"AND EVERYCH CRIED 'WHAT THING IS THAT?'" A READING OF CHAUCER'S *HOUSE OF FAME*

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ABSTRACT

The thesis attempts to show the complexity of the literary challenge which Chaucer undertook in the *House of Fame*. Firstly, I establish a sense of the tradition of criticism inspired by the poem, and then show the ramifications of the choice of medium. The poem is a "dream vision", a genre which took the contentious truth-claims and unsettled status of dreams, and used it as the foundation for a poetics which concentrated on the relation of the conscious subject to truth. This is investigated in an extended metaphor, where the experience of the unconscious subject in a purely linguistic world is tested, and from the experiment, conclusions may be drawn concerning the human condition with regard to all knowledge. I briefly examine the divergent positions of the *Divine Comedy* and the *Romance of the Rose*, situating Chaucer in the debt of both, but philosophically in the French camp. The *House of Fame* I see as a "deconstruction" of any position of certainty in rational or mystical epistemology, which marks out a secular sphere of influence for literature in the manner of Ovid. The second half of the thesis is largely a close reading of the poem itself, which attempts to trace the development of these "skeptical" ideas in literary form, showing how, by appealing to the whole European literary inheritance, the force of the argument is enhanced in subtlety, range and wit. Love, Nature, and Fame, the three *topoi* of the three books, are each in turn unsettled, as too are the three "ways of knowing" - perception, reason, and memory. The poem does not "end" in the traditional mode of closure largely because it has made such a notion an impossible ideal, beyond the reach of the unaided human mind.

MY SWEVEN FOR TO TELLE ARYGHT

"O God comma I abhor self consciousness"
John Barth, *Lost in the Fun House*.

Unfinished poems and old mysteries are generally tantalizing. Chaucer's *House of Fame* has both these advantages, and an investigation of its secrets opens onto a fascinating world of forgotten concepts and debates, which, on closer inspection, turn out to be the very issues at the centre of a good deal of our contemporary explorations of language and, especially, literature.

The poem is unfinished in common with much of the Chaucerian opus - *The Legend of Good Women*, *Anelida and Arcite*, and the great *Canterbury Tales*, all come to us incomplete. Each represents a literary challenge which either bored or finally defeated its author. The abrupt ending of the *House of Fame* however seems to be almost mimetic of an intellectual *impasse* which develops in the course of the dream vision and which precludes it achieving a satisfactory conclusion. The rumoured "man of great authority" never appears, and never can appear, to resolve the conundrums of the text.

The reason for this is simple and complex. Simply, Chaucer cannot go any farther than the end of the poem. He has, at this point, exhausted the possibilities for truth offered by language, and, in the theoretical frame he has established, cannot produce any credible authority to elude the constraints of speech and texts. The process by which he has reached this dead end is complex to the point of being labyrinthine - indeed,the labyrinth is one of the overarching metaphors which runs through the work - for it evokes the profound difficulties in the whole apparatus of communicating and recording the transient thoughts which run continually through the mind. Speech acts are shown to be governed by fantasy and projection in the account of Dido and Aeneas, a positive hindrance to truth and self-recognition, inextricably bound up in literary models and discourses of power. In conversation with the Eagle who bears the narrator to the heavens, language as a signifying system is shown to be divorced from its physical being in the realm of nature.

Sound is governed by the immutable physical laws of "Kynde". Language, as ordered and signifying sound, falls under the hegemony of "Crafte" - a blanket term for human constructs which are all driven by desire and imagination. In Fame's house we see the random fate of linguistic artefacts when subjected to the arbitrary processes of history, and the impossibility of finding transcendant truth in human narratives. At the end of this comprehensive deconstruction of the metaphysical capabilities of language "there ys namoore to seye". Chaucer's fragments and ruins house only the suggestive ghost and memory of "authority".

Chaucer employs the dream vision as a metaphor for the area of his exploration and as the generic vehicle for the poem. This establishes a binary opposition between the contrary states of consciousness and sleep equivalent to that between the real and fictional worlds. In sleep, the constraints of reality are abandoned and replaced by the workings of an inexplicable unconscious - Chaucer implies the reverse of Lacan's famous dictum, and demonstrates that language (and literature in particular) is structured "like the unconscious" rather than after the model of rational consciousness.

To reinforce our awareness of separation from "common-sense", the tutelary deities of each section of the poem are feminine, and consequently "other" to the masculine narrator. The narratorial voice attempts to establish canons of "right" interpretation and "accurate" reporting and is defeated by the dynamics of the dream, where the hideous goddess Fame despatches honest men to oblivion, Venus makes heroes into liars, and benevolent Nature is oblivious to human aspirations. The world of words is strictly rhetorical and therefore contingent, transitory, and feminine. To quote Catullus:

> "...mulier...quod... dicit
> in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua."
> *Carmina*, LXXII.

In the last analysis, the *House of Fame* is a nightmare of entrapment within a self-referential system of signification, a kind of literary

solipsism which has implications for all knowledge. The human subject is so conditioned in the habit of seeing or saying what it desires or expects, that reality is an habitual projection of a self-generated fantasy. Consequently, dream and fiction come more accurately to resemble one's experience of reality than models derived from the scientific project or the natural order. This awareness is fashioned into the structure of the poem; its tripartite nature may be read as an echo of the three modes of cognition which constituted the mediaeval model of epistemology (perception and imagination, reason, and memory), each of which is paralysed and distorted by the fact that the events are experienced by a mind overcome by sleep - the dream of reason produces monsters.

Mapping the texture of dreams onto crucial areas of knowledge and tradition awakes the "cultural unconscious". None of the assumptions of the narratives of power which make up a literary heritage or authoritative history survive Chaucer's foray into the territory of Fame. Inevitably, this begs the question; "what of the human subject?". Are our self-perceptions also no more than the chance collections of inchoate forces, natural and unnatural? There can be no final answer to such questionings in life or in art.

> " ...We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little
> Life is rounded with a sleep..."

AND EVERY WIGHT THAT I SAW THERE
ROUNED EVERYCH IN OTHERES ERE
A NEWE TYDYNG...

The lack of an end to the poem leaves the reader in a more than usually exposed position. To complete the contract that texts generally expect (closure, that is) the reader is obliged to intervene self-consciously and assume the role of author. In other words, the *House of Fame* is a Barthesian "*texte écrisible*" *par excellence*, and demands to be written, as well as read, when the author (prematurely) expires. Kittredge, expressing his pleasure at the fact that the poem gave his imagination exercise in completing it, was being directed towards the hermeneutical

concerns and metalinguistic quandaries encoded into the poem by its very structure (1). This ancient trap lures the reader into the dream as interpreter and also subject of the narrative.

The tantalising nearness of a resolution has tempted generations of critics, lured by an ancient suspense, to offer their own neat conclusions, in effect casting themselves in the shadowy role of that authoritarian figure who is the final arbiter of meaning. But like the spurious ending of the Caxton-Thynne edition with its twelve lines of inconclusive conclusion, these endings have not brought the poem to order, and it continues to resist "closure" from any source. The joke is that each reader projects "his" reading onto the blank space at the end of the text, and in the process is effectively "analysed" by that which he set out to analyse.

In the past, prevailing intellectual fashions have provided endings (now in itself an unfashionable habit) in hypotheses which betray their own dominant concerns - some might say "neuroses".

An older school of critics (steeped in Rankean historiography) took themselves to the circumstances which produced the poem, in the belief that unearthing a real formative event would dissipate the fantastical element of the poem and produce "meaning"; just as rightly assembled facts displaced Myths and replaced them with History. So the work was read as an "occasional" poem which Chaucer was supposed to have written to mark, for example, the wooing of Anne of Bohemia (2), or to expose a scandal concerning John of Gaunt (3). The antiquarian interest of these several hypotheses failed to tidy away the real challenges of the text, and the *deus ex machina* appearances of various historical figures appears contrived and unconvincing.

An alternative way of reading is to examine the shape of the work. The philological tradition attempts to harmonise the poem with one or other generic framework, out of which general structures the specific nature of this example could be deduced. Nineteenth century opinion was that the poem was what Lydgate had referred to as "*Dant in Ynglyssh*", in

other words a satirical rewriting of the *Divine Comedy* and its tripartite revelations (4). In disagreement, other critics traced its pedigree as a Love Vision of the French tradition which included the *Roman de la Rose* (5), and still others have categorised it as a philosophical discourse in the style of Alan de Lille with Boethian underpinnings (6) or as an imitation of the *Corbaccio* and satire on women (7).

In subsequent years, scholars have repeatedly produced diffident "men of authority" from the literary wings as evidence of the principal influence dominant in the poem. Baker prompted Virgil forward (8), Ruggiers suggested Boethius (9), Goffin, Boccaccio (10). Koonce reverently discloses the presence of Christ or his surrogate, a priest (11), and Winny produces Chaucer himself in the last resort, a wry smile playing about his features (12).

But the text is not just a perfect crime adorned by an absent Macavity. Other critics have suggested that the "man who wasn't there" isn't supposed to be, and ought to stay away (13). A single authority is what the text simply does not have, and even should one be unearthed, the carefully prepared elusiveness which informs the writing would preclude it from dominating the poem as a unified whole. Made wary of the bland assumption of closure and the pitfalls of monolithic readings, modern readers have found the *House of Fame*, along with the rest of the Chaucerian canon, to be replete with an awareness of self-reflexivity, labyrinthine complexity, inter-textuality, and positively entropic inconclusiveness. It has been a bracing confirmation of the problematics central to contemporary conceptions of reading and a timely justification of the relevence of Mediaeval texts to these, no doubt burning, and certainly publishable, issues.

The reaction against prescriptive reading may be seen in the way conclusions reached by B.G. Koonce have been overturned. Koonce, representing the "exegetical" approach, assumes the influence of Dante and proceeds to interpret the poem in the allegorical method of the Schools, an enterprise which leads inexorably to the discovery of

religious truth at the core of the text, and insists upon Chaucer's saturation in the complex hermeneutics of the Friars. The four-fold, polysemous nature of the "Mediaeval Imagination" is taken as absolute and fundamental to all writing in the period, including all of Chaucer (14). Koonce's methodology maps the goals and methods of Dante on to the poem regardless of the parodic or evasive techniques employed, and ignores the enormous achievement of the *Commedia* in naturalising and harmonising its subject matter within one philosophical paradigm. His reading, although ingenious, is partial and prejudiced. It neglects the vital attention due to the problematics of signs and ways of writing which were, at the least, contemporaneous with any fourteenth century author. Worse, it misses the fun of the poet's dilemma and, in so doing, its real seriousness.

Recent work has enriched our knowledge of a larger field of reference, and helped to show that Chaucer was not part of a monolithic cultural moment dominated entirely by naif faith and realism. Piero Boitani has placed the poem within the entire tradition of Fame in the Western and Middle Eastern world (15). Sheila Delany has probed its philosophical credentials and assigned it to the somewhat uncomfortable niche of "skeptical fideism" within the collapse of the Mediaeval intellectual consensus (16). Jacqueline Miller has alerted us to the conventional Mediaeval requirements for legitimate parentage even in one's literary offspring and the consequent textual power-play between author and authority (17).

If it can be said that a critical consensus has been reached at present, it is that Chaucer here is indeed diligent "To shewe craft" (*HoF*, 1100) and that, in some way, "The whole work is a vindication of poetry" - the opinion of a scholar as independent of fashion as J.A.W. Bennett (18). Clearly, the poem is beyond argument "literary". That is, it is learned, widely allusive, sophisticatedly witty, parodical and aware of its uncertain place in a new and malleable English literary tradition. The dream form which is employed has come to be seen as mimetic of literature as a whole, rather than a merely convenient generic form (19). But the poem is more than a brilliant exercise. It is a serious

attempt to lay the foundations for a poetics, and the fruits of the attempt are to be seen at their best in the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer is learning how to write as a fallible human being in a delicate and restrictive medium, incapable of grand claims to truth and enlightenment. In doing so, he is deliberately avoiding an alternative tradition of letters which attempts to rise above the inherent limitations of language and produce "truth" in a transcendant way, as if unbounded by the medium in which it is expressed.

Chaucer takes seriously the radical nature of the Fall. In that cosmic calamity, language too fell and acquired the opacity of the material creation in place of primal transparency. Signifiers lost their absolute and spiritual connexion with their signifieds, leaving words as merely material objects, a shadow of their former glory, full of uncertainty and confusion. The evils of Babel are only to be undone by the work of the creative Logos. It is no accident that the *House of Fame* echoes the Apocalypse. In that final moment of history, the division between truth and falsehood will become obvious and absolute when he who is Alpha and Omega will "take the book and open the seals thereof". In Fame's sublunary Revelation there is nothing but the confused sound of words at the mercy of the elements, swept about in a far from crystal sea.

There is no abatement in the battle of words and meanings. The dilemmas of the *House of Fame* are those of all who speak, read, and write, reminding any who would imagine that there was anything new under the sun that Chaucer's traditional appelation; "Father of English letters" refers not only to his ontological position, but to the fact that he located and shaped our understanding of the essence of what it means to read and write . As Ezra Pound observes;

> "...no one will ever gauge or measure English Poetry until they know how much of it, how full a gamut of its qualities, is already there on the page of Chaucer." (20)

SO WONDERFUL A DREAM

The *House of Fame* is self consciously, indeed ostentatiously, presented as a dream. The sections labelled by Robinson as "Proem" and "Invocation" are entirely devoted to the nature, definition, interpretation, and problems of recounting, the phenomenon. Fifty lines are devoted to the taxonomy and scientific appraisal of dream data, during which the narrator proclaims his ignorance and displays his knowledge in the devices of *dubitatio*, and the *captatio benevolentiae* -

> "For hyt is wonder, be the rood
> To my wit, what causes swevenes..." (*HoF*, 2-3)

The narrative proceeds systematically, as if following the outline of an approved treatise. Varieties ("gendres") of dreams are tabulated as including:

- avision,
- revelation,
- drem, and
- sweven,
- fantome,
- oracle (*HoF*, 7-11).

The "distaunce" between dreams and times of occurrence needs also to be noted (*HoF*, 17-19).

Possible causes are listed also. Specific experiences may be the results of

- complexion,
- abstinence,
- overwork, or
- "feblenesse of brayn",
- illness,
- paranoia ("inly ful of drede"), (*HoF*, 21-31).

Dreamers, although found among all sorts and conditions of men, are especially to be found among those devoted to the "supreme fictions":

- scholars "to curious in studye" (*HoF*, 29-30),
- religious contemplatives and mystics (31-35),
- lovers "that hopen over-muche or dreden" (36-38).

As a general theory of dreams, the following triad is offered (*HoF*, 39-48):

- they are simply the simulacra of sense impressions gleaned while waking and rehearsed mechanically in sleep,
- they are produced by spirits which invade the mind when its conscious resistance is lowered,
- they are the result of "memories" retained by the soul of its pre-incarnate existence, a Neoplatonic theory which held that the "soule...be so parfit...that yt forwot that ys to come". This wisdom is imparted "be avisiouns or be figures" which may be prophetic, but requires interpretation.

