

Under the Reign of Doubt: Chaucer's *House of Fame* and Narrative Authority

Christopher B. Smith
Department of English
Villanova University

Edited by Edward Pettit

Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* is an unusual poem by anyone's set of standards. Its feast of colorful action and antic pace seem at times to overwhelm the reader, as it does the somewhat hapless narrator; for a rather brief work, it contains a great deal to puzzle over. That the text is made all the more baffling by an abrupt conclusion has led to much speculation from scholars regarding its finished or unfinished nature, especially pertaining to the identity of the man of great authority seen "atte laste" (*The Riverside Chaucer* 373, l. 2155), who, ironically, will remain indefinitely unseen.

Attempting to whittle down critical concerns with the poem to this one question, however, would be overly reductive, just as showing aesthetic appreciation merely for the fanciful humor and bewildered awe that portions of Chaucer's text exhibit — treating it as a sort of fantasy story with a mild moralistic bent on the capriciousness of fame — misses its deeper concerns. Stephen Knight sees the poem in contrast to the relatively simplistic *Book of the Duchess*, a work with an "unproblematic ideology," as one with "epistemological, even ontological concerns"; rather poetically, he says it is "a winter dream" (Knight 28). If the knight of *Book of the Duchess* exhibited honor as an absolute (and likewise for the characters and relationships exhibited in Chaucer's narrative forebears), the concept itself, as well as "the mechanics of fame," are now illuminated as far more complex than in previous imaginings: just as the "physical nature of [an] inquiry" is dealt with in the vocabulary of medieval science, the work as a whole involves a highly developed philosophy (28-29).

One way the poet questions fame, and by implication, literature, is by asking how reliable the standard model for literary production (a main vehicle for reputation) is. Conventionally, and for its medieval audience, writing has an indelible authority. Yet it is deconstructed in the poem in various metaphoric scenes — physical and, at times, topographical representations of the dilemmas of narrative and language — that anticipate the rhetorical moves of literary theory.

Likewise, the text itself breaks down to a certain degree whenever the issue of the narrator's truthfulness (in contrast to his skillful maneuverings as a crafter of verse) is brought to light by unwieldy meter, as meant to be a sacrifice of adornment for pure truth. For an audience well aware of the fact that this story is pure, fanciful invention, this move on the poet's behalf anticipates metafiction, leading the inquisitive reader to examine the choices made in constructing a self-aware series of willfully poor lines. Such is also the case when Geoffrey, the narrator, sets before himself a panorama that overwhelms the senses and cannot possibly be given an adequate description, while the use of *occupatio* creates a humorous tension between what can and cannot be spoken of. In this and other ways, the textual construction of the poem undercuts its own authority.

If the idea of House of Fame not merely flirting with but expressing certain postmodernist concerns such as these seems a bizarre juxtaposition or a somewhat shaky claim at first, perhaps a realization that ample evidence supporting such claims, says Ruth Evans, will "jolt us out of our expectations that the past is radically other" (Evans 69). Just as today's authors experience the anxiety of influence, are haunted by the fact that there may be little new left to express in mediums ranging from prose fiction to television to pop music, and often (especially in the pastiche-crazed 1990s, where the presence of signs of the past seemed to embody Fredric Jameson's theory of a cannibalized present) turn to irony as a solution to these problems, Chaucer does the same with his source material. B. G. Koonce elucidates in saying that "Dante and Boethius supply the major elements, structural and thematic . . . adapted to a unique intellectual and artistic design and to a style distinctively Chaucerian," yet one in which it is not respectful homage or slightly adorned retelling that provides the "dominant note," which is instead struck by "irony" (Koonce 87).

By using the teleological structure Boethius and Dante earlier employ — inspiration produces poetry which inspires others — to decidedly different ends, the result is a skewed, ironic form of the poetic enlightenment brought on by the intrusion of the otherworldly. In part, this seems a response to the impossibility of following Boethius' Lady Philosophy with an encore presentation of the same set of facts: once human folly has been exposed and the problem of divine provenance and free will is solved, there seems little left to write about. (If anything, writing itself becomes a profane, hopelessly self-interested activity in such a world, one that runs the constant risk of the sins of pride or blasphemy.) Boethius' Philosophy urges her pupil to "avoid vices, cultivate the virtues [and] pour out your humble prayers" to an understanding of "heaven" (Boethius 114) that is very much unlike the topsy-turvy, mazelike celestial zone Geoffrey explores. Rather than follow the "pattern imposed by Fate" that metes out "what is appropriate for each human being" (90) from a prison cell, Chaucer follows the complex thread of a fickle goddess' whims.

