ABSTRACT

"Truth, Craft, and the Real in Chaucer's House of Fame"

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Contemporary study of Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* has made numerous attempts to categorize the poem under the loosely defined modern category of "literary nominalism," drawing heavily on disputed interpretations of the fourteenth-century philosophical debates about the ontological existence of universals. The approach takes a largely postmodern view towards language, literature, and epistemology, and assumes that the poem is a precursor to the values and prejudices of the modern world instead of a challenge to them. This dissertation studies the *House of Fame* in light of its intellectual context and its social and literary milieu: it is a poem that draws on a rich tradition of Christian and pagan literary authorities, densely populated with mythical figures, epic heroes, biblical prophecies, and literary allusions, all co-opted into an intricate, imaginatively appealing web of figural representation. It also imbibes the apocalyptic consciousness and the philosophical flux of the fourteenth century. At the foundation of this unwieldy poem lies distinct philosophical assumptions that hearken back to orthodox, realist sources and positions, expressed most relevantly to Chaucer's interests and time period in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and Wyclif's defense of realism, in *On*

Universals in particular. Standing on the firm ground of Augustinian realism, Wyclif disputes the modern logicians, who refute the existence of universals and thus chip away at the foundations of the Christian faith. In Boethius's and Wyclif's defense of universals, the themes and concerns of their work align closely with those of Chaucer, in particular in his emphasis on the connection that exists between word and deed, between language and reality. Chaucer is concerned with language and its ability to convey meaning, both as a poet and as a thinker grappling with the philosophical and intellectual currents of his day.

Truth, Craft, and the Real in Chaucer's *House of Fame*

by

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A Dissertation

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CHAPTER ONE

Contemporary and Historical Contexts of Chaucer's *House of Fame*

Introduction: The Divorce of Word and Deed

> Somtyme the world was so stedfast and stable
> That mannes word was obligacioun,
> And now it is so fals and deceivable
> That word and deed, as in conclusioun,
> Ben nothing lyk, for turned up-so-doun
> Is al this world for mede and wilfulnesse,
> That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse.
> —Geoffrey Chaucer, "Lak of Stedfastnesse" (lines 1–7)

The cultural condition Chaucer laments in this late fourteenth-century poem, namely, a general loss of confidence in the relationship between word and intention, word and deed, is distant from us in time but not in political and social experience. Cultural critics such as George Steiner, Ingeborg Hosterey, and novelist and philosopher Raymond Abellio have all used the biblical figure of the Tower of Babel as an image for a general crisis in western cultural authority, a crisis that since the mid-point of the twentieth century has diffused its fragmentation deeply into language itself.[1] The late Paul Ricouer describes the same phenomena from the perspective of a philosopher of history whose natural desire is to find meaning and truth in history; according to Ricoeur, in such times "the philosopher calls on history because he is threatened, shaken, and even humiliated to his very depths. Distrusting himself, he tries to regain possession of his own meaning by recovering the meaning of history lying beyond his own consciousness" (33). Closer to home, novelist and essayist Wendell Berry has likewise probed the consequences of a divorce of words and meaning, attributing to the modern world "a gradual increase in language that is either meaningless or destructive of meaning" (24), an "increasing unreliability of language" that parallels the disintegration of relationships among individuals and social entities. Berry says this semantic decline has been most visible in the past 150 years, but certainly socially conscious authors in every age have grappled with the same problem: when the very material of one's craft is shifting and unsteady, there exists not only an artistic concern with how to build, shape, or create something lasting and true but also an epistemological and philosophical problem with far-reaching consequences for community and humanity.

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[1] Cf. George Steiner, *After Babel*: *Aspects of Language and Translation*; Ingeborg Hosterey, *Zeitgeist in Babel: the Postmodernist Controversy*; Raymond Abellio, *Les Yeux d'Ezechiel sont Oueverts.*

Chaucer's lament for substantially the same deterioration of language in the late fourteenth century, explicitly here in his "Lak of Stedfastnesse," points out that men's words in his own degenerate time no longer represent steadfast obligation; instead language is now used deceitfully, and words and deeds are no longer necessarily alike in kind. This does not represent a merely passing concern for Chaucer: specific references to the relationship that ought to exist between word and deed can be found in his major works *The Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Crisyede*, and the *Boece*. Chaucer's concern is occasioned not merely by the inexorable shift in the forms of oral and written expression within a given language, such as he laments in *Troilus and Criseyde* (2.22–28),[2] but by social acceptance of a disingenuous use of language to conceal, dissemble or confuse in regard to speaker's meaning.[3] While this subject is complex technically in a way