By now the narrator is thoroughly flustered and, having avoided conscription by any of his paradigms, tails off rather lamely. Authority in these matters, he avers, is the property of "grete clerkes" and he is of "noon opinion". In any case, he piously reiterates "(God) turne us every drem to goode !" (*HoF*, 1/54).

Disconcertingly, this burst of benign eclecticism is followed by a series of blood-curdling denunciations for any who misinterpret the dream in "malicious entencion" or in

> "...hate, or scorn, or thorgh envye,
> Dispit or jape, or vilanye..." (*HoF*, 93/96-7)

These are wished all the harm that has ever happened to anyone "syth the world began" (*HoF*, 100). Now, not only does this sit ill with some one who has just received an illuminative vision and who *ought* to be "bet in charyte" for the experience (*HoF*, 108), but it leaves the reader in a peculiar dilemma. If the narrator himself cannot be sure of the status of the dream, how can the reader possibly avoid misinterpretation? Leaving this unresolved, the story begins.

The model of description which is followed appears to owe much to Macrobius' *Commentary on the "Somnium Scipionis" of Cicero*, and critics

have used this source to reinforce their own conclusions about the text. Koonce assumes that the dream is a "revelation", a category which corresponds to Macrobius' "*visiones*" or true oracles. In consequence, the text becomes a semi-sacred revelation (21). Delany insists that the narrator suffered from a "phantome" (Macrobius' "*phantasmata*") which bears no validity, and that his dream is merely "a free-floating quantum of psychic energy" (22). In fact, as Alison Peden notes, there is little evidence that Macrobius was much used in the fourteenth century, and Chaucer may have been employed the reference as a deliberate archaism (23).

The real point of the Proem, however, is that it should produce confusion and evade clarity even as it attempts precision. The continual and pointless hair-splitting ends up collapsing meaning altogether, and the narrator surrenders to a chaos which is more easily described than mastered (24). The only conclusion left is the singularly unhelpful one that no dream is *ever* an unequivocally trustworthy event in itself. Where then does one situate the *House of Fame*?

Perhaps Chaucer's most accomplished brush with dream theory is in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, where he teases out the ramifications of this very dilemma in the form of a *fabliau*.

SEYDE HE NAT THUS, "NE DO NO FORS OF DREMES?"

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* is, by this reading, an interpretive battle over the validity of treating dreams as message-bearing texts. In it the *conseil de femme* of the sensible Pertelot is based on a physiological and skeptical conception of "swevenys". They are, for her, the mental equivalent of dyspepsia. Her opinion is answered at considerable length by Chauntecleer, whose position is that dreams do indeed bear meaning. He substantiates that position by recourse to authorities and "ensamples". What the ensuing story offers is a chance to expose either hypothesis to the verification principle which fulfilment of the dream in actual experience would provide. The course of events is as follows:

Chauntecleer awakes, his "herte...soore afright" (VII, 4085) having seen a black hound-like creature with glowing eyes and menacing visage. His wife is heartily shocked at his cowardice and, to encourage him (somewhat incongruously) to "play the man", gives him an accomplished diagnostic catalogue of the causes of natural dreams. Her logic is medically flawless.

> "Swevenes engendren of repleccions
> And oft of fume and of complecciouns
> Whan humours been too habundant in a wight"
> (VII, 4113-5)

Her spouse has either an excess of "rede colera" which may cause dreams of biting monsters, or of "malencolic" which summmons up visions of predatory black bears and devils.

This being so, the remedy is clearly purgation. Chauntecleer is "choleryk" of complexion, and in view of the rising sun, might well break out in a tertiary fever (the only likely ill his dream forbodes). A dose of "wormes" or

> "of lawriol, centaure, and fumetere
> Or elles of ellebor...
> Of katapuce, or of gaitrys beryis,
> Of herbeyve" (VII, 4152-6)

will serve as an emetic and indirectly exorcise his mental delusions.

With a show of restrained courtesy, the injured rooster replies, thanks his wife for her advice, and politely declines it. His preferred interpretation is based on literary tradition, an entirely superior mode of thought which concerns itself less with causes and remedies than with significance and interpretation. The division of opinion is entirely apt. As Chauntecleer considers himself the centre of the universe and a bird of more than paltry intelligence, it appears fitting to him that he should be warned of impending doom and that his experience be textualized as an avian apocalyptic. Pertelot, more modest and, like many a wife, more practical than her husband, wishes to deal with the

disturbing dream in the least bothersome fashion by denying it the slightest import.

Chauntecleer at once proceeds to recount an *exemplum* (from Cicero's *De Divinatione*) of a prophetic dream, nods in the direction of Macrobius, calls up the mythological/historical tales of Croesus and Andromache, and notes the important scriptural precedents of Daniel and the dream-ridden Joseph. This flood of information, we note, is called up equally by the fear of "laxatyves" and desire to "fether" Pertelot as by an urgent search for truth. Before long, the cock resumes his quotidian farmyard pleasures, and the *contretemps* is abandoned.

The joke of the debate lies partly in the half truth and ambivalence of the pair's authorities. Pertelote does not end her quotation from Cato: "*somnia ne cures*" concludes "*nam fallunt somnia plures*". Chauntecleer omits to mention Cicero's fierce opposition to the Stoical practice of slavish dream divination in the very work from which he quotes. Both are play-acting and manipulating their source-texts, imperfect proponents of their schools. But the proof of the pudding lies in the eating, or in this case, the escape from being eaten. When Chauntecleer is confronted by the object of his natural fears, Daun Russell the fox, he makes no connexion with the supernatural warning he has so stoutly defended. And, far from proving the literary expert, he fails to recognize one of the oldest ploys in the repertoire of fable (the *Gallus et Vulpes* trick). Pertelote too is scarcely the hardbitten pragmatist she has claimed to be, throwing herself into the fire as a woeful and consciously "literary" diversion. She

> "...shright...
> Ful louder than did Hasdrubales wyf" (VII, 3364).

The tale dissolves into anarchic chaos, where predictive or dyspeptic dreams are subsumed under the directionless hullaballo of the immediate. Carnival displaces clerisy, and Chauntecleer is given a sound lesson in the interpreting of representations and the delusive power of pride.

> "...I shrewe myself, bothe bloode and bones
> If thou bigyle me ofter than ones
> ...thurgh thy flaterye"
> (VII, 3427-9)

The point of this long diversion is to highlight the importance of dreams as a crucial test case for the whole interpretative project. Chauntecleer's dream, he claims, has force because a textual tradition exists to say it does in the same way that Scripture or a literary canon validates certain ideas and forms of expression. His experience makes sense within that tradition, and relieves him of the twin perils of insignificance in the overall scheme of things and of the *anomie* of not knowing what to make of his experience (Chaucer, as usual, maintains his discreet and ironic distance).

Every dream when remembered or retold becomes a linguistic rather than a psychological entity. A double process of mimesis precedes any reading of a dream - it is initially an entirely "fictional" and unconscious event in the sleeping mind, made of words stored in the memory ("*Thought*") which mimic the reality they represent. After the dream, a narrator must once again reconstitute the verbal product in language and in the conventions of narration.

The *House of Fame* cannot be a "real" dream. Despite its rhetorical protestations, it is only a specimen of a convention which makes use of the empirical experience of dreams for literary purposes. The *House of Fame* looks for validation to the same two contexts which are in conflict in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. The first is the "scientific" attempt (the term includes philosophy) to discover the nature of the dream and its potentialities. The second is the literary tradition where dreams carry significances beyond the capacities of normal cognition. Both hold out the possibility that non-rational perception may help explain the condition and destiny of the human race.

Whether dreams bear any significance, and if so, what significance, is an issue unsolved even today, when they have been subjected to a scrutiny previously unparalled. Largely on the uncertain foundation of

the evidence they offer, at least one of the great myths of our century, the Psychoanalytic project - Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian - has been built. The *House of Fame* is confronting similar systems which claim to have found areas of knowledge outside of the common, fallible order of experience, and asking the eternal question: "How can you possibly *know*?"

DREAMS: A DARKLING PLAIN?

"Sunt geminae somni portae: quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur existus umbris,
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia manes.

Virgil, *Aeneid* VI 893-98.

Artemidorus of Daldis, that indefatiguable second century researcher, collated the dreams of his ancient contemporaries from criminals and athletes to rhetors and
knights. To order this material, he adopted a system of classification which had a long history ahead of it. He assumed five types of dreams:

> Dreams - which hide messages in figures,
> Visions - images reproduced from everyday life,
> Oracles - which are revelations received directly from paranormal forces,
> Phantasies - vain imaginings brought on by physical disorders, and
> Apparitions - chimerical forebodings, self-engendered by fancy (25).

This range of alternative readings in fact allowed almost any significance, or lack of significance, to be assigned to dreams. Authorities of the utmost distinction disagreed violently on the matter. Platonic opinion was generally favourable to the idea of an enlightening dream (26), Aristoteleans regarded them as interesting quirks of the dormant mind, but without intrinsic significance (27). The Stoics were

slavish and habitual dream readers, and Cicero, in reaction to them, condemned the whole practice as superstitious folly (28).

The religious practices of the pagan world which involved dream reading and ecstatic visions (the Oracles, Incubation, and the concept of immanent divinities like Pan) brought the nascent Christian Church into conflict with the dream diviners and, by association, with dreams themselves as psychic phenomena (29). The Greeks expected their Gods to appear to them, awake or asleep, in regular epiphanies, and the shock of collision between the old pagan and the new christian worlds is nicely dramatized in the account of Paul and Barnabas in the city of Lystra, in Asia Minor. The pair healed a cripple, and were at once taken by the crowd for the gods Zeus and Hermes and worshipped (30). Two supernatural world views which valued the incorporeal above the material took issue over the truth claims of their revelations. Final victory belonged to the Christian Realist discourse.

The Faith rested on solidly historical foundations. Incarnation and Resurrection were naked facts, revealed to witnesses, preserved in creeds and texts, and to be believed of all at face value. The Church insisted on a simple, direct relationship between word and event, and in the sufficiency of texts to say what they meant. In this scheme of things, additional invasions of reality by ecstacies of any kind could be at best mere refinements of revealed truth, or at worst, the work of the "father of lies". Enthusiastic visionaries might threaten the central pillars of doctrine. The arcane projections of believers, even holy martyrs like Perpetua, could eventually lead to ecstatic cults and heresy - as happened in the case of Montanus - or be uncomfortably reminiscent of Pagan hermetic practices (31). Dream interpreters were consequently banished from baptism, and only recognisably scriptural dreams allowed a limited cognisance. Prophets reported their messages to bishops, who decided their validity. In fine, the church wanted a simple, sacramental discourse, purged of insubordinate inferences to serve as a vehicle for a truth that was at once empirically and spiritually true. It also provided a paradox at the centre of the tradition. Christianity is supernaturally revealed, parts of it

ecstatically vouchsafed; how could it both retain this window on eternal certainty and close it off to any future intruders?

It is in some ways a peculiar irony of History that a dream turned Christianity into a world religion. When Constantine saw his vision of the cross and became a Catholic emperor, he ushered in a period in which claims identical to his would come under unsympathetic scrutiny, and the power of the state be harnessed by religious orthodoxy into keeping these awkward phenomena at bay.

ONE CHURCH, ONE FAITH, ONE GOD.

The history of control over the dream-lives of the faithful is a record marking the development of an intellectual and political hegemony. The scriptures themselves do not allow certainty in the matter of involuntary "seeings" in the form of dreams and visions; rather, they show the conflict between monolithic orthodoxy and individual revelation. Dreams are not collective phenomena, but the property of lone visionaries, often in conflict with prevailing acceptable views (32)

Orthodoxy is not easy to attain, and to do so one must demolish the credibility of competing positions. The seven General Councils stand as witnesses to the struggle for "right doctrine" and an end to heresy. Invasive dreams are not unduly worried about defective observations on the hypostatic union and like technicalities; they are spontaneous and inspirational. Any organisation with the secular responsibilities of the mediaeval Church could not be tolerant of competing revelations. The early Fathers held divergent views (33), by the time of the Gregorian reforms dreams were officially seen as works of wickedness (34). Popular practice, one assumes, continued to use semi-pagan oneiromantic skills inherited from time immemorial, but only the dreams of the saints were approved for public instruction (35).

As the Church achieved a more comfortable and unquestioned leadership, forbidden areas once again became open to study. Le Goff holds that the

twelfth century "reconquered" the dream for rational study. The neutral dream (*somnium*) became a valid area of study under the recognised discourses of medicine, physiology, and theology (36).

But even cursory analysis of the work of two theological giants confirms that the crux of the matter remained unsolved. Augustine, generally hostile to dreams, allows the *visio intellectualis* credence (37), S.Thomas gives four types of dream, some of the body and others of the soul, but discourages divination (38). In other words, some dreams were from God, but only He knew which they were.

The point is that the world of dreams seemed "so beautiful, so various, so new", so full of the promise of meaning, that it seemed to offer an Archimedian point of objective truth from which to judge the bewildering world. That it should itself be only an anarchy "where ignorant armies clash by night" denied the human "will-to-truth".

**THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY -
WORD AND FLESH**

Dreams might only become meaningful if they were "signs" in themselves, natural signs, produced in the mind and signifying a reality consonant with the Truth. Therefore what could be said of words, in sign theory, could be predicated also of dreams. For the purposes of analysis they were signifying entities which might or might not be bearers of truth, depending on their source or use to which they were put.

Knowledge of any kind, in the orthodox Mediaeval paradigm, presupposes the primacy of being over knowing. In other words, the true creation exists in its fullness before it is apprehended and understood. Hence, epistemology is almost a subordinate function of metaphysics, for the final object of knowledge is God himself, in whom all is contained.

To mediate between the ineffable and final source of wisdom and fallible understanding, an intermediary, translating agent was required. Words performed this function, taking things, labelling them, and allowing the

mind to abstract logically about the real world. A real and valid relationship between words and things was taken as fundamental to this conception. Dreams could only be signs if they were part of the divine order where signifiers were naturally wedded to signifieds, an intimation from the world of absolute truth.

