In 1700, John Dryden designates Geoffrey Chaucer “the father of English poetry.” This course will consider the primary work on which Chaucer’s reputation rests: *The Canterbury Tales*. We will pay sustained attention to Chaucer’s Middle English at the beginning of the semester to ease the reading process. Then we will travel alongside the Canterbury pilgrims as they tell their tales under the guise of a friendly competition. *The Canterbury Tales* is frequently read as a commentary on the social divisions in late medieval England such as the traditional estates, religious professionals and laity, and gender hierarchies. But despite the *Tales*’ professed inclusiveness of the whole of English society, Chaucer nonetheless focuses inordinately on those individuals from the emerging middle classes. Our aim is to approach the *Tales* from the practices of historicization and theorization; that is, we will both examine Chaucer’s cultural and historical contexts and consider issues of religion, gender, sexuality, marriage, conduct, class, chivalry, courtly love, community, geography, history, power, spirituality, secularism, traditional authority, and individual experience. Of particular importance are questions of voicing and writing, authorship and readership. Lastly, we will think through Chaucer’s famous Retraction at the “end” of the *Canterbury Tales*, as well as Donald R. Howard’s trenchant observation that the *Tale* is “unfinished but complete.” What does it mean for the father of literary “Englishness” to end his life’s work on the poetic principle of unfulfilled closure and on the image of a society on the move?

**Course Goals:**
1. Read texts closely and critically; identify intellectual concerns; conduct scholarly research; and articulate focused arguments that are both historically informed and theoretically engaged.
2. Obtain fluency in the elements of academic writing, including thesis, evidence, analysis, critical reading, summary, paraphrase, MLA conventions for citation, and revision.

This course can be used to satisfy the College Option Literature Requirement.

**Texts:**
3. Some of the readings will be available at the password-protected course blog. It is your responsibility to access and print the readings.
4. It is highly recommended that you have access to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers 7th* ed. 2009.

**Papers:**
With the exception of the 1-page response papers, all papers must follow MLA documentation style. Late papers will result in grade reductions. Papers more than a week late will not be accepted. You cannot email your papers to me. The assignments are:
(1) Five 1-page typed response papers: these short papers are required but not graded. In them, you can freely explore your responses to assigned texts. You may hand in your response papers anytime throughout the semester, but no more than two during the final four weeks of class.

(2) First 5-page paper: a close reading of a passage.

(3) Second 5-page paper: an examination of a particular cultural-historical practice or theoretical issue at work in a text.

(4) A final 12-page research paper on a topic of your choice. The final paper may build on the first two papers, but it must demonstrate further research and critical thinking. You will submit a working prospectus and an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources a month before the deadline.

• Required Readings:
You are expected to keep up with the weekly reading assignments. For each tale, you should also read the corresponding chapter in Helen Cooper’s guide to the Canterbury Tales.

• Translation Exercises and Quizzes:
Throughout the semester, you will be asked to translate select Middle English passages into idiomatic Modern English either as take-home assignments or in-class exercises. There will also be 4-5 graded quizzes on the readings. If many students do not come to class prepared, weekly quizzes may be implemented. You cannot make up a quiz if you are late or absent.

• In-Class Discussion and Presentations:
You are responsible for 3-4 thoughtful discussion questions based on the primary reading for one class session. You may consult the recommended secondary reading(s) for ideas. You will also give a 5-minute reflection (i.e., a response paper) on the particular tale before you pose the questions. On the last day of class, you will give a 5-minute presentation on your final research paper.

• Peer Critiques:
Two workshop sessions will be held during class, in which students will be divided into small groups. You will give constructive feedback on the writings of other students. Your participation is crucial to your grade.

• Plagiarism:
Plagiarism will result in an automatic “F” for a paper and the course. Further actions will be pursued by the English Department and the College. Please refer to the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity.

• Participation and Attendance:
This course requires your diligent attendance, punctuality, and active participation. You should be prepared for discussions, have with you any necessary materials (readings, drafts, notebooks, etc.), and stay for the entirety of the class meeting. You will be called on during class to respond to questions. Being absent, arriving late, and leaving early do not constitute full participation. If you missed any in-class assignments, collaborative activities, and quizzes, you cannot make them up. Handouts for in-class activities will not be distributed ahead of time. If an absence is unavoidable, it is your responsibility to get any materials and find out what you missed from your classmates. Please try to notify me prior to the absence if possible.

• Classroom Etiquette:
Do not use your phones or any electronic devices. And please be respectful of others during discussions.

• Course Blog:
The course blog will be used for posting some of the required and optional readings, as well as supplementary resources. Please check the blog often for updates and announcements.
• **Special Needs:**
  If you have special needs for educational activities, please contact the Office of Special Services for Students with Disabilities (Kiely 171).
• **Grades:**
  20% = Active class participation and quizzes
  10% = Two in-class presentations
  15% = Five 1-page response papers
  15% = First short paper (including first draft)
  15% = Second short paper (including first draft)
  25% = Final Paper (including an annotated bibliography)

**Schedule**

**Week 1:**
8/30 Tu  Introduction to Chaucer’s Language
*The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse*
*Chaucer’s Words unto Adam, His Owne Scryveyn*

9/01 Th  *The General Prologue*
Cooper, 27-60.
Recommended: Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, chp. 1 (“Chaucer and the Structure of Social Relations”)

**Week 2:**
9/06 Tu  *The Knight’s Tale* (I. 859-1354)
Cooper, 61-91.
Recommended: Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, chp. 5 (“Adventure”)