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[2] "Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge / Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho / That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge / Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so, / And spedde as wel in love as men now do; / for to wynnen love in sondry ages, / In sondry londes, sondry ben usages." (2.22–28)

[3] Owen Barfield's four lectures on this subject, given at Brandeis University in 1965, are now reprinted by the Barfield Press in *Speaker's Meaning* (2006). Barfield's conception here is also useful as a

Chaucer does not formally engage it, we can see how, at the foundational level, it is prompted by the same underlying factors and order of concern. We see this clearly in his *House of Fame*.

When there is a crisis of authority in the culture—something Chaucer reflects everywhere in his poetry after the dotage of Edward III and the loss of civic idealism and chivalric values during the regency of Richard II, political instability is only one of the more obvious manifestations.[4] When we consider as well that the divided papacy, the so-called "Babylonian captivity" of the throne of Peter, with one claimant in Rome and another, equally disreputable, residing with a rabble of cardinals in Avignon, we can understand just how deeply the Catholic culture of Chaucer's England was shaken. Chaucer's poem was written in 1378—the year of this great scandal. The loss of authority at all levels—political, theological and ecclesial—was more traumatic than we can adequately now imagine. Given the absolute importance of Truth—in its medieval sense of correspondence, verifiability and also of "troth," fidelity in respect to covenants of word and deed—to late medieval culture, there were serious ramifications for literature and history, and for their reliability as well. Suddenly, at the deepest levels of trust and filiation, there are almost overwhelming grounds for cynicism and skepticism; signification itself comes under intense strain. This is particularly the case where a loss of trust in authority has engendered dispute about "what counts" as important or praiseworthy, as the vacuum in the realm of noble ideals seeks to be filled.

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perspective in Chaucer, because of its correspondence to the essentially Augustinian medieval notion that meaning resides ultimately in the speaker's intention, not mechanically either in the sign employed or even in the object referred to by that sign.

[4] Cf. Derek Brewer's *Chaucer and His World.*

House of Fame is often assumed to be either an inferior or an unfinished poem (although Chaucer certainly had time and opportunity to complete it to his satisfaction). Those holding this opinion point to the seeming lack of continuity, confusions of purpose, and thwarting of readerly expectations that are endemic to the poem. Alexander Pope writing his paraphrase, the "Temple of Fame," in the much more culturally self-confident Augustan age of the eighteenth-century does away with these confusions entirely, confining the matter of his revision of Chaucer's original to the temple of Fame itself and Fame's activity in the preservation of reputation, eliminating the seemingly tangential and lengthy narrative that Chaucer indulges in as he recounts various histories, theories, and suppositions. Pope then ends with an entreaty that heaven teach him to scorn false fame, creating a sense of closure that Chaucer's poem does not so unequivocally achieve: Chaucer's ambiguous ending instead trails off immediately after the introduction of an unnamed "man of grete auctorite," a man whose appearance is anticipated by the general expectations of the dream-vision genre and by the stampede of the various dream figures in his direction. These expectations of closure are frustrated, as are many other of the expectations created in this many-layered poem, and it is unclear whether the *viator*, the eponymous, dull-witted Geffrey, attains any sort of transcendence, illumination, or even understanding as a result of the vision. In creating this dissonance, Chaucer's text raises deliberate questions about the nature of speaking, writing, and interpreting, and about the reliability of authorities—compounding these difficulties with ambiguous and ironic tones and with a curious multitude of images and references—but he does not share in the ultimately skeptical philosophy that divides words from meaning, despite what such questioning might imply to contemporary readers schooled in the angst of the modern age.

