

CALL FOR SESSION PROPOSALS
The 24th Biennial New Chaucer Society Congress
University of Freiburg, Germany

The NCS Program Committee invites proposals for sessions for the Society's 2026 Congress in Freiburg, Germany.

Session proposals may be submitted **either** (a) in connection to any of the thematic threads described below, **or** (b) to the 'open topic' thread, if the proposed sessions do not fit with the threads described below.

To submit your panel proposals by Friday, 17 January, please follow these steps.

1. Select one OR two threads if more than one seems feasible.
2. For each proposal, provide this information.
 - a. an indication of which thread the proposed session would be attached to (including the 'open topic' thread).
 - b. a brief description of the session that would be appropriate for the upcoming Call for Papers (150 words maximum)
 - c. short proposer bio (2-3 sentences maximum)
 - d. preferred session format(s), described below.
3. Submit this information to these two sets of email addresses: the email addresses of the thread organiser (or organisers, if multiple seem appropriate) and ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.

Please note that proposers should submit a maximum of two proposals each. Proposals not accepted on a thread for whatever reason will automatically be considered for the open thread (so there is no need to specify the open thread as a second option).

We encourage members to consider all session formats when designing a session proposal (please see the session format descriptions following the thread descriptions below). Though this will primarily be an in-person congress, we also hope to include at least one remote session in each thread. Further details about remote sessions and participation will be forthcoming in the Call for Papers. In the meantime, please indicate whether your proposed session would work particularly well as a remote session.

We warmly invite members to submit sessions on pedagogy in relation to all threads.

The conference will also feature a variety of workshops run by the Guild of Medievalist Makers (GUMM). If you have potential ideas for a workshop please reach out to the guild by contacting Laura Varnam (laura.varnam@univ.ox.ac.uk), Kristen Haas Curtis (kristen.curtis@unibe.ch), and Eleanor Baker (eleanor.baker@conted.ox.ac.uk). We will work with them on any proposals for workshops.

Following submission, the thread organisers and program committee will consider session proposals and contact proposers to finalize session descriptions. The call for papers will follow shortly thereafter, likely sometime in early February.

We look forward to reading your session proposals.

Mary Flannery & Ryan Perry

SESSION FORMATS

Long paper sessions will consist of either three papers of 20 minutes max each or four papers of 15 minutes max each. These panels should include no more than 4 presenters total (**either** 4 papers **or** 3 papers and a respondent) and should allow for at least 30 minutes of open discussion.

Short paper sessions will consist of up to 6 speakers delivering short presentations of 5-7 minutes, allowing at least 45 minutes for open discussion. Presentations may be scripted but need not be. The sessions can be either in the style of roundtables/lightning panels (short, individual discussions of a topic) or position papers (presentations that open into discussion of the state of the field).

Seminars will consist of 5 to 8 pre-circulated papers on a given topic. Presenters will read all of the papers before the conference and the session will consist of discussion amongst the presenters about their papers and any audience members who have also read the papers before the session.

The Research Expo will host research with strong visual or digital elements presented in a display or poster format. Presenters will discuss their display and the underpinning research during a single launch session. *For this reason, separate proposals for Expo sessions are not invited as part of this Call for Sessions, but the Research Expo will be fully advertised in the upcoming Call for Papers.*

A note on pedagogy sessions: A pedagogy session may take any of the forms above or may propose an alternative form. It should address topics or questions relevant to teaching medieval literature and culture at a variety of academic institutions. Proposals might focus on overarching questions of course design or curricular development as well as individual assignments, lesson plans, or units. These proposals should be sent directly to the individual threads or to the open thread.

Please note that session organisers are not permitted to present work in their own session, though they may chair the session and may present work in another session at the conference.

THREADS

1. Comparative Environmentalisms

Co-organizers: Anke Bernau (Anke.Bernau@manchester.ac.uk) and Kellie Robertson (kr robert@umd.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

environmental criticism; nature; ecopedagogy; bioarchive; ecocriticism; materialism

Over the past decade, the importance of biocultural diversity has increasingly been foregrounded (and included in COP16). Biocultural diversity refers to the deep 'interconnection of human societies and ecosystem' (Maffi 2010). This interdependence has many and long histories – including from the period between the 6th and 16th centuries. In the European context, for example, the late Medieval French *environs* means 'to be surrounded by', the Medieval Latin *natura*, and 'to be born'. Medieval texts explore many different models that articulate the relation of the human to beyond-the-human nature, whether ones based on proximity and adjacency (environing) or on generation and creativity (*natura naturans*). This thread invites panels that explore ecocritical approaches as well as ecopedagogies generated by medieval ways of thinking.

