

Keynote Talks

Presented by the Vagantes Conference on
Medieval Studies



Dr. Susie Phillips, Northwestern University

“Teaching matters: Mercantile Mischief and Popular Pedagogy in Premodern England”

What happens when the schoolmaster is banished from the early modern classroom? The popular vernacular textbooks that flooded the European market in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries posed precisely this question and launched a radical pedagogical experiment. These texts did not simply eschew linguistic and grammatical discipline, they flouted the rules of ethical, moral, and social discipline that governed the premodern classroom. In this talk, Phillips will show how adopting the humbler pedagogical perspective of these little books enables us to uncover some surprising stories—tales of resourceful chambermaids, savvy Black stableboys, and arithmetically-adept barmaids whom these textbooks ask readers to imitate; the story of a schoolgirl who compiled and published a textbook of her own, and the narrative of a Black schoolmaster teaching in Elizabethan London.

Susie Phillips is Associate Professor of English at Northwestern University and winner of an Alumnae of Northwestern Teaching Professorship, the University's highest award for distinguished teaching. Author of *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (2007), she has published essays on Chaucer, gossip theory, late medieval pastoral practice, Renaissance dictionaries, medieval multilingualism, and pre-modern pedagogy. Her current project, *Learning to Talk Shop: Mercantile Mischief and Popular Pedagogy in Premodern England* (forthcoming from University of Pennsylvania Press in Spring 2025) examines the multilingual dictionaries and phrasebooks that flooded the European marketplace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, opening a virtual classroom to an audience who did not have access to formal education and offering instruction in the pragmatic, and murky, ethics of the premodern marketplace.

Thursday March 21st,
4:30-6:00 PM - Harris
Hall 108

Dr. H.M. Cushman, UNC Chapel Hill

“Ghostly Manslaughter: Scandal and Literary Production in the Later Middle Ages”

This talk investigates how late medieval writers, scribes, and performers understood the sin of scandal—causing another person to sin through poor example or bad information—and how, as a result, they understood their ethical responsibilities to their readers.

Harry Cushman is an Assistant Professor at UNC Chapel Hill. He just completed a book about late medieval biblical drama and cultures of knowledge production and is currently beginning a new project on scandal and literary production. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, *Exemplaria*, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, *Post45 Contemporaries*, and the *Literary Encyclopedia*.



Saturday March 23rd,
5:00-6:30 PM - Harris
Hall 108

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