. I work on the theatrical representation of physical pain in post-World War II theatre, with a particular focus on Samuel Beckett and his Francophone contemporaries, and it would be much more difficult to do this kind of project in a less interdisciplinary faculty or university. There are fantastic theatre and modern literature scholars (including my own supervisor, Susan Jones) and medical humanities scholars in the English Faculty, and so much exchange with the Modern Languages Faculty, the History Faculty and the Wellcome Unit here; this has made my project not only possible but profoundly more exciting.

The faculty is also very supportive of our professional development as DPhil candidates. There's a healthy awareness of how tough the Humanities job market is for early-career scholars at the moment, and we're given lots of encouragement to work on projects beyond our dissertations to aid our professional development. I'm currently organising a medical humanities conference in the faculty along with another English DPhil candidate Patrick Burley, for example. We've received with financial aid from TORCH and AHRC, and the English Faculty is allowing us not only to use their premises but also to run our account through the faculty and bounce our event planning ideas off them. Faculty Finance Officer Katie MacCurrach may be the most patient woman in all of England, and without her advice our conference would be looking much more chaotic than it currently does!

The faculty also offers a teaching mentoring scheme and PLTO training course to allow DPhil candidates to start building up their teaching experience. Working with the undergraduate students here is a real joy – they're a

fantastically dedicated and insightful bunch. Engaging with them and their work really brightens up an otherwise long day of writing! The same is true of the other DPhil candidates in the English Faculty. It's a great thing to be surrounded by motivated colleagues doing their own interesting research. There's a real culture of support and collaboration in the department: I'm currently co-editing a journal special issue with another DPhil student and have just organised a Faculty lecture series with another DPhil colleague, for example, and many of us will 'peer review' each other's work before it gets sent for publication, or send a conference call for proposals over to someone who might be interested in it. It's a fantastic place to start an academic career.

Hannah Simpson, 2nd Year DPhil student

Spotlight on Staff

Professor Lorna Hutson



Which book has had the biggest impact on you?

This is difficult to say, because I always seem to prefer the minor genres (e.g. lyric and comedy over epic and tragedy) and so there's no big blockbuster that changed my life. But I do remember, when I was about 14, a drab-looking school poetry anthology which introduced me to Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Edwin Muir, T. S. Eliot, Auden, Stevie Smith, Thom Gunn, Sylvia Plath etc. A selection of poems for each poet, fronted by a grainy black-and-white photograph. Somehow this seemed mesmerizingly rich and enigmatic to me, though I've no recollection of 'studying' it – I think I just read it on my own. But it had an impact on me, because I wanted to read more of this stuff.

What do you do in your spare time?

I like going for walks. I like poking around churches and manor houses and other ancient buildings, preferably in good company (that is, with my partner and/or old friends). I like cooking, and going to markets. My partner and I also go occasionally to the theatre and to art galleries (for example, the brilliant Joan Eardley exhibition in Edinburgh last year) and we're always saying we should do this more. Swimming outdoors in warm weather is also something I love doing.

Describe your ideal day.

Take two or three of the seven ingredients above and factor in a glass of wine on a warm terrace or by a blazing hearth, and you've got it.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

I love being by the sea. I love the sea mist (called 'haar' in Fife, where I used to live, and 'fog' in Berkeley, where I lived before that) and the astringent, salt smell of the air and the way the land just stops. These days I live by a little river, and that's a pretty good second-best. I used to relish living in cities. I lived in central London, near Russell Square, for many years and at that time I really enjoyed the electric sense of connection, the creative energy and even the grime. But those days are past.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A famous artist – or, at the very least, a very good cartoonist. I'm still sorry that I didn't manage that.

What teacher had the greatest impact on you?

Greatest impact, I don't know . . . great entertainment value, though. I had a Latin teacher who built us a model of Troy and set light to it in the playground. This did not seem to be an officially approved pedagogic technique, however. Shortly afterwards we got a new Latin teacher.

Do you have pets?