Berry's critique of the "standardless functionalism" of the contemporary language theory that sees language as only arbitrary—that will not admit "any fidelity between words and speakers or words and things or words and acts" (29)—is thus a useful parallel to the intricacies of Chaucer's semantic and epistemological questions in *The House of Fame*. Like Chaucer, Berry is reacting to conditions created by a general loss of cultural authority and social confidence; this loss, too, is reflected in a species of neo-nominalism in language (e.g. Deconstruction) and a tendency, at both the civic and ecclesiastical level, toward perversion of heretofore stabilizing referents in the pursuit of subversive agendas. Theories of language contain within them a view of the human place in the universe, in the hierarchy of being, and Berry's account of language holds truer for Chaucer's system than does a "degenerative accounting," i.e. the modern view that language refers to nothing and requires no action or belief from its users. This portrayal of language holds in contempt "the common ground of human experience, memory, and understanding from which language rises and on which meaning is shaped" (52), and thus invalidates the historical and cultural continuity necessary for understanding an author who was concerned with making his words *mean*. Berry describes this contemporary account of language as a "linguistic no-man's-land in which words and things, words and deeds, words and people failed to stand in reliable connection or fidelity to one another" (62). This theoretical wasteland obviates the relationship between language and reality, putting words out of correspondence with their substance.

Berry's own theory of language, on the other hand, rests on the premise that accountability is essential to its function: in order for language to *mean*, it must designate precisely, be spoken by a speaker who believes it and will stand and act upon it, and be conventional, expressing relationships recognizable to the community. "We assume, in short, that language is communal, and that its purpose is to tell the truth" (Berry 26). The two parts to this assumption are equally important in their effect on the users of language. Community speech is the unconsciously absorbed foundation of a language system "in which words live in the presence of their objects": it "is the very root and foundation of language" (33). The rich, varied mysteriousness of this shared speech whose possibilities are never completely grasped or drawn fully into the consciousness is the opposite of language cut off from its root: rootless language is in service of immediate, expedient, or selfish ends, and, Berry says, ultimately leads to destruction. The assumption of truth as a foundation and a goal is essential for communal speech, and the truth to which Berry refers exists both inside and outside the system. Truth exists within the system through relational accountability between words and things, between perception and reality. It exists outside the system as a standard of measurement and evaluation, the objective Truth by which things are judged.

These notions are not much in vogue among contemporary literary theorists, as interest in dialectic has shifted away from truth-telling and truth-finding to the linguistic possibilities of lies, subterfuge, indeterminacy, and conflict as mere variety, subjectivity in pursuit of "playfulness." The contemporary privileging of discord leads to reinterpretation of the past, identifying in our literary forefathers sympathies with and precursors to this predilection of our own time, but Berry distinguishes between these conflicting ideologies unequivocally: "The first aim of the propriety of the old poets, by contrast [to the moderns], was to make the language true to its subject—to see that it told the truth. That is why they invoked the Muse. The truth the poet chose as his subject was perceived as *superior* to his powers—and, by clear implication, to his occasion and purpose" (29). This outside truth, external to the author, is a more or less objective and, indeed, timeless truth. This truth is necessary: without an outside standard of judgment, the system of language fails.

I begin with Berry's critique as an antidote to anachronistic readings of *House of Fame* that see Chaucer as a twentieth-century existentialist who despairs of finding truth or meaning. This dissertation purposes to place the decidedly fourteenth-century Chaucer in relation to orthodox philosophical positions on the nature of truth in language and being, positions often dismissed by contemporary critical studies of the poem for their incompatibility with current critical predilections and trends. In particular, this study will address the topic of "literary nominalism" as it has been applied to *House of Fame*, arguing that instead of demonstrating nominalistic tendencies—as literary scholarship in the past several decades has loosely (and oftentimes incorrectly) defined nominalism—Chaucer can be identified, more appropriately for the time period, as a philosophical realist of sorts, drawing heavily from widely-accepted sources instead of deliberately flouting the philosophy defended by the standard, orthodox authorities of his day.

Relationship between The House of Fame *and* The Canterbury Tales

The eponymous narrator of *The House of Fame* is a poet—in the service of Venus—who, after an inconclusive summation of medieval dream theory and a startlingly serious injunction to the audience to take this dream seriously or face dire consequences, relates the dream he had, ostensibly, on the evening of December 10. The dream journey itself begins in Book One in the temple of Venus, where the narrator finds himself looking at the story of Aeneas depicted all around him on the glass walls. He is fixated on the story of Dido and Aeneas and their disastrous love affair, which is consummated in Book IV of the *Aeneid* and culminates in Dido's suicide, after Aeneas abandons her to fulfill his duties to his gods, his people, and his progeny. After sympathizing with Dido's plight and questioning the injustice of the historical record that excuses Aeneas's dishonorable actions towards her, Geffrey leaves the temple of Venus, feeling disconnected and confused, looking for someone who can tell him where he is and who created the images that have caused him such internal conflict. He wanders outside into a desert, and, with no human help in sight, prays that Christ will preserve him from "fantome and illusion." Immediately afterwards he is snatched up by a large, golden eagle.