The theoretical basis of this realism was the doctrine of the Incarnation. When Christ became Man, he embodied the eternal truth of the Father, translating the spiritual into speech and action and standing as guarantor of the ability of words to reveal truth. The logos mysticism of S.John showed that the ascent to truth began with the word and ended in the concept the word conveyed:

> "...we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and *truth*."
>
> *John*, I, 14

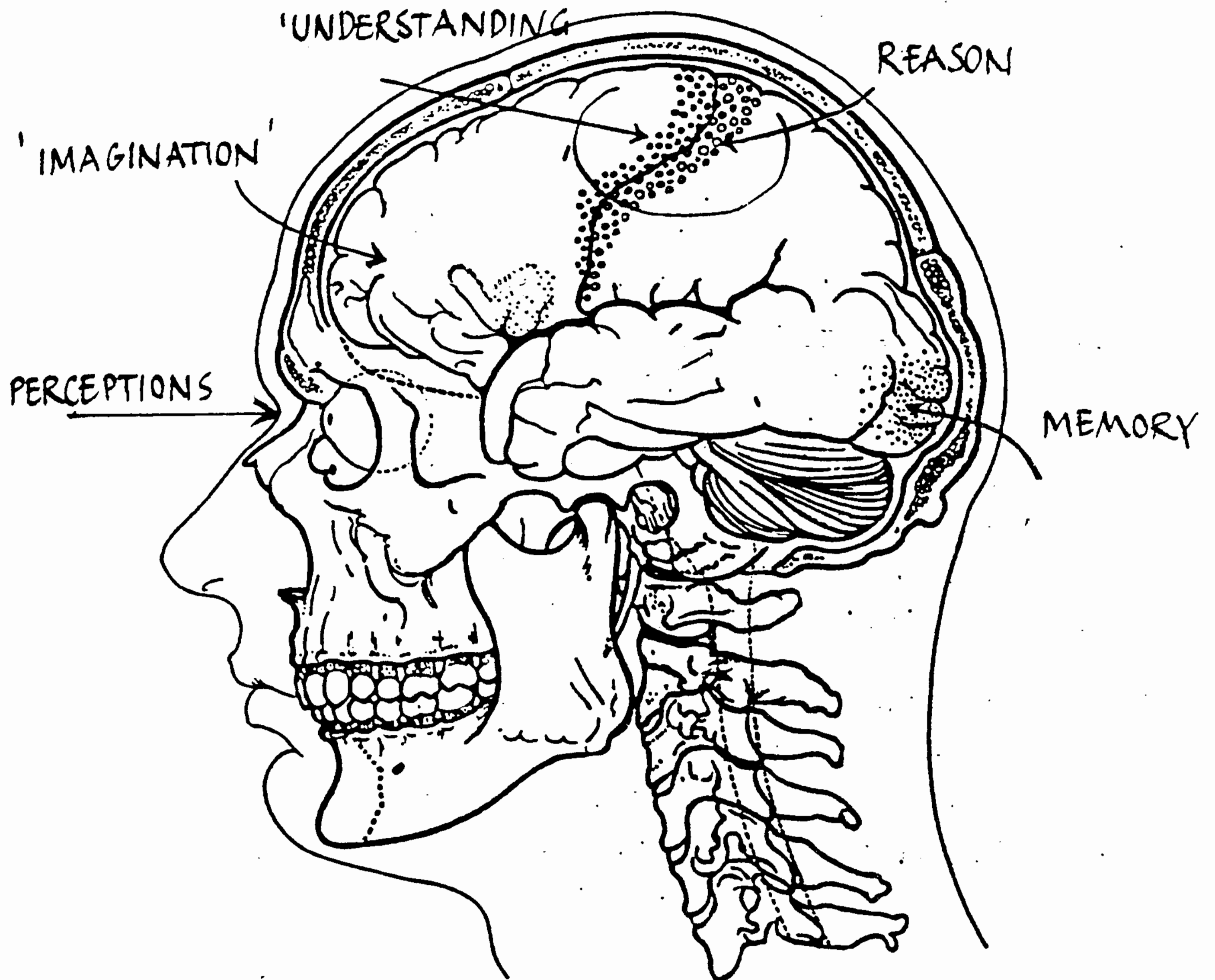
S.Augustine develops this conception at length in a number of his works. Signs for him are ways to a truth beyond adequate signification, but which are nevertheless essential to understanding. Through the incarnate word, the *flatus vocis* of a spoken word became meaningful - *vox significans rem*. All truth, all true significations, therefore, came into being through the operation of the true being of God in Christ. Interpretation of signs was necessary, of course, but one could rely on the guidance of the Spirit of God in explicating the word of God. If now one saw *per speculum in aenigmate*, one would at length see in the same medium as the creator, and the enigmatic figures of speech which constituted creation would no longer impede the vision.

Aquinas defends an essentially similar position. The whole universe he takes as a *signa dei*. As one learns about the creation through the senses, the data become signs and then intelligible signs or *verba mentis*. Things themselves stand as the criteria of truth, and by naming them one may learn their mode of being. Again, being is the foundation for truth, and God is the ground of being. To reach the truth one took the existence of God as given, and advanced "*fides quaerens intellectum*" (39).

The illuminative search for truth set theology on the quest for true words and "sincere" discourse. Included among Bishop Tempier's condemnations of 1277 was the rejection of what was called the "standard of double truth" (ie, saying something to be true according to, for example, Aristotle, although not true by the yardstick of revelation). The inclusion of this proposition showed the tension between the demands of Orthodoxy and exploratory philosophy which culminated in the "fideism" of the nominalists. Ockham, to take a prominent example, separated the sphere of provable things from the realm of Faith. While empirical knowledge had to be learned by experience, faith was a self-validating construct. One believed simply because one believed. Revelation was the way in which an omnipotent God chose to disclose himself, and the only way he could be approached or understood (40).

The linguistic implications of this philosophy unsettled the consensus of Augustinian and Thomistic epistemology. Instead of the gradual abstraction from the real to the significant by a path of linguistic universals, the nominalists insisted on the arbitrary nature of the sign, holding that "universals" had no intrinsic reality, and existed simply as convenient landmarks in the mental landscape. Faith, not language became the path to truth, casting language out to the vagaries of an imperfectly observed natural world. In the age of Chaucer, language could not make claims to truth unchallenged any more than dreams could claim the power of revelation.

PHYSICAL MODEL OF MEDIAEVAL EPISTEMOLOGY.



POLYCRATICUS: THE DREAM AS SIGN

> "...But know that in the Soule
> Are many lesser Faculties that serve
> Reason as chief; among these Fansie next
> Her office holds; of all external things,
> Which the five watchful Senses represent,
> She forms Imaginations, Aerie shapes,
> Which Reason joining or disjoining, frames
> All what we affirm or what deny, and call
> Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
> Into her privat Cell when Nature rests.
> Oft in her absence mimic Fansie wakes
> To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,
> Wilde work produces oft, and most in dreams,
> Ill matching words and deeds..."
>
> (*Paradise Lost*, V, 100-112)

One of the most self-contradictory discussions in the scholarly literature of the Middle Ages is John of Salisbury's account of the status and uses of dreams. On the one hand, he cannot deny that dreams may bear significance, because the infallible founding text of his religion is quite clear that such dreams have been vouchsafed to selected and inspired people. On the other hand, the recognition of the dream as site of real knowledge allows a disturbingly random element into epistemology which unsettles reason and traditional authorities.

His perplexed argument is centered on the way in which dreams subvert the nature of signs. Signs, he says, are superior to the reality they represent. Subordinate objects may be seen to bear resemblances to other entities of higher importance and be used as signs of those things. So, for example, a boat may be a "sign" of the Church, as analogy with the vessel explains conveniently certain characteristics of the community of faith. The unexpressed analogy is with textual sudies of the Scriptures, where all signs were effectually subordinated to the supreme sign of Christ, and pointed to him and his saving work in typology, analogy, and allegory.

Reading the signs in dreams, however, is a an unreliable activity because the hierarchy of significances cannot be firmly established (in other words, one can never know quite what represents what). Dream guides he considers unreliable and far-fetched for the fact that they will not submit themselves to "authority" - what appears in dreams may have manifold or restricted meaning, signify itself or something else, resemble another dream or be entirely original. Despite a certain embarrassment at the divination evidently used by Daniel and Moses, he insists on the orthodox line: whatever the vagaries of the Holy Spirit,

> "...it is no art, or at best a meaningless one.For whoever involves himself in the deception of dreams is not sufficiently awake to the law of God, suffers a loss of faith, and drowses to his own ruin... This whole matter really needs no further consideration since the whole tradition of this activity is foolish.."
>
> (*Polycraticus* II, 97 & 98)

The burden of the second book of the *Polycraticus* is that Nature in itself does not provide Truth, nor does the innocent observation of Nature without the framework of Faith. All the "signs" of Nature are the communications of God, and show what he desires to show, not what human beings deduce from observation. Accurate and genuine knowledge is the result of proper perception - "unless a man is born again he cannot *see*". What was necessary was that the doors of perception be correctly set, so that the reason could make true deductions and memory store those in increasingly whole and enlightened stores.

Mediaeval psychology posited three essential actions in the intellectual process: reception of data in perception, abstraction and logical ordering of these by reason, and the powerful and mysterious work of memory in storing the worked intellection in great patterns of interlocking recollection (41). The part of the intellect concerned with perception was the *ingenium*, an area which performed not only the mechanical functions of information gathering, but combined and prepared data, ordering the world correctly for the mind it served.

The *ingenium* had the functions of what we term the "imagination", and could form images in the mind *without* external stimulus, using stores of images which had been previously garnered. The *ingenium* as a function of the mind distinct from reason was the basis for a "poetics of the imagination", one which took as its medium that moment when the imagination had the most untrammelled power over the whole mind, that is, the dream.

DE NUPTIIS PHILOLOGIAE ET MERCURII

We have already seen that the dream was an unstable form of experience (Lynch calls it "liminal"). Descriptions of supposed dreams could consequently venture on imaginative territory which transgressed the boundaries of convention, or told of places and experiences not accessible to man in his natural state. As it seemed that pure philosophy could not adequately solve the problematic dialectic between Faith and Reason, poets volunteered their skills to marry thought and expression.

The "symbolist" theory of reality held by Aquinas proposed a vast chain of analogies by which the material could approach the divine. Seeing the way in which the created order showed and symbolized the higher order resembled interpreting the literary techniques of allegory, *fabula*, *involucra*, and *integumentum* by which a poet could veil his message in words. So, understanding the world was to read its concealed meanings correctly, abstracting from appearances to invisible areas of truth. Dream poetry was an attempt for the pure creative imagination to read the riddles of the world and to expound them in new wholes.

Just as the phi and omega on the robes of Boethius' Lady Philosophy showed a visionary attempt to meld praxis and theory, and the Nature of Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* is known through both *genius* and *ingenium*, the writers of literary dreams were exploring the place of the mind in the world, often attempting to explain the relation of the imagination and the perception to what was ultimately real and finally true (42).

TWO KINDS OF WRITING

The tradition of the dream poem provides two opposing models. That a narrative had its birth in a vision might be an earnest of its absolute veracity and proof positive of its sublime inspiration. It might alternatively imply that it was the product of random and possibly malign forces, and to be treated with considerable reserve and caution. So too, in exploring the workings of the mind, poets could either emphasize the liberating and illuminating effects of the dream and extrapolate from that into a model of epistemology which showed the approach of the mind to truth, or, alternatively, they might use the darkness and confusion of the dream to demonstrate the difficulties of attaining truth, and the many barriers in the process of gaining wisdom.

Of the many paradigm texts available to Chaucer, the two of greatest moment were the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun and Dante's *Commedia Divina*. The pair form precise opposites in terms of the modes in which they are expressed, the tenor of their expression, and the nature of their subject matter. Dante's vision is a sublime summation of the philosophical achievement of an age, which is made absolute when located in an apparition of eternity. The *Roman* is partly an elegant allegory of Love, and partly a roller-coaster ride through a carnival of conflicting Mediaeval voices, brought together in the imaginings of a mind stimulated by desire. The *House of Fame* cannot escape this commanding pair of texts, and is forced to make something of them. Precisely what is a question more illuminating than one might suppose.

In the nineteenth century, considerable scholarly opinions designated the Divine Comedy as Chaucer's model. Ten Brink in 1870 published his *Studien* detailing common points shared by the texts, and this study was followed by another in 1880, which noted further similarities, by Rambeau . The case rested firstly on general resemblances. Each poem is a vision in three parts, each has a dream guide and each heads for a place of heavenly revelation. Secondly, they exhibit such common

features of subject matter as the use of Virgil's *Aeneid* and discussions of natural phenomena in scientific terms - Dante; Gravitation, and Chaucer; sound. Thirdly, detailed comparisons were made - the use of "invocations", the eagle's derivation from the *Comedy*, common comparisons with the vision of St Paul, and particulars of descriptions used for the respective groups of people - Chaucer's minstrels and Dante's redeemed souls, for example. The point of finding these affinities was to show that the *House of Fame* was, in conception, primarily a parody of Dante's poem (43).

W.O. Sypherd, in 190 , dealt summarily with these resemblances (44). While not doubting Chaucer's general debt to Dante or challenging clear echoes of his work (such as the Invocation of Thought (523-8) which is based on *Inferno* II, 8/9 and *Paradis o* I, 11) Sypherd dismisses the case. The general resemblances, he asserts, while certainly detectable, are common to a large number of vision poems, and in any case, shared subject matter may be explained as the predictable product of a common literary domain. Resemblances of specific points are either trivial, of a shared cultural heritage or subsumed, as borrowings, into a different kind of literary work. Nor is the work a parody of the *Divine Comedy*, specifically, for it does not work closely enough against its model for parody to be recognisable. Sypherd convincingly demolishes a simplistic reading of the poem as pure caricature, but fails to see the literary importance of the concept of satirical imitation. In writing differently from Dante, Chaucer is aligning himself with an inimical and contrary ideology of textuality, an act which locates his poem in an ancient debate.

The importance of reopening Sypherd's case is that such a casual dismissal of conceptual influences would make the poem deceptively easy of access and interpretation - something which it is obviously not. More significantly, debating whether or not the *House of Fame* is a simple parody of Dante is a false trail which obscures the deeper disagreements which divide the respective literary conceptions of the Italian and his English admirer.

PRAESTAT FIDES SUPPLEMENTUM SENSUUM DEFECTUI

The *Commedia Divina* is an influence that cannot be avoided. It is the supreme example of a dream vision which appropriates authority to itself, claiming for the mind, and especially the imagination and the memory, powers of almost supernatural discernment. Dante's vision is a "vision of authority" insofar as it is replete with guides and revelations. But, as Gabriel Josipovici describes, what makes the *Divine Comedy* sublimely convincing is the way it "represents" what Dante sees (45). It employs venerable conventions; personification allegory is used, the narrator lays claim to the credence granted to eye witnesses. But Dante transcends these. In his account, the reader seems to be taken beyond the need for mediated discourse into a private epiphany of the text. Dante's "realism" attempts to be a sacramental reflexion of creation, which strains against the bounds of the interposing text and interpretative process and masquerades as transcendent reality, sublimely and uniquely present. Dante turns the workings of the mind in a visionary mode into a symbol of the way the cosmos is structured in the mind of God.