I have a very eccentric and badly-trained collie. It's always an embarrassment to have people comment on how clever collies are, and how wonderfully obedient, because I seem to have managed to acquire (more or less by

accident) a unique specimen of the breed, a canine airhead or four-legged featherbrain, who either can't or feigns not to remember a single command. But for all that, she's quite affectionate and appealing. And has enviable Frisbee-catching skills. Of course, she's not really my dog, she's my daughter's . . . but they don't accept dogs in student accommodation.

Were you popular as a teenager?

I don't think I ever was a teenager – they skipped that sort of thing at my Victorian-era Edinburgh boarding school.

What is your favourite music?

Well, my partner is now in charge of my sadly neglected musical education. Conventionally enough, I like baroque music and German lieder, but I can now testify to having enjoyed *Rosenkavalier*...

Describe yourself in five words.

Loquacious, peripatetic, epistolary, histrionic, insomniac, innumerate

How would your friends describe you?

A bit neurotic, a faithful correspondent.

Why are we here?

I ask myself that daily.

If you weren't a member of the English Faculty, what would you be?

A very idle person.

Lorna Hutson is Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, specialising in literature of the early modern period. She has for some time been interested in forensic rhetoric, English law and the dramatic imagination. More recently, she has been working on Leverhulme-funded project entitled Shakespeare's Scotland, 1503-1616, which brings the distinctive and conflicting historiographies and literatures of sixteenth-century England and Scotland together.

Dr Stuart Lee



Which book has had the biggest impact on you?

Unsurprisingly it is Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* but for various reasons. Not only did I read it in my early teens and it left a lasting impression, and like many people have reread it over the years several times, but it also coincided with my growing interest at school in English Literature as an academic pursuit. I remember talking to my English teacher and asking why we were not allowed to read books like this as part of the course. His reply was 'it's a bit long' but noting the interest I was showing he gently pushed me in the direction of a translation of *Beowulf*. When I then went on to University to read English, an inspired bit of marketing by the medievalists along the lines of 'If you liked books like *The Lord of the Rings* then you'll love this'

took me into Old and Middle English which I continued with up to PhD level and have been teaching at Oxford, off and on now, for nigh on twenty years.

What do you do in your spare time?

I double as a trampoline for my young daughter, but before that (and at some point in the future again I hope) I write plays – mainly for local groups – but have had a couple of successes with plays touring the UK and abroad.

Describe your ideal day.

It would depend on the season, but I suspect it would be either a long country walk in the summer through field, meadow, and wood; or a rainy wintry day in a cottage by the sea.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

The world is such a varied place I think everywhere has something wonderful to offer. I can imagine spending Autumn in New England, Spring in France, Christmas in Bavaria, and so on; but honestly I have no real desire to live anywhere else than Britain or Ireland (where I was born).

Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood?

It would be hard not to say my parents as I learnt so much from them, or my Grandfather who instilled in me a sense of possibility (he had grown up in Hampshire and went to sea at the age of 12 but worked his way up to run the Cocktail Bar in The Savoy and one of the most sought-after London clubs in the 1950s and 1960s – his claim to fame being he refused admission to The Beatles).

Who were your childhood heroes?

In fiction it was Captain James T. Kirk of Star Trek fame. In reality for some reason I became interested in politics quite early and remember hearing Tony Benn speak once and realizing that he truly believed in what he was saying. So in real life it's either him or Billy Bremner (I'm a lifelong Leeds Utd fan).

What teacher had the greatest impact on you?

It was certainly my English teachers at school. In addition to Mr Gleeson (the teacher who pointed me at *Beowulf*) there was also Mr Jones who saw me through O Level. He was the first to remark that I could actually write quite well, which gave me confidence, but he also gave me a book of War Poetry and we chatted a lot about Owen and Sassoon (both of whom I've returned to in later life). He also gave me a copy of *The Miller's Tale* in translation (by Coghill I believe) and it made me realise that Literature, even from a very long time ago, could be both fun and showed you that sometimes we share so much with our predecessors. At University my main influence was Professor Barbara Raw who gave me steered me towards postgraduate work in Old English (which I did at KCL). She also told me that it would be a good idea not to rely on getting a position in medieval literature as, at the time (early 1990s) most departments were stopping it. So she pushed me towards IT and especially digital humanities, which is where I now work.