The voluble eagle who descends upon Geffrey introduces himself as a messenger from Jove, come to reward the poet's fruitless service to Venus by taking him to the midpoint of the world, the house of Fame, which is the final home of all speech. Here, Geffrey is promised, he will hear "love tydynges" of a far country. The eagle acts as Geffrey's guide as he carries him through the air, tutoring him on speech theory and cosmology, and then deposits him at the court of Fame, built on a foundation of ice. In the court of Fame, Geffrey will witness the goddess dispensing renown to worthy and unworthy petitioners arbitrarily, revealing the instability of worldly fame and again calling into question the authority and objectivity of the historians and poets who hold up the glory of the past. The vision ends in Book Three in a whirling cage of twigs which is the house of Rumor, a labyrinthine structure swarming with a gossiping mass of people. These shipmen, pilgrims, pardoners, and messengers exchange among themselves various lies and truths that fly out through the cracks and chinks in the cage and head for Fame, who will broadcast the rumors according to her whim. It is here in the house of Rumor—as Geffrey revels in the gossip that he missed out on as he spent his evenings shut up with books, knowing nothing of his neighbors and having no personal experience of love himself—that the man of great authority appears and the poem ends.

There is a critical consensus that this ending holds within it the promise of what is to come: the dimensions of the cage, being sixty miles in length, suggest the sixty-mile journey from London to Canterbury that Chaucer's pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* will take. Rather obviously, this cage holds within itself the "authority" centers of Church and State. Included on that journey are a motley collection of tale-tellers, both liars and truth bearers, similar to the mass of figures that appear generically in the cage of Rumor. The multiplicity of distinctive individual voices in the tales (and therefore in the less-regarded *House of Fame*) holds interest for modern scholarship in its variety and conflict. Italo Calvino has commented specifically on this hallmark of the hermeneutic of modernity—the hermeneutic that his own meta-fiction exemplifies—delineating an important contrast between modern and medieval perception:

> Medieval literature tended to produce works expressing the sum of human knowledge in an order and form of stable compactness, as in the *Commedia*, where a multiform richness of language converges with the application of a systematic and unitary mode of thought. In contrast, the modern books that we love most are the outcome of a confluence and a clash of a multiplicity of interpretative methods, modes of thought, and styles of expression. Even if the overall design has been minutely planned, what matters is not the enclosure of the work within a harmonious figure, but the centrifugal force produced by it—a

> plurality of languages as a guarantee of a truth that is not merely partial. (*Six Memos* 116–17)

Here, Calvino lays out his hermeneutic of multiplicity, a mode of interpretation that showcases for the reader the confluence of many voices representing the spectrum of human experience. In some ways, this hermeneutic seems compatible with the broader principles of Augustinian charitable reading practiced in the Middle Ages, reading that could incorporate many representative voices in its quest for truth: Augustine describes the practice of charitable reading as reading that not only seeks reconciliation within texts, allowing for apparent surface imperfections to be subordinated to and explained by the *sentence* of the whole, but also produces charity within the reader, who will be led beyond self to a deeper communion with God and neighbor (*On Christian Doctrine* 1.36.40). But Calvino's version is fundamentally at odds with the medieval hermeneutic because multiplicity is its end; the modern form of interpretation Calvino practices does not seek reconciliatory wisdom or charity, but multiplicity itself, an appreciation of particularity that precludes unity.

This is where critical approaches to Chaucer's oeuvre tend to begin, with the assumption that it is variety and *solaas*, not unity and *sentence*, that are the ultimate goal of the texts. However, being caught up in this critical fascination with the multiplicity of voices makes it easy to overlook the problematic fact that both the *Canterbury Tales* and *The House of Fame* end with a man of authority. The many voices in the text are answered by the final authoritative voice of the Parson in the *Canterbury Tales*, and they are silenced in the anticipation of the final, unnamed, authoritative voice of *House of Fame*. The implications of these final figures cannot be, as modern studies of Chaucer tend to assume, summarily dismissed: in both cases, the presence of the final authority and anticipation of his advent is woven throughout the entire narrative project.