Some topics panels may wish to engage with include (but are not limited to):

- Speculative comparative environmentalisms drawing materials from different global traditions;
- How medieval models of nature can contribute to modern ecocriticism or theories of modernity based on natural(ized) categories;
- Biocultural diversities, then and now;
- How medieval texts and theories can contribute to ecopedagogical approaches today;
- The extent to which medieval texts question or reinforce late antique definitions of nature or the natural;
- Tensions between material culture and textual understandings of human and nonhuman worlds;
- Manuscript studies and the construction of bioarchives;
- How different kinds of archives can be read alongside textual culture to inform our understanding of medieval theories of nature and lived relations in the world;
- How environmental histories (with their expanded notion of the archive) may affect conceptions of what counts as 'medieval';
- The possibilities and challenges of eco-medievalisms.

2. Multilingualism and Mobility

Co-organizers: Rory Critten (rory.critten@unil.ch), Jonathan Hsy (jhsy@email.gwu.edu), and Liza Strakhov (yelizaveta.strakhov@marquette.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

language contact; translation; diplomacy; trade; migration; contemporary activism

Multilingualism was the fundamental condition of medieval literacy, yet it is one of the hardest aspects of the medieval experience for us to reconstruct. In England, literate people might read and write first in Latin, and then in French and English; in their professional lives, bureaucrats, clerics, and scribes worked across all three of these languages. Trade and diplomatic contact at home and abroad called for an ability to communicate with speakers of Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, either via these languages or via (broken) French and Latin (and these *linguae francae* in turn allowed for deferred language contact between speakers of English and writers of non-Germanic, non-Romance languages such as Polish, Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian).

This thread invites sessions exploring medieval English multilingualism through the prism of physical, social, interlingual, and conceptual mobility. Topics may include:

- pilgrimage and trade as vectors of language contact;
- the languages of migration, displacement, diplomacy, and colonization;
- the circulation of manuscripts, people, texts, and languages across geographies and cultural borders;
- and the historical transformation of medieval texts, genres, and artistic movements across languages and media.

On a broader sociopolitical level, this thread can consider social and material conditions that shape human mobility through language, such as race, class, gender, disability, technology, law, and built or virtual environments. In contemplating the multilingual affordances of medieval mobility, we also invite broader ruminations on social movements. Can international endeavours such as the UK-based Refugee Tales project mobilize medievalists to act in solidarity with collective struggles beyond Medieval Studies (such as Ethnic Studies, Migration Studies, Critical Refugee Studies, and more)?

3. The Social Lives of Medieval Books

Co-organizers: Megan Cook (mlcook@colby.edu), Grace Catherine Greiner (g.c.greiner@uu.nl), and Zachary Hines (hines.464@osu.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

books; manuscripts; networks; systems; circulation; reception

This thread proposes a focus on the lives of medieval books in all periods and spaces where they (and the lives they contain) live, have lived, or might live. Medieval books

derive their meaning from the social, political, and environmental systems in which they are embedded, but such systems are never permanent or all-inclusive. Accordingly, this thread invites proposals for panels that foreground the myriad and often interlocking networks in which medieval books are and have been situated, including the role that we, as modern readers and scholars, play in shaping these systems. How do the contexts in which we come to know medieval books shape the questions that we as scholars ask, not only of books themselves, but of the texts that they contain?

We interpret the term 'life' broadly, inviting panels that focus on topics such as biocodicology and the study of manuscripts and early printed books as bearing traces of other (once-living) life forms; the use and circulation of medieval books; textual forms such as life-writing and hagiography; and the transmission and reception of texts over time.

Motivating questions across sessions organized under this thread might include: where and how do we detect traces of the lives of medieval people in books and the texts they contain? With how many 'lives' do we come into contact when making a study of the past? How do we, as scholars living in the postmedieval world, encounter the lives of medieval books today and how might those encounters change in the future?

4. Ubiquitous Medievalism

Co-organizers: Jenna Mead (jenna.mead@uwa.edu), Anita Obermeier (aobermei@unm.edu), and Lawrence Scanlon (lscanlon@english.rutgers.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

medievalism(s); Chaucer; global expressions; temporalities; theorizing; thematics

Over the past four or five decades, studies in medievalism have developed from their origins in an almost hobby-like antiquarianism to a vibrant, robust and wide-ranging subfield. Targets of inquiry have included canon and archive construction, the institutionalization of Medieval Studies, the multifarious political, ideological and artistic purposes to which the medieval past has been put. While these inquiries have ranged over medieval culture as a whole, Chaucer has always provided a particularly important focus. We welcome proposals for panels in all formats on any topic relating to medievalism, both Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian. A partial, non-exclusive of possible topics could include Medievalism and the Global Middle Ages; Medievalism and Global Chaucer; The Politics of Medievalism; Literary and Artistic Medievalism; Theorizing Medievalism; Popular Medievalism; Digital Medievalism; and Medievalism and Indigeneity.