9/08 Th  *The Knight’s Tale* (I. 1355-1880)
Cooper, 61-91.
Recommended: Elizabeth B. Edwards, “Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* and the Work of Mourning”
Recommended: Catherine A. Rock, “Forsworn and Fordone: Arcite as Oath-Breaker in the *Knight's Tale*”

**Week 3:**
9/13 Tu  *The Knight’s Tale* (I. 1881-3108)
Cooper, 61-91.
Recommended: Sylvia Tomasch, “Mappae Mundi and *The Knight’s Tale*: The Geography of Power, the Technology of Control”

9/15 Th  *Peer Critique Workshop (Bring 6 copies of your rough draft)*

**Week 4:**
9/20 Tu  *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale*
Cooper, 92-107.
Recommended: Dawn Simmons Walts, “Tricks of Time in the *Miller's Tale*”

9/22 Th  *The Reeve’s Prologue and Tale*
*The Cook’s Prologue and Tale*
Cooper, 108-122.
Recommended: Jim Casey, “Unfinished Business: The Termination of the *Cook's Tale*”

**Due: 5-page Paper (Close Reading)**

**Week 5:**
9/27 Tu  *The Man of Law’s Prologue and Tale*
Cooper, 123-138.
Recommended: Kathy Lavezzo, “Beyond Rome: Mapping Gender and Justice in *The Man of Law's Tale*”
Week 6: Fragment II
10/04 Tu (No Class; Friday Schedule)
10/06 Th *The Man of Law’s Prologue and Tale*
Cooper, 123-138.
Recommended: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment”
Recommended: Steven F. Kruger, “Becoming Christian, Becoming Male?”

Week 7: Fragment III
10/11 Tu *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*
Cooper, 139-155.
Recommended: Carolyn Dinshaw, “‘Glose/Bele Chose’: The Wife of Bath and Her Glossators”

10/13 Th *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*
Cooper, 156-166.
Recommended: Elaine Tuttle Hansen, “‘Of His Love Dangerous to Me’: Liberation, Subversion, and Domestic Violence in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale”
Recommended: Shawn Normandin, “The Wife of Bath’s Urinary Imagination”

Week 8: Fragment IV
10/18 Tu *Peer Critique Workshop (Bring 6 copies of your rough draft)*
10/20 Th *The Clerk’s Prologue and Tale*
Cooper, 185-201.
Recommended: Sarah Stanbury, “Regimes of the Visual in Premodern England: Gaze, Body, and Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale”

Week 9: Fragment V
10/25 Tu *The Squire’s Introduction and Tale*
Cooper, 217-229.
Recommended: Britton J. Harwood, “Chaucer and the Gift (If There Is Any)”
Recommended: Kathryn Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s Squire’s and Franklin’s Tales”

Due: 5-page Paper (Historical/Theoretical)
10/27 Th *The Franklin’s Prologue Tale*
Cooper, 230-246.
Recommended: Emma Lipton, Affections of the Mind: The Politics of Sacramental Marriage in Late Medieval English Literature, chp. 1 (“Married Friendship: An Ideology for the Franklin”)

Week 10: Fragment VI
11/01 Tu *The Physician’s Tale*
Cooper, 248-259.

11/03 Th *The Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale*
Cooper, 260-276.
Recommended: Carolyn Dinshaw, “Chaucer's Queer Touches/A Queer Touches Chaucer”
Week 11: **Fragment VI & Fragment VII**  
11/08 Tu  *The Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale*  
Cooper, 260-276.  
Recommended: Glenn Burger, “Kissing the Pardoner”  
Recommended: Shayne Aaron Legassie, “Chaucer's Pardoner and Host—On the Road, in the Alehouse”

**Due: Research Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography**

11/10 Th  *The Prioress’s Prologue and Tale*  
Cooper, 287-298.  
Recommended: Sylvia Tomasch, “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew”

Week 12: **Fragment VII**  
11/15 Tu  *The Tale of Melibee*  
Cooper, 310-322.  
Recommended: Carolyn P. Collette, “Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: A Context for the Melibee”

11/17 Th  *The Nun’s Priest’s Prologue and Tale*  
Cooper, 338-356.  
Recommended: Peter W. Travis, “Chaucer's Heliotropes and the Poetics of Metaphor”

Week 13: **Fragment VIII**  
11/22 Tu  *The Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale*  
Cooper, 358-367.  
Recommended: Gail Berkeley Sherman, “Saints, Nuns, and Speech in the *Canterbury Tales*”

11/24 Th  *(Thanksgiving)*

Week 14: **Fragment VIII & Fragment IX**  
11/29 Tu  *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Prologue and Tale*  
Cooper, 368-382.  

12/01 Th  *The Manciple’s Prologue and Tale*  
Cooper, 383-394.  
Recommended: Jamie C. Fumo, “Thinking upon the Crow: The Manciple's Tale and Ovidian Mythography”

Week 15: **Fragment X and the Retraction**  
12/06 Tu  *The Parson’s Prologue Tale*  
Cooper, 395-409.  
Recommended: Nicole D. Smith, “The Parson's Predilection for Pleasure”

12/08 Th  Chaucer’s *Retraction*  
Cooper, 410-412.  
Recommended: Peter W. Travis, “Deconstructing Chaucer's Retraction”

Week 16: **Chaucerian (In)Completeness**  
12/13 Tu  *In-class Presentations of Final Papers*

**Due: Final Paper**
Recommended Secondary Readings


