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Eastern Illinois University

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GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S *HOUSE OF FAME*: FROM AUTHORITY TO EXPERIENCE

BY

Victoria Frantseva

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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1996

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Abstract

Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* is one of the most provocative dream-vision poems written in the fourteenth century. In many ways, it continues to present a serious problem of interpretation to students of medieval poetry. Many critics have tried to arrive at a singular cohesive theory explaining meaning and defining the genre of the *House of Fame*. However, these attempts have failed and the poem's enigma endures, probably for all time.

The *House of Fame* seems to elicit many different responses from its readers. While opinions of the poem may vary, the points of argument generally concern the following areas: the poem's genre and Chaucer's literary devotion to the old traditions of French and Italian poets; the *House of Fame*'s thematic unity (or lack thereof); the presence or absence of a central theme(s).

Although this study of the *House of Fame* claims no final solution to the problems raised by the poem, it does attempt to present an interpretation of the poem which will demonstrate artistic cohesiveness and argue the presence of one central theme. It argues that the *House of Fame* is a journey into the depths of the human mind, thought, and poetry, and an odyssey into experience. It demonstrates Geffrey's questioning the importance of tradition and literary authority in Book I. In Books II and III, it depicts the poet's quest for a new source for his poetry and a movement in Chaucer's art away from the echoes of authority and towards, in Chaucer's words, "Somme new thinges" (III.1887), a new poetic direction, a new understanding of his art form and of his standing as a poet.

This study argues that Geffrey's journey is one of discovery, which becomes evident as the story unfolds. In order to find a new poetic voice, Geffrey has to go through the Temple of Venus with its false Goddess, the barrenness of the desert, rise above the

sublunary sphere in his transcendental journey inward, "with fethers of Philosophy," and visit the Houses of Fame and Rumor. During this journey, Geffrey has to awaken to the power of his own thought and imagination, delve into the depths of his own mind in search for new material for his poetry, new experiences of life, new "tydynges." Geffrey has to learn many lessons. The most important is that a sole reliance on literary sources for poetic inspiration and truth is ultimately self-defeating. No single authority presents the absolute truth of the matter. On the contrary, as Chaucer will say in the *Canterbury Tales*, "Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie" (*The Parson's Tale* 81-83): there are many ways to God and many, for Chaucer, to literary truth. Throughout this journey, Geffrey overcomes his delusion that poetry's only source is love experience. Poetry can come from the material drawn from experiences with the real world around him. Poems can be born out of rumors and sound and not necessarily proceed from the service to love.

Finally, Geffrey learns that an audience will not remember his name if he employs only somebody else's words and ideas and adheres rigidly to the authority of his predecessors. Immortality of one's name is reached not through counterfeiting the works of others, but through reflecting life experience of one's own countrymen. Throughout his *alter ego* Geffrey, Chaucer conveys his realization that in this world, where mutability touches everything, including Fame, true success and immortality spring from life experience, and from this source alone comes pure and lasting art, the only thing that can endure the test of time.

"Experience, though noon auctoritee" (*Wife of Bath's Tale* 1) validates the purpose of creative writing and blurs the lines of distinction between the artist and his work. The artist becomes inseparable from his art, and, thus, the immortality itself is reached through art. Therefore, Geffrey's answer to the question "Artow come hider to han fame?" (1872) at the end of the *House of Fame* by saying "I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,/For no such

cause, by my hed!" (1874-75), becomes clear. Chaucer recognizes that if his works are not about the world but of the world, then they will live forever, and his own poetic name with them.

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Chapter I
The Critical Debate

In many ways, one of the most provocative dream-vision poems written in the fourteenth century, Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* continues to present a serious problem of interpretation to students of medieval poetry. Many critics have tried to arrive at a singular cohesive theory explaining the meaning and defining the genre of the *House of Fame*. However, these attempts have fallen short because of the poem's incomplete nature, its seemingly blurred focus, and its "breadth of human interest and range of intellectual curiosity" (Bevington 55). Thus, the poem's enigma endures, probably for all time.

The *House of Fame* seems to elicit many different responses from its readers. Critical descriptions range from an "encyclopedia of myths both ancient and medieval and an exploration of various literary genres" (Boitani *CCC 55*) to a poem in which "an apparent disjunctiveness of subject matter and mood is enhanced by an air of deliberate obscurity" (Koonce 3). The diversity and polarity of the responses continue with the characterization of the work as "the most tantalizing of Chaucer's dream-visions" (Ruggiers 261), contrasted with the poem's critical description as "Chaucer's profoundly discomforting poem" (Hanning 141). While opinions of the poem may vary, the points of argument generally concern the following areas: the poem's genre and Chaucer's literary devotion to the old traditions of French and Italian poets; the *House of Fame*'s thematic unity (or lack thereof); and the presence or absence of a central theme(s). These recurring points of argument will be discussed within the context of the revelations of each book of the *House of Fame*.

Argument about the poem's genre provides an ardent point of disagreement. Critics differ over whether the *House of Fame* is a love-vision in the tradition of French poetry, along with Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess,* or whether it belongs to the genre of dream-vision so popular in the fourteenth century.

Brian Stone, for instance, notes that the *House of Fame* is ostensibly a love-vision (156) as exemplified by the dreamer's finding

> himself in an emblematic setting, which the audience would either understand as being conventional in courtly love and romance, or accept because it was taken from a recognizable literary authority. In either case, it establishes a thematic harmony with the main material of the poem which is to follow. And the setting of that main material is also emblematic, not realistic. The dreamer's journey from the first setting to the main one involves strange experiences which further distance the reader from reality. (153)

Similarly, George Kittredge finds that the *House of Fame* fits the romance model when he describes this work as belonging, like the *Book of the Duchess*, "in some sort to the genre of the Old French vision of love" (76).

Accompanying the argument about the genre of the poem, there is an on-going discussion about Chaucer's following the old canons of French-Italian literature. The *House of Fame* contains multiple references to Virgil (378, 1483), Ovid (379, 1487), Dante (449-50), Boethius (972-8), St. Paul (980-2), St. John (1385) etc.[1] Some episodes of the poem resemble those described in the classical love-vision romances. This fuels the dispute about to what extent Chaucer is indebted to the "old books" (Boitani *CCC* 39) and whether or not Chaucer is attempting to represent the literary traditions of the day or distance himself from them.

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[1] See the more complete list of Chaucer's references in The Cambridge Chaucer's Companion, p. 43.

J.S.P. Tatlock concurs with Boitani's point about Chaucer's debt to the classic love-vision romances. Tatlock states that "hardly any of Chaucer's poems show so many reminiscences from earlier works, or at least resemblances to them, in Italian, French and Latin" (57). The *House of Fame* "follows the usages and manner of the well-defined, fashionable, and quite contemporary French type of poem, the love vision, from the thirteenth century *Roman de la Rose* to Froissart's *Paradys d'Amour*" (56). The comparison of the House of Fame with the poems written by French, Italian, and Latin poets shows that Chaucer adopts the form of the eight-syllable couplet generally used by the French/Italian poets. Like other love-visions, Tatlock notes, the *House of Fame* presents the elaborate descriptions of the temples of Venus and Fame and personifications of ancient mythology. Like other love-visions, it "is in the form of a dream which gives lifelike freedom for rambling and inconsequence" (56).

Lisa Kiser sees the poem as written in the "visionary/apocalyptic genre" with very clear influence from Dante, but, she agrees that Chaucer does not truly conform to the genre; in fact, he mocks the style. She writes, "Chaucer's response to the writers of the visionary tradition (Dante included) is not without irony--even high comedy--for the *House of Fame* often parodies the typical themes and conventions these writers employed in their visions" (100). The poem is a "kind of antivision, a parody of solemn medieval attempts to describe the otherworld to earthbound readers" (100). In essence, Kiser's treatment of the poem as an ironic comedy and antivision contrasts with that of Tatlock's, setting forth a good example of the variety of critical responses to the poem.

The diversity of critical responses show that even those critics who consider the *House of Fame* a love-vision following the French-Italian tradition do not have a single opinion on whether Chaucer adopts the style, structure, and imagery of the French canon or parodies it. Brian Stone's argument, for example, falls into the love-vision camp. He describes the *House of Fame* as a love-vision, or as one of focus on the romance poet-

dreamer rather than as a representation of the love-vision genre; one that "bring[s] to the poet-dreamer experiences and insights which, when he wakes, he regards as significant for himself and the world of his audience" (153). Stone observes that "in spirit it [the *House of Fame*] breaks the medieval French mould and shows that its main concern is with the role of the poet rather than with love" (156). Although Stone takes his argument further, outlining the problem of the main theme of the poem, his opinion of the genre of the poem parallels Kiser's. Despite the fact that the *House of Fame* is a love-vision, it seems to vary from the French-Italian traditional love-visions in its main theme and the manner of its presentation. This dissimilarity provides an acute point of debate and disagreement among critics and fuels the controversy over the poem's "position" and genre among other literary works.

There is no clear agreement among the opposing group of critics who claim that the *House of Fame* is a dream-vision. Their arguments are probably as numerous and diverse as the topics and subjects raised by the *House of Fame* itself. Although most of the scholars in this group agree, in general, that the *House of Fame* is a clear dream-vision, their opinions are not unanimous regarding the type of poem. Some argue that it is an ironic/comic dream-vision. Others contend that it is an inner-directed meditative type journey into experience/poetry. Still others describe the poem as an allegorical journey with elements of symbolism.

Among the scholars proffering the concept of the *House of Fame* as an ironic/comic dream-vision are Sheila Delany and Larry Benson. Delany argues that the *House of Fame* is an ironic dream-vision that "opens with an ironically disrespectful resume of medieval dream-lore" (3). Similarly, Benson suggests the *House of Fame*'s ironic/comic genre when he describes the poem as one of "comic reversals, in which almost anything is possible" (7). He argues that "much of its fun is in its contradictions,

its sudden shifts of focus, and its creation of significant tensions, and part of its peculiar pleasure lies in the fact that it ends . . . with these tensions intact and unresolved" (9).