Were you popular as a teenager?

I don't think so; I actually think most people (outside of my really close friends) didn't know I was there. My family moved over from Ireland in the early 1970s and having an Irish accent in those days in Britain was not necessarily a great idea (especially at school). I developed a tactic of remaining pretty much under everyone's radar.

What is your favourite music?

The Beatles (despite my Grandfather's run in with them).

If you could have dinner with five famous people from history, who would they be?

Ælfric of Eynsham, Wilfred Owen, J. R. R. Tolkien, Richmal Crompton, and Geoffrey Chaucer. It would be great to invite Jesus, just to nail that religion thing once and for all but I guess that's not allowed.

Describe yourself in five words.

About 5'11" with grey hair.

How would your friends describe you?

I think they'd probably say I was a good organiser.

What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?

My full time job is helping run the University's IT, which involves a department of over 350 staff. This grew out of the digital humanities work I did some time ago and now is more mainstream IT. It has been an incredible period of the development of IT over the past 20-30 years and the pace of change just accelerates so that is very exciting and challenging. I also really enjoy the fact that I have some time to still work on digital humanities projects and to keep up a bit of teaching and research. My main project at present is building on the crowd-sourcing work we have done around items from the First World War – which all started with my first computer project in 1991.

In terms of what I like least it is failing to meet all the aspirations of users, and possibilities that digital

technologies can offer mainly because of lack of resources.

Why are we here?

To inch humanity forwards.

If you weren't a member of the English Faculty, what would you be?

Working in IT, which is actually what I do.

Despite his role being based in the IT department, Stuart remains committed to teaching and researching English Literature. His current research project, [Lest We Forget](#), is a nationwide initiative, which aims to recognise and record those stories, objects and memories from World War One which survive – not in museum collections or history books – but in the hearts and homes of the very many families and individuals affected. In addition, together with Carolyne Larrington, he is leading the 'Here Be Dragons' Summer School in Fantasy Literature, which will take place in the English Faculty on 11-13 September 2018. See below for further information about this exciting event.

Spotlight on the Faculty

New Merton Chair announced



We are delighted that Professor Helen Small has been appointed to the Merton Professorship of English Language and Literature, and will take up the post from 1 October 2018. Professor Small has been a member of the English Faculty at Oxford since 1998, and is currently Jonathan and Julia Aisbitt Fellow in English Literature and Professor of English Literature at Pembroke College. She will take up her new post on 1 October 2018. Professor Small is passionate about advocating for the Humanities, and has previously published a study of the defences for the humanities which have been most influential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and which still hold sway today. She is currently working on a study of modern cynicism, looking at its function within literature and critical

philosophy.

Faculty aiming for Athena SWAN certification

During the course of the coming year, the English Faculty (alongside History and Music) plans to put in an application for an Athena SWAN bronze award. Athena SWAN is a scheme run by the Equality Challenge Unit (an independent (non-Oxford) body) which is designed to consider questions of gender equality in higher education settings. Athena SWAN (which stands for the Scientific Women's Action Network) began as an initiative to address the under representation of women in the sciences. While the acronym sticks, the idea of 'science' is no longer a vital part of Athena SWAN. The initiative has been extended to the humanities, and is used as a way in which all departments can reflect on the way in which they support and promote gender equality.

In order to qualify for an award, our Faculty's Self-Assessment Team will gather quantitative and qualitative evidence about gender equality – looking at everything ranging from undergraduate and graduate performance to questions of career progression and equality in our working environment. We'll then make an action plan in response to our discoveries. We've taken this as a great opportunity to bring different members of our Faculty – staff, students, College Lecturers, postdocs and academic postholders – together to reflect on what our Faculty does well, and what it could do better. So far, our meetings have been thought-provoking, convivial and inspiring – and we aim to use our engagement with Athena SWAN to leave a positive and lasting legacy in relation to our Faculty's approach to equality.