As Boethius' presence loomed large in medieval literature, poets of the Middle Italian period such as Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch had a key influence on Chaucer's style, thanks to his diplomatic missions, yet the influence of Dante is again slightly skewed in *House of Fame*. Often likened to the *Divine Comedy*, given the nature of its narrative strategies — the eagle that abducts Geoffrey being a humorous combination of the appearance of Virgil and the device of ascent — and subject matter, the poem seems a parody of didacticism. It is an explanation of things commonly thought of as beyond the mind of man as shown to a man given a guided tour of unearthly regions, but it is a journey that leaves us with more questions than it does answers; rather than offering up the intricately mapped vision of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise that explains what fate awaits sinners and the repentant alike, the poem confounds with the arbitrary judgments of Fame, as well as the madcap nature of the House of Rumor. (Imagine Hell's circles randomized, ever-shifting, its denizens tossed from one punishment to the next regardless of severity, or Purgatory as an even more precarious climb heavenward with conflicting directions shouted at the climber from every direction.) In addition to these modifications, Chaucer makes Geoffrey a clearly inferior narrator to his story, making it a friendly, miniaturized spoof of the *Comedy* that can share some of its subject matter without direct challenge or contradiction.

Similar to the way in which *Troilus and Criseyde* plays a shell game of sorts — as postmodern authors are often derisively said to engage in — with the notion of narrative authority, failing, deliberately, to mention Boccaccio as a source, but crediting the fictive Lollius, *House of Fame* performs a somewhat similar trick with its inspirations. Their rhetorical patterns are used not to form the harmonious whole one would imagine from a poem informed by Dante and Boethius, but rather one which leaves its traveler — who, as a man of the “study” (RC 356, l. 633) prefers books to experience — more bewildered (ostensible, though it is no more likely that the man or authority would provide a staid explanation for all that has preceded him) at the end of his journey than at the beginning. It is as if the Ciceronian music of the spheres exposes not just the limits of human perception with its deafening quality, but does so through deliberate overload and bafflement: Geoffrey cannot offer much in the way of interpretive glosses on what greets him, just a sense of perplexity.

In terms of the expectations of its audience for enlightenment and interpretation on the nature of fame, situating the action of *House of Fame* within a dream vision, according to Sheila Delany, “permits the writer to treat questions which man cannot hope to answer by reason alone but which may require an epiphany only or an oracular answer” (Delany 37-38). Yet we never receive a frank illumination of the nature of Fame; the concept is more shadowy, more unstable, escaping the narrative authority of absolutes. While Chaucer himself becomes a

source of (modified) narrative authority in Henryson and others (27), he denies an overarching source of concrete authority in his narrative, be it human, divine, or a visitation from the divine order that serves the function of mediation between the two (such as Lady Philosophy). It is unlikely, again, that the man of great authority, even if he is, as a few have speculated, Jesus Christ, would provide a form of closure; if anything, he would boot Geoffrey down from the heavens to puzzled wakefulness. This attests to the mazelike difficulty of a search for the truth, characterizing it as non-linear in form, given the arbitrary nature of Fame's judgments that serve as the core of narratives that concern themselves with repute. A stable essence is denied. Chaucer's is an "ironic treatment" of "intellectual systems" that Delany says is "with us still" (122).

Before taking us directly into the dream vision, the proem of Book I analyzes the nature of dream itself, offering up a taxonomy of dreams and Middle English dream vocabulary. In an effort to classify dreams through conventional scientific knowledge, everything from "swevenes" (RC 348, l. 3) to the difference between a "fantome" and "oracles" (l. 11) to the possible significance of the "distance / Of tymes" (l. 18-19) is mentioned, yet to no justifying or explanatory effect. Here, the emphasis lies on the inadequacy of accepted knowledge and verbal (or textual) classification in probing the issue. As the humors and other such justifications for dreams are cast aside in occupatio, ambiguity is favored, which points to the prevalence of ambiguity in the poem as a whole. The narrator can only opine, in an appeal to the unknown and the transcendental, that he wishes "the holy roode / Turne us every dream to goode" (349, l. 57-58).