Rather than focusing on the ironic effects of the poem, another group of critics considers the *House of Fame* a journey with varying destinations. David Bevington, for instance, sees the *House of Fame* as an "unwilling journey into experience" (56). He points out that this journey serves the purpose of educating the "drudging love-poet" (56), with the help of knowledge "from literature, science, philosophy, and the ways of men themselves" (56). This point of view provides a different perspective as well as outlines the range of topics raised by Chaucer: literature or poetry, science, philosophy, and the nature of mankind.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Buckmaster argues that the *House of Fame* is a journey inward, into the thoughts and psyche of Chaucer. She muses that the *House of Fame* is "a journey into his [Chaucer's] mind to *see* all that he knows and remembers of potential sources and ideas for poems, both from books and from life. It is an internalized search for new poetic materials--tidings--as well as a meditation on literary reputation" (279). At the same time, according to the medieval definition of meditation--"a programmatic attempt by the practitioner to turn his attention inward" (279)--the *House of Fame* is a clear meditation as well as Chaucer's inspection of himself as a poet. Along these lines, Robert Edwards argues that in the *House of Fame*, Chaucer addresses the essence of poetry and makes his observations and conclusions part of the very work itself. He suggests that Chaucer "reflect[s] on the nature of poetry and write[s] his reflection into the poems as part of their narrative action" (8). Similarly, Joerg Fichte calls the *House of Fame* "the transcendental journey" (67) akin to the flight of the mind searching for a higher or central purpose with all the attendant potential for the poet.

Wolfgang Clemen's interpretation of the *House of Fame* provides a still different perspective. Clemen argues that even though the *House of Fame* might be said to belong

to the literary pattern of the allegorical journey, which was frequent enough in the medieval poetry, this journey is a diversion and its destination a comic or ironic end. He states,

> a glance at these works and above all at the tradition of journeys . . . suffices for us to recognize their fundamental difference from Chaucer's *House of Fame.* What had hitherto always been a serious and noble subject, a theme used for moral edification, serves quite a different purpose with Chaucer; it is as if he reversed the symbols in its scale of values. What had been a sublime translation into unknown spheres becomes a diverting trip, and in the place of solemnity we have comedy or irony. (71-72)

Clemen further argues that the *House of Fame* does not really fit into any of the existing genres or formal traditions, although, he speculates, it benefits from and is a hybrid of them all. Clemen's response challenges other critical views as his ideas do not fall into either the love-vision supporters camp or that of the dream-vision ones. What Clemen suggests is really quite unique. He proposes that the *House of Fame* eludes all categorization as a pure romance/traditional type. He succinctly states that "any attempt to pin down the *House of Fame* to a distinct type, to see it as 'true to type', is . . . fruitless; [although] on the other hand, it is just as mistaken to ignore its connection with literary traditions and recognized basic patterns" (72). It would appear as though every possible interpretation of the genre of this somewhat vague work has been proffered and no leaf has been unturned. However, the dispute continues.

In summary, the two major alternative points of view on the genre of the *House of Fame* are that the poem is a love-vision or that it is a dream-vision. The central argument among the critics treating the *House of Fame* as a love-vision focuses upon the poem's following or breaking away from the French-Italian medieval poetic canon. The dream-vision theory supporters argue whether the *House of Fame* is a humorous and ironic poem, a vignette into life experience, a model of literary tradition, or an allegorical journey,

historically and fundamentally unique. While the argument is ardent and the opinions diverse, the problem of the poem's genre remains a matter of ongoing debate.

As with the issue of genre, debate continues over the poem's central meaning. The range of issues is exceptionally wide, but two major questions of the poem's unity and its central theme(s) provide the primary and the most fervent foci of debate.

Some critics maintain that there is no unity in the *House of Fame* whatsoever. Clemen argues that any organic unity in a literary work demands that the separate parts are harmonious or, as he puts it, that its "individual parts stand in a mutual relationship" (72). The *House of Fame*, in his opinion, with its "somewhat loose construction, its aim to amuse and entertain, its delight in experiment and telling a tale" (73), has incohesive narration, is incomplete, and thus, cannot qualify for any kind of unity. Therefore, Clemen continues, we are warned against "persisting too stubbornly in any demand for unity and search for a central theme" (73).

Robert Payne's point of view, similar to Clemen's, argues for the separate existence of each book of the poem. In speaking about the first book, he writes: "Book I (excluding the Proem and Invocation) has a completely separate existence; it does not suggest anything which follows, and critics have been able to correlate its "sentence" with the rest of the poem only by abstracting to so great a degree as to vitiate comparison" (133). He responds very similarly to the rest of the books of the poem, arguing for general disunity of the *House of Fame* and lack of a unifying theme.

In contrast to Clemen and Payne, who deny the *House of Fame* any artistic cohesiveness, underscoring the poem's incoherence, digression, and incompleteness, another group of scholars argues that Chaucer had a fairly all-encompassing plan which he implemented with great forethought. The *House of Fame*, according to Bevington, "has far more direction and control than at first appears, and seems in fact complete except for the need of a brief ending" (57). In support of Bevington's point of view, B.G. Koonce,

Steven Kruger, Larry Sklute, and Paul Ruggiers argue that the poem "is unified both thematically and structurally" (Koonce 12), and that a close reading of the work should convince even the most reluctant reader of its unity of purpose and form. As Sklute notes, "poems like Gottfried's *Tristan* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* remind us that incomplete works are not necessary inconclusive, the incompleteness of the *House of Fame* may not be responsible for the inconclusiveness of its form. Rather inconclusiveness may account for its incompleteness" (35). Sklute, like others, seems to tirelessly pursue this intellectual tennis in an effort to bring order to that which others believe is relatively chaotic.

As with the argument about the genre of the poem, there seems to be no accord among the critics discussing the problem of unity within the poem. The poem covers a wide variety of topics and, at first sight, seems to focus upon a new subject in each book and every movement within each book. This focal diversity seems to be rather misleading and confusing for readers and critics. Consequently, it provides a basis for various, sometimes quite opposite, interpretations and opinions about the unity or disunity of the poem.

The problem of articulating a central theme in the *House of Fame* constitutes the cornerstone of critical debate. A discussion of this issue presents itself in every article written on the *House of Fame*, and as one may suspect, scholarly opinions are quite diverse. The variety and range of the topics presented, compounded by the contradictory nature of the poem, provides fertile soil for argument. At first sight, individual books appear to have dispersed direction and theme, and as Sklute explains, the poem "presents a shifting and unresolved sense of what it is about, [since] each of its books concerns different conceptual problems, the logical contingencies of which are not fully apparent" (35). However, a more detailed analysis of each book in particular and the poem as a whole is very useful in illuminating central theme(s).

There are many opinions of what the central theme of the *House of Fame* is. Piero Boitani argues that the central theme is Fame, "embracing the spheres of nature, death, heroism, love, chivalry, wisdom, conscience, virtue, fortune, myth, language, and poetry--the very themes Chaucer explores in his book" (*CCC* 53). B.G. Koonce also argues that in its purest form, the central theme of the *House of Fame* is Fame itself. He explains, that "in its simplest reduction, the theme of the *House of Fame* is the vanity of worldly fame, this theme explored by means of a contrast between earthly and heavenly love and fame which governs the poetic structure and fuses its heterogeneous details into unity" (5). The two points of view seem to be quite similar in their outlining the main subjects discussed in the poem through the notion of Fame as well as in the means by which the theme is explored and presented. However, while Koonce focuses on idealistic and eternal aspects of Fame, Boitani brings into consideration more worldly concerns and values.

Sheila Delany, Jacqueline Miller, and Lara Ruffolo provide yet another angle for identifying the poem's central theme. They contend that the central theme of the *House of Fame* is the poetic search for truth and the derisive attitude of the poet toward tradition, literary authority, and authorship.

Delany suggests that the purpose of the *House of Fame* is to explore some traditions in which Chaucer worked as scholar and poet. She states, "the poem attempts to establish for the artist a rhetorical and intellectual stance that can accommodate both traditional material and a skeptical approach to that material" (5). Further, she continues, the main task of the poet is "not merely to collect opinions but to choose among them in order to construct his own vision of the truth" (5). She takes up the problem of active participation of the poet in his creation and of skeptical approach of the poet to the traditional material he employs in his creation as opposed to blind imitation of it.

Similarly, Miller reads the *House of Fame* as an esoteric search for the concept of a poet as an artist and the connection with the dimensions of his artistic world, literary

confines, and traditions. She offers that the poet is trying to "define the (often uneasy) relationship between the status of [his] own individual authorial position and the authorizing principles of [his] art--to find the proper balance between their claims for poetic independence and [his] reliance upon the sanction of traditional, or even invented, *auctores*" (95). Miller interjects an air of skepticism in the relationship between the milieu and a pursuit of a new niche in a literary world, or "poetic independence."

Ruffolo feels that the central theme surrounds the debate over the source of poetic inspiration, specifically whether it springs from literary tradition or from life experience. She explains that the poem is "a meditation on literary authority that first denies the traditional notion of that authority's resting in some historical or moral truth then redefines it as being read or heard, and redistributes it to all the spreaders and hearers of tydynges" (326). However, there is a slight difference among Delany's, Miller's, and Ruffolo's responses. While Delany and Miller focus primarily upon the idea of the poet's finding his place in literary tradition and his skeptical approach to creating poetry out of traditional sources, Ruffolo emphasizes the originality and the creative effort of the poet's breaking with literary authority.

Finally, the last group of critics analyzing the central theme of the *House of Fame* consider Chaucer's poem as an exploration of the meaning of literary creation and the method and purpose of composition of poetry. Derek Traversi, comparing the *House of Fame* with the *Book of the Duchess,* shows that even though the poem's themes generally parallel the three themes dealt with in the *Book of the Duchess*--those of authority, experience, and the love-vision--Chaucer's focus in the *House of Fame* is on the essence and meaning of the creative effort. He states that "the poet is considering, for the first of many times in his work, the nature and the limitation of his vocation" (54). Joerg Fichte contributes to the argument with the suggestion that the *House of Fame* is generally about the art of poetry and specifically about Chaucer's search for a subject matter for his poetry.

In order to find this subject matter, Fichte feels, "the narrator had to rise above the sublunary sphere" (76), and "open himself to new experiences" (75), and to come to an understanding that "the composition of poetry equals the exploration of the human mind in its philosophical, moral, social, and psychological interaction with the outside world" (75), that poetry "functions as a device for instruction and delight" (76), and that poetry by its very nature is unending, like the *House of Fame* itself, "and can only be concluded by the means of arbitrary endings" (77).

