The literature of every period is a reflection of the society which engendered it and the people who read it. This is especially true of medieval lit in general and of Geoffrey Chaucer in particular as he was the first to use the English language for literary purposes and likewise the first to employ the continuous narrative to convey his message. In doing so, he also left us a cross section of medieval life that is unequalled anywhere in literature. During this course, we will examine the unique structure of the CANTERBURY TALES which brilliantly unites all the themes and topics which Chaucer covered through the metaphor of the pilgrimage which relates to life as well as literature. To aid us in this study, we will employ the following texts:

A.R. Myers, LONDON IN THE AGE OF CHAUCER
J.R.R. Tolkien, SIR GAWAIN & THE GREEN NIGHT
Ronald L. Ecker & Eugene J. Crook, editors THE CANTERBURY TALES

Following our discussion of the Myers book which will provide a detailed picture of the world of medieval England, we will turn our attention to the life and times of St. Thomas Becket the most influential saint of medieval England understand what the pilgrims were going to Canterbury “for to see”. Since the metaphor of the pilgrimage is the major device in Chaucer’s great work, we will spend further time in considering what it meant to the medieval world and what Chaucer is doing with it in his work. We will also view the movie BECKET which will underscore the importance of this saint in the life of the times. After a study of two of the minor works, AN ABC and THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN, we will turn our attention for the rest of the term to THE CANTERBURY TALES. Each student will be assigned a pilgrim on which two oral reports will be given. The first will cover the material in the General Prologue and should explain the social standing of the pilgrim, his relationship to the other characters, his personality, profession or job and reasons for being on the pilgrimage. Three of the pilgrims, the Knight, the Parson and the Plowman are paradigm or models for Chaucer and will require special attention. The second report will be the basis for discussion of the tale which the pilgrim tells and should be thorough and detailed so as to indicate an understanding and appreciation of the content and form of the story, in addition, the work of the course will include:

** One short paper (2-3 pages)
** One major paper (8-10 pages)
Two hour exams
2 Oral Reports
Numerous quizzes
Contribution to class discussion

In addition to holding an honored place in English Literature, Chaucer also enjoys the reputation of having written some of the most entertaining and amusing works of fiction. In our coverage of his writings, we will also take time to enjoy and understand this aspect of his reputation.