In *The Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis makes a distinction between what he calls the "allegorical" and the "symbolic" modes (46). Allegory, in the manner of metaphor, takes the apprehensible data of the material world and uses them to express the immaterial experiences of the mind, but a mind which is everywhere bounded by the real world. So an allegorical "person" who behaves like a visible person is given a title "*Ira*" or "*Patientia*" and expresses the manner in which the passion or virtue of that name operates; just the kind of process, in fact, which Chaucer employs to portray Fame. Like "Love", this is not a substance with its own existence, but, as Dante says "*uno accidente in sustanzia*", "*una figura o colore rettorico*" (*Vita Nuova*, XXV).

The symbolical mode takes this signifying process and changes its terms of reference. In it, the Allegorical mode is turned on its head and the material world is treated as if it were itself the copy or symbol system

of another higher immaterial world; as if the realities we see around us were simply the signs or words which signify other and superior realities. The process may be illustrated in the following table:

"SYMBOL"-

expresses a superior reality which comprehends what is taken for "Real", in the same manner as a sacrament.

(SACRAMENTAL)

"HIGHER" REALITIES

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE REAL

"LOWER" REALITIES

(PSYCHOLOGICAL)

expresses a subordinate reality which it represents by means of a code, in which the lower concepts are described in terms of the highest unity, the human self.

"ALLEGORY" -

The Symbolical mode is Platonic in conception and equivalent to the sacramental impulse, where the function of a natural element such as water which washes, cleanses, and revives becomes the matter of baptism which actually (in the preeminently "real" spiritual order) washes, cleanses, and revives the soul. It is a linguistic model which aids the imagination in constructing ideas of things beyond ideas. It is, in fact, faith's mode of expression.

The power, then, of the *Commedia Divina* is that in it Dante "naturalises" the mysteries of the spiritual realm as if in a directly mimetic process. The persona of the *Commedia* is at pains to insist that he is merely the medium, a copyist, and not the manufacturer of what he sees ("quella materia ond'io son fatta scriba"). Entering Paradise, Dante is relieved of the curse of the Fall which rendered words unreliable and defective. Virgil leaves him as an unworthy interpreter with this solace

"Non aspettar mio dir piu, ne mio cenno.
Libero, dritto e sano e tuo arbitrio
El fallo fora non fare a suo senno"
(*Purg*. XXVII, 139-41)

(Do not any longer expect my word or sign. Your judgement is now free, upright, and pure, it would be a fault not to act as it directs.)

The reader need only look through Dante's eyes to see "The Real World", a supernatural order of existence. The narrative becomes sacramental because God, not the author, is the source of the reality which is described. Dante attempts to use the dream position as a privileged space from which his authorship will be refined out of the relations of the text because of his "inspiration" and replaced by that of the original creative word. The text aims at an utter stasis - "*En la sua voluntade e nostra pace*". The nature of the world as a book written by God is opened through the extinction of the writer's mediating personality, and divinely permeated Reality is produced.

The Allegorical *personification*, on the other hand, deals with realities whose operations are unmistakable and which stem from an obviously material source - the brain - but which work by complex processes which are mysteriously hidden. A human "character" is the best fictional copy of such processes; what one might call an "anthropomorphic model". It deals similarly with intricate social relationships ("falling in love") or social/historical processes ("Fame" or "Fortune") in the same humanised and dramatic scale. It is a shorthand expression, as it were, of what is partially understood, but difficult to represent. As a mode, it is essentially rhetorical, a trick of language used to master what is acknowledged to be subordinate, human and material.

The difference between Dante's endeavour and that of Chaucer in the *House of Fame* could scarcely be more profound. Rather than producing a text which would be a transparent window on the world and mediate Truth, Chaucer, seeing "through a glass, darkly", produces discourse which is impenetrable, constantly aware of its fictional nature and status as one text among many, entangled in the material and

unpredictable fate which texts must suffer in the historical world of the Lady Fame. This is, indirectly, a parody of Dante, who situates himself in the other worlds of Heaven and Hell because they are places where the confusions and deceitful representations of this world are finally dispelled. Chaucer's alternative world is a more muddled extension of the temporal one. More importantly, it is the product of another tradition of writing altogether, one which avoids the claim of final authority made by Dante (that the world is "*really* like this") and rather explores its own nature as text and demonstrates that *writing* is "like this" and that its realities are representations.

DEFLOWERING THE ROSE

Rather than extending the imaginary vision outward to a supernatural world which the mind may visit, the French Love Vision, which culiminates in the *Roman*, focuses on the inward self at a moment when that self is in the throes of destabilisation. Rather than the supremely confident epic self, we encounter the "romance" self, a fictional persona who is being defined and explained by the plot as if he were a text under critical scrutiny. Especially familiar to English readers (from Malory) is the achievement of Chretien de Troyes. In Chretien's Arthurian adventures, the action of the questing knights is largely an excuse for psychological introspection, and where Chretien ventures into the mind, he does so allegorically (47). This kind of thing is retained by Malory (much watered-down) especially in his treatment of the Grail Quest - a quest is a less self confident and more introspective mode than empire founding - and in episodes such as Percival's experience of killing a lion and serpent and dreaming of women riding on identical beasts. Later, he is told that they symbolized the Church and the Law respectively, in battle for his soul. Bors too has adventures with "lust" in the form of women who attempt seduction, but vanish when he makes the sign of the cross (48).

Love, not surprisingly, occupies a prominent place in this literature. Irrational and complex psychology lures the allegorizers to exercise their psychoanalytic skills, and the process of making a love contract

reveals a good deal of the elaborate processes of desire, self deception, craft and, especially, divisions within the self which are the very stuff of such analyses. (Catullus' "*odi et amo*" shows this type of conflict precisely, as does Dante's description of the effects of the siren on a mind excited to lust by the beauty of a song.). Because of this, Love is perfectly suited to the allegorized literary mode, in which the mental landscape of romantic encounters may be personified and given independent life.

> "The gaze turned inward with a moral purpose does not discover character. No man is a "character" to himself and least of all when he thinks of good or evil...The unitary "soul" or "personality" which interests the novelist is for him merely the arena in which the combat ants meet." (49)

Lewis speaks specifically here about the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius and its tradition, but the principle (as he later shows) holds good for all psychological explorations in the mode. Love simply concentrates the mind on a singular object with particular power, and the internal conflicts which result are not "abstractions", but real encounters with parts of the psyche that seem to have assumed autonomous powers, and which dislodge reality. An encounter with the "other" in the form of a love-partner arouses unknown tracts of the unconscious mind which register in emotions and desires in conflict with reason and habit. The lover in the *Rose* encounters these on his way to his tryst with his beloved, and discards them as the plot tends gradually towards seduction. Amans is always within the framework of the mind, however, and makes no "ascent" or escape in his journey. Compare this with Dante's infatuation. Beatrice inspires him to reunify his model of the cosmos with Love as the central force and the Mother of God as its chief ornament, "sublimation" ending in the sublime.

The *Roman de la Rose* precedes the *Commedia*. Its conception is rooted in psychic fragmentation , and it is essentially introspective. At a crucial point in Guillaume de Lorris' text, the Lover discovers the very fountain at which Narcisscus died, rapt in the prospect of his own reflexion. Looking into it, he sees two crystal stones which reflect the garden. Closer inspection reveals the roses and, among them, an

unopened bud for which he at once feels a strange desire. This sudden and transforming experience, so reminiscent of Stendhal, deftly evokes the subjective tyranny of being in love. The crystals of the stream are, by their nature, reflexive,and in fact the Dreamer sees only himself, his own eyes and the unyielding surfaces of water and stone. He may see obliquely off the reflexions of those surfaces - as in a dream, "codes" allow ideas to evade the "internal censor" - but it is in the first instance himself he perceives, and only incidentally the garden which is the setting of his passion. As J.V. Fleming observes, "The ultimate object of Amant's love is not the 'lady', not 'love itself', not even some fragile and immeasurable mystery of the human heart...but himself. Amant's object is *seipsum*" (50).

WE THINK OF THE KEY, EACH IN HIS PRISON
THINKING OF THE KEY...

T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland.*

> "My external sensations are no less private to my self than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it...In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul"

F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p.306.

We have by now come to a great divide in Western thought, and the positions are clearly enough establised for us to range them against one another in a series of dualistic oppositions. The vision of Dante and the dream of Amans are only two of these ancient reflexions of one another.

Plato's denunciation of the Sophists is an equal set of paired antitheses. The philosopher argues for a stable self, not to be manipulated by the ploys of art, and denounces the rhetorical flamboyance of the sophist wordsmiths (51). Knowledge is an illumination of something eternal for Plato, not something to be

achieved by the bandying of mere words. At a less violent level, this same conflict divides the Aristotelian from the Platonist, for the Aristotelian is prepared to be imprisoned within a system of natural laws, learning only through his senses and reason, while the Platonist is open to a superior spiritual world, the locus of all truth.

The *homo philosophicus* is in theory, a unitary self governed by general laws and spiritual constraints. Language is a means of storing *wisdom* - a higher entity altogther than words. The *homo rhetoricus* is, alternatively, the sum of the words he produces and the self of the most recent speech act he has uttered. In consequence, man as lingustically constituted cannot occupy any place of privilege outside his own system of signifiers.

The kind of language used by these two schools is also radically different in theory. On the one hand, language is an act of remembrance and illumination in which humans echo the divine. On the other it is a simple exercise in the variety of effects which may be achieved in an extremely large and complex system.

In the late Middle Ages, as we have sketched, the Realist fusion of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian thought was challenged by a system which insisted on the provisional and unverifiable nature of thought, and of language in particular. Augustine and Bonaventure, mediated in Aquinas gave way to Siger and Ockham. In literature a similarly deep divide in modes of expression is to be found.

The transition from "epic to romance" in the literary history of the Middle Ages could perhaps have given impetus to the analysis of this dichotomy. The epic is a text of the establishment, literally and figuratively. It is a discourse of power and used as such to identify a people and exalt a hero at some primal historical or mythological moment, looking out of its text to a greater reality. Romances, on the other hand, thrive on the matter of lovers defying Fate, circumstance and tyranny in order to express their personal destinies and desires. Their tales end conclusively within the frameworks of their texts and

claim no allegiance from their hearers apart from emotional identification.

In the Latin tradition, Virgil and Ovid oppose one another as epic bard and love lyricist; I have chosen Dante and the Rose poets as Mediaeval examples of the modes of sacramental and psychological writing. Chaucer is, I think, one of the Ovidian writers. He establishes a particular space for language, where all other demands are subordinated to the intrinsic fictionality of a specific speech event. In the House of Fame this conception of language as a way of knowing and being is developed with extraordinary complexity.

In situating the mind within a dream, Chaucer reduces its work to that which is already sealed off within itself. In oher words, everything is reduced to words, the code by which the brain simplifies and stores all data. Then, systematically, he leads us through an examination of how the brain functions according to contemporary models, showing at each stage the pitfalls of that particular mode of intellection. All this is contained in the extended metaphor of literature and language, which stands for all possible knowledge.

As an act of self-analysis, the dream of the tenth of December is a ruthless, if comic, delineation of the human predicament. Locked into the prison house of the body, ensnared by language, even the illusions we have of flight are thrust down like the over-ambitious Icarus. Fame has only partridge's wings (*HoF*, 1391-2), like those of the humble and earthbound Perdix (*Metamorphoses*, VIII 236-59) and cannot rise above the mortal sphere.

The point of the three books of the *House of Fame* is to take us through a complete act of thought, following the traditional threefold model. In the first book, the dominant mode of apprehension is sight, a sense traditionally associated with desire and the eye of the imagination. Both of these are functions of the *ingenium*, the first epistemological process, here the claims of pseudo-romantic poetic theory to knowledge of a higher order are thoroughly de-bunked in the disastrous and

deceptive love of Dido and Aeneas, and in the the interpretative work of the narrator persona. The second book is dominated by sound, the mode of reasonable understanding and teaching. Here, the teacher and hearer fail to complete their didactic contract, and the Nature they attempt to understand seems to be a hopeless muddle of the real and the fanciful - Reason is not the irresistible tool it claims to be. Finally, the third book takes us to the place where memory is stored, and this proves to be the most chaotic of all. Far from resembling the chain of being in the mind of God (like the *Paradis o*) this world which the dreamer vicariously experiences is a chaos of language which has escaped from all the constraints of the conscious and controlling mind. Worst of all, for those who hope for redemption from chaos, even those hints we have of a mystical ascent to truth are rebuffed, language cannot even carry us to the God whose own words made us and by which man lives, and not by bread alone.

ELVYSSH BY HIS CONTENAUNCE

First among the decentring techniques Chaucer employs is to unsettle a stable sense of the unitary consciousness. This is achieved by permeating with irony the narratorial voice of his persona. Readers of the *Canterbury Tales* will recall the bumbling storyteller whom Chaucer uses as his persona in that work which is a dazzling *tour de force* of narrative art. Similarly, in this work which is a shrewd exposition of the convolutions of reading and writing, the persona is a man befuddled by reading, described by the eagle as a hard working servant of Venus who continually strives to create love stories and devours romances

" Tyl fully daswed ys thy look" (*HoF*, 658)

Despite this effort, he has never had the characters of his fantasy life reply to or recognize his devotion. As the unaided action of fictional characters is quite simply beyond the bounds of possibility, the reader must make the adjustment that it is into a high fictional world that the dreaming Chaucer enters through the door of sleep, much like the Wonderland Alice dicovers down a well or through a looking-glass.

Although we abandon the canons of reality in this realm, the attitudes of Realism remain in the highly ironic ghost voice of the meta-narrator.

The intervening persona "Geffry" divides the living man from the literary man - self from self - in recognition of the rupture between being and representation. Although lightly expressed, the division is a profound attempt at revealing one of the paradoxes of language and a basic premise of Fiction. Viewed seriously, the text obliges one to abandon the habitual assumption that one's own unique perception of the world is *the* world. The joke on the eagle is that he is so bombastic and prolix that he never pauses to discover that even his own discourse is provisional, at the same time as he overbearingly displaces Geffry's voice, reducing him to a punctuating "Noo? why?" or "Nay". His pointed remarks on Geffry's stoutness - "Thou art noyous to carye" - are plainly references to Chaucer himself, which includes him in the programme of ironies as yet another replaceable "character".

The narrator-persona has chosen the company of books rather than people and is now condemned to live out that fantasy in the world of books as reward, but he experiences fiction where it most obviously impinges on the real world, that is in the matter of Fame. Fame is a distillation of all the ways in which speaking beings project themselves, using language, for the purposes of love or reputation or amusement or identity. Historical events exist in sealed units of Fame used like bullets in a"war of the words".

The dream forms an elegant way to express this division between the irreducible spaces of signifiers and signifieds. In the dream, all the traditional literary devices - like the *ekphrasis*, guide-interpreter, use of personification allegory, and significant landscape become temporarily real, the very landscape of the fiction, while the character "Chaucer" as a thinking subject becomes temporarily fictional. All of this inversion is enclosed in the meta-narrator's level of discourse, felt at the level of ironic interruption.