In converting his dream to writing, the narrator wishes to combat the waters of "Lete" (l. 71). Writing, as an archival system, supplies an antidote to Lethean forgetfulness, meant to withstand the slide of the author's subject (and his own subjectivity) into oblivion. Yet at the same time these waters serve as the foundation for what the narrator aims at describing, making his task a difficult one often that often undercuts itself; his task is nearly impossible, given the contradictory and perilous nature of describing what occurs in a dream. Indeed, if a dream is deeply ambiguous – is to be distrusted — the only act that should produce more skepticism is producing a textual copy of one. By altering the convention of the guide to one's adventure — an eagle who lofts Geoffrey into the air against his will — as well as the hyper-reality of sorts in which the dream is situated, it is removed an additional step from the world of narrative certainty and the authority it connotes.

Despite these concerns, Geoffrey still prays to the god of sleep for accuracy, while subordinating him to "he that mover ys of all" (l. 81), which seems to root his odd outburst of spite towards any who would "skorn," "jape," or "mysdeme" (l. 95-97) the work in an odd context. We are presented with a somewhat simple-minded

man who believes he is doing God's will, yet is still to a degree unsure what that means, or how well he carries out the task. Most likely equally confused by his dream as any layman, he can only offer aggressive disdain to those who might think the many ambiguities of his story are due to his own fault through poetic embellishment or the sanding away of rough edges to produce sonority. In giving Geoffrey a sheen of well-intentioned ignorance in the Invocation of the first book, Chaucer skillfully raises the issue of a narrative unreliability that stubbornly eliminates other perspectives yet fails to recognize its own tenuous underpinnings.

Uncertainty as a narrative preoccupation, established from this outset, only grows over the course of the poem. The recounting of the story of Dido and Aeneas that takes place in the glass temple finds an indecisive speaker attempting to reconcile opposing versions of the story: as he says Aeneas "left hir ful unkyndely" (351, l. 295) and compares him to other flawed (because unfaithful) heroes such as Theseus, whose betrayal of Ariadne merits an exclamation of "the devel be hys soules bane!" (353, l. 408), he also makes steps toward the act of "excusen Eneas," (l. 427) since one account says he was made to go to "Itayle" by "Mercurie, sans fayle" (l. 429-430). Unable to establish a definitive stance on the issue, just as he finds himself knowing not "where I am, ne in what contree" (l. 475), he is confronted with a panoramic view of the matter that refuses to cohere into a whole. It is one that begs for further interpretation or the commentary of a definitive source, both of which would provide the bestowal of "auctorite" (373, l. 2158) by an ultimately absent (like the man of authority) transcendental signifier that poststructuralism has lamented.

Ruth Evans' commentary on this section of the poem provides a different perspective on the loss of decisive authority, claiming that this reappraisal of Aeneas' betrayal locates the issues of cultural memory and authority "within an explicitly gendered frame" greatly expanded upon in *Troilus and Criseyde* (Evans 57). Similarly, Goddess Fame's female prominence "raises some significant questions about the relationship between gender and archiving" (57). As Chaucer sees dreams as possessing different kinds, referred to as "gendres" (RC 348, l. 18), which — despite a rather unclear authorial intent in the use of the term — create meaning through difference, a parallel can be drawn between language's ability to engender "differences and divisions" that relate to sexuality, history, and other matters (Evans 57-58). Somewhat similarly, Geoffrey's flight from Earth to the heavens may be parodic of Dante and "comically preposterous," but it calls into question "uncertainties about categories and (sexual) differences" in the poem's earlier section when a (questionably stable) dividing line between earth and heaven is crossed (58). Evans also points out that the vernacular (seen as a feminine subordinate to the prestigious and permanent act of writing) intersects with the Latin tradition in the "table of bras" (RC 350, l. 142), which could symbolize stultifying

familiarity and ultimate linguistic stasis caused by the assumption of authority: the death of the vernacular's linguistic fluidity (Evans 58-59).

The table of brass is both a physical — mated from tin and copper, two malleable metals that lose this quality in their final product — and metaphorical stand-in for the narrative alloy that the opening lines of the *Aeneid* now exist in. Like the love of Aeneas and Dido, it is produced by the merging of two sensibilities; it is also less durable and significant than it may appear, unaware that it is but one voice in a competing wilderness of voices — among them Virgil, Ovid, and now Chaucer — that throw Geoffrey's knowledge of the story out of focus just as easily as his theorization of dreams. Inconsistencies appear here, as well as absences: "How Creusa was ylost, alas / That ded, not I how, she was" (RC 350, l. 183-184). The fact that not even Virgil can answer this question provides an examination of the nature of narrative authority; at the same time, setting this action in a temple dedicated to Venus introduces the impossibility of excluding cultural bias from an examination of history. Objectivity is precluded. The Aeneas's telling of events will be contrasted with non-Virgilian versions of the story that contradict his pious, heroic nature, such as Dares', where Aeneas opens the gates of Troy with Antenor. The problem of conflicting authority that results in reputation is even more crucial and problematic for Dido.

