

# How to Read a Medieval Poem

## Discussion Points

- What makes a poem “medieval”? Is it about the language, the date, or the themes?
- How does reading a medieval poem differ from reading a modern one? What tools do we need?
- Why is it important to consider the manuscript context in which poems were written or read?
- In what ways do ideas of gender, power, or religion appear differently in medieval texts?
- What surprised you most about the language or form of the poem(s) discussed in the session?
- How might a medieval poem speak to contemporary experiences or emotions?

## Have You Considered...?

- Trying to read a short passage in Middle English or Old English? (e.g. Chaucer or *The Wanderer*)
- Thinking about the role of memory and orality in a world with limited access to books?
- Exploring how love, nature, or death are represented differently in pre-modern literature?
- Looking into how texts circulated — through manuscripts, scribes, and performance?
- Considering the links between literature, philosophy, and theology in medieval education?
- Writing a modern poem in the style of a medieval one (e.g., with a refrain, or as an allegory)?

## Further Reading & Exploration

- ☐ **Geoffrey Chaucer – *The General Prologue, The Knight’s Tale, and The Wife of Bath* from *The Canterbury Tales***  
*Start with a translation (or a dual-language edition).*
- ☐ **Marie de France – *Lais***  
*Short, mystical tales in verse. Strange and feminist.*
- ☐ **The Pearl Poet – *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***  
*Try the Simon Armitage translation.*
- ☐ **Seamus Heaney – *Beowulf* (translation)**  
*A modern poetic version of the Old English epic.*
- ☐ **Caroline D. Eckhardt – *A Companion to Middle English Literature***  
*Helpful if you’re considering English at university.*
- ☐ **YouTube: Modern Chaucer or The Medievalist.**
- ☐ **The British Library – *Discovering Literature: Medieval***  
*Digitised manuscripts, background notes, and excellent academic but accessible writing.*
- ☐ **Harvard’s Geoffrey Chaucer Page**  
*Original texts, translations, glossaries, and pronunciation guides.*