'Designing English' Exhibition

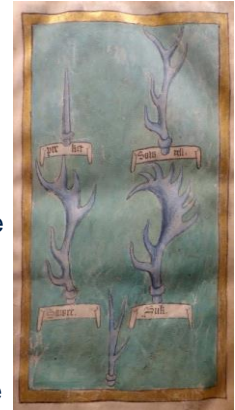
1 December 2017 to 22 April 2018, Bodleian Library



Professor Daniel Wakelin, the Jeremy Griffiths Professor of Medieval English Palaeography in the Faculty of English, curated the exhibition *Designing English: Graphics on the Medieval Page* at the Weston Library, part of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The exhibition illustrated the graphic design of handwritten manuscripts and inscriptions for the first thousand years of English, across the Middle Ages, and showcased the Bodleian Library's rich holdings of medieval manuscripts in English, along with inscriptions on artefacts loaned from the Ashmolean Museum and British Museum.

The exhibition emerged from Professor Wakelin's teaching for both graduate and undergraduate courses, in which he introduces students to the making and design of the manuscripts in which most medieval literature survives. Several students from the MSt course and DPhil programme worked as tour guides for short 'taster' tours in the exhibition gallery, especially with school groups and at the Bodleian's 'Library Late' evening events.

Just as Professor Wakelin seeks to introduce students to the full range of books in English, the exhibition likewise showed the full range of such books. It ranged from Old English picture books or notes scratched into herbals, through fragments of medieval songs scribbled on spare pages, to masterpieces framed with illustrations and gold, or new page designs for practical tasks, such as manuals for handling swans. It covered books and other objects with writing on, from grisly tombs to graffiti. It revealed the experiences of both the makers and the users of writing: how craftspeople planned and made books, and how readers responded to their designs. It uncovered the craft of the scribes, painters and engravers, to preserve, clarify, adorn, authorize and interpret writing in English. It covered not only the gorgeous treasures of the finest artists, as often seen in exhibitions of medieval manuscripts, but also the ingenuity of ordinary people writing for practical tasks. It showed how everyday writings – practical and scientific as well as literary – could involve imagination and skill in design. English could be belittled and squeezed in alongside the other languages more common in medieval books, and which influenced the design of English. As English was more rarely written, often outside powerful institutions which wrote in Latin, scribes and artists sometimes had to experiment in that language. Whether in such fugitive places or presented with pride, the craft and inventiveness of scribes, painters and engravers have resonance today, when digital media lets many people experiment in amateur design – word processing, social media, customized products.



To show the likeness to modern craft, a parallel exhibition ran until March 11, *Redesigning the Medieval Book*: a display of contemporary book arts inspired by the exhibition, and created through a workshop and competition. With support from the University's Public Engagement in Research Seed Fund, we invited contemporary artists to a preview of much of the exhibition several months in advance. Fifty-six artists then submitted a new piece of book art in response to the medieval manuscripts. We awarded four prizes and displayed twenty-four of the new artworks in the Bodleian Library. Many of the competition entries will then be displayed at the University of the West of England later in 2018.

Together the twin exhibitions showed the creativity of medieval artisans in recording English and suggested ways in which that creativity might continue to inspire artists today.

Daniel Wakelin teaches on the MSt course in English literature 650-1550 and for Course II of the English FHS course. Designing English runs at the Weston Library, Broad Street, Oxford until 22 April. Admission is free.

Spotlight on our Alumni

Frances Hardinge (BA, 1992)

I was brought up in a sequence of small, sinister English villages, and spent a number of formative years living in a Gothic-looking, mouse-infested hilltop house in Kent.

When I came to Oxford for a university interview, I fell instantly and utterly in love with the city. I didn't get in the first time, but by then I was so determined to come to Oxford that I took a year out and reapplied. This time I won a place at Somerville College, and felt instantly at home with its friendly, relaxed, outward-looking character. I had always suffered from crippling shyness, but before long I had made friends, and found a strange, new confidence I had never known before.

I thoroughly enjoyed the English Literature and Language course, and threw myself into the reading schedule, sometimes with a bit too much gusto. (After I had read the entire poetic works of WB Yeats in a week, I remember my brain feeling a little numb and over-heated, though that may have been due to lack of sleep.) If Anglo-Saxon hadn't been a compulsory component I might not have chosen to study it, but then I would have missed out on a fascinating glimpse into the roots of English literature and culture, not to mention a harshly melodic and beautiful language.