Philosopically, the use of the unreliable persona expresses a kind of secular tolerance. Chaucer is not an unbeliever or a cynic, necessarily, but, as we have noted, he takes seriously the concept of a Fall which has flawed all communication. Human intercourse flounders in lack of mutual understanding because of this intrinsic failing, and at times even needs the aid of fiction to make its meaning clear. The obtuse persona in the *Book of the Duchess* misunderstands the knight's lament for the loss of his queen because he cannot understand the terms of the basic metaphor the dream-vision employs. In the *Duchess*, the conceit actually becomes the terms of the "real", just as the chess board *is* the real landscape in *Alice Through The Looking-Glass*. Dramatic tension comes from the reader's realisation of the literary equation while the actor in the story still blunders around seeking a map of what his situation is . Similarly, "Geffry" in the *House of Fame* is unaware of the terms on which he is in the vision. Is he Enoch or Elias, snatched up by God? Romulus or Ganymede in a classical extravaganza? Paul or John in the throes of a supernatural revelation? These self-important conjecturings are neatly punctured both by the eagle's disrespect and by the reader's sense of the ridiculous. Geffry is the dupe of his creator, whose eye for comic deflation catches the least opportunity.

The first dream encounter with the temple of glass emphasises the levels of fiction at work in the conception. Geffry encounters the formative epic moment (as seen by the Middle Ages) in Virgil's work. Rather than seeing a series of events, or being transposed back to that fictional moment where it all "happened", the story is shown at another level of artificiality: it is painted on the walls of the elaborately crafted shrine, and introduced by a brass tablet inscribed with the opening words of the *Aeneid*. This allows us to see the demolition of the epic impulse as Geffry reads and "deconstructs" the presuppositions of the text, and we watch his interpretative, selective mind at work.

What transpires in the telling of Book 1 is the collation of a series of separations into a single narrative. The plot on the panels is the work of Virgil, modified by Ovid and reshuffled according to notions of

Mediaeval propriety into the *ordo naturalis* (53). In this form it runs fairly smoothly as a record of Geffry's impressions: prolix where he becomes personally stirred by the turn of events and terse when he is abridging what he simply scans. The different "speeds" of this perusal are more than incidental. They are the evocation of a more subtle theme in this section as a representation of the actual process of reading as it happens. "Reading" is the essential link in all the textual layers of this palimpsestic passage, and it is seen to be a product of desire through the practice of the Geffry persona.

The interpretative spiral begins with the core story, that of Dido and Aeneas, which is assumed to have been "real". In the plot structure which the story assumes, all the action springs from a misreading. Dido reads Aeneas according to a private discourse of desire, in which the Trojan is the princely lover of whom the queen has always dreamed. Conversely, his script is written by the god Mercury and does not include this entanglement. When the actions of Aeneas show absolutely bluntly that he is not the character of her fantasies, Dido "writes herself out" of the story and effectively ends her role by killing herself.

The next layer is that of Virgil's textual stratagems, which are critically read by Ovid in the *Heroides*. The Ovidian act of reading refuses to accept the whitewashing heroic convention of the epic form and replaces it with the more "dialogical" romance. Instead of the overarching concern of the founding of a great city, Ovid insists on the smaller scale of personal desires and private betrayals. A gulf of difference divides the Virgilian ur-text from the Ovidian reader. It is only in the re-connecting discourse of a third narrative that they can be harmonised, or at least intertwined.

It seems that an anonymous painter has read both views of the story and transposed them into a single string of frescoes, perhaps depicting the heart-wrenching events at Carthage in higher colours. Certainly this is a new work, an interpretation and reperformance of the "matter of Rome" and this fact stresses again the fictiveness of the self-reflexive glass

temple, in the Mediaeval equivalent of a big-screen adaptation. Having no doubt read the book, the persona Geffry enters and sees the pictures. His reading expresses both possible lines of interpretation dialogically, and although it seems clear that his emotional sympathies lie with Dido, Aeneas' singular sense of destiny is given a hearing in mitigation ("But to excusen Eneas"). We see both Geffry's reading and have access to his critical comments

> '"A, Lord!"thoughte I, "that madest us,
> Yet sawgh I never such noblesse
> Of ymages..."'(*HoF*, 470-72)

So moved is he that he composes a diatribe and lament for the jilted queen to deliver in his own words "Non other auctor alegge I" (*HoF*, 314). Needless to say it is a highly influenced piece, which contrasts pointedly with Aeneas' own detachment when he encounters the representation of his own story (*Aeneid*, I.453ff).

A distinction is implied between the God who made us and the unknown craftsman who created the "chirche" from which Geffry has emerged, a reminder that the temple is not natural and "only a story". Geffry is, however, slow to grasp the "nature" of his predicament and cannot make the perceptual leap required to orientate himself in the hall of mirrors. As he is not in the world of Nature, he will not see

> "...no manner creature
> That ys yformed be Nature
> ...me to rede or wisse." (*HoF*, 489-91)

Only the unreal flora and fauna of the Imaginary world exist in this unreal, deserted landscape, and even the eagle which hovers in the sky above is as much a compact literary allusion as a character. The poor Geffry's heartfelt prayer:

> "'O Crist!' thoughte I, 'that art in blysse,
> Fro fantome and illusion
> Me save...'" (*HoF*, 492-4)

could hardly be less apposite, for Geffry is in the toils of a phantom already and soon to be in the claws of another. The mythological Jove is the motivating deity in these parts, and his decrees determine the subsequent events. The God of the real world is without competence in the framed space of Fame and would scarcely deign to rescue a caricature like Geffry.

Geffry's inept efforts at reading a semiotic field are being read in their turn by the author of the story, and his critical stance is sceptical irony. Chaucer defies identification with his simulacrum, a man who will not look at the stars because he is quite happy to trust the opinions of those who "write of this matere" (*HoF*, 1013), even though the stars in this cosmos are the mythical bodies of stellified beasts and heroes.

The last process of understanding will be the reader's. It is not entirely an independent one, especially if the text be orally presented, for the mechanism of irony is to contrive a particular response from the ideal audience, insisting that it create an ideal text by comparison with which the actual opinions of the actual text are inadequate. Interpretation of this slightly more rigorous kind hammers home the point once again, that all the texts of this section of the poem are provisional and open to many re-tellings and re-readings. All experiences of dreams remind us of this, as we strive to remember what our selves "did" in the story, and have to assess our parts in an unconscious fiction, reviewing a genuine but provisional reality. In the process, the unreality of the account as against the event shows that language and its crude tools are a poor replacement for the visionary moment, now vanished forever.
The essence of this Book is the oblique assertion that the whole world of fiction is equally contingent and, despite Geffry's angst, Chaucer will proceed to delight in the pleasures of a kingdom where all judgements, appearances, terrors, and delights are strictly temporary and displaceable and everything may be exploded simply by waking up. The sharper one's sense of what is fictional, the more clearly one will recognise the borders of the limited world we are prepared to recognise,

and imagine what lies beyond it, in the mystery of how things are not. In the other concerns of this poem, Chaucer explores just how much of the world - as his contemporaries saw and read it - is "fictional", being constructed out of conventions, representations, literary tradition and the fantasies of desire and self-importance. The *House of Fame* is a grand semiotic romp through the hallowed portals of conventional ways of seeing which calls the bluff of seriousness in the name of comic irony.

I propose to deal with this "deconstructive" enterprise sectionally, following the traditional editorial divisions of the text into books. Each book is ruled by a "goddess" figure, whose sphere of fictional power is teased apart and examined. Love, Nature, and Fame should each, ideally, be accompanied by extensive explanatory introductions, tracing the construction of their particular complex of ideas or ideology, but this the exigencies of space will not permit. The dream encapsulates a sceptical and strictly provisional reading of the epistemologies of affection, man's place in the natural world, and the world of language, taking in along its course a quizzical look at the claims of Science and the operations of Literature. "Only disconnect", Chaucer seems to insist, and one will be astounded at what unravels.

TO CARTHAGE THEN I CAME

The glass temple which is Geffry's first destination is soon recognizable as a shrine to Venus. The goddess is emblazoned on the walls in iconographical pose "rising from the waves", surrounded by doves and attended by her son, Cupid, and husband, Vulcan. The blindness of the one and the ugliness of the other are allegorical expressions of Venus' qualities of randomness and incongruity. Cupid's arrows signify the absolutely arbitrary workings of desire and the incongruous match with Vulcan, crippled, hideous, and probably impotent, shows the absurd couplings that result. Although it is not unfitting that Venus should adorn the walls of her own temple, one is surprised to see that the other frescoes show the adventures, not of famous lovers, but of an epic hero. Aeneas, moreover, is not a faithful Paris

or an antique Casanova who devotes his life to the service of love, but a grim and fairly ruthless empire builder whose life's plan treats women as breeders or sexual conveniences. It is precisely the way of Venus to be the mother and patron of such a cad, keep him out of scrapes, and even act as his pimp when she arranges that Dido fall for him.

Read by the Middle Ages, as here by Geffry, the *Aeneid* becomes a romance rather than an epic, and turns around the brief *affaire* between a royal couple cast up on foreign shores, alone but with kingdoms to govern, overcome by sudden and helpless passion. Like Havelock and Goldboru or Floris and Blancheflour their union becomes the engine of their plot and the engineer of their plight. When Aeneas leaves, he simply destroys the narrative, leaving Dido no decent dramatic course of action but to end her redundant life.

How does this situation occur? It seems that Dido has been guilty of a progression of misreadings - she has presumed that she is the heroine of the story, even situated herself in the wrong genre altogether. The brittle, delicate, and reflexive temple enhances the sense of *trompe l'oeil* by which the queen has been deceived. In her desire to see Aeneas as lover she has constructed a being which is simply a projection of her imaginative powers.

Aeneas emerges out of a racily brief saga of narrow escapes and high perils and is cast up on the shore of Africa where Venus is disporting herself, masquerading as a huntress. In no time she solves the predicament of his ruined fleet by despatching him off to Carthage and sweetening up the queen on his arrival. "Venery" disrupts the order of things almost at once when the pair illicitly consummate their union, and do "al that weddynge longeth too"(*HoF*, 244).

Aeneas' method of seduction seems to lie in the power of his words. Like Othello, the story of the dangers he has passed make him exotic and desirable. The textual nexus is laconically snide - in two successive images Aeneas tells of his progress (every cas / That hym was tyd upon the see...*HoF*, 255-6) and receives the adulation of Dido as

"Hyr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir lord" (*HoF*, 258). That he has lied is not explicitly stated, nor - as other critics assert - is it plain that Chaucer has inserted an oath of fidelity on Aeneas' part. All that is settled is that Dido paid him the homage which any woman might do "wenyng hyt had al be so / As he hir swor..."(*HoF*, 262-3). Quite what Aeneas swore is unspecified; it may have been that he so often protested his own veracity as a reporter that Dido, yearning for an oath of fidelity, took this as sufficient earnest of his intentions. The implications of the narrator's outrage are that he "as good as" promised marriage and then took advantage of this dangling understanding to mend his ships and take his pleasure, but the partisan stances of observers when love matches break up are scarcely material evidence. Was Aeneas behaving like Odysseus, and manipulating a favourable situation, or was he the innocent victim of an hallucinating woman? The texts do not allow sufficient certainty. Perhaps Aeneas, being an epic hero, is too "true" to be good.

What is clear is that Dido considers herself deceived and that Geffry, stirred by the tale, casts himself as her champion. First he delivers a string of gnomic *sententiae* like "hyt is not al gold that glareth" (*HoF*, 272) and"he that fully knoweth th'erbe / May saufly leye hyt to hys ye" (*HoF*, 209-1). The overt point of these is to establish that it is the common wisdom that "men were deceivers ever", that they use words to lure the objects of their desire and when that is dissipated, slander them as "unkynde, fals, privy or double", and with words dispose of them. Can it be that Chaucer too intends such a simple interpretative equation? The fusion of "trouthe" in verbal praxis and as an attitude of soul, familiar to readers of the *Franklin's Tale*, is applied to Aeneas who "wolde hir of trouthe fayle" (*HoF*, 297). Remembering Virgil's constant epithet "*pius*" for his hero, which translates well into a similar semantic field as this use of "true", Aeneas here stands accused of destroying his own nature. By allowing misrepresentation to exist, even through complicity with Dido's self-deception, Aeneas opens the way for an infinite uncertainty of readings which will in turn compromise Dido, and which ill befit the representation of a founding father.

WHAT SHULDE I SPEKE MORE QUEYNTE,
OR PEYNE ME MY WORDES PEYNTE
TO SPEKE OF LOVE? HYT WOL NOT BE;
I KAN NOT OF THAT FACULTE.

Women's truth rests less upon the spoken word than on the truth of their bodies: a "true" woman is a chaste one. The patriarchal set of power relations forces women into subordinate positions, from which they can only escape by the use of evasive and subversive tactics. Women's craft, as described in the *Merchant's Tale*, characteristically employs lies and prevarication, and by implication, all feminine discourse is suspect to men. To be true, a woman must preserve her chastity or be martyred in order to purge herself of any taint of misrepresentation.

After having been made false by Aeneas, appearing to be a wife without actually placing the relationship under the constraints of law, Dido ceases to be true and is no longer fit to exercise her role as the law maker in Carthage. The law expects a perfect consonance of word and deed in a stable convention of representation, "sincerity" as it is abbreviated. Her word can hardly be law when she patently cannot enforce it on her man or obey it herself. In her defence, she is obliged to construct a legitimating lament in which she reveals Aeneas as the stereotypical philanderer, just like all other men, in order to exculpate herself. He is converted from a wholly individual and captivating subject in her first discourse of desire to an example of a type; simply one villain among many, in the discourse of dissociation which follows. A few examples suffice to give the tone of the monologue:

> "O, have ye men such godlyhede
> In speche, and never a del of trouthe?...
> ...We wrechched wymmen konne noon art...
> ...Thus be we served everychone...
> ...For though your love laste a seson
> Wayte upon the conclusyon..."(*HoF*, 330-1,335,337,341-2)

Turning her personal grief into an impersonal set of verities is Dido's last attempt to win the textual battle with Aeneas. The common wisdom

she vents will endure beyond her single tragedy in women's lore, and she seals it in the way traditional to the helpless female victim - by dying as the proof of her sincerity. Her complaint enters into a stream of like texts, and in the examples given by Geffry of famous jilts - "Breseyda, Oenone, Dyanira" and others we are shown another, feminised literature. The subversive feminine strain finds a promoter in the person of Ovid.