The pillars of the temple include Homer, Dares and Dictys, Guido delle Colonne, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Lucan, and Claudian, as well as Chaucer's invention "Lollius" (RC 365, l. 1465-1470). Again, this is a metaphoric representation of the way in which fame is held "upon [the] shoulders" (l. 1462) of these chroniclers. It also means that the house is architecturally endangered to a degree, especially when one considers the possible shortcomings of these stories, as well as questionable differences in their longevity (durability). Likewise, "Venus' 'chirche'" may be made of glass, which Koonce's 1966 study identifies as possessing the "purity and transparency" denotative of the "clarity of vision and the purity of condition in the heavenly Paradise" (Koonce 98-99), but merely stopping at this level of analysis of this section of the poem is far too simplistic. It belies the true nature of the church, an instability that becomes more apparent with Geoffrey's arrival at "Fame's resplendent castle" and the House of Rumor, a "false paradise" that not merely enchants the eye and spirit but "distorts the truth," as any attempt to rescue a definitive account of the story of Aeneas from the contradictions it is predicated upon makes clear (100).

If the church of glass distorts, the many instances of what Evans refers to as "memorial archives" in the poem perform similar functions, all of which explore memory and the "preservation" of incident, including the dissolving "ice foundation" of Fame's castle and the "sixty-mile long house of twigs" that cannot "retain or conserve" what it is meant to hold (Evans 56-57). She calls Chaucer's

vision of the House of Fame in the second book “something like a vast telephone exchange or switchboard, uncannily able to tap into every conversation” in all its truth or falsehood, accessing the entire range of human discourse (57). Rather than using this image to lend organization to discourse and the means in which it is disseminated into the archival process, however, it ends in an overwhelming, Babel-like labyrinth of “gret noyse” (RC 372, l. 2141), where “every speche, or noyse, or soun” (357, l. 783) contributes to the sensory overload that ultimately ends the poem.

All these images are presented as the “nightmarish others” (Evans 44) to the means of recording. Imagining Chaucer composing House of Fame before a computer which contains all his sources, from commentary on The Dream of Scipio to Dante, Evans notes that the poem, which comments on language using a “part comic, part anxious” tone, “is itself . . . obsessed by late medieval technologies of memory and archiving” (44). The reliability of the means of archival, especially when linked to the polyphony of rumor, is what Chaucer sets out to criticize in the poem: by finally taking us to the heart of it all and showing how problematic and arbitrary, respectively, archiving and reputation (which enjoy a symbiotic relationship) truly are.

Evans and French theorist Pierre Nora both view archives as obsessively produced, faulty substitutes for memory itself in much the way Julia Kristeva might describe a signifying economy as a system of words that aims at and fails at being what it represents. Nora says we create “lieux de memoires” (49), memory places, which utilize “auctoritas, a socially situated form of cultural memory” (55) as a means of maintaining “continuity with the past” (49). Vernacular writing, however, offers a place of memory which differs from the authoritative speech of medieval learning — the “weight of authoritative academic traditions” (55). The anxiety of difference produces the lingering presence of auctoritas in the text, finally slated to appear in human form as the poem cuts off, can today be seen as dramatizing the “deadly effects” of authority imposed upon the new vernacular which speaks to “every maner man / That Englissh understonde kan” (RC 354, l. 510): “the threat of no more writing” (Evans 55). When interpreted in this way, the end of the poem recalls the abrupt “She ys ded!” (RC 346, l. 1309) of Book of the Duchess. Alternately, it can be seen as a dramatization of the ultimate — comically agnostic — unknowability of any governing authority, the man who might somehow crash the party of language and pair off people with their exact belongings as he organizes concepts in their proper scheme.