Even after I finished my BA and Master of Studies, I remained in Oxford for many years, with a friend circle I had gained through university clubs and societies. A few of us set up a writers' group, and with this new incentive I started writing much more frequently and regularly.

Whilst working full time as a technical author for a software company I started writing my first children's novel, *Fly by Night*. I had little faith in it, but fortunately a good friend of mine named Rhiannon Lassiter persuaded me to submit the manuscript to Macmillan Children's Books, who accepted it. I have been writing fantastical books for children and young adults ever since, including *Cuckoo Song*, which won the Robert Holdstock award for Best Fantasy Novel at the British Fantasy Awards.

When my seventh book, *The Lie Tree*, won the Costa Book of the Year 2015, my life went delightfully insane. *The Lie Tree* proceeded to win the Boston Globe Horn Book Fiction Prize, the UKLA award for the 12+ category and the LA Times Book Prize for Young Adult Literature. To my considerable surprise, I found myself appearing on television and at international literary festivals. Despite this, I have somehow found time to persuade my eighth book, *A Skinful of Shadows*, to exist. I am now working on another Young Adult fantasy novel, some of which is set underwater.

Frances Hardinge read English at Somerville College from 1992-95.

Duncan Baxter (BA, 1972)

Arriving at Trinity to read English from an Oxfordshire grammar school was a dream come true. I had occasionally peered through the college gates at the breathtaking gardens and stately buildings, wondering if one day I would be on the inside amidst the park-like surroundings, and it really happened. I had enjoyed reading *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* for A-Level and was advised that the Tutor in English, Dennis Burden, was a Milton specialist who had recently published *The Logical Epic*, in which he argued that Milton's justification of 'God's ways' was watertight. Examining the minutiae of the poem's language and structure he believed Milton formulated a convincing case for God's actions. Sadly (or happily perhaps) this was at odds with my own view that Milton's personality was so full of tensions and contradictions that *Paradise Lost* could never be described as logical. This led to some fascinating tutorial discussions!



Having flirted with the idea of research, I settled on a career in teaching. Seeing post-grads sitting solemnly in the Bodleian with their boxed card index filing systems (the nearest we had then to 'cloud' storage) apparently without enjoyment, was unappealing. I progressed through the ranks, culminating as Head Master of Kingston Grammar School, an independent London day school, a role I held for eighteen years. I stayed for double the length of time I had intended because of my commitment to the biggest single development of the school in its 450 year history, which saw the purchase of a third more land, enabling the construction of a Performing Arts Centre, together with additional teaching and Sixth Form accommodation, and expansion of student and staff numbers by a third. It was a special moment when Queen Elizabeth II officially opened the new building, heralding a new era for a school which had been founded by Elizabeth I.

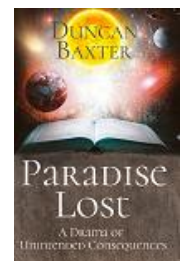
Four years after this event seemed the right time to move on, and I enjoyed three and a half years of education consultancy. This provided the variety and change I needed, from advising independent schools on the appointment of Heads, to supporting 'failing' state schools and collaborating on the establishment of new schools. Consultants all too quickly become out of touch with the rapidly changing realities of leading schools, and I did not want to be viewed as a dinosaur. Equally I had an urge to go back to ideas about Milton which I had first considered ten years (possibly even forty years) earlier. I therefore devoted the following three and a half years to writing *Paradise Lost – A Drama of Unintended Consequences*, (published by Troubador) in an approachable style suitable for a wide readership, which was published in 2017 to coincide with the 350th anniversary of the first edition of *Paradise Lost*.

My thesis is that whilst Milton does not fully succeed in justifying the ways of God to men, he does justify the ways of men to God. The difficulty of being human is examined in forensic detail, ranging from questions about limitations on our knowledge to the place of imagination and ambition in a world created by Milton's God to be static and constrained. Milton's was the toughest challenge – to show and understand the mind of God – but he was able to demonstrate the human tendency to wonder at the reasons God allows suffering, and why our knowledge is so limited. His insistence on the intricacy, responsibility and drama of working out our destinies creates a deeply moral energy, which speaks to readers in every generation.