To summarize, the two major fields of debate surrounding the *House of Fame* concern the unity of the poem and its central themes. The argument about the unity of the poem mainly focuses upon the problem of whether the three books comprise a unified whole or not. While some critics argue that there is no unity in the *House of Fame*, others set out to establish that Chaucer had a distinct plan in mind. The latter group contends that the lack of an ending does not necessarily mean disunity, and this, indeed, was a device contrived by the author. On the other hand, the issue of the presence or absence of a central theme in the poem provides another point of disagreement. There is no consensus among critical responses to the subject of the central theme. Among the named are Fame with all her attributes, including rumor and literary authority; and Chaucer's search for the meaning of literary creation and for subject matter for his poetry.

Although this study of the *House of Fame* claims no final solution to the problems raised by the poem and demonstrated by the modern critical debate, it does attempt to present an interpretation of the poem which will demonstrate artistic cohesiveness and argue the presence of one central theme. I will argue, like Buckmaster, Fichte, and Bevington, that the poem is a journey, a journey given to Geffrey, as the poem's eagle tells him, as a reward for his long service to Cupid, the classic symbol of love and love poetry, an adventurous journey into the depths of the human mind, thought, and poetry, given to the reader by Geoffrey Chaucer.

I will argue against Kittredge's, Muscatine's, and Tatlock's points of view and show that the poem denotes a movement not towards another conventional form or school but rather towards a new poetic voice. I will show that in Book I of the *House of Fame,* Geffrey seems weary of following conventional forms and the voices of authority. He questions the importance of tradition and the merits of mimicking the old voices. The remaining two books--the flight to the Houses of Fame and Rumor--depict a search for a new poetic voice and some new poetic material. These books are devoted to the description of the poet's active observation of life, his evaluation of words and thoughts, and his gaining experience of real life. Geffrey's journey compels him to contemplate the fickleness of Fame, as well as to portray original images of the formation of words and characters--poetry--from the raw material of experience, observation, and rumor. The *House of Fame* thus demonstrates a movement in Chaucer's art away from the echoes of authority and towards, in Chaucer's words, "Somme new thinges" (1887). Chaucer's search for "new thinges," which he seems unable to identify until midway in the poem, suggests a search for a new poetic direction, a new understanding of his art form, and an affirmation of his standing as a poet.

It is noteworthy to remember that Geffrey's journey is one of discovery, which becomes evident as the story unfolds. His comment ending Book I, after he exits the Temple of Venus, where he is looking for somebody, "That may me telle where I am" (479) (he does not know where he is) is in direct contrast to his words at the end of Book III, after he has visited the House of Fame--"I wot [know] myself best how y stonde" (1878) (he has found himself). In the first part of the work, he is immersed in his study of literature. However, by the end of his journey, he discovers life experience and real people to draw upon for his literary creativity. At the House of Rumor, the final stop in his journey, he observes shipmen, pilgrims, pardoners, "currours, and eke messengers" (2128). These people are the *real* people who give him the substance for creative genius.

Significantly, after finishing the *House of Fame*, Chaucer turns toward completing the *Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories told by "real" people to other people.

Chapter II
Book I: The Break with Tradition

Book I of the *House of Fame* has always been the most enigmatic of the poem and has generated a great deal of controversy among the critics. Scholars have been arguing for years over whether Book I is connected with the rest of the poem or whether it comprises a separate work by itself. Some, like Wolfgang Clemen and Robert Payne, maintain that Book I has an autonomous existence from the rest of the poem and that it is impossible to assume that it is a part of the *House of Fame.* Payne argues that

> the real point is that stylistically as well as structurally, Book I (excluding the Proem and Invocation) has a completely separate existence: it does not suggest anything which follows, and critics have been able to correlate its 'sentence' with the rest of the poem only by abstracting to so great a degree as to vitiate comparison. (133)

At first glance, Book I's themes and form differ from the remainder of the poem. However, a closer reading proves that Book I not only presents part of the whole, but also constitutes an essential part of the *House of Fame*--one that introduces the main themes developed further in the poem. In Book I, Chaucer questions the importance of tradition and breaks with conventional forms, traditional works, and the past voices of authority. Book I describes the beginning of Chaucer's search for a new poetic voice and a new subject matter for his poetry. It lays the foundation for the discussion of the issues further developed in the second and third books.

Book I opens with the Proem dedicated to the nature of dreams, a topic with which Chaucer seems preoccupied throughout his work. What is important to him in this Proem is the causes of dreams, particularly, whether dreams originate from within or without. In

the Middle Ages, the status of dreams was a matter of frequent deliberation. As Miller notes,

> a conventional argument was that dreams are to be identified by locating their origin: externally induced--that is, divinely inspired--dreams are legitimate and valuable; those created by man himself (out of his personal thoughts and activities, his daily experience, his psychological and physical condition) are classified as meaningless and insignificant. The individual's participation in composing his dream thus immediately invalidates it; the only sanction for a dream derives from a source extrinsic to the mind of the dreamer. (96)

In the Proem to Book I, Chaucer insists on the fact that this particular dream was not imposed by external supernatural events, but produced by his own mind. However, despite its intrinsic origin, Chaucer argues, the dream is not insignificant and meaningless. It passes beyond the traditional elements of the dream-vision and presents the most marvelous dream he himself or others ever dreamed. He writes in the beginning of Book I,

> But oonly that the holy roode
> Turne us every drem to goode!
> For never sith that I was born,
> Ne no man elles me beforn,
> Mette, I trowe stedfastly,
> So wonderful a drem as I
> The tenthe day now of Decembre,
> The which, as I kan now remembre,
> I wol yow tellen everydel.
>
> (I. 57-65)

Chaucer seems to ponder the idea that dreams are representations of the internalized world of imagination and creation. Real life problems are recounted in dreams, and Chaucer seems to question if there is a connection between dreams and the real world. Traversi echoes this sentiment when he asks if there is truth "in the claim that dreams--like

poems--can offer insight into the reality of things" (54). In the actual work, Geffrey himself reflects on the nature of dreams and reality,

> . . . yf that spirites have the myght
> To make folk to dreme a-nyght;
> Or yf the soule of propre kynde
> Be so parfit, as men fynde,
> That yt forwot that ys to come,
> And that hyt warneth alle and some
> Of everych of her adventures
> Be avisions or be figures . . .
>
> (I.41-48)

Sigmund Freud, in his work *Delusion and Dream*, says that the "dreams which have never been dreamed, those created by authors and attributed to fictitious characters in the context of their stories" (25) are worthy of evaluation since they represent "the fulfillment of a wish of the dreamer" (25). Further, Freud argues that, creative writers "when they cause the people created by their imagination to dream, . . . follow the everyday experience that people's thoughts and feelings continue into sleep, and they seek only to depict the psychic states of their heroes through the dreams of the latter" (26-27). Therefore, according to Freud, Geffrey's dream described in the *House of Fame,* presents the fulfillment of a wish of the dreamer, or the *persona* (Bevington 58), created by Chaucer in the poem and named Geffrey.

This created persona seems to be a self-projection of Chaucer and a personification of his own hopes, ideas, fears, and wishes. The eagle in Book II calls the persona "Geffrey": "Geffrey, thou wost ryght wel this. . ." (729) (the only time in his poetry when Chaucer calls himself by name) and describes his habits as sitting "at another book/Tyl fully daswed ys thy look" (657-58). As is very well known, Chaucer had a reputation for being a bookworm. The dream then, and thus the *House of Fame*, presents the embodiment of Chaucer's own thoughts, feelings, and ideas about a subject he concerns himself with during the day as well as in his sleep. The questions that come to mind are:

what is the object of Chaucer's thought and what is his wish? And what will lead to the fulfillment of this wish? Book I lays a good foundation for the answers to these questions.

The object of Chaucer's thought is the art of poetry as an entity and his true standing as a poet. He wishes to examine the relationship between the traditional poet and the old poetic schools. He seeks fulfillment in his search for a new independent poetic voice and a new subject matter for his poetry. This search, however, appears to depend on a break with the old tradition of love poetry.

Geffrey's actual dream begins in a temple of glass, which partially resembles temples or chambers described in many other love-visions written by French, Italian, Latin poets, and Chaucer himself (cf. the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowles*):

> But as I slepte, me mette I was
> Withyn a temple ymad of glas,
> In which ther were moo ymages
> Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages,
> And moo ryche tabernacles,
> And with perre moo pynacles,
> And moo curiouse portreytures,
> And queynte maner of figures
> Of olde werk, then I saugh ever.
>
> (I.119-127)

Chaucer's description of the temple of Venus and particularly his admiration of the images "of olde werk" seem to symbolize the poet's initial abiding by the laws of the tradition of love poetry. There is nothing yet unusual in this description and no signs of Chaucer's break with the conventional descriptions of love-temples. The Temple of Venus thus feeds the argument about the *House of Fame* being a love-vision written in the best traditional canons of the old French romances.

As Geffrey wanders "up and doun" (140) the temple, looking at the riches of the temple, he comes to realize that the temple belongs to Venus, whose world of beauty, love, and passion he has dedicated his earlier poems to. However, Venus herself is not physically present in her temple:

> Wher that I was, but wel wyste I
> Hyt was of Venus redely,
> The temple; for in portreyture
> I sawgh anoon-ryght hir figure
> Naked fletynge in a see.
>
> (I.129-133)

Knowing that Geffrey is a love-poet, a servant of Venus, and a follower of the old tradition of love poetry, one would expect Geffrey to find Venus herself in her Temple. Yet, this temple contains no god of love. Venus is not the main character, but only present "in portreyture" (131) on the wall. The description of Venus "in portreyture" in the *House of Fame* opposes that of the *Parliament of Fowles*. In the *Parliament of Fowles*, Venus is actually present in person:

> And in a prive corner in disport
> Fond I Venus and hire porter Richesse,
> That was ful noble and hautayn of hyre port--
> Derk was that place, but afterward lightnesse
> I saw a lyte, unnethe it myghte be lesse--
> And on a bed of gold she lay to reste,
> Til that the hote sonne gan to weste.
>
> (*Parliament of Fowles* 260-266)

One can clearly see that from the outset, the desire to break with tradition unveils itself. The emphasis in the *House of Fame*, unlike that of the *Parliament of the Fowles*, is upon the portraiture, the unreal image of Venus on the wall, not the Goddess herself. The scene of Venus coming out of the sea, painted on the wall of the Temple of Venus, is the artist's rendition of love-tradition, rather than Venus herself--others' views of Venus rather than his own. Geffrey, even though a love-poet, has never experienced love himself. In the eagle's description in Book II, Geffrey,

> . . . so longe trewely
> Hast served so ententyfly
> Hys blynde nevew Cupido,
> And faire Venus also,
> Withoute guerdon ever yit,
> And never-the-lesse hast set thy wit--
> Although that in thy hed ful lyte is--
> To make bookys, songes, dytees,

In ryme or elles in cadence,
As thou best canst, in reverence
Of love and of hys servantes eke,
That have hys servyse soght, and seke;
And peynest the to preyse hys art,
Although thou haddest never part.