Calvino's popular work of metafiction *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* demonstrates this clash of the interpretive cultures of the "via moderna" and the "via antiqua"[5] clearly. At the conclusion of the novel, an intertwining of a multiplicity of voices and stories culminates in the final scene in a public library, where the Reader, the main character, tries to view the books he could read only pieces of on his journey. His desire for closure is checked again when he finds that book after book continues to be unavailable. Various readers studying in the library begin to converse with the Reader, revealing their particular reading habits and tastes and adding to the slowly developing definition of true reading, the ideal modern hermeneutic by which books should be approached. The missing book titles coalesce into one essentially meaningless (though coherent) sentence, a string of words that reveals nothing but continued expectation for closure. The open-ended question of the library readers hangs in the air: "What story down there awaits its end?"

In this conclusion, the numerous stories that have tantalized the Reader (and readers) along the way remain incomplete, but they are all subsumed under the larger narrative, an indeterminate ur-text to which all story hearkens back. This is Calvino's ultimate answer: the multiplicity of voices join together into a vague mix, and though our readerly desire for closure has been frustrated repeatedly through the novel, we end with a connection to Other Readers. All the readers have contributed their methods, shared their desires, and though their perspectives on reading may be limited or even flawed, the dialectic itself is the answer: the readers of the novel have learned something about the inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of the contemporary act of reading. In the hermeneutic advocated by Calvino's representative readers, the indiscriminate convergence of all truths makes them simply a part of a featureless mass, a cloud of thoughts and ideas that have no form or individual appeal to attract us to them: one is just as good (or as mediocre) as another.

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[5] Cf. Laurence Eldredge's "Chaucer's *Hous of Fame* and the *Via Moderna*." The terminology used to label these categories will be explained more fully below, in Chapter Three.

In a lecture entitled "Multiplicity," Calvino describes the contemporary novel "as an encyclopedia, as a method of knowledge, and above all as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world" (*Six Memos*, 105). *If on a Winter's Night* fits this description of a modern encyclopedia, a scientifically objective *summa* of all things known, which makes no commentary on the relative value of the information it collects. Meanwhile, the characters give no sense that they are able to evaluate the "truths" they receive out of the amorphous collection of data. Without an internal hierarchy of language or ideas that reflect external truth, one word or idea is just as true as another, and these competing realities cannot be reconciled in the text. This modern reader, however, does not expect such reconciliation: the egalitarianism of this hermeneutic ensures that all voices have equal weight in the end.

This modern hermeneutic is one of the reasons that the *Parson's Tale* is so often overlooked in modern editions, criticism, and study of *The Canterbury Tales*. Readers begin with assumption that the multiplicity of voices is the end goal of this text as well. The tales are all assigned equal weight, making it possible to exclude tales based not on a judgment of their ultimate value in context or on their own merit, but on the amount of entertainment they can provide. Without a larger hierarchy of order, an underlying unity of meaning, the text becomes a mere collection of voices telling stories that are only loosely linked by the narrative frame. But it is the *Parson's Tale* in which order, the order of the world and the order of the Canterbury pilgrimage, is made apparent, for though "God hath creat alle thynges in right ordre" (218), man has disturbed the created order and must seek remedy: "God sholde have lordshipe over resoun, and resoun over sensualitee, and sensualitee over the body of man. But soothly, whan man synneth, al this ordre or ordinaunce is turned up-so-doun" (262–63). The "up-so-doun" disorder of sin has been evident throughout the whole of the *Tales*, and now is the time for penitential self-examination. The sun is descending and time is running out: the day of judgment is nearly at hand. The enjoyment of the tale-telling competition has run its course and the Parson now turns to pure *sentence*, to the individual's necessary self-interpretation, to the end that God might "enlumyne and lightne the herte of the synful man to have repentaunce" (244). He invites the listeners and readers to participate in the reality of the Christian life, to diagnose the true state of the soul and apply the corrective, not only internally, but externally, in good works.

Throughout the *Tales,* diverse folk speak and interpret differently. Their voices compete and clash with one another, fighting for dominance in the mix of stories and genres and ill-conceived motives. But, as in the substance of the gospels whose narrative technique the poet references in explaining his own storytelling in the prologue to the "Tale of Melibee," there is—even in this motley collection of tales—authoritative truth that is unified in its meaning, its *sentence*: there is One voice that is authoritative, and that voice dignifies all voices, giving them the power to speak. The dialogue of the text is a true multiplicity of voices representing all social ranks, stations of life, degrees of education, and capacities for understanding deeper truth, but in the end there is a final word that makes all the others make sense. There could be no true multiplicity without this final voice that evaluates them all. There is variety in interpretation (even among valid interpretations), but Truth itself does not change and cannot be altered.