5. Precarity

Co-organizers: Taylor Cowdery (cowdery@email.unc.edu), Harry Cushman (hcush@email.unc.edu), and Mariah Min (mariah_min@brown.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

class; climate; danger; precarity; risk; survival

What makes a life precarious? How do market logics, institutions, and political forces work to protect some people while neglecting, marginalizing, and exploiting others? This thread invites panel proposals that consider any aspect of precarity as an economic condition, a literary theme, an aesthetic mode, or an experience of life in the age of Chaucer and in the present moment.

While precarity is a concept traditionally yoked to studies of social class and capitalism, it has increasingly appeared in work on ecology and the climate (Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rob Nixon), in queer and antiracist critique (Judith Butler, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney), and in theories of culture (Michael Dango and Sianne Ngai). We would particularly welcome proposals that think across these concerns, or that link socio-economic precarity to other forms of precarious life. Recent work in medieval studies has likewise turned its attention to conditions of social and economic life that may be understood as precarious. Panels considering topics such as the management of risk and debt in late-medieval culture, or the literary representation of religious peril and vulnerability, or the precarities of the late-medieval climate, or the role that race, gender, and class played in making certain late-medieval social positions more precarious than others would also be very welcome.

Some broader questions for panels might include the following: What are the biopolitics of precarity, both in the past and the present? What is the difference between “vulnerability” and “precarity”? What might an attention to socio-economic precarity add to the study of marginalized people in late-medieval England, such as Cecily Chaumpaigne or Eleanor Rykener? And how might medieval depictions of precarity contribute to the recognition of modern forms of precarity—or vice versa—and suggest potential modes of survival?

6. Tales in Translation

Co-organizers: Leah Schwebel (las235@txstate.edu) and Juliette Vuille (juliette.vuille@unil.ch). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

translatio studii et imperii; medieval translator; reception studies; narrative transmission; cultural intertextuality; source study

We invite proposals that consider narratives as so many knots in the part of a continuum of literary transmission, translation, and transformation, across languages, cultures, and time. This intentionally capacious thread encourages both looking back to sources in

antiquity and forward to the present day so as to think about *translatio studii* on a grand scale, asking not only how narratives change, but *why* they change.

We are particularly interested in sessions that will move beyond traditional source-study to engage with tracing the literary transmission of concepts and thought experiments across language, space, and time, and how they are adapted for a new context of authorship. Can one, for instance, trace metapoetic patterns and authorial stances from antiquity to the present day, by way of fourteenth and fifteenth-century England? How are these adapted for each period and culture's specificities? Can one connect conceptualisations of gender across stories, and analyse their transformation to fit an evolving cultural context? How are changing political circumstances expressed through time, and how do they affect poetic *inventio*? We welcome proposals that address these and other queries about continuity and transformation in translating tales for a new context.

7. Thinking with/through Ethics/Aesthetics

Co-Organizers: Martha Rust (martha.rust@nyu.edu), Amanda Gerber (gerberax@jmu.edu), and Stephanie Batkie (sbatkie@sewanee.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

Keywords:

form; rhetoric; literarity; textuality; instrument; ethics

Epic, romance, hagiography, history, fable, fabliaux, exempla, lyric, list. Chaucerians have long gravitated towards the medieval poet for his mastery of literary formats and ethics. In recent work, scholars have attempted to go beyond form (e.g. *The Medieval Literary: Beyond Form*, eds. Robert Meyer Lee/Catherine Sanok) and inquired into the transgressive potential of literature and the affordances of form(s) as means for and tools of thought. Building on such work, this thread invites papers reconsidering the formal boundaries of literature, including questions of genre, aesthetics, ethics, and even functions of literature. For instance, what can literature do? What thoughts can it encapsulate? What even counts as literature in the Middle Ages? In experimental moments, how can texts create sensational meanings? How do medieval texts negotiate (and/or instrumentalize) a sense of the literary to define, challenge, or justify ideas or ethics?

We are interested in teasing out how thoughts respond to literary forms, such as lists, analogies, comparisons/similes, exempla, diagrams, allegory, and rhetorical devices—that is, 'figures of thought' that belong under the rubric of *ductus* (explored by Mary Carruthers). We also encourage comparing narrative elements to a wide range of thought processes, including narratives' relationships to heuristics, ethics, inventions, decision-making, differentiations/discernments, question formulation, travel outlines, cultural (mis)understandings, or personal journeys. We invite papers devoted to Chaucer, but also those that pursue his relationship to broader medieval literary environments. Panels should embrace wide-ranging perspectives on the limits of medieval literarity as they relate to extra-textual worlds.

8. OPEN TOPIC THREAD

Co-organizers: Megan Leitch (m.g.leitch@rug.nl) and Joe Stadolnik (jstadolnik@uchicago.edu). [Please remember to also send proposals to ncs2026freiburg@gmail.com.]

This thread will include panels that do not fit into any of the seven threads described above. Proposed panels may be in any of the session formats described above.