(II.615-628)

. . .

In thy studye, so thou writest,
And ever mo of love enditest,
In honor of hym and in preysynges,
And in his folkes furtherynges,
And in hir matere al devisest,
And noght hym nor his folk dispisest,
Although thou maist goo in the daunce
Of hem that hym lyst not avaunce.

(II.633-640)

Geffrey "haddest never part" or no experience of real life. In composing his poetry he has been painting a portrait from the portrait. In Plato's terms, he has been making copies of copies, thus twice removed from reality.

Furthermore, in the *House of Fame*, Venus is depicted solely by means of the Dido-Aeneas story, which Geffrey also sees on the walls of the temple, engraved on brass tablets. Dido and Aeneas' story, not Venus, seem to be the main focus in the first book. Chaucer provides the reader with his own account of one of the most famous love-stories of the Middle Ages, the story of love and treachery of Dido and Aeneas. Although it is generally recognized that the factual information and idea of the story are borrowed from Virgil and Ovid, Chaucer's interpretation, in both style and form, is a far cry from either of the texts. Chaucer makes the old story serve his own narrative purposes. This revised vision of the story seems to provide another step away from the old convention.

Chaucer draws a picture of Dido's "falling in love, her desertion, and her destruction" (Fichte 68). He seems to be primarily interested in showing "the fatal consequences" (68) of Dido's irrational love, her complete dedication to Aeneas and his betrayal of her:

> And after grave was how she
> Made of hym shortly at oo word
> Hyr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir lord,
> And did him all the reverence
> And leyde on hym al the dispence
> That any woman myghte do
>
> (I.256-261)

> But let us speke of Eneas,
> How he betrayed hir, allas,
> And lefte hir ful unkyndely.
> So when she saw al utterly
> That he would hir of trouthe fayle,
> And wende fro hir to Itayle,
> She gan to wringe hir hondes two.
>
> (I.293-299)

The heart of the problem is Chaucer's emphasis, which, unlike Virgil's, is not on the heroic aspect of Aeneas' adventures, but on his treachery to Dido. His being a "worthless deceiver, a mean fellow who with scornful heartlessness deserts Dido after getting what he wanted" (Clemen 82) is the focus. On the other hand, unlike Ovid, Chaucer does not share Dido's sentiments either and "does not absolve her from guilt for irrational devotion to Aeneas" (Fichte 71). As Clemen puts it, Chaucer's interpretation of the story "reduces the stature of his lovers, stripping them of all heroism and grandeur" (83) and makes it look like an ordinary love-affair. This break with traditional grand plots entwining destiny and fate to bring lovers together is replaced by a mundane and everyday approach to the story. As Clemen explains, Chaucer makes the story "a tale not of some fateful entanglement but of the everyday weakness of men and women" (84). This certainly begs the question of Chaucer's motive for this portrayal of Dido and Aeneas. The reason is that Chaucer uses the episode to express his thoughts and ideas about art rather than life. The Dido-Aeneas episode, in Chaucer's version, contrasts and challenges old traditional perspectives on love poetry and historic and prevailing literary authority. Both Ovid and Virgil present the same story, but differently. Consequently, there is no one ultimately true view, no one single authority. The old canons of love poetry are

undermined and, therefore, cannot serve as adequate sources for Chaucer's poetry any longer.

The poet comes to understand that a sole reliance on literary sources for poetic inspiration and truth is ultimately self-defeating. It leads to a greater isolation from reality and a greater sense of being lost. No single authority presents the absolute truth of the matter. Thus, he exclaims: "As me mette redely--/Non other auctor alegge I" (313-14) and decides to break with the old conventions once and forever.

In summation, the episode in the glass Temple of Venus with its false Goddess and the story of Dido and Aeneas engraved on the walls is used to illustrate the poet's break with love-poetry and literary authority. These traditions, with, as Mehl reminds us, their "impressive image of the artificial reality generations of poets have built up around the concept of love" (56) and to which Geffrey used to be a dedicated and true servant, have fallen from their place of honor.

Once he has decided to break with the old tradition and to move away from the theme which has been exhausted for him, Geffrey does not feel comfortable in the temple any more. He leaves it, stepping through a small gate. This departure is significant and symbolic for the interpretation of the poem. As Shook points out, Chaucer is escaping from "the Temple of Love tradition" (347). The old thesis, "the Temple-of-Love thesis" (348), which stipulates that love provides the emotions, passions, and feelings out of which poems are made appears to be completely wrong for Geffrey, the poet. He is trying to depart from it being in need of new experiences and observations.

The disoriented and confused poet leaves the temple to go through the transition period associated with barrenness and an intensive quest for a new poetic ground, which is symbolically represented in the Book by the desert, with nothing to behold. He does not know "Ne where I am, ne in what contree" (475). He finds himself in a desolate landscape "Withouten toun, or hous, or tree,/Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond" (484-85)

filled with questions about what he has seen--"whoo did hem wirche" (474), "where I am" (475, 479), "in what contree" (475). This scene of disorientation is important for the course of the poem, and, like the Dido story, is symbolic. Geffrey, the "great" love-poet, suddenly comes to a dead-end and finds himself stranded in a poetic desert. He does not know where his standing as a poet is; he has lost his orientation and needs to find and identify his artistic position, for which the temple walls engraved with conventional literary "truths" do not furnish adequate guidance any longer.

In summary, Book I of the *House of Fame* clearly contributes to the unity of the poem and presents an essential part of it. It illustrates Chaucer's questioning of the old traditional voices of authority, his break from them, and the beginning of his journey-quest for a new poetic voice and the impressions of real life.

Chaucer's revision of the Dido-Aeneas love story seems to have the primary purpose of depicting the poet's disillusionment with the view of love as a subject matter for his poetry and the old authorities. Geffrey's departure from the temple of Venus in the hope of finding someone "That may telle me where I am" (479) and his standing in the middle of a barren desert hoping and praying for an escape--all represent the stages of the poet's gradual movement away from the old conventions of love poetry.

One might think that the golden eagle's coming down from the skies to rescue the frightened and lost poet is a symbol of Geffrey's going back to tradition. The eagle described by Geffrey at the end of Book I definitely bears features of the golden eagle from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But such a return is not the case. Although Geffrey is stranded in the middle of nowhere, fearful of what is going to happen to him, he never mentions returning to the temple of Venus. This seems to be a strong indication of his firm decision to get away from the old theme and, albeit inconveniences and adversities, reach a new goal. Although we are not given the direct answer to what Geffrey's goal is in Book I, this theme is to be further developed in Book II.

Essentially, Book I is significant in that Chaucer is introducing the real subject of his poem: an art of poetry in general and the relationship between literary authority and real life experience. Interestingly, Chaucer writes his *House of Fame* on the threshold of his literary career. He himself appears to be living and developing through his dream story and his *alter ego*, Geffrey. This brings us full circle to the beginning of the earlier Freudian discussion of the fulfillment of Chaucer's wish. In his early poetry, as well as in the beginning of the *House of Fame*, Chaucer follows the normal conventions, which prescribe Love as the proper theme for writing poetry. However, this literary convention has failed to meet Chaucer's poetic needs, and his developing genius has to search for a more suitable subject matter. For this reason, Chaucer, together with Geffrey, symbolically leaves the temple of Venus and takes on the journey for tidings, described in Books II and III.

Chapter III
Book II: Flight of Thought

One Latin proverb says: "Per aspera ad astra" which means "Through adversities to the stars." This proverb seems to describe very well what Book II of the *House of Fame* is about: the flight of Geffrey's imagination, evolving creative intellect, through adversity, to a new literary horizon. Book II is considered by many critics to be the most successful part of the whole poem. As Ruggiers puts it, Book II serves as "a statement of purpose, the quest for tidings," and provides "in Boethian terms the basic scientific and theological formula of the orderly universe. Its narrative thread is spatial, and thus the book is structurally, as well as geographically, transitional" (266). Clemen notes, that Book II possesses the quality of directness, which was very rare in the poetry of that period, and that it also draws upon the most diverse themes, "transforming them and linking them together in a very unexpected way" (90). The quest for tidings is a key search and a central theme, for it is through tidings that Geffrey finds the true path for his poetic journey.

Book II is of great importance for the interpretation of the poem. It contributes a great deal to the poem's central theme: a journey into poetry and a search for a new poetic voice. It depicts the period of active search, the transition Geffrey makes from the old tradition of love poetry to a new subject matter and a source for his poetry: the experience of real life. This interpretation challenges Payne's point of view that Book II has "its own self-contained existence, . . . [and] a style all its own, which it shares with neither of the others, although much of its over-celebrated humor derives from parodying by one means or another the rhetorically decorated styles of the other two" (134). Book II describes the shift of focus, the shift of the narrator's vision from other people's experiences to his

search for “tydynges,” the source of poetic inspiration. Thus, Book II provides the meaningful link between Books I and III.

Beginning with the Proem and continuing throughout Book II, the reader is focused in numerous ways on the narrator’s own cognitive capabilities. For example, in the Proem, Chaucer refers not to Venus or Christ, as he did in Book I (“O Crist,” thoughte I that art in blysse,/Fro fantome and illusion/Me save! . . .(492-94)) but to his own mind and Thought:

> O Thought, that wrot al that I mette,
> And in the tresorye hyt shette
> Of my brayn, now shal men se
> Yf any vertu in the be
> To tellen al my drem aryght.
> Now kyth thyn engyn and myght.
>
> (II.523-28)

The occurrence of these references does not seem to be coincidental. Chaucer questions his own mind, just as he questioned poetic authorities in Book I, about whether it has the “engyn” or skill to tell the dream “aright.” The request is made of Thought to release in the form of poetry the treasury shut in the mind of the narrator. In the actual text of Book II, the dreamer is awakening to what he has not been aware of before, to “the treasury” hidden deep down in his own mind. Geffrey’s journey to the new poetic source and new poetic materials will lie, as Buckmaster observes, “through the landscape of the mind” (279). This journey will bring Geffrey to a realization that the poetry and the inspiration for it come from within.