The Canterbury Tales thus ends with an authoritative voice, and it is truly authoritative, for the weight of the gospel, the teaching of the church, and the penitential manuals of the day, are clearly evident in the Parson's preaching. The man of great authority in the *House of Fame* is easier to misconstrue, as he remains unidentified and does not speak. Though his presence has been problematized in modern interpretations, this dissertation will argue that the man of great authority, too, wields the authority of scriptural Truth and signifies the coming fulfillment of expectations in the true Last Judgment, of which the scene in Fame's temple serves as an inverted version, reminding the biblically literate of the impermanence of the things of this world within the larger scope of the Christian grand narrative.

Chaucer's Hermeneutical Context: The Medieval Synthesis

The Christian grand narrative is essential context for understanding the epistemological assumptions at the basis of medieval literary theory.[6] Hugh of St. Victor, a leading theologian and interpreter in the twelfth century, begins *The Didiscalicon*, his guide to the arts, with a summary statement of the end of all philosophy: "Of all things to be sought, the first is that Wisdom in which the Form of the Perfect Good stands fixed. Wisdom illuminates man so that he may recognize himself [. . .]" (44 [1.1]).[7] This wisdom "is by definition a communal rather than an individual possession," an inheritance possessed not only by individuals in particular moments of time, but rather in a diaphonic community of fellow citizens across all time, as David L. Jeffrey discusses in his study of literary culture in the Western Christian tradition, *People of the Book* (169). These voices and sources of wisdom and knowledge came not only from within the church, but from outside as well, as medieval thinkers appropriated pagan voices from the past and harmonized an array of *auctoritas* in *florilegium*, compilations, and *summas*. Because of the mystical nature of the Church itself, a receptive openness to others in communal reading results in deeper understanding through the organic continuity between individual and community, the one and the many. Mariano Magrassi in *Praying the Bible,* an introduction to the practice of *lectio divina*, or prayed reading, explains that "The Church and the individual are not two different realities—not just because the individual is part of the Church but because the entire mystery of the Church is in some way contained in every soul" (9). The communion of many voices which leads individuals to the transcendent Truth is the essential mystery of the Church.

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[6] Cf. David Lyle Jeffrey's chapter "The Book without and the Book within" (139–66) in *People of the Book*: "In a medieval Christian world view an aspiration to understanding is vigorously encouraged—but with a *caveat*: frustration is to be expected, because though our minds are wonderfully adept instruments, our fallen use of mind is perpetually encountering experiences of limit. It is in this context that the biblical 'grand narrative,' setting our sense of both potential and limit in relation to creation's larger story, from beginning to ending, became so useful to medieval Christian discussions of how it is that we learn, and why" (144).

Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* is representative of such compilations of voices, pagan and Christian, and Chaucer, speaking as the fictive representative of himself who has journeyed among the sundry folk on pilgrimage, begins his prologue to *Melibee* with a set of instructions for charitable reading, for reconciling the matter within and without this tale which seems outwardly to be so different from the others. As *Melibee* is the only complete tale that Chaucer assigns to his own character, readers have reason to give particular weight to this tale as a key to discerning Chaucer's entire authorial *entente*. The tale allegorizes crucial doctrine that will be explained in more depth in the culminating sermonic call to repentance, the *Parson's Tale*. *Melibee*, as Chaucer tells his readers, is "a litel thyng in prose," a moral tale which has been told before, "Al be it told somtyme in sondry wyse / Of sondry folk, as I shal yow devyse" (937–42).[8] The story has been told and retold, with fluctuating attention to details and episodes, just as the four gospel writers who tell of Christ's life and passion "seith nat alle thyng as his felawe dooth," with some saying less and some more. But these variations in the narratives are mere "tellyng" differences: "doutelees hir sentence is al oon" (945, 948). The *sentence* of a narrative is deeper than the sum of its parts: there are no contradictions in meaning among the Evangelists, Chaucer maintains, for truth cannot contradict itself. He follows this brief reconciliation of the gospels with an exhortation to both the fictive and the actual audiences who will "hear" the tale:

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[7] Ivan Illich writes that Hugh of St. Victor viewed reading as "ontologically remedial" (11). This could easily be said of medieval authors in general, for they believed texts were formative, providing remedy for the vices and disordered loves that corrupt the essence of man, for as Wendell Berry implies, all authors worthy of the name have a vision and a truth to convey—the difference in their hermeneutics lies in their conceptions of the essential nature of man and the agents of corruption that are at work on his soul.