The auctoritas of the church, which constitutes a rejection of “the excessive sign” for a humbled language in the Christian Platonic tradition, is traditionally contrasted with the “lavish” signification of courtly aristocracy (Knight 45). Yet House of Fame makes this relationship between language and ideology

“problematic” (45-46). “Learned and rare language” of Boethian philosophy, Macrobius’ commentary on Scipio’s dream, and the academic tradition are rendered powerless in the opening section on dreams, providing “no assurance” (46). Even as religious faith is nominally invoked in trying to explain the production of such mysterious images, it exists as an anti-philosophic (and almost parodic) consolation for a lack of certainty, an acknowledgement of powerlessness. Knight says that the poem continually “prove[s]” a “loss of faith in language,” as well, with great poets likened to rooks, and its linked signifiers “positivistically seen as ‘ayr ybroken’ . . . found to be a questionable instrumentality of the social power structure” (46). He sees Chaucer as creating subjectivity, confirming Foucault’s “famous challenge that ‘man’ is a recent invention” (38), replacing church- and state-constructed forms of the shaping of experience with a Gnostic, inquisitive view of the role of the author in social structures. While recognizing his own inability to change this mad carnival of discourse subjected to flawed archival, he nevertheless may be offering a replacement for at least some of the unstable bridges he has crossed, by stepping back and recognizing this radically destabilized vastness (On what axis does the house of wicker whirl? Does the axis itself whirl?) in a humbled poetic speech agonizingly aware of its own impermanence, the fact that it will vanish “like one’s own trashed e-mails,” invisible but having existed in a “virtual archive” comprised of “unconscious traces of the past” (Evans 63).

The ascent to Fame’s dominion begins in the second book with the appearance of the Eagle, which invokes the mythological and Biblical tradition of flight in such figures as Icarus and the mysterious “Ennok” (RC 355, l. 588), who (this action devoted little space in terms of its significance) walked with God and was no more. Men such as him and Ganymede have been “ybore up” (l. 590) to serve the gods and receive understanding. There is something significant in Geoffrey’s receipt of this honor, which has to do with his status as an author; this is learned when he, always the questioner requires explanation for this sudden, startling occurrence, which with its arbitrary suddenness, recalls Fame’s judgments. Analytical in nature, Geoffrey asks why he was chosen; the Eagle replies that the activity he undertakes, “In thy studye [...] of love enditest” (356, l. 633-634), has motivated his choice. It is time that he, as a writer and philosopher, will learn fully of a subject matter that “abstynence” (l. 660) has mediated an understanding of.

Koonce notes that Chaucer’s use of the Eagle mirrors Boethius’ Philosophy, “in whose feathers [he] makes his flight” (Koonce 142), but his employment of this archetype is ironically reconfigured to fit with Geoffrey’s thick-headedness; it can be no accident, after all, that the Eagle complains of his heft while transporting him. Intellectually, too, Geoffrey is “hardly ready to sing at heaven’s gate,” possessing a “fear and confusion” (Koonce 142-143), a “drede” (RC 355, l. 551) from which he must “Awak!” (l. 560). Chastised by the Eagle, “domb as any stoon” (356, l. 656)

he allegedly awaits enlightenment, a cure for the sickness that has blocked the fluidity of heaven, and the recognition of divine order, from entering his all too literal consciousness. Yet the shift in perspective — literary authority opposed to, and now replaced by, direct experience — that occurs in no way strips the text of ambiguity, no matter how much “art poetical” (361, l. 1095) is downplayed in favor of direct representation. If anything, Geoffrey’s proximity to the source of archival representation problematizes matters even further.

The House of Rumor, for example, is represented as the eye of the textual storm, to so speak, “a dizzying but exhilarating imagining of the archive without any of its gatekeeping functions” (Evans 65), with its wicker structure, abounding with “chirkynges, “gygges” (RC 371, l. 1942-1944) and “tydynges” (l. 1955) of a profusion of varieties, in all their deregulated variety: “Ne never rest is in that place that hit nys fild ful of tydynges” (l. 1956-1957). As this verbal chaos, what Evans refers to as a very feminine riot of language, occurs, one cannot help but note that the cage-like structure of the House lacks the primary function of the word “cage,” a clear illustration of the Saussurean gap between sound-image and concept, between signified and the faulty nature of the signifiers the poet adapts in order to represent it. Likened to “a model of the Internet” (Evans 65), the cage’s function is less to confine than it is to demarcate the boundaries of a Borgesian labyrinth, such as his famous, endless library that contains every volume imaginable, proliferating with correct and incorrect information (and incorrect “corrections” to correct data!).

This library model recalls his story “The Garden of Forked Paths,” but, given the nature of reputation and power that permeates the stuff of the Houses of Fame and rumor, a closer parallel is the story “The Lottery in Babylon,” wherein the transfers of power within the system of the lottery enable the narrator, “like all men,” to be both “proconsul” and “slave” (Borges 31). Language itself is arbitrary, linked to other interrelated, arbitrary symbols of power in an alphabet, as seen when the narrator displays the “vermillion tattoo” of Beth: “This letter, on nights when the moon is full, gives me power over men whose mark is Gimmel, but it subordinates me to the men of Aleph, who on moonless nights owe obedience to those marked with Gimmel” (31). Here, the (traditionally feminine) waxing and waning of the moon again recalls the fickle nature of Fame’s process of deciding reputation.