The *Amores* and more particularly the *Heroides* of Ovid are deliberately in counterpoint to the masculinist epic and heroic tradition. As Virgil does, Ovid sees love as a metonymy for the irrational impulses of the human mind. Unlike the epic bard, he is sceptical as to whether irrationalism may be controlled by reason or sublimated in the pursuit of duty. When Ovid attempts to write in the epic mode, he finds that his views of the world preclude such an endeavour - in allegory, Cupid wickedly steals the last foot of the heroic line:

> "arma graui numero uiolentaque bella parabam
> edere, materia conueniente modis.
> par erat inferior uersus; risisse Cupido
> dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem." (*Amores*, I.i.1-4)

The *House of Fame* owes its conception to the *Metamorphoses*, that fictional bible of the Middle Ages, and the relationship between the two authors is one of innate sympathy as well as shared material. Both refuse to accept monolithic texts which mythologise the conventions of representation. Ovid allows "closure" only in the moment of metamorphosis, never permitting his characters the liberty (or constraint) of a fixed textual position like that foisted on "*pius Aeneas*", and constantly undermines older conventions. The pastoral lovers of the *Georgics* are displaced by the grasping urban *meretrices* whom Ovid pursues, the cosmic Gods of the *Aeneid* become clever hellenistic conceits. Chaucer also evades the rigidity of generic straitjackets and introduces a multiplicity of voices, most notably in the *Tales*, and is committed to a belief in the conditional nature of texts. This is not a division between "high seriousness" and frivolity but a perfectly serious philosophy, based on an understanding of

literature which is rhetorical rather than illuminative. The different sense of representation is like that between, for example, Faulkner and Nabokov; the former's mimesis attempts to produce epiphanies of understanding by immersing one in the enclosed minds of his narrators, the latter constructs elegant word games around the obsessions of his characters, who constantly identify their accounts as their own created texts.

In the *House of Fame*, the feminine voice signifies this opposition to the claustrophobic and dominating text. The reader is not allowed to let conventions of discourse like the epic mode become invisible and "taken as read" without being challenged by the strident objections of the cheated heroines. Chaucer merely records these contradictory positions without allowing his own authoritative voice to decide the matter for the reader. It is Dido's propaganda and the lonely voice of her complaint we hear for a moment drowning out the strains of arms and the man, not Chaucer's ironic prompting.

Dido's projected death, Aeneas'obligation to love, and the alleged oath that he has sworn are all used as ammunition against him. They are an illogically assorted cluster of influencing factors, connected principally by the merciless conventions governing an abandoned woman's swansong. There is no material necessity for her to end her existence but she is compelled to fulfill an expectation inherent in her literary/dramatic performance, situated in the style adopted by female martyrs from Perpetua to Clarissa to S. Therese de Lisieux. In this genre, the visible world is confined to the doomed woman's own heightened intuitions of events. Her drama becomes the central focus of cosmic events, assuming implications for all morality and all time. Against this kind of discourse Aeneas is silenced and excluded, for his is the language of heroism and founding patriarchy, ill-equipped to answer a word which insists on making itself flesh in self-immolation, demanding the last word.

Dido's feminine resistance appeals also against the double standards of representation applied to men and women, their relative fame, in other

words. Aeneas, she claims, has been assiduous in cultivating his own glory, and has used her not only for his "delyt" or "synguler profit", but also for fame and "magnyfynge of hys name" (*HoF*, 305-310). He has the opportunity, through heroic action, to establish a name for himself, but Dido is only to have the name given to her by a man - a husband - or that accorded her by Rumour. A summary of her dirge identifies her contention

> "O, wel-away that I was born!
> For throrgh yow is my name lorn,
> And alle mine actes red and songe
> Over al this land on every tonge...
> (I am) yshamed...thourgh Eneas,
> (but) Al hir compleynt ne al hir moone,
> Certyn, avayleth hir not a stre." (*HoF*, 345-363)

While it is certainly true that Dido has become a by-word among the people, her literary *tour de force* immortalises her in her funeral pyre just as much as Aeneas' exploits immortalize him. The battle of the genres is won in the *Aeneid* by epic seriousness, but the grievances of the feminine casualties beget their own set of writings, like the *Heroides*, which remind the male protagonists of how much of their fame is owed to their helpmeets, and how paltry a recompense they gleaned (*HoF*, 383-425). Dido has struck a blow, not only against the fame of Aeneas, but against a monolithic masculinist textuality. Just as Venus begets Aeneas, the femininised tradition is claiming precedence over the "patriarchal" set of texts. This has two implications: firstly, that the female experience in these texts has been misrepresented and the fictional heroines mal(e)treated, and secondly a more theoretical subtext, that the epic mode is secondary, begotten by the female expression. Translated into the terms of textual dynamics, this claim is that literature exists not principally to enshrine and glorify the male exploit and its obvious and hyperbolic expression of the self; Fame in short, but to find terms of expressing desires and possibilities not available except in terms of fantasy, fiction, and projection; Love, in short.

The negative effects of Dido's challenge are to call into question any posibility of Truth in texts if, as she claims, they are self-interested and exclusive constructions. Equally, her attempt to replace Aeneas' text with her own shows that any account of events may be re-made on radically different premises. Dido herself speaks to avoid becoming the passive victim of Rumour, which is nothing more than a set of texts made by other people in which their desires and "will to truth" combine at random. Undoing one discourse obliges us to remember that all discourses may be unravelled and unmasked; is even Geffry's defence of Dido the product of anything more than an erotic attraction to celebrated women and a longing for literary fame?

At this point we are better qualified to understand why the decorated temple opens the poem. Love and Literature are intertwined, and as Venus is the mother of desire, the great epic is the primary source of literature. More subtly, it is established that fictional discourses are generated by the emotional forces of desire, either positively in the modes of love-talk and courtship, or negatively in the darkly vengeful imprecations of cheated longings. The tangled textual relations of the two classical lovers are the *locus classicus* of a crux in the development of western literary concerns and prototypes of all subsequent loves. Geffry is told by the eagle that he is to hear tidings of Love's folk, and in a way all literary people, all the people who exist in discourses of any kind are "love's folk", for they are constituted in texts which come into being because of the desires, projections, needs and fantasies of those who produce those texts. No speech is olympian and detached, even that of the gods or their servants. One such servant, the golden-feathered eagle, imagines himself as the objective speaker of Truth, and to this particular kind of fantasy we now turn.

**AD ASTRA SUBLIMIS FEROR,
VATES UT OLIM RAPTUS AD COELUM SENEX
AURIGA CURRUS IGNEI.**

(Milton, "*In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis*")

The second book, after a teasingly suspenseful 'proem', takes us from Virgil's world to Dante's (54). The Dantesque eagle which swoops from the heavens in answer to Geffry's prayer seems a worse predicament than abandonment. Geffry looks up at the golden image of impending salvation, scorching and lighting up the heavens as if in echo of the Transfiguration. Just as the apparition begins to descend, a structural division is inserted. There is more than sensationalism to this progression. The expectation is that the eagle - a symbol of enlightenment and far-seeing - will provide guidance through the hostile and barren landscape, as befits the mediating figure in dream visions.

The proem increases expectation by insisting on the uniqueness of this vision. Not Isaiah, Scipio, Pharoah, or Turnus has seen such marvels. To do justice to the experience, the narrator calls on the aid of Venus, Apollo, and the psychological resources of one of his five inward wits, Thought. As if in answer, the first descriptions of the eagle are awe-inspiring:

> "I gan beholde more and more,
> To se the beaute and the wonder." (*HoF*, 532-3)

A hint of bathos is contained in the mildly surprised aside:

> "But never was there dynt of thonder,
> Ne that thing that man calle fouder..." (*HoF*, 534-5)

If the eagle be the messenger of Jove, Geffry's ego would like to be flattered with a thunder-bolt out of the Olympian's endless stock. Nonetheless, being swept up in the eagle's "grymme pawes" to extraordinary heights is terrifying in itself, and sends Geffry into a swoon.

Apart from its station as most worthy of the noble (predatory) birds, the eagle is traditionally a bird which symbolises acuity. It is the only creature which may look on the sun without shading its eyes, a trait allegorised in the bestiary as a type of clear understanding. As the symbol of the evangelist, St John, the bird implies revelation of a supernatural kind which culminates in the unveiling of the last things. Centuries of worshippers have heard the Scriptures read from lecterns fashioned in the shape of eagles, as they were in fourteenth century churches. The least one might expect from a bird of such distinguished pedigree is dignity. At best, he might open the secrets of the universe (55).

Geffry is aroused (in the first of a succession of deflations) by a voice which he recognises as the same as "oon I coude nevene". Unkind critics have suggested that this "mannish" voice could be his wife's; whatever the truth of the suggestion, it is not the kind of encounter that inspires awe at recognition. (Compare, for example, the homage that Dante pays to Virgil at their initial encounter). The eagle's cry, although harsh, is still more friendly than the habitual tone of the familiar voice, an obviously cheap crack at somebody's expense, no doubt to the amusement of the audience. The eagle revives his burden, and then complains at its excessive weight, simultaneously reducing our sense of his mysterious power and poking fun at the portly Geffry. The ridiculous dangling figure begins to wonder whether this signal honour portends an approaching "stellification" - a trophy of enduring fame reserved for the more prominent mythological heroes - or whether, like Elijah or Enoch he has been deemed worthy of escaping the pangs of death and proceeding directly to Heaven. A self - satisfied expression begins to play about his features at the idea and is promptly squashed by the eagle in wryly disparaging tones:

> "Thou demest of thyself amys;
> For Joves ys not theraboute -
> I dar wel put the out of doute -
> To make of the as yet a sterre" (HoF, 596-599)

The puncturing irony of "as yet" deflates Geffry's pipe-dream, but also does the more subtle job of exhibiting to the readers his ingrained inclination to make everything "literary". Rather than taking in the details of a view unique in human experience, Geffry is indulging in a fantasy from the world of his books, casting himself as the hero. The invincible fiction-making propensities of the mind interpret reality according to conventional models of self-glorifying desire. Part of the eagle's task as Geffry's celestial ferry is to correct that condition.

The extraordinary event Geffry is about to experience is a marvellously apt dream fulfilment. The people of his bookish imagination are to come alive and respond to his devotion, and all his cherished fantasies are to take on an existence independent of both their textual prisons and the confines of his imagination. The forms which Love's folk assume will prove to be governed by a set of rules as arbitrary as those which govern their behaviour, and coded into a system which operates in a way as unpredictable as the workings of desire.

The reward comes in response to Geffry's long service to Love as a literary *topos*. He has lived like a hermit in worship of a deity, spending late nights in attempts at new tales of romance. Despite this abstinence he has received no recompense, and no tidings of love have reached him. Whether this refers to a case of writer's block is not clear. There appears to be no reason to believe that Geffry cannot find subject matter for his pen while he "in hir matere al devisest" (*HoF*, 637). Rather it seems that Geffry cannot understand the way stories of love *really* operate, for his knowledge is limited to his inadequate readings of books. It is easy to read this as a kind of plea for "realism" and an engagement with the physical and empirical world. Some have suggested this as the primary intention of the work - that Geffry is used as a vehicle through which Chaucer expresses a new sense of appreciation of the things of the every-day world stretching around him (56). That this is not so one may deduce from the highly artificial corollary to this section. If Geffry were suddenly imbued with a desire to produce realist documentary fiction, he would surely find himself in

the next episode of the poem in an ordinary and unremarkable scene of normal existence rather than in the bizarre pantheon of Fame which in fact follows.

The progression of the eagle's explanation follows the course it does almost in answer to this position. It first draws attention to the various kinds of love and the inexplicability of the phenomenon. It then expresses the *copia* of varieties of love - the flushes of first love, the long-held devotions, the surprising and improbable affections that arise with as much reason as when "a blind man stert an hare" (*HoF*, 681). These are followed with the other eruptions of emotion caused by love - the contention, jealousy, rumour, false representation and treachery - all of which, combined, would exceed meaningful mathematical expression, more than the grains of the sea-sand or the seeds of corn in barns or the tunes that may be plucked from stringed instruments. The last is an especially telling comparison, in that it shows the similarities between Love, Music, and Language as rhetorical systems. In each, sets of conventional tropes serve as the medium for transmitting individual sensation and sentiment.

Geffry finds it incredible that Fame should have the power to catalogue such a vast number of emotions. The answer is telling. All speech, the eagle says, rises of its natural properties to a particular place in the heavens, just at the edge of the sublunary sphere. Love can only be traced and charted when it is turned into a speech-act, at which point is is inescapably encoded into the rules of language and Fame. This view of language as another artefact in the physical world denaturalises it from its privileged position as the mediator of consciousness, and highlights its artificial origins. All speech is governed by two contradictory principles; it is motivated by unique acts of desire on the one hand while on the other it becomes part of an impersonal and material system of communication. This inhuman and mathematical behaviour of the spoken word returns to vex users of language as it emerges from a sojourn in the halls of Fame and haunts all subsequent discourse.

Like Language, the concept of Love is not a natural phenomenon. Human beings do not rut "like brute beasts that have no understanding" but behave according to an artificial construct - the erotic idea, in which emotions are the result of private fantasies imposed upon the object of desire. Beloved partners play a part in our private narratives of which they are not aware. The place of Love in the world of Nature, of which the eagle is a representative, is as tenuous as that of speech.

The figure of the goddess Natura has an importance in the vision poetry of the Middle Ages which is profound, and requires more extensive treatment than is possible here (57). In the influential work of Alain de Lille, the goddess assumes the elevated role of vice-regent of creation below the creator himself; like Wisdom she is the power of the divine being in action. Her special care is the power of generation which God has given to man, and the corruption of which she ceaselessly laments. The sexual organs are the tools of her trade, to be used in lawful and fruitful coupling, not idealised abstinence, promiscuity or homosexual perversion. The sophisticated, literary fantasies of Love which are Geffry's stock in trade are, at best, irrelevent to her grand design. The *Parliament of Fowls*, a love vision inspired by the "Pleynt of Kynde", deals with the dichotomy of Nature and Culture with regard to sexual relations. The noble birds of prey are paradigms of the courtly love convention and look in horrified disdain on the indiscriminate self-indulgence of the lesser fowl. But the humbler birds choose their mates simply and sensibly, in stark contrast to the competition between the terclets for the love of the formel. The queenly eagle refuses to be governed by Venus or Cupid, and the whole lot of courtly love birds remain unmatched for another year. Nature's laws are being intricately frustrated by the synthetic doctrines of love-service, to nobody's clear advantage. Geffry's eagle is not a romantic bird. Brusquely, he proves himself to be a creature of Nature, and not a servant of the allegorized goddess, but a civil servant in the material and physical creation of Jove.

The eagle had far rather propound the laws of matter and the hierarchy of created things than squander breath on Love. He delivers a

surprisingly Einsteinian account of sound waves taken from Vincent of Beauvais (*Speculum Naturae*, 4.14), showing how they spread in concentric rings from a focal point of impact, much like the rings in water disturbed by a stone (*HoF*, 782ff). Sound rises to the heavens because it is out of its "kynde place", and must return to it. In consequence, one would expect both the benevolent care of Nature for sound and that Fame might mirror some of the qualities of her orderly colleague. On both counts the expectation is disappointed. Nature is not concerned with the content or properties of speech, and merely relays the phenomenon to Fame.