> Therfore, lordynges alle, I yow biseche
> If that yow thynke I varie as in my speche,
> As thus, though that I telle somwhat moore
> Of proverbes, than ye han herd bifoore,
> Comprehended in this litel tretys heere,
> To enforce with th'effect of my mateere,
> And though I nat the same wordes seye
> As ye han herd, yet to yow alle I preye,
> Blameth me nat; for, as in my sentence
> Shul ye nat fynden moche difference
> Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte
> After the which this murye tale I write.
> And therfore herkneth what that I shal seye,
> And lat me tellen al my tale, I preye. (*Tale of Sir Thopas* 953–66)

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[8] This and subsequent citations from *The Canterbury Tales* and all other Chaucerian texts are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

Though the tale may seem at variance with previous tales because of its differences in speech, matter, and use of authorities, Chaucer, transcending his role as pilgrim narrator and speaking as the author of the whole of the *Canterbury Tales*, maintains that the *sentence* of the tale is not substantially different from that of the larger narrative, that in fact the careful reader will recognize that the *sentence* of this tale is at one with that of the larger frame of the pilgrimage to Canterbury. As such, the tale is ultimately a miniature of the Christian grand narrative in which all believers participate.

Lady Prudence is the wife of Melibee, a householder who, as a result of neglecting to guard his property, has been robbed and injured by three enemies, who allegorically represent the three enemies of man: world, the flesh, and the devil. By allowing his house to be broken into, Melibee has allowed the immediacy of this world's pleasures to depreciate both his material and spiritual equity, neglecting the potential for self-transcendence available in maintaining the integrity of communal bonds and mutual obligations, and forgetting the imminent coming of Christ in each day. Prudence acts as a wisdom figure, a faithful physician who ministers to Melibee's soul, seeking to repair his wounded wisdom and his ties with his community, and pointing beyond the immediate context of Melibee's situation to community life into the kingdom of heaven. Melibee puts himself under Wisdom's governance and is taught the healing lesson of forgiveness and, ultimately, of redemption. He is led through the stages of self-examination and mastery to the restorative action of forgiveness, which will reconcile him with his community and with God.

Melibee's closing speech of forgiveness to his enemies is in the language of reconciliation and earthly peace, but it also pertains to the final judgment:

> it contsteyneth me to doon yow grace and mercy. / Wherefore I receyve yow to my grace / and foryeve you outrely alle the offenses, injuries, and wronges that ye have doon agaym me and myne, / to this effect and to this ende, that God of his endeless mercy wole at the tyme of our diynge foryeven us oure giltes that we han trespassed to hym in this wrecched world. / For doutelees, if we be sory and repentant of the synnes and giltes which we han trespassed in the sighte of oure Lord God, / he is so free and so merciable / that he wole foryeven us oure giltes / and bryngen us to the blisse that nevere hath ende. (1879–87)

Melibee's conclusion is a fitting one, showing that Prudence's cure has worked in restoring his wisdom, but it also signals beyond this story to the larger pedagogical strategy of *The Canterbury Tales*, preparing the reader for the Parson's sermon in which reflection will turn inward to the individual's repentance.

The medieval hermeneutic presupposes life as a transforming pilgrimage, a continual journey in company toward the celestial Jerusalem.[9] In *Canterbury Tales*, the metaphysical journey is figured in a physical pilgrimage, as the company of secular and religious pilgrims makes a penitential journey for their individual misdeeds, a journey whose ostensible purpose and end is Christ, figured in the Eucharist they will partake of when they reach their destination. There is thus eschatological significance for the *Parson's Tale*, which comes at the end of the narratives and serves as a reminder of what the purpose of the pilgrimage ought to be. Of course we know from the General Prologue and from the prologues to individual tales that there are unworthy motives among the pilgrims. Some travel to shirk responsibility, some for monetary gain, some to collect more religious relics at the shrine gift-shops (Christian kitsch was a lucrative business from the very beginning of Christendom), and some, such as the Wife of Bath, are along for pleasure. In his fourteenth-century book of moral instruction, the Knight de la Tour Landry cautions his daughters to not look for worldly pleasures in holy places, for "no body shulde go in holy pilgrimages for to fulfelle no foly, plesaunce, nor the worlde, nor flesshely delite. But thei shulde go enterly with herte to serue God" (51). The reminder is necessary, for this is a period in which the institution of the pilgrimage comes under severe attack as result of these abuses it suffered at the hands of the unscrupulous, religious and secular alike. The ideal pilgrimage, though, is an internal journey, one that leads toward transformation. The individual in communion with the company is brought to awareness of his or her shortcomings, resulting in salvific penitence: a reordering of self and of the desires occurs.