Milton does this by being a great dramatist; he empathises with each protagonist, he is able to see things from their perspective and is more even-handed in the praise and blame he dispenses than he intended. His democratic temperament does not allow him to do other than give his protagonists their head, to have their say, thus creating the complex web of possible interpretations.

Dennis Burden disagreed with me, but on reading a preliminary paper I had written in 2001 replied, "As you may guess I don't come at the poem along that line but that is neither here nor there. I will make two sorts of points here; one about where the argument could be strengthened, and the other on minor points of detail." It was more than 25 years since I had come down and Dennis was becoming very ill, yet he still found time to engage in his customary supportive way. That was the kind of man he was, and the academic approach he always displayed. My Oxford experience would have been the poorer without his example, and he remains a beacon of how scholars should approach their profession.

Duncan Baxter read English at Trinity College from 1972-75. Paradise Lost – A Drama of Unintended Consequences was published by Troubador in January 2017.



Graduate Destinations Survey

We would like to find out more about what our alumni go on to do once they leave us – we know that many of you undertake further study, but if it isn't in Oxford we rarely hear about it. Many of you write books, and we hear about some of those (but not enough! Please keep telling us). We know from researching our older alumni that we have had Bletchley Park cryptographers, publishing and editorial staff who brought us revolutionary

newspapers and classic novels among other works, and at least two poet's muses among our number. What have the rest of you been doing? Take the opportunity to tell us by clicking [here](#). We're interested in all of you. And if you'd like to tell us in more detail, please [email us](#) your stories. We may be able to include you in a future edition of Spotlight!

Spotlight on Events

Trinity Term Public Lectures



This term, we welcome Professor Helen Fulton to deliver the **O'Donnell Lecture**. The O'Donnell Lectures in Celtic Studies were established in 1954 in honour of Charles James O'Donnell. Under the terms of his bequest the lectures can examine British or Celtic elements in the English language or in the existing population of England. Professor Fulton's talk will be delivered on **Thursday 10 May at 5pm** in Lecture Theatre 2, English Faculty, on the topic 'Cheapside in Wales: Textiles and Commodities in Medieval Welsh Poetry'. Helen Fulton is Professor of Medieval Literature at the University of Bristol. She has published widely on medieval Welsh literature in its social and political contexts, with particular reference to

relationships between Wales and England in the late Middle Ages. Her most recent publications include the edited collections *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales* (2012) and *Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations in the Later Middle Ages* (2018). She is the co-editor of *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, which will be available early in 2019.

Simon Armitage's Trinity Term lecture as **Professor of Poetry** will be given on **Wednesday 16 May** at 5.30pm in Examination Schools, High Street, Oxford. The Professor of Poetry lectures were conceived in 1708 by Berkshire landowner Henry Birkhead and began after he bequeathed some money so the lecture series could be a valuable supplement to the curriculum. He believed 'the reading of the ancient poets gave keenness and polish to the minds of young men as well as to the advancement of more serious literature both sacred and human'. Simon Armitage's lectures to date have covered a wide range of topics, from the poetic value of lists to the poetry of Ted Hughes and Bob Dylan.



'Here be Dragons': the Oxford Fantasy Literature summer school, 11-13 September 2018



We are very excited that 'Here be Dragons': the Oxford Fantasy Literature summer school will be held in the Faculty in September. Speakers from the Oxford English Faculty and other UK universities will look at different aspects of the genre, through 14 talks delivered over three days interspersed with a series of 10-minute talks. Along with presentations focussing on the works of individual authors such as Tolkien, G. R. R. Martin, J. K. Rowling, Ursula Le Guin and Diana Wynne Jones, and overviews of the history of fantasy, there will be a number of short lectures on wider themes such as fantastic beasts,

writing processes, and Arthurian fantasy. Further details and the full programme are available [here](#).

Further details of these and all public events can be found on our website, www.english.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events.

Contact us

To keep us informed of what you're doing now, or to submit suggestions for what you'd like to see in our newsletter, please email english.office@ell.ox.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can write to:

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