In the terms of this cosmology no words can escape the verdict of Fame - as gravity is to matter so Fame is to language. It orders, controls, selects, and recombines words as Nature oversees the pattern of life and growth. However, the eagle does not differentiate between "speche" and "soun", an attitude which lowers intelligible discourse to the same level as any other noise, as Swift does in the *Tale of a Tub*:

"Words are but Wind; and learning is nothing but Words; Ergo, Learning is nothing but wind."

The eagle is absolutely devoid of any understanding of the value or power of words or emotion, a pragmatist who sets no store by poetry, but whose diatribe is no less flatulent as a result.

The lecture given by the eagle also indicates that the natural world is not directly accessible to language, for not only does its meaning elude natural laws and natural order but rhetoric obscures any attempt at a mimesis (even a "scientific" one) of the real. The eagle claims to have given an address that is

> "Withoute any subtilite
> Of speche, or grete prolixite
> Of termes of philosophie,
> Of figures of poetrie,
> Or colours or rethorike?" (*HoF*, 855-859)

But like the Franklin, the eagle is less than accurate in his protestations of plain speaking. Even this *peroratio* is distinguished in its use of anaphora and quattuorcolonic repetition. The speech also perhaps reminds the new Aristotelean scientific empiricists of the limits of their enterprise and of the value of the unfashionable disciplines of the literary curriculum. The eagle's pride at his performance is nicely undercut in Chaucer's ironical use of avian vocabulary. The bird is smug at his facility in an appropriate level of lexis, speaking "lewedly to a lewed man" with such success that the lewd listener might well shake his beak in agreement. That humans are not blessed with beaks is a concept that escapes the winged pedant who, like all self-important bombasts, is oblivious of any more interesting audience than himself and forgetful of the fact that his words also will appear before the merciless bar of Fame.

The ultimate irony played out against the eagle is that, despite his scientific assurance and *blasé* realism, he himself is a literary figment and is flying through an incredible and mythological cosmos where none of his carefully conned data applies. He is obviously unable to extricate his scientific from his literary knowledge, for his account of the Milky Way as the path of Phaeton's chariot is fictional in terms of the waking world's canons of the true, just as his explanation of sound is out of place in a cosmos where words become living people. After he directs Geffry's gaze downward to the rapidly vanishing globe, he recalls that neither Alexander, Scipio, nor Daedalus ever flew as high - a dubious string of allusions for a bird of science.

Geffry, who has until this point taken the monosyllabic course of least resistance finally puts up a show of stubborn independence on being ordered to inspect the zodiacal figures at close quarters. No doubt annoyed at having a reverie in which he was once again musing over his experience in the light of the flights of philosophy toward truth (*après* Boethius) and the mysterious intimations of St. Paul - interrupted; and just when he was deciding that, on balance, he was beginning to believe the reliability of the Anticlaudianus , Geffry refuses. He claims that he is too old to be further enlightened, and is not relieved to detect

the eagle launching himself into another didactic ramble about the positions and history of the constellations. "No fors!", he cries, twice, before halting his guide in mid flight. In merciful silence they proceed until the mighty rumbling of a tide of speech washing through the portals of Fame's palaces stirs Geffry to ask the source of the sound.

The eagle explains that the sounds reconstitute themselves on arrival into the images of their original speakers, and are consequently easily identifiable. The image owes something to the idea of the corporeal resurrection of the dead depicted in so many churches of the period. He leaves with the slightly insulting hope that Geffry will learn something of use in the place, and - to remind us finally that he is an animal, and not human - his parthian shot is a beast's idea of useful encouragement -

> "'Nay drede the not therof,' quod he,
> 'Hyt is nothing will byten the...'" (*HoF*, 1043-5)

THE STATE OF THE ART

The first thing to confront Geffry on arrival is a mountain of glass - or so it appears. The glass mountain is a folk-lore motif one might expect to find in Childe Roland or a fairy story - the sort of daunting barrier a hero would overcome in a death-defying feat of bravery. Like the crystal sea of the Apocalypse it signals an eternal city, a principle which is at unity in itself, clear and without contradictions. On closer inspection, however, the peak proves to be formed entirely of ice. The contrast is surprising, but revealing. If one reads the ascent of the mountain as a metaphor of the *ars longa, vita brevis* idea, with the force that an aspirant poet has a long and arduous track to climb, a long struggle to the top of a solid mass would be at least an achievement of similar solidity. If the peak be ice, it is a foundation as fickle as that of the man who "built his house upon sand" (cf HoF, 1132-3). On the slopes are engraved the names of those who were the glory of their times, now sadly perished and almost illegible, as though they had never been. They were not buffeted away by storms. The simple

process of heat has gently melted them, just as Fame lapses not by persecution but by the imperceptibly slow and unplanned loss of interest. Only the shade of the palace at the summit has saved some of the inscriptions from oblivion, indeed, kept them as fresh as the day they were carved. If even the shadow of the wings of Fame is potent enough to stave off ruin, what may be the power of her inner sanctum?

The palace of words is, as one would expect, beyond the power of words to describe (a part cannot contain its whole) and exceedingly elaborate. It is really of stone - of one perfect beryl, a stone credited with the property of making love increase in the lapidary, and encrusted with the flamboyant lavishness of late gothic art. Surrounding the castle on all sides are the wandering minstrels of the past - *rhetorices*, bards, troubadours, and harpers. It is their role to transmit Fame's stories, and a school of minstrelsy is in progress in which lesser talents sit at the feet of the great Orpheus, Orion, Chiron and the British Glascurion, imitating them "as craft countrefeteth kynde" (HoF, 1213). Each bears the instrument appropriate to his subject matter. Pastoral poets bear their oaten flutes, Dutch singers their pipes, war-poets a martial trumpet. There is also a more dubious mob in this galaxy of performers who are magicians, pythonesses, witches and sorcerers. Medea, Circe, Hermes Balenus, and Simon Magus are among those whose speciality it was to make low tricks of conjuring appear real. Only now does Geffry encounter the sovereign lady of the city set on the hill.

SHE SEEMED A THING THAT COULD NOT FEEL THE TOUCH OF EARTHLY YEARS

As he enters the castle gates, Geffry hears Fame being proclaimed in the style which befits a great lady.

> "'God save the lady of this pel,
> Our oune gentil lady Fame,'" (*HoF*, 1310-1)

Before her is a procession of nobles bedecked in the fineries of their station - crowns, ribbons, and fringes - attended by their heralds. These celebrities are more than decorative, they represent the flower of

chivalry from the whole known world and their outward glories are worn rightfully and truthfully, not as an easily copied piece of social pretension. Such, at least,is the truth that they would have us believe.

Fame holds court in a hall rich and strange, thick with gold and all the gems in the lapidary. She presides from a throne formed of a single ruby and is hideous beyond belief. Others of her features include her enormous height (she seems to stretch from earth to heaven), wild gorgon-like hair and thousands of ears, eyes, and tongues. She is surr ounded by the heavenly music of the Muses, who hymn her eternally:

> "'Hereyed be thou and thy name,
> Goddesse of Renoun or Fame!'" (*HoF*, 1044-5)

As literary trope, Fame is a combination of three strands of tradition - the Virgilian, Ovidian and Boethian. From each she takes a grotesque adornment, in each she is seen as the enemy of "true" speech who misleads men and destroys with her barbed fabrications.

In order of precedence, Virgil's portrayal is first. In the fourth book of the *Aeneid* (173ff), *Fama* (Rumour) brings the news of Dido's entanglement with Aeneas to the nations round about. Like a plague the *dea foeda* terrorizes cities by day, and flying at night, she swells and grows as she travels. She is the last-born daughter of Earth, an awe-inspiring creature with her head in the clouds and her feet on the ground, a kaleidoscope of whirling eyes, ears, mouths, and baying tongues. She bears news to Iarbas which sets in motion the tragedy of Aeneas' departure and Dido's suicide. Fame's *multiplex sermo* (*Aeneid*, IV 189) is an amalgamation of truth and falsehood which is the opposite of the language of the poet as *vates*, teller of the truth. Her random passing of news is the discourse of chaos - unselected, unverifiable, corrupting, and ultimately the channel through which tragedy and meaninglessness descend upon human lives.

Ovid accepts Virgil's model of Fame, but in the plastic world of metamorphosis such a phenomenon is not the anathema she might be in the heroic vision. She simply embodies the way things happen to be in the

world. In *Metamorphoses* 9, 137 ff, *Fama loquax* brings news to Deianira of Hercules in a ferment of true and false undifferentiated, spread beyond control or deliberate intention. In an expanded description at *Metamorphoses* 12,39 ff, Ovid gives a topographical view of Fame's abode (the immediate source of Chaucer's poem). The house is in the centre of earth, sea, and sky; open ,and made of echoing brass. All words come here and are echoed endlessly as mutating and murmuring *confusa verba*. This is essentially Chaucer's vision of Fame as an inescapable force operating in language. Fame is the inevitable result of the material nature of language, which is independent of its speakers and survives beyond its immediate usefulness in the forms of texts, tales, and traditions. The descriptio n also demonstrates the paradox of Art which by making a fiction which is untrue, evokes a better impression of the truth of the operations of Fame. Poetry, like Fame's tidings, is continually receding from its subject matter into more and more insubstantial layers of textual fictionality.

In the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Fame and her works are dismissed along with those *meretrices*, the Muses, by the Lady Philosophy. In Book 2 of the work, Philosophy prises the narrator away from earthly affections by showing the insignificnt and ephemeral nature of fame when seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. Nations, languages, authors, and the tedious realities of history, militate against the private fantasies of enduring fame. Like the other bitch-goddess, Fortune, Fame (even as *gloria*) is a worthless trap of desire and projection. This stern renunciation of Fame gives Chaucer a sense of the flaws even in good reputations, for all good names are only the labels of the fickle mob, "hosanna!" today and "crucify!" tomorrow. It grounds his perceptions not only in the verbal web woven by philosophy, but in a tradition which looks beyond mere words for its ultimate verification.

The *House of Fame* also echoes Revelation, because Fame's house is a type of the city of the Last Judgement. The after-life of words culminates not in equitable justice, separating the sheep and the goats, the true from the false, but in interminable confusion where unresolved representations endlessly repeat themselves before an arbitrary judge.

Fame is finally the obverse of the "judge of all the earth", in whom all certainty resides.

There are several things to be noted here. The personification allegory of a female form is a familiar convention, displacing the rational and merciful male deity with feminine inconsistency and injustice. Her gorgon-like behaviour typifies the aggressive female, and the fact that the Muses - traditionally the companions of Apollo - appear to be in her service is another example of the way in which Fame has occupied traditionally male territory. In a consummate irony, her female shoulders are what bear up the reputation of the heroes Alexander and Hercules, not the raw empirical fact of their exploits, nor the masculine builders of their poetic reputations.

The feminine concept attracts male desire, for better or for worse. The empowering love of the virgin heroine is matched by the paralysing castration of the gorgon witch. Equally, when the feminine is used ideologically as an embodiment of the "other", she may be either the symbol of an ideal perfection which inspires devotion and wonder (Wisdom or the Blessed Virgin) or she may be a perverse and wicked expression of the vagaries of malign fate or reprehensible emotion (Fortune, the Fates or the Harpies). In either case, the siren song of these enchantresses is irresistable to men and fascinating in texts.

The figure of Fame around whom the poem is structured is a typical feminine personification of this tradition. She embodies a set of anti-Apollonian, subversive and seductive values. Like Catullus' women we have noted, her words are written in water, not carved in stone as the epic text would be. Feminine and malign, she is just the sort of monster one might meet in a nightmare, an object of an inescapably perverse desire. To meet her in a celestial judgement hall where language is assessed is a nightmare which engulfs a whole culture.

THE HALL OF FAME

> "Hi narrata ferunt alio, mensuraque ficti
> crescit, et auditis aliquid novus adicit auctor."
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII 55-6.

Further into the hall are the rows of pillars , on each of which is set a great writer whose works have helped establish the fame of a particular event, nation or person. Josephus for Israel, Statius for Thebes, Homer for Troy, Geoffry of Monmouth for England, and Virgil for Rome, are part of the numberless multitude. Each pedestal is constructed of a metal appropriate in its symbolic connotations to the poet's subject matter - so epic poets sit on pillars of lead and iron, the metals of Mars and Saturn respectively, and Ovid - a love-elegist - sits on copper, the metal of Venus. The clamour of these erstwhile poets fills the air with a "ful confus matere" like the sound of a rookery.

The curious inversion of the hall is that it is not a showcase for the heroes, but for their publicists. The writers and bards who have sung the praises of their subjects have created and displaced them (58). The real and the primal events are lost behind the welter of artistic plasticity. It is not history which provides Fame's luminaries, but the successful fictions of artists. The artists in turn are the vessels of their Muses - that inexplicable, feminized creative force which sings in them.

The authors may be guilty of propagating slanted history and partial memories. The great Homer is accused of favouring the Greeks:

> "Oon seyde that Omer made lyes,
> Feynynge in his poetries" (*HoF*, 1478-9)

A reminder that even the most hallowed histories mingle "fantasie" with fact. Britons had good reason to decry Homer's version, as their founding epic claimed the Trojan Brutus as Father of the race. If the

mists of the past cannot be dispelled, and the constructions of over-ingenious chroniclers are art, not fact, then History becomes one of the victims of Fame, and the past a closed book. As Frederic Jameson expresses it;

> "History is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise but that as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form." (59)

The sons which Time, "like an ever-rolling stream", bears away are reborn as the bastards of the prostitute-goddess, who also, in turn, devours her children.

"CLERE LAUDE/SKLAUNDRE"
YER PAYS YER MONEY...

Before the throne of Fame, a band of petitioners beg for her good offices. In response, she calls up her servant Eolus, "the god of wynde" (*HoF*, 1571) with his two trumpets. One is called "Clere Laude", the other, "Sklaundre". With these, the master of the winds may bruit abroad the reputation which Fame chooses to grant. The baroque operatics of this process are given several splendid descriptions; the black trumpet emits smoke of "Blak, bloo, grenyssh, swartish red" (*HoF*, 1647) and the golden one smells like "a pot of bawme...Among a basket ful of roses" (*HoF*, 1686-7).

But the real interest of the passage is the methodical way in which Fame, although appearing to be utterly arbitrary, in fact covers all the possible options of recognition. One may only be obscure, renowned, or infamous in the collective memory, and groups approach Fame with each of these intentions. In each case, the group is awarded one of the three possible alternatives, but without regard for their hopes or express requests. Again, the gap between the delicate reveries of the petitioners and the harsh realities of their fates demonstrates that language is beyond control, and governed by "natural" laws of immense and inhuman intricacy.