The dream itself picks up the narrative thread of Book I. At the end of Book I Geffrey--puzzled, overwhelmed, and lonely--is left outside the temple of Venus, stranded in the desert, trying to figure out where he is, in what country, and hoping that God will save him from false dream and fantasy:

> In the desert of Lybye.
> Ne no maner creature

> That ys yformed be Nature
> Ne sawgh I, me to rede or wisse.
> "O Crist," thoughte I, "that art in blysse,
> Fro fantome and illusion
> Me save!" And with devocion
> Myn eyen to the hevene I caste.
> Thoo was I war, lo, at the laste,
> That faste be the sonne, as hye
> As kenne myghte I with myn yë,
> Me thoughte I sawgh an egle sore,
> But that hit semed moche more
> Then I had any egle seyn.
>
> (I.488-501)

Suddenly the eagle swoops down upon him, snatches him up into the skies, and talks to him in a human voice. He tells Geffrey that he is a Jove's messenger, sent to take him, Geffrey, to the point of his destination, the final point of his search. The place to which he is taking him is called the House of Fame. It is located precisely between earth, heaven, and sea, and Geffrey is challenged to learn more about it along the way.

The eagle is, of course, reminiscent of Dante's eagle:

> Hyt was of gold, and shon so bryghte
> That never sawe men such a syghte,
> But yf the heven had ywonne
> Al newe of gold another sonne;
> So shone the egles fethers bryghte,
> And somwhat dounward gan hyt lyghte.
>
> (I.503-508)

But the eagle's depiction in Books I and II, as well as the bird's behavior, its speech and the topics it chooses for discussion, differ from Dante's heavenly eagle in *Divine Comedy,* Chaucer's eagle seems to be more of this world than of celestial origin. This, once again, signifies Chaucer's break with traditional literary authority and continues the momentum of the story line toward earthly or worldly sources for creative inspiration.

The eagle, a born lecturer, offers to share his knowledge with Geffrey. He is the first to point out that Geffrey is a book worm who lacks experience with the world around him. As the eagle rightfully observes,

For when thy labour doon al ys,
And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
In stede of reste and newe thynges
Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon,
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another book
Tyl fully daswed ys thy look;
And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
Although thyn abstynence ys lyte.

(II.652-660)

Geffrey had not made any attempts to learn anything from people and things that surround him, from reality. His previous habits and his subservient bookishness have dulled his brain rather than awakened it (It is important to remember that Geffrey was asking to awaken his mind and thought in the Invocation to Book II). He had not sought new things; he had devoted all his time to reading books. He had been looking at the world through somebody else's eyes and somebody else's experiences and impressions. He had been making copies of copies, twice removed from reality. He had not taken the trouble of going out to seek the meaning of life for himself.

And also, beau sir, other thynges:
That is, that thou hast no tydynges
Of Loves folk yf they be glade,
Ne of noght elles that God made;
And noght oonly fro fer contree
That ther no tydynge cometh to thee,
But of thy verray neyghebores,
That duellen almost at thy dores,
Thou herist neyther that ne this. . .

(II.643-651)

Because Geffrey had "herist neyther that ne this," he, therefore, had heard no news or made no discovery in any field, including love poetry, of which he had been a true servant. His reward for this behavior landed him in the desert, the image of poetic desert serving to illustrate the absence of poetic materials.

However, as the eagle reminds Geffrey, "That thou so longe trewely/Hast served so ententyfly/Hys blynde nevew Cupido,/And faire Venus also" (615-618), Geffrey will be rewarded for his service to the Goddess of love by means of a trip to the House of

Fame. There he is to learn the tidings (love stories/experiences) that come there from far and wide. Geffrey is promised more "tydynges" than there are grains of sand:

> The way therto ys so overt,
> And stant eke in so juste a place
> That every soun mot to hyt pace;
> Or what so cometh from any tonge,
> Be hyt rounded, red, or songe,
> Or spoke in suerte or in drede,
> Certeyn, hyt moste thider nede.
>
> (II.718-724)

On the way to the House of Fame, the eagle takes Geffrey on a flight through space. Geffrey is rewarded with a panoramic vision of the world from which he has been previously isolated through his monastic study and his bookish behavior. Taken up into the air by the eagle, Geffrey sees

> . . . feldes and playnes
> And now hills, and now mountagnes
> Now valleys, now forestes,
> And now unnethes grete bestes,
> Now ryveres, now citees,
> Now tounes, and now grete trees,
> Now shippes seyllynge in the see.
>
> (II.897-903)

This flight is undoubtedly a metaphoric one which, as Steadman notes, "emphasizes the purely intellectual character of his [Geffrey's] journey" (159). This flight seems to be "essentially a flight of thought" (Steadman 159) and an illustration of Geffrey's wish in the Proem about an inner-directed voyage into his own mind and his poetic self. Buckmaster reinforces the point of the flight/journey as a search for life stories/experiences. She states that the flight is a "journey into his mind to see all that he knows and remembers of potential sources and ideas for poems, both from books and from life. It is an internalized search for new poetic materials--tydynges--as well as a meditation on literary reputation" (279).

This ostensibly first-hand experience and a journey through space is a vision contained within Geffrey's own head. The *House of Fame* is Chaucer's attempt to turn his attention inward, to the powers of his own thought and his own experiences. As Chaucer acknowledges in his immediate recollection of Boece:

> And thoo thoughte y upon Boece,
> That writ, "A thought may flee so hye,
> Wyth fethers of Philosophy,
> To passen everich element,
> And whan he hath so far ywent
> Than may be seen behynde hys bak
> Cloude"--and al that y of spak.
>
> (II.972-978)

Chaucer here quotes from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, wherein Boethius describes the ability of the soul to reach its proper home using the wings of Philosophy. Boethius writes, "the swifte thought . . . seth the clowdes byhynde his bak, and passeth the heighte of the regioun of the fir, that eschaufeth by the swifte moevynge of the firmament, til that he areyseth hym into the houses that beren the sterres. . . . And whan the thought hath don there inogh, he schal forleten the laste hevene, and he schal be makid parfit of the worschipful lyght of God" (*Boece* IV.m.1). One cannot escape noticing the multiple parallels between Boethius' and Chaucer's lines. The "feathers of Philosophy," that lead Boethius to knowledge of God, parallel the feathers of the eagle, which facilitates a flight of Geffrey to his destination: the House of Rumor. Thought and Philosophy, through which Boethius finds his way to the perfect understanding of God, parallel thought, learning, and judgment, through which Geffrey finds his way to the house of tidings, which he "requerest" for his art.

The religious/philosophical aspects of *Boece* are transformed into artistic ones in the *House of Fame*. The thought of the creative artist frees him to fly from the mire of traditional thinking to the ethereal light of God-like knowledge. Geffrey's thought flies him to his "hows," the house of Rumor, for potential sources and ideas for his poetry and

for the real life experience that he is lacking. Geffrey's thought, his own mind, awakens him to enlightenment, knowledge, truth, and life itself. As the eagle says,

> . . . "Awak!
> And be not agast so, for shame!"
> And called me tho by my name,
> And, for I shulde the bet abreyde,
> Me mette, "Awak," to me he seyde
> Ryght in the same vois and stevene
> That useth oon I koude nevene;
> And with that vois, soth for to seyn,
> My mynde cam to me ageyn.
>
> (II.556-564)

At this point, Geffrey's perception is clear. He seems to have come to terms with his initial fear and bewilderment. Although still in doubt, he seems to have become confident in his perception that he is pursuing the right avenue. :

> Thoo gan y wexen in a were,
> And seyde, "Y wot wel y am here,
> But wher in body or in gost
> I not, ywys, but God, thou wost,"
> For more clere entendement
> Nas me never yit ysent.
>
> (II.979-84)

As a matter of fact, this clearness of perception is symbolic in that it complements the picture of Geffrey's development as a poet throughout Book II. From being incapable of seeing things around him and afraid to face the reality, Geffrey gradually approaches the point of "clear vision," where his confusion and fear give way to a sense of confidence that he must awaken and leave off his fantasies about love as the ultimate subject for his poetry and move on to topics and themes more valuable and suitable for him as a poet. This is the final transitional step Geffrey takes away from love convention and towards a new way of thinking and a new way of composing poetry. Geffrey's maturation is evident in his realization that his final destination is not the Palace of Venus, that sources of poetry can be found outside literary authority, and that worthy poetry can break with convention. He has further realized that it is time to explore the world outside the Temple of Love and gain the

experiences more true to life than those which would "derive from a continued following of the familiar, but more limited love-conventions" (Traversi 67). As a result, he decides it is time to search for new poetic sources in the Houses of Fame and Rumor.

He is intrigued by the eagle's explanation that words finding their way to Fame's house take on the physical shapes of their speakers being reproducing images from experiences:

> But o thing y will warne the,
> Of the whiche thou wolt have wonder.
> Loo, to the Hous of Fame yonder,
> Thou wost now how, cometh every speche--
> Hyt nedeth noght eft the to teche.
> But understond now ryght wel this:
> Whan any speche ycomen ys
> Up to the paleys, anon-ryght
> Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight
> Which that the word in erthe spak,
> Be hyt clothed red or blak;
> And hath so verray hys lyknesse
> That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse
> That it the same body be,
> Man or woman, he or she.
>
> (II.1068-1082)

From this point forward, Geffrey's interest lies not in seeing the proof of what others have written and recounting what others have described, but in forming his own images, in finding his own tidings and his own voice, the place where *he* best stands. He shall be attracted to the sounds rumbling from Fame's house, the sounds "of folk that doun in erthe dwellen" (1060), the "tydynges," or real life experiences, "good to lernen in this place" (1088). As a poet, whose tools are words, Geffrey shall draw his focus on the tidings from the sublunary world, on sounds rather than visions, on speech or human discourse. His job as a poet will be to inwardly create images from sounds.

