AP English Notes
5 October 2004

I gave Quiz 8 today.

The Canterbury Tales
by Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer began writing *The Canterbury Tales* in the 1380s; however, the work was never completed, and modern versions of the poem are productions of scholars, who have attempted to make the best guess at arranging the various completed parts.

Within a narrative about a visit to Canterbury, Chaucer sets a series of stories of the travelers and their entertainment that become The Canterbury Tales. These "tales" are narratives, mostly in verse (Chaucer's own story *Melibee* is in prose). While the tales are skillful examples of the story-teller's art, Chaucer has produced them in ways which add to the reader's enjoyment. For example, each tale in some way reflects what we learn elsewhere about the character of the person telling the story (in the General Prologue or in each individual prologue or linking narratives written for the individual tales).

The Canterbury Tales are grouped in ways which cause debates on subjects (such as the nature of marriage and class structure). Chaucer at once shows that there is more than one way to tell your story, and that style should be appropriate to the subject. Chaucer himself appears, not only as the storyteller of the travels, but as a character too.

The General Prologue to the tales, explains how Chaucer found himself, one April day, in the company of a group of pilgrims, riding from London to Canterbury, each one of whom he describes vividly for us. As they set out from their inn (*The Tabard* in *Southwark*) their "Host" (*Harry Bailey*, the innkeeper, acts rather as a tour guide) proposes that as they ride out and return, each pilgrim should tell two tales (four in all). On their return to Southwark, the teller of the best story (as judged by the Host) will win a meal, paid for by all the rest.

Chaucer describes the Knight first in the General Prologue. The Knight has just returned from service and is still dressed in his stained tunic (the armor has rusted on the shirt causing these stains). He is described as following chivalry, the code of ethics followed by the knight. The code includes: truth, honesty, generousness, and courtesy. He is also referred to as being "as gentle as a maid" and never being boorish (crude).

We began talking about how one becomes a knight. The steps include: a page (age 7) who dresses and serves the knight; a squire (age 14 or 15) who was a personal servant to the knight, prepared the table, practiced for battles, and took part in some battles.

Chivalry is a system of discipline and social interaction that is derived from the warrior class of medieval times, especially and primarily the class of trained warriors who participated in the Crusades (12th - 14th centuries).

Chivalry has a discipline because those ancient soldiers trained themselves daily through learning and practicing the arts of attack and self-defense. These arts gave rise to the idea of control of body, mind, and speech in the Knight. (www.historymedren.about.com).