The whole rigmarole shows Fame as mistress of a random mathematical formula, designed to cater as little to human multiplicity and individuality as is possible to imagine. Eugene Vance makes a suggestive analogy between money in an exchange system which, like that of the fourteenth century, is subject to rampant inflation (60). Human sensibilities are relentlessly bulldozed by the conceptual monsters of compound interest and exchange rate discrepancies in the same manner adopted by Fame. History is not only a human construct. Even if "men make their own histories", they "do not make them in circumstances of their own choosing". History under the control of Fame becomes a memory out of control, a data-bank generating random information under the guise of truth.

Geffry, chastened by this spectacle, is asked by an anonymous man standing behind him if he also desires Fame. He replies that he will take refuge in his art and take the consequences as they come. His real search is for "tydynges", something new and original not yet appropriated by the great masters in the pantheon of Fame. In answer he is sent to the house in the valley, the strangest he has ever seen, which spins in one place "as swyfte as thought" (*HoF*, 1924)

DOMUS DEDALY

The house is the work of the legendary master craftsman, Daedalus. His name is synonymous with "craft", and literature with the Labyrinth (*labor intus*) he constructed on the isle of Crete. The implications of such an identification cover the whole range of human constructs, for Daedalus is master of all ingenuity, fertile in devices from architecture to weaponry to flight. Knowledge, and even life itself, are likened to the maze. Umberto Eco employs the image for his library in *The Name of the Rose* where it is a snare of signs twisted around one another in perpetual toils. The patterns on cathedral floors, "Jerusalems", have been interpreted as maze-images of the pilgrimage of life, at the end and centre of which is the celestial city. Joyce uses Daedalus' name for Stephen, his artist persona in *Portrait of the Artist*. The writer is a maker and manipulator of the networks of

language, but what Geffry's new intelligence implies is that the writer too is the victim and and tool of his medium. As Icarus' flight ended in disaster, so too may the passage on the "feathers of philosophy".

The house is made of a hugger-mugger heap of twigs of several colours and has entrances on all sides. Nothing may shut it off from the elements - or rather element, for all is sound here. Every corner of the dwelling is stuffed with "tydynges", "whisprynges", "rounynges", and "jangles" about every happening under the sun and moon. An *acurvatio* of sixteen lines follows, all breathlessly begun with an *anaphora* of "of's", a list of all-enclosing dimensions. Peeping through one of the endless windows, Geffry sees a mob beyond description enormous, crammed into its narrow space.

The people of the house exchange hurried and interrupted gossip in muddled half-sentences:

> "'Thus hath he sayd,' and 'Thus he doth,'
> 'Thus shal hit be,' 'Thus herhe y seye,'
> 'That shal be founde,'' That dar I leye'" (*HoF*, 2052-4).

and as the news is told, it mutates in the telling and grows like fire consuming a city. Like repulsive and comical beasts, Geffry sees "a lesyng and a sad soth sawe" both stuck in the same window and fighting over who should escape first. Like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, their petulant battle ends with sworn brotherhood, and truth and falsehood become indistinguishable twins (*HoF*, 2089-2109).

The nightmare grows worse. It assumes the likeness of a harbour, busy exporting the corrupt mixture back to the world that spawned it on Eolus' winds and the words of sailors, pilgrims, pardoners, and messengers. A sudden frenzy sends the swarm rushing towards some epiphany in a corner of the hall in an undignified scramble. Between the bodies, Geffry catches a glimpse of what seems to be an authoritative notable, a man...but of what type or station we shall never know, for at this point the manuscript consigns its most singular character to oblivion by ending.

**ITS A VERY STRANGE THING, AS STRANGE AS CAN BE
THAT WHATEVER MISS T. EATS TURNS INTO MISS T.**

Walter de la Mare, "*Miss T*".

"C'est dans la langue que l'homme se constitue comme sujet. Est 'ego' qui dit 'ego'."

E. Benveniste.

At the end of his poem, Chaucer has demonstrated that there is no final authority in the world of language capable of stilling the cosmos of communication. He shows that language is, like the library of books in Russell's paradox, a self-referential system which cannot define itself as true or false while using itself as medium and evidence. All perception becomes language in the verbum mentis, all thought is formed already in its moulds, all ideas leave the speaking subject in its capacious code. Only God is "his own interpreter", for he is the Archimedian point from which objective truth proceeds, while words remain ensnared in their self-generated morass.

Every word, however inspired, from whatever prophetic or artistic source, enters the common streams of speech and is subject to its laws. Even poems, however elevated, are made of words rather than ideas, and words are linguistic artifacts, tools only, not to be conjured into sources of intrinsic authority. In one way, words die once they leave the minds and mouths which use them as an inadequate semaphore of their mental processes. In a more sinister fashion, they are renewed as independent and parasitic beings when they are so released, and prey upon their creators.

As a manipulation of signs, the *House of Fame* is obliged to end in silence when threatened by a final, accurate, and unequivocal authority, for signs may not be tamed by one of their own number. There are authorities in Chaucer's world, but they are not in the first instance linguistic. Dwelling in the silent darkness of the soul are unspeakable mysteries, and in the sharp brilliance of revelation are things that "ear hath not heard, eye hath not seen". But at the approach of things

so high and wonderful there is no response but silence. If we demand clarity and unity from the babble of the *House of Fame*, we are condemn it to silence for we expect words to do what they, by their very nature, cannot do - mean what they say without the means to say the unsayable. And this is a thing that

> "...al the folk that ys alyve
> Ne han the kunnynge to discryve" (*HoF*, 2055-6).

ABBREVIATIONS

ABR......*American Benedictine Review*
CL.......*Comparative Literature*
CR.......*The Chaucer Review*
DQR......*Dutch Quarterly Review*
ES.......*English Studies*
E&S......*Essays and Studies*
GR.......*Georgia Review*
JEGP.....*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
MRS......*Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*
MAe......*Medium Aevum*
MLN......*Modern Language Notes*
MLS......*Modern Language Studies*
MS.......*Mediaeval Studies*
NM.......*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
PLL......*Papers in Language and Literature*
PMLA.....*Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America*
PhR......*Philosophical Review*
REL......*Review of English Literature*
RUO......*Revue de l'Universite d'Ottowa*
SAC......*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*
SN.......*Studia Neophilologica*
SP.......*Studia Philologica*
TSSL.....*Texas Studies in Language and Literature*
UCPE.....*University of California Publications in English*
UOttR....*University of Ottawa Review*

FOOTNOTES

1) Kittredge, (1915) pp.81-4

2) Immelman, R., 1912. 'Chaucer's *Haus der Fama'*, *Englische Studien* 45, pp.397-431.

3) Riedel, F.R., 1928. 'The Meaning of Chaucer's *House of Fame'*, *JEGP* 27, pp.441-69.

4) Notably, B. Ten Brink, 1870. *Chaucer Studien*, Munster, and A. Rambeau, 1880. in *Englische Studien* 3, p.209ff. See Sypherd, (1907).

5) Sypherd, ibid.

6) Ruggiers, (1953).

7) Brown, (1917).

8) Baker, (1966).

9) Ruggiers, (1953).

10) Goffin, (1943).

11) Koonce, (1966).

12) Winny, (1973).

13) Baum, P.F., 1941, 'Chaucer's *The House of Fame'*, *ELH* VII, pp.255-6.

14) Koonce, (1966), passim.

15) Boitani, (1984).

16) Delan y, (1972).

18) Bennett, (1968), p.xi

19) Spearing, (1976).

20) Quoted in Josipovici, (1971), p.

21) Koonce, (1966), Ch.8.

22) Delaney, (1972), pp.58-68.

23) Peden, (1988).

24) Fyler, (1979), p.27.

25) Lane Fox, (1986) pp.155-58. The classification of the *Oneirocritica* clearly shares a common source with Macrobius, and bears strong similarities with the schema given in the Proem of the *House of Fame*. Cf. C. Blum, 1936, Studies in the Dream Book of Artemidorus.

26) Plato's own opinions vary from denunciation in the *Republic* to a story Socrates tells in the *Phaedo* of a dream in which he was instructed to write music, an intimation he obeyed by composing a hymn and versification of Aesop. Neoplatonists were generally favourable to the idea of dreams, perhaps because they encountered in them the lesser *daemones* or recalled their pre-incarnate existences. Cf. Iamblicus (c.300).

27) Aristotle dismissed the notion of dream revelation as contrary to reason. See *On Dreams*, and *On Prophecy in Sleep*. His position is remarkable in a period when dreams were universally considered to be oracular. He sees dreams as the result of a natural cause, heat, acting on the sleeping mind. The result is a set of magnified and distorted perceptions, like "pictures in water". As the lower animals also appear to dream, he dismisses the divine origin of the phenomenon.

The following application of Ockham's razor is a masterpiece of understated rationalism: "...the fact that one can see no reasonable cause why it should be so (i.e., dreams prophetic) makes one distrust it, the idea that it is God who sends it, apart from its improbability on other grounds, is strange, especially as it does not come to the best and wisest, but to any chance persons. But, if we dismiss the theory that it comes from God, there seems no other possible explanation left" *On Prophecy in Sleep*, I. In the second book of the same work, he avers: "But the most skilful judge of dreams is the man who posses the ability to detect likenesses...", an almost psychoanalytic/artistic position, emphasizing the similarity of dreams to art.

28) See *De Divinatione*, II lxxii 148, "Let us reject, therefore, this divination of dreams...For to speak truly, that superstition has extended itself through all the nations, and has betrayed them into countless imbecilities."

29) Lane Fox, (1986), pp.102-167.

30) *Acts*, 14:8-18.

31) See e.g. the *Shepherd of Hermas*, in which the church is allegorized as a female figure that gives advice to the dreamer, who also offers angelic opinions on fasting and theology. Also *Fourth Ezra*, in which the angel Uriel appears as dream guide. The "tour" of Heaven and Hell took on great importance beginning in e.g. parts of *First Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, (second century), and the *Acts of Thomas*, (third century). Most influential in the West was the *Vision of S.Paul*, translated in the fifth century, and purporting to be an account of the apostle's experience of the third Heaven. The *Gospel of Nicodemus*, source of the Harrowing of Hell, had a wide public, as did also Drycthelm's vision in Bede's *History*, V 12. The popularity of these pseudo-authoritative writings was a sufficient warning to limit their

numbers and influence wherever possible. Note also their similarity to such pagan literary dreams of other authoritative worlds as that of *Aeneid* VI, *Odyssey* XI, or the myth of Er, *Republic* X.

32) Scriptural tradition is divided. Four divergent strains may be seen in the Old Testament -
i) The dream riddle, susceptible to interpretation by a "seer". Cf. Joseph's fat and thin cows (*Genesis*, 41:14-36). The signs were generally obscure as in the "writing on the wall" read by Daniel as an omen of the collapse of the Persian state (*Daniel*, 5:17-29).
ii) Dreams of prophets, in which the visionary received divine instruction e.g. *Ezekiel*, passim. Note Elihu's words to Job "...in a vision by night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, and they are sleeping in their beds:
Then he openeth the ears of men, and teaching instructeth them in what they learn." (Job, 33:15-6)
iii) Direct visions could be granted in extraordinary cases e.g, "...with my servant Moses who is most faithful in all my house...I will speak to him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not by riddles doth he see the Lord" (*Numbers*, 12:6-8)
iv) As a reaction, perhaps, against Chaldean soothsaying, dreams sometimes received outright condemnation e.g. "neither harken to your dreams which ye caused to be dreamed. I have not sent them, saith Jehovah." (*Jeremiah*, 29:8-9)
The New Testament is simpler. The five dreams of the gospels are not esoteric e.g. the oriental type of dreams in Matthew, in which Joseph is warned (*Matthew*, 1:18-25/2:14-22). Peter's "unclean beasts" dream makes a simple moral point, and has the authority of the apostolic leader (*Acts*, 10:10ff). Most varied are the waking visions of e.g. Stephen's martyrdom or Paul' Damascus road experience. Paul's allusion to secret wisdom (*II Corinthians*, 12:1-4) and the Apocalypse share the mystery of coming from unknown sources of God's communication.

33) Compare the montanist, Tertullian, who saw dreams as marks of grace, Origen, who found them unremarkable and normal, and Augustine, generally hostile - see *De Genesi ad Litteram*, XII ii; xiii; xxx. or *De Trinitate*, XI iv 7.

34) Gregory sees dreams as works of wickedness in almost all cases, see *Dialogi*, IV 48.

35) e.g. the dreams of S.Martin around which there was a considerable cultus, recorded by Gregory of Tours: *De Virtutibus sancti Martini*, c.LVI.

36) Le Goff, (1980), p.201ff.

37) As a type of the beatific vision the *visio intellectualis* avoided the twin pitfalls of the *v. spiritualis*, which mixed sensual with spiritual perceptions and the *v. corporalis* which is ordinary seeing.

38) S.Thomas is undecided. Some dreams have to be acknowledged, others may be the work of demons. See *Summa Theologica*, Pt.2, Q.5, Art.6.

39) Colish, (1968), passim.

40) Delan y, (1972), Ch.2, Boitani, (1984), pp.212-215.

41) Curry, (1960), Lynch, (1988), pp.26-34.

42) Lynch, ibid, 21-45.

43) Sypherd, (1907), 74-76.

44) Ibid, passim.

45) Josipovici, (1971), passim.

46) Lewis, (1936), Ch.2.

47) Chretien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, *Cliges*, *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, and especially the *Conte de Graal*.

48) See Malory's "Tale of the Sankgreal", for Perceval, XIV, 368-9. Note the use made of it also in T.H. White, *The Once And Future King*, 1962, Fontana, pp. 440-5.

49) Lewis, (1936), p.61.

50) Fleming, (1969), p.54-5.

51) Especially in the *Cratylus* and the *Republic*, X.

52) e.g. Garbarty, (1974)

53) See Tisdale, (1973), Brewer Hall, (1963), among others.

54) Dante's eagle is from the *Purgatorio*, IX 28-30, cf. *Metamorphoses*, X, for the story of Ganymede, and *De Cons. Phil.*, IV Pr.I. See Teaguer, (1932) and Dane, (1971).

55) Leyerle, (1971).

56) Rowland , (1968).

57) See e.g. Economou, (1973) or Collingwood, (1960).

58) Cf. Pope's "The Temple of Fame",
"But in the centre of the Hallowed choir,
Six pompous columns o'er the Rest aspire;
Around the Shrine itself of Fame they stand;
Hold the chief Honours and the fame command." (178-181)
Here the six ancient poets are pre-eminently famous over all other achievers, a bolder assertion than Chaucer's, and perhaps less perceptive of the *melange* of advertiser and commodity. See also Cawley, (1962).

59) Jameson, (1981), p.35.

60) Vance, (1979).

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