The metaphor that words spoken form the shapes of speakers prompts the reader to conclude that the words or "tydynges" heard are the substance of life and should, therefore, be the substance of art. The tidings are the substance from which real life becomes formed

or visible. This parallels the transition of poetic authority from the literary tradition, or written word, to the life experience source (people themselves).

Thus, Book II depicts the awakening of the perplexed dreamer to the power of his own thought and imagination. It illustrates Geffrey's delving into the depths of his own mind in search for new material for his poetry, new experiences of life, new "tydynges." Book II, thus, describes Geffrey's gaining experiential knowledge and his "change of allegiance from authority to experience" (Fyler 55). Dazed and confused in the beginning of the book, Geffrey is finally granted a clear vision which will give birth to a change in his approach to the art of poetry in general and to the poetry he composes in particular. This vision will give Geffrey inner peace and build faith in his talents and in his artistic capabilities. This vision will make him overcome his delusion that poetry's only source is love experience and will help him to realize that "poetry's origin is not in the temple or church of love; it is in the temple or house of fame or sound" (Rowland 350). Poetry can come from the material drawn from experiences with the real world around him. Poems can be born out of rumors and sound and not necessarily proceed from the service to love.

Throughout this intellectual flight of imagination, Geffrey comes to perceive that the poet ought to operate by means of sound, as heard and experienced in the living of life, especially the sounds of human speech. As Rowland notes "the poet's privilege is to control sound, and especially the speech of men" (350). Geffrey, as the eagle tells him, should learn facts about "thy verray neyghebores,/That duellen almost at thy dores" (649-650), men and women of all sorts and conditions whom Geffrey has been ignoring while turning out "bookys, songes, dytees" (622) in praise of the artificial deities.

In essence, Book II depicts Geffrey's overcoming the state of confusion and taking active steps towards forming his own images and finding his own poetic voice. In this book, Geffrey completes his break with the old French tradition of love poetry and sets out on a journey for "the tydynges" which, he is sure, will constitute the new subject matter for

his craft. Book II, thus, viewed in this way, illustrates a transition Chaucer himself makes from traditional dream visions and the ways his early poetry was written to "some new, undisclosed form of poetry that was not represented among the great authors of the past" (Ruffolo 326). Book II thus signifies a transition from *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowles* to the *Canterbury Tales*, the book of stories or rumors told by common folk.

Chapter IV
Book III: Journey's End

In Book III, Geffrey comes to his final vision--the House of Fame. Here the poem reaches its apogee and conclusion. However, as the critical responses point out, the finality or completion of the story line with resolution of the underlying conflicts remains in question. Did Geffrey discover what he had been promised? Did he reach his destination, and was closure achieved for this transitional literary journey? As one would expect by now, the critical responses are diverse, and the answers to these questions remain a matter of debate.

Some critics argue that in Book III, Geffrey finally reaches his "otherworldly destination" (Payne 136), and the whole book is devoted to "the elaboration of the banal marvels of this dreamland. It is a good example of Chaucer's ability to produce exactly the kind of poetry which some critics believe the rhetorical poetic produced inevitably: exaggerated elaboration of the obvious without any illumination" (Payne 136). This point of view, however interesting, seems insufficient. Clearly the wealth of material for the critical debate alone is testimony to the complexity and profoundness of the work. Surely critics would not expend so much energy on a shallow "dreamland" landscape.

More realistic is Howard's point of view on Book III and his analysis of the poem from the standpoint of its being a part of medieval hierarchy of dreams:

> the medieval dream-vision was structured so that each element prepared for the next. Chaucer began the poem with an account of the kinds of dreams that can and cannot be interpreted. . . . . [Chaucer] calls Book 1 a "sweven" (Latin *insomnium,* line 79, the meaningless dream that repeats waking experience) as if to suggest it merely refers to what he had been reading. He calls Book 2 an "avisioun" (Latin *visio*, line 531, a vision of the

> future seen but not understood). The implication is that Book 3, with its "man of great authority," was to be an "oracle" (Latin *oraculum*), a meaningful dream in which a venerable figure gives advice or reveals the future. (243)

Book III seems to meet the definition of an oracle despite the fact that the poem breaks (incomplete) when "the man of great authority" enters the stage. The Book answers all the questions raised in the previous two books and, although incomplete in form, it actually concludes the poem and completes Geffrey's internalized journey. Book III depicts Geffrey's finding "the tydynges," the new subject matter for his poetry and his final switch from the fixed norms of authority to the variety of manifestations of experience.

In Book III, Geffrey resolves his poetic problem(s). His concern with the "'nature of poetic influence' (Buckmaster 281) as well as his meditation on poetry and "the material (old books, scientific fact, travel, tidings) from which both poetry and tidings are made" (281) is settled. By the end of the Book, he says he knows best where he stands as a poet. Thus, Geffrey does reach his destination and accomplishes his poetic mission. Book III presents the apogee of Geffrey's evolution as a realistic poet.

The images of Proem to Book III, though contrasting in weight, parallel the images of the Proem to Book II. In Book III, Geffrey calls not on Thought, but on Apollo, the god of the arts, "God of science and of light" (1091), meaning knowledge and inspiration. Geffrey invokes Apollo not for his help in demonstrating the "art poetical" (1095), but for his help in conveying the meaning, "o sentence" (1100). He asks Apollo to help "shew now/That in myn hed ymarked ys" (1103), to help him define the meaning of his artistic journey, and describe the vision, "ymarked" (drawn, engraved) in his head: the vision of the House of Fame. Geffrey feels that this vision will bring a new view of his art, "one in which Chaucer was to set aside the temple of love in favor of the House of Fame as the basis for his Art of Poetry" (Shook 420).

The first thing Geffrey admires is the beauty of the house which "astonyeth yit my thought/And maketh al my wit to swynke,/On this castel to bethynke" (1173-76). At the same time, along with the beauty of the Palace, Geffrey notices that it is built on a mountain of ice that looks like glass. As Howard notes, this detail is "conceivably inspired by the passage in the *Roman de la Rose* where Fortune's gifts are said to be 'like glass in their fragility'" (244). Surely, the glass foundation of the Palace is too feeble to build on, Geffrey thinks. That is the first indication that Fame's Palace will not satisfy Geffrey's striving and wandering. Just as the foundation of the palace is too fragile and impracticable, so is Fame itself: it will not last and thus may not be the goal of the poet's journey.

Geffrey looks at the names of famous individuals engraved on a side of the palace and notices that they are melting away:

> Tho sawgh I al the half ygrave
> With famous folkes names fele,
> That had iben in mochel wele,
> And her fames wide yblowe.
> But wel unnethes koude I knowe
> Any lettres for to rede
> Hir names by; for, out of drede,
> They were almost ofthowed so
> That of the lettres oon or two
> Was molte away of every name,
> So unfamous was woxe hir fame.
> But men sayn, "What may ever laste?"
>
> (III.1136-1147)

Should he choose this Palace for his final destination, his name will fade away too, leaving no trace behind. No, Fame is not an attraction for Geffrey and cannot satisfy his search. Like everything in the world, Fame is mutable; it will melt away; it will not last. The "tydynges" are yet to be found.

Outside the Palace, Geffrey sees crowds of minstrels, harpers, and musicians--all petitioners for Fame's grace. Standing on metal pillars in the House of Fame are the giants of literary tradition. Geffrey recognizes Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Lucan, among others.

All of these great names represent literary authority and tradition; and, as Boitani notes, the characters within and without the castle constitute the "literary universe of a fourteenth century Englishman . . . these are his songs, his music, his tales; these above all his books" (Boitani *World of Fame* 205). Geffrey looks around and recognizes himself in the images of harpers who sit beneath Orpheus and Orion and "counterfete he as an ape,/Or as craft counterfeteth kynde" (1212-13). He also, unlike Homer and Ovid who wrote about their people and culture and preserved the historical tradition of their civilization, has been merely counterfeiting the works of others. He has been painting a portrait from a portrait, making copies of copies.

He acknowledges that while he was earlier unaware of where Fame dwelled, he thought that the House of Fame was where he needed to go for the "tydynges." However, the list of fading names, lesser harpers, petitioners for Fame's grace, and subsequent events, dissuade him from this path. Looking at this "obsessive and slightly ridiculous bibliography . . . which the eagle's mission proposed to correct offering instead tidings of the real world and love" (Boitani *World of Fame* 205), Geffrey realizes that there are "no such tydynges/As I mene of" (1894-95) in the Palace of Fame.

Geffrey witnesses Lady Fame's giving out renowns, and he cannot miss her fickleness, capriciousness, and spitefulness.

> Tho gan I loke aboute and see
> That ther come entryng into the halle
> A ryght gret companye withalle,
> And that of sondry regiouns,
> Of alles kynnes condiciouns
> That dwelle in erthe under the mone,
> Pore and ryche. And also sone
> As they were come in to the halle,
> They gonne doun on kneës falle
> Before this ilke noble quene,
> And seyde, "Graunte us, lady shene,
> Ech of us of thy grace a bone!"
> And somme of hem she graunted sone,
> And somme she werned wel and faire,
> And some she graunted the contraire
> Of her axyng outterly.
>
> (III.1526-1541)

As Geffrey watches Lady Fame granting good fame to traitorous and wicked men and refusing it those who have done good works, or even bestowing on them bad fame, he confirms his desire to leave. He did not come to obtain Fame; in fact, he will be satisfied if after his death, no one will falsely quote his name, as he notes to the "frend" whom he meets in the Palace of Fame:

> I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
> For no such cause, by my hed!
> Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
> That no wight have my name in honde.
> I wot myself best how y stonde;
> For what I drye, or what I thynke,
> I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
> Certeyn, for the more part,
> As fer forth as I kan myn art.
>
> (III.1874-1882)

Geffrey finds no value in Fame, "so capricious, unreliable and incalculable" (Clemen 109). The House of Fame did not serve his goals. Although gorgeous and glorious, the Palace of Fame is just another step in his, Geffrey's, transition from authoritative conventions of love-poetry to the realism and experience of life. By this point in the poem, the poet seems to have discovered a value in his own self-reliance. He appears to have changed from the narrator lost and in despair at the end of Book I and from the frightened captive of the eagle in Book II to one who is satisfied with his achievements and responsible for his craft:

> I wot myself best how y stonde,
> For what I drye, or what I thynke,
> I wil myselven al hyt drynke.
> Certeyn, for the more part,
> As fer forth as I kan myn art.
>
> (III.1878-82)

He still, however, has not found the "tydynges" he seeks:

> The cause why y stonde here:
> Somme newe tydynges for to lere,
> Somme newe thinges, y not what,

Tydynges, other this or that,
Of love or suche thynges glade.