This process is carried out upon each “companye” (RC 366, l. 1528) of folk in all shades of moral ambiguity. Whether they, like the second company, “demand fame as their desert” (Bennett 155) for the cultivated virtue of “gentilnesse” (RC 367, l. 1611), or claim they deserve it for other reasons—like the fourth, who claim “Goddys love” (368, l. 1697)—“the proud,” regardless of merit, “are prey to Fortune” (Bennett 157). Fame is equated with Fortune in its transitory nature and “unpredictability” (158), ranging from the granting of “hollow” (161) glory to a “contemptuous dismissal of “identical wishes” (161). As an ironic revision (yet one

that is careful not to contradict Boethius) of the traditionally accepted nature of receiving the glory that one deserves, it is similar to the device of the ice castle's foundation, which "records the names of the famous" yet depends "entirely" upon "the shadow cast by [F]ame, her fickleness imagined here as the vagaries of temperature" (Evans 62); Fame scoffs at notions of permanence. Thus the names of those once famous are "molte away with hete" (RC 362, l. 1149), causing men to question "[w]hat may ever laste" (l. 1147). As an image of the fragile archive gone awry — something like a CD-Rom of important documents that we can imagine rendered unplayable in fifty years — it calls into question "the function of the (memorial) archive," which lies somewhere between a temporally defined usage or a permanent, auctoritas-based "conservation" (62-63).

Ultimately, this description of the realm of Fame is just as problematic as anything that has preceded it. The narrative form of the text that describes it, relies on a Christianized "aesthetic humility" (Knight 46) that is likely a parodic, conscious decision of Chaucer's behalf, an acknowledgement of language's failure to archive or represent what it describes, as well as a nearly metatextual acknowledgement of the hollowness of adorned verse. To use such language, after all, would lead one to fall victim to the disease of surplus that increasingly contaminates the poem in its main instances of sensory overload (RC 356, l. 674-695; 371, l. 1961-1976), twin litanies of events — ranging from discords and jealousies to marriages and famines — that Knight sees as a "casual," meaningless survey of the "garbled sounds of the whirling chaotic house of human productivity" (Knight 46), an overabundance, a "plente" (RC 371, l. 1973). Geoffrey's retreat into Christian rejection of this mad influx of language and event is informed by a value of divine order, and is perhaps fittingly evocative of a monkish, awed silence. But Chaucer's knowing use of it is more likely a sign of "despair" (57).

As one who prefers to gaze at the stars from the safety of his home, their evidence of divine order — and the narrative quality of the constellation — better comprehended from afar rather than in space, with the world "no more [...] than a prikke" (RC 359, l. 907) dwarfed in the presence of its massive "Galaxie" (l. 936), Geoffrey, the humble poet, would perhaps prefer not to be reminded of the transient quality of his existence, let alone the shortcomings of language. Yet the poem does a remarkable job of illuminating these murky aspects of literature and subjectivity, just as the "limitations" of the "authoritative [...] structure[s]" of both the church and the secular yet religiously informed literary world have been "inspected, even looked across" in Chaucer's earlier work (Knight 33).

This is, ironically, what House of Fame will be remembered for: a poet's mediation on his status as a meta-archiver of others' archived tales and memories and how his own memories shall effect others, reverberating throughout the ages. The continuity between past and present that the poem brings to light by anticipating

the postmodern, the uncertain, the ambiguous, is seen in its distrust of traditional narrative authority, which births a new turn in subjectivity seen in all literature to follow. Chaucer asks some very intriguing questions which haunt us still.

References

Bennett, J.A.W. Chaucer's Book of Fame: An Exposition of "The House of Fame." London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy. Translated by P.G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Lottery in Babylon." Everything and Nothing. New York: New Directions Books, 1999.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Riverside Chaucer. Larry D. Benson, Ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1987.

Delany, Sheila. Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Evans, Ruth. "Chaucer in Cyberspace: Medieval Technologies of Memory and The House of Fame." Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Vol. 23. Larry Scanlon, Ed. University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

Knight, Stephen. "Chaucer and the Sociology of Literature." Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Vol. 2. Roy J. Percy, Ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Koonce, B.G. Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in the House of Fame. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.