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"THE CANTERBURY TALES"

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BASED ON THE CANTERBURY TALES BY G. CHAUCER

A FILM BY PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

WINNER GOLDEN BEAR AWARD BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL

WITH HUGH GRIFFITH LAURA BETTI NINETTO DAVOLI FRANCO CITTI JOSEPHINE CHAPLIN ALAN WEBB JENNY RUINACRE JOHN FRANCIS LANE ATHOL COATS
TOM BAKER OSCAR FOCHETTI ROBIN ASQUITH WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

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T H E A T R E

A film that captures the X-rated texture of life among 14th century commoners

THE CANTERBURY TALES. Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Screenplay by Pasolini. Photographed by Tonino Delli Colli. Music selected by Pasolini. At the Seven Gables. Rated X.

By BRENT NORTHUP
J-A Film Critic

The Canterbury Tales earns every ounce of its "X" rating by portraying in explicit detail the saucy tales of English poet Geoffrey Chaucer.

Chaucer, born in London in 1345, wrote *The Canterbury Tales* around 1387 as a 17,000-line poem. Structured in heroic couplets, this lengthy, never-finished epic told the tale of 29 pilgrims who stopped at an inn on their way to visit the shrine of Becket at Canterbury.

Not unlike Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, Chaucer's story sketches each of the travellers in a vivid, unique way. He spares no one embarrassment as he uncovers the sexual fantasies and sacrilegious beliefs of the guests.

The eight tales selected for the film include the typical *Steward's Tale* — two Cambridge students seduce both the daughter and the wife of a sleeping husband, a dishonest Miller.

Whether or not the English ever lived as raucously as Chaucer suggests hardly matters; what does

matter is that Chaucer's poetry captured the texture of life among the commoners of the 14th century.

That texture has been remarkably well transferred to the screen by the late Italian poet/director Pier Paolo Pasolini. Forever controversial, Pasolini's films have always sought to portray life in uncompromising, often shocking, tones. His portrait of Christ, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, has been banned and protested many times.

Pasolini himself was violently assassinated in 1975, three years after filming *Canterbury*, now in its

first U.S. release.

Because Pasolini refused so stubbornly (and admirably) to "modernize" Chaucer, the film is almost as hard to appreciate as the original poem.

The saucy jokes are apparent, but the movie's flow is regularly broken by hard-to-understand lines (spoken in Cockney and Scottish) and rapidly unfolding stories.

The Canterbury Tales will not be fully enjoyed by most moviegoers. This film seems designed to honor the spirit of Chaucer, not to please commercial audiences.