(III.1885-1889)

The "frend" whom Geffrey meets in the House of Fame, seems to understand what the poet is looking for--"for wel y se/What thou desirest for to here" (1910-11)--and directs Geffrey out of the House of Fame. This "frend" figure, to my mind, can be interpreted as the "venerable figure," referred to by Howard as "giv[ing] advice or reveal[ing] the future" (243). The "frend" does lead Geffrey out of the House of Fame and into the House of Rumor, thus showing him the right direction. Viewed this way, Book III fits the definition of an oracle as all the elements are present. At the same time, it illustrates Chaucer's departing from traditional ways of composing dream-visions and his breaking with authority. For Chaucer substitutes the "venerable figure" of the "man of great authority," who might be expected to be Geffrey's guide, with the figure of a "frend." Once again, the commonplace man shows the poet the way to the journey's completion, not the traditional literary authority.

Thereafter, Geffrey leaves the House of Fame to explore the House of Rumor. As Boitani notes, he "abandon[s] the world of literature to tackle reality" ("Labyrinth" 220). The differences between the House of Rumor and the temples of tradition Geffrey visited before are striking. The House of Rumor, or the Palace of Words, if I can call it that, presents a place where the "tydynges" originate before they fly to the House of Fame to be judged and dispersed. It is made of twigs and is constantly spinning "so swyft as thought" (1924). As Howard observes, the House of Rumor is "a figure for the world; in it the things of the world become reports" (249). It has nothing in common with traditional allegorical detail. It belongs, as Clemen notes, "at once to fancy and to reality" (109). The House of Fame is solely inhabited by historic and legendary figures, long dead. The House of Rumor, in contrast, is filled with living breathing people of everyday life. Delany describes the occupants of the House of Rumor as, "crowds whose exclusive concern is

the present. Many of them have occupations which make them appropriate retailers of news: shipmen and pilgrims, pardoners, couriers, messengers. All of them are actively engaged in the business of life, or at least in talking about it, and their interests include whatever is temporal and temporary" (106).

The House of Rumor does indeed seem to be a caricature of the world. As Howard points out, it is not so much the "physical locus of sound and speech where words are matched with things, but the mental world in which words are matched with thoughts" (249). It symbolizes the process of making or composing poetry within the poet's mind. Geffrey can finally match the words he hears in real world, the daily facts of life, or the experiences he gains, with his own thoughts and ideas, his own impressions. He learns to convert experiences into poetry. Howard finds Geffrey's earlier fascination with a parallel image outside the castle of Fame--Colle Tregetour's ability to "carien a wyndmelle/Under a walsh-note shalle" (1280-81)--a metaphor critical for the poet. The windmill represents the cosmos and the walnut shell the brain; "the author encompasses the world within his mind" (245).

The House of Rumor appears to be Geffrey's true final destination and the end of his long quest for tidings. The House of Rumor provides Geffrey with all that he has been promised. Here he finds more tidings than he thought possible, more words in their purest state than he could imagine. He finds here the "raw material of poetry" (Delany 105):

> And over alle the houses angles
> Ys ful of rounynges and of jangles
> Of werres, of pes, of mariages,
> Of reste, of labour, of viages,
> Of abood, of deeth, of lyf,
> Of love, of hate, acord, of stryf,
> Of loos, of lore, and of wynnynges,
> Of hele, of seknesse, of bildynges,
> Of faire wyndes, and of tempestes,
> Of qwalm of folk, and eke of bestes;
> Of dyvers transmutacions
> Of estats, and eke of regions;
> Of trust, of drede, of jelousye,
> Of wit, of wynnynge, of folye;
> Of plente, and of gret famyne,

Of chepe, of derthe, and of ruyne;
Of good or mys governement,
Of fyr, and of dyvers accident.

(III.1959-76)

Interestingly enough, love is but one topic among many and is not the first mentioned. This is significant because it shows that throughout his journey, Geffrey has broadened his perspectives and knowledge and grown beyond his stature of a love-poet. He came to understand that "love, whether romantic, heroic, happy, or unhappy is only one small aspect of the human condition, and the poet, therefore, can not rely on it as main source of inspiration. Rather, he has to open himself up to new experiences, which in turn will create new vistas, if he intends to function as chronicler and interpreter of human affairs" (Fichte 75). Geffrey's newfound well-rounded approach to life and art resolves the original conflicts developed in the story and provides a workable ending for the poem.

Geffrey's journey to the Houses of Fame and Rumor becomes a grand moment of awakening to his inner powers and discovery of himself as poet. It teaches him how words become images and how the power of thought can convert those images into poetry. It helps him realize that poems originate not only in the Temple of Love but more often in experience and observation: in the House of Rumor. Geffrey learns that "to be a true poet does not mean voluntary restriction to one subject matter that has been worked over for centuries by scores of the writers. On the contrary, the composition of poetry equals the exploration of the human mind in its philosophical, moral, social, and psychological interaction with the outside world" (Fichte 75).

It is surely no coincidence that the bearers of the tidings that Geffrey finds in the House of Rumor are "shipmen and pilgrimes . . . pardoners,/Curours and the messengers" (2122-28). These are the very kinds of characters who will come to inhabit the text of his masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*, a collection of tidings/stories springing from the knowledge Geffrey gains in the House of Rumor. They represent different attitudes

toward love, virtue, God, money, etc., illustrating the many possible choices a poet can have for his subject matter.

Geffrey has traveled a long distance from his earlier bookish life, validated through books and others' experience and authority. His mind, once dulled by his reading to the point that he "herist neyther that ne this" (651), has been "awakened" by his intellectual flight inward. He now views tidings, prospective material for his poetry, from a much different perspective. He views them from their origin. This standing at the source of tidings, the very source of experience itself, gives Geffrey an opportunity to understand the poet's vocation, which is to transform these tidings and this experience into poetry, and to give meaning, "o sentence," to these sounds. This journey to the House of Rumor allows Geffrey to comprehend that it is not the books and others' ideas, but the tangible world with its everyday experience that should be his focus in developing realistic and meaningful art.

Book III is a microcosm of the *House of Fame,* a poem about the poet's search for his true vocation and his evolution as a narrator. In order to find a new poetic voice, Geffrey has to go through the Temple of Venus with its false Goddess, endure the barrenness of the desert, rise above the sublunary sphere in his transcendental journey inward, "with feathers of Philosophy," and visit the Houses of Fame and Rumor. During his journey, Geffrey has to learn many lessons. The most important of them is that in this world, where mutability touches everything, including Fame, the old Latin saying "Vita Brevis, Ars Longa Est" ("life is short, art is forever") proves true. True success springs from life experience, and from this source alone comes pure and lasting art, the only thing that can endure the test of time.

Chapter V
Conclusions: The House of Fame and Its Significance

"Experience, though noon auctoritee"
Wife of Bath's Tale

The *House of Fame* is an odyssey into experience. From the very beginning of the poem to the very end, Chaucer examines and opposes the two ways of learning about the world and the two sources for composing poetry: authority and experience. Authority, as Fyler notes, is constituted by the "books, which preserve the wisdom of the past . . . . Authorities disagree, and the distant past is not always clearly relevant to present needs" (23). Thus, Chaucer's narrator takes a journey away from the past and into the future in search for "new thynges," the "tydynges," the experiences of real life, which would satisfy his poetic needs and serve as sources for his future poetry. As a result of this journey, Geffrey rejects the old books as guides and continues on his own, now able to take responsibility for his own creation:

> I wot myself best how y stonde;
> For what I drye, or what I thynke,
> I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
> Certeyn, for the more part,
> As fer forth as I kan myn art
>
> (III.1878-82)

The *House of Fame* is considered by critics to be a monument to a poet's self-inspection of his thoughts, the creative process, and his position in the literary world. As Howard notes, the *House of Fame* is one of the "greatest poetic statements in the English language about the nature of poetic influence and poetic tradition. It affords a surprising

glimpse into a poet's inner world of thought. There is nothing like it before in English Literature, probably nothing like it again until Milton's time or after" (252).

Like any other work of art, the *House of Fame* is a product of its time. Therefore, it is best interpreted within its historic, social, and literary context. A closer look at the fourteenth-century historic and literary milieu, as well as Chaucer's personal concerns at the time of creating the poem, provides an insight into the interpretation of the meaning of the poem.

The fourteenth century was a turbulent period in the history of England. As Tuchman notes, "no age is tidy or made of whole cloth, and none is a more checkered fabric than Middle Ages" (xvii). Fourteenth century England suffered from a laundry list of social ills, which was a breeding ground for dissent. Tuchman enumerates medieval England social woes: "economic chaos, social unrest, high prices, profiteering, depraved morals, lack of production, industrial indolence, wild expenditure, luxury, debauchery, social and religious hysteria, greed, avarice, maladministration, decay of manners" (xiv). Adding to the social turmoil was the uneven distribution of power and wealth. The social order consisted of a very small upper class, virtually no middle class, and a large impoverished lower class. The country, ruled by the aristocracy and the clergy, was highly structured. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, composed of the pope, archbishops, bishops, and prelates was extremely powerful and vying for power and control with the aristocracy. The aristocracy, or civil hierarchy, consisted of emperors, kings, dukes, counts, barons, and knights. Certainly this group could be counted upon for various power-grabbing ploys and maneuvers which were heightened by the unrest of the times and the general mood change throughout the population.

Authority was being questioned; and, fueled by the miserable condition of the nation, the entire anti-authoritarian mood grew. The ecclesiastical and aristocratic orders were being challenged. Seventy-four knights of the shire and sixty town burgers made up

the Commons in the Good Parliament. Their primary demand was the dismissal of venal ministers as well as annual Parliamentary election rather than appointment of members. Accompanying it, was a long list of restraints upon arbitrary practices and bad government. Two of the strongest objections were directed not against the government, but against abuses of the Church hierarchy.

As elsewhere in Europe, there was a deep craving to make the Church less reliant upon secular holdings and clear the way to God of all the money and fees and donations that cluttered it. Religious unrest was disturbing the public mind and found its voice in an Oxford theologian and preacher, John Wyclif. In the year of 1374, Wyclif metaphorically nailed his thesis to the door in the form of a treatise, *De Civili Dominio* (*On Civil Authority*), which proposed nothing less than disendowment of the temporal property of the Church and the exclusion of the clergy from the temporal government. All authority, he argued, derived from God alone, and in earthly matters belonged to the civil powers alone. That is why priesthood should be disestablished as the necessary mediator between man and God. In replacement he offered the Bible in English, translated by his disciples, that would bring religion to the people in a form they could understand without need of the priest and his sometimes meaningless Latin doggerel.

It was in this milieu that Chaucer wrote the *House of Fame*. Like all great poets and writers, he reflected both the hearts and minds of his countrymen in his poetry. In the spirit of Wyclif's rebellion against traditional authority, in his *House of Fame*, Chaucer opened a dispute of traditional literary authority, which was later completed in the *Canterbury Tales*.

However, the *House of Fame* reflects not only the sentiments of the era but Chaucer's own inner conflicts and personal thoughts. The *House of Fame* certainly projects the author's cognitions; and as the main character, Geffrey, roams the poetic landscape, the reader gains insight into the mind of Chaucer. As John H. Fisher in his

introduction to the *House of Fame* notes, "none of Chaucer's poems tempts one to autobiographical interpretation more than the *House of Fame*" (258). Certainly, the reader cannot escape the similarity between the leading character's name and the author's own, as well as parallels between Geffrey's winter of discontent and Chaucer's own.

As noted above, Freud postulated that creative writers' dreams reveal their own states of mind and their own strivings and wishes. In his chapter "The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming" of *Delusion and Dream*, Freud further develops the concept, explaining the mechanism of creating poetry. He argues that typically, "some actual experience which made a strong impression on the writer . . . arouses a wish that finds a fulfillment in the work in question" (131). In other words, a poet, influenced by a real life experience, in an attempt to reach inner balance and make sense of things around him, will express his feelings, worries, or ideas in his creative work. This proves true in the *House of Fame*, which, as Howard notes, seems to "reveal an element of struggle--over the poet's hopes and goals, over certain literary ideas and models, and, it appears, over discontents in his personal life" (232).

Chaucer's biographers indicate that Chaucer was in his early thirties when he started the poem. By that time, he was a family man, had been married for thirteen years, had children, and had a career in the royal household providing a good income. He had a comfortable home in London and seemed to be well settled. Yet, Chaucer was a geographic bachelor and lived alone, traveling frequently because of his job. His wife, employed in the duchess Constanza's service, was often away at court. In his position as a controller, he did a lot of "rekenynges" (653), and his responsibilities were many. Chaucer was very possibly beginning to see life as monotonous, with limited choices, and without a challenging future. He had apparently reached a low point in his career. He spent his days reading books, "domb as any stoon" (656).

However, if the *House of Fame* is a testimony to Chaucer's inner feelings, he found no relief in reading and was dissatisfied with his art. His poetic ideas had become limited solely to those expressed in the books, and he found himself merely counterfeiting the works of others, like those minor musicians who crowd the House of Fame. The poet seemed to be tortured by inner discontent, a lack of purpose or direction in life, poetry, or both. "The poet of love is without anything to write about, takes no part in Love's affairs, even *hears* nothing about them" (Howard 252). He feels he is ready for a change, for "newe thynges" (654), new experiences, new life. He is looking for something to write about, a subject or theme, a "purpose." Yet, he is not ready to find it at this point. As Howard argues, "until now Chaucer's literary model was French courtly poetry. If he had a personal model or mentor, it was probably John Gower . . . . But it is at this time that Chaucer's way of writing turns away from Gower's. He had gone out on his own" (Howard 255).

It is at this time that Chaucer travels to France, Rome, Florence, and Genoa. Chaucer's commission of 1372-1373 gave him his first contact with Italy. This visit to Italy and especially to Florence, seems to be a significant step in Chaucer's career as a poet. Petrarch and Boccaccio were living in that region at that time; and if Chaucer did not meet them, he must have heard a good deal about them. His Italian experiences helped him, as Edwards notes, "shift from poetic 'making' (the technical composition of verse, especially in a courtly context) to poetry (the full realization of the moral dimension of linguistic art)" (14).

These experiences found their reflection in the *House of Fame* and later in the *Canterbury Tales*. For example, Chaucer's biographers argue that he could not have written about fame as he did without knowing the Italian humanists' ideas about it. In Italy, fame was an incentive or a reward which surpassed both political power and material wealth. Chaucer's Book III of the *House of Fame* with its description of the nine groups

of petitioners soliciting Fame can be considered a critique and a parody of the Italian notion, as Chaucer's Fame "denies a connection between merit and reward, being and reputation" (Edwards 117). She forces renown on those who want to avoid it, "granting rightful claimants even more than they deserve, but commanding for others 'a sory grace' (1790)" (117). Chaucer shows that Fame is equally indifferent to right and wrong, good and evil, very capricious, and therefore, not worth seeking.

At the end of Book III, Geffrey finally finds "the tydynges" he sought. Those tidings, or the "reports passed by word of mouth" (Howard 255), seem to be of the same origin as those constituting the new kind of stories fashionable in Florence at that time, the "novelle." These tidings consist of human everyday life experiences and describe the tangible world as opposed to the world of mythical characters. These are the very tidings which will later form the foundation for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories of real life.

Chaucer's travels allow him to widen his perspectives on life itself and provide him with much grander literary horizons. In contrast to his previous concentrating on creating love poetry, he gains life experience and knowledge, which allow him to cover more themes and involve a wider audience. Chaucer, as well as his *alter ego* Geffrey, does not limit himself to one subject, the subject of love, any longer, and does not hold to the rules of authority. Chaucer becomes concerned with his influence on his readership. He comes to realize that an audience will not remember his name if he employs only somebody else's words and ideas and rigidly adheres to the authority of his predecessors. The commemoration of one's name can be achieved only through the faculties of the poet and via audience. That is why he needs to speak the language of his audience, to listen to their stories, and to be their poet.

During the process of his creative evolution, Chaucer learns that "no linguistic utterance, discursive or poetic, can claim a truth value" (Edwards 120) as the "final

authority resides in each hearer of a work" (Ruffolo 340). Just as Ovid's and Virgil's views of the Dido-Aeneas' story differ, so does the perception of each individual reader on the subject in question. Just like the "man of great authority" does not speak at the end of the poem to grant the final word, so Chaucer leaves the final interpretation to his reader. The authority is mute at the end of the book because there cannot be one ultimate truth or ultimate authority in poetry or literature. Instead, as Chaucer will say in the *Canterbury Tales*, "Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie" (*The Parson's Tale* 81-83). Truly, there are many ways to God and many ways, for Chaucer, to literary truth.

Chaucer does not give his reader any one view on the subjects presented in the *Canterbury Tales*, nor does he utilize one genre. The *Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories, genres, opinions, "tydynges." They represent, as Delany notes, "possible attitudes toward love, money, God, virtue, and one another: they show many possible choices without explicitly prescribing any" (117). The *Canterbury Tales* do not give any one answer to a question, any one perspective or concept. They provide a variety. For example, the Wife of Bath gives one view of women and their position in marriage; the Clerk gives the opposite. The views and positions of the Church, merchants, farmers, gentry, or nobility are never portrayed singularly; Chaucer offers all viewpoints. He further prefers multiple genres in writing his *Canterbury Tales*: fabliau, breton lai, romance, beast fable. Or even multiple themes--the *Nun's Priest's Tale's* multiple themes, for example, are perhaps intended to show the futility of trying to establish one theme, one singular point, for a given work. Repeatedly, the common thread of multiple viewpoints laces through the *Canterbury Tales* because Chaucer has discovered that there is no one right way of knowing things, no one correct view, just as writing French love poems is not the only way of writing about love.

In the *House of Fame*, Chaucer symbolically moves "from the Book at the beginning (the *Aeneid*) to the oral fragments of it at the end" (Boitani *CCC* 56), turning the matter over to other transmitters of tidings in the House of Rumor. "Soon the shipmen, pilgrims, pardoners, and messengers who crowd the House of Rumor with their 'tydynges' will begin another journey during which they will tell each other tales to be collected in a book--the *Canterbury Tales*" (Boitani *CCC* 56). The *House of Fame*, thus, is a transitional poem from Chaucer's early love-vision poetry to the *Canterbury Tales* and the realism of life. The *Canterbury Tales* will collect stories that will appeal to a wide array of classes of society. This collection of stories will illustrate the conclusion and completion of Chaucer's search for his literary identity. They will symbolize the end of Chaucer's search for new topics, new themes, and new ideas for his poetry, which was begun in the *House of Fame*. They will supply the meaning for his poetry and the poetic "immortality of [his] name" (Fyler 62).

In the final view, The *House of Fame*, is a reflection of the evolution of Chaucer as a poet. Chaucer, like his poetic *alter ego* Geffrey, in the beginning of the poem, is a romantic love poet blindly following the traditional old models of French love poetry. He lives in his unrealistic fantasies and old books. Like Geffrey, he becomes unhappy with the traditional views and seeks a new poetic niche. Like Geffrey, at the end of the poem, he enters the state of mature awareness and reaches the point of knowing best where he stands. Having found his true vocation as a poet, Chaucer symbolically makes a transition from the group of lesser harpers to the gallery of the poets and historians in the House of Fame. These poets ask for no fame or reward for their deeds. They are remembered by posterity for celebrating the people and events of the past. Their works, as their names, are immortal.

Throughout his imaginary inner journey to the House of Rumor, to the deepest wells of his poetic inspiration, Chaucer learns that immortality of one's name is not

reached through counterfeiting the works of others, but through reflecting life experience and the culture of one's own countrymen. Throughout his poetic meditation, Chaucer realizes that life experience is the only true source for poetry. It validates the purpose of creative writing and blurs the lines of distinction between the artist and his work. The artist becomes inseparable from his art, and, thus, the immortality itself encompasses "both the immortality of the poet's own name and the immortality of the names of those whom he celebrates" (Fyler 62-63). Therefore, at the end of the *House of Fame,* Geffrey's answer to the question "Artow come hider to han fame?" (1872) that "I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,/For no such cause, by my hed!" (1874-75) becomes clear. Chaucer is not asking fame for himself. It is not his wish. He recognizes that if his works are not about the world but of the world, then they will live forever, and his own poetic name with them. Indeed they have.

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