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[9] As Jacobus de Voragine explains in *The Golden Legend* in the thirteenth century: "The whole time-span of this present life comprises four distinct periods: the time of deviation or turning from the right way, the time of renewal or of being called back, the time of reconciliation, and the time of pilgrimage. . . The time of pilgrimage is that of our present life, for we are on pilgrimage and constantly engaged in warfare" (3).

As is the entire corpus of Chaucer's work, *The House of Fame* is written in the language of public discourse, the Scripture-saturated language of symbol and image with which audiences and solitary readers were all familiar. Far from allowing readers to escape into pure *solaas* of the text, Chaucer is continually challenging them to think—an indication this is not a time period that found thinking to be a burdensome occupation—because pleasure in reading comes from peeling away the outer husk, the pleasing surface of the story, and finding the layers of meaning and, eventually, the fruit of understanding. As Saint Augustine writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, his work on Christian literary theory which is foundational for the Middle Ages, "no one doubts that things are perceived more readily through similitudes and that what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure" [2.6.8]. Reading was a clearly interpretive activity: it is no new theory that each reader comes to a text with his own presuppositions, creating meaning. Both Augustine and Wyclif explain that in the effort to glean truth from a text (specifically sacred texts, but including secular texts by extension), the quality of interpretation depends on the training, character, virtue, and loves of the reader who approaches the text of Scripture, which was itself the ultimate standard by which people were to measure both their interpretations and themselves.

By his own disavowals of responsibility for the material he rehearses,[10] Chaucer places the burden on the reader to interpret rightly, to profit from this interpretation, and to discriminate between true and false.[11] As Chaucer plays with language, sources, and story in relating the misinterpretations and manipulations committed by his characters, he is relying on the court audience's previous knowledge of Scripture, "counting on the audience's ability to recognize the distortion. Aware of his manipulation of the material and the discrepancies between the original and his treatment of it, they would give the necessary corrective," for of course misinterpretation of Scripture would require correction (Reiss, "Biblical Parody" 52). Readers and listeners would also be aware of the traditional images Chaucer incorporates into the text, images which, as V. A. Kolve points out in his book on Chaucer's narrative imagery, would have been a part of the "essential literacy" of the time, providing "a cue for meditation" and inviting readers to "reflect upon the fiction in which it has been discovered, as well as its application to one's life" (359–60). The medieval readers' evaluative criteria were woven into the fabric of public life: right reading was not a matter of subjective preference, but an act of discrimination based on the orthodox standard.

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[10] In the *Miller's Tale*, in particular, Chaucer as narrator places responsibility back in the hands of the reader, reminding us that he, as the supposedly unbiased narrator, must "reherce" all the tales, regardless of the possible offense they might cause. Whoever wants to avoids a churl's tale is advised to skip the Miller's tale and choose another: "Turne over the leef and chese another tale; / For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale, / Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse, / And eek moralitee and hoolynesse. / Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys" (MilT 3172–85).

[11] Cf. A. J. Minnis's treatment of Chaucer as a "lewd compilator" in *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, which raises important questions on the subject of the author's role (190–210).

Chaucer's Historical and Philosophical Context: Medieval Schism

In his monograph on the intellectual and physical climate of Chaucer's time period, *Chaucer and His World,* Derek Brewer says of the *House of Fame* that it "reveals something of personal dissatisfaction and something of the deeper stresses of the age" (144). Being a careful diplomat, in the king's employ, Chaucer is circumspect in his acknowledgment of these stresses and dissatisfactions and equally careful in his criticism of the trends of his day, focusing his biting satire on the results of the contemporary upheaval instead of endangering himself and his career by indicting the powerful forces responsible for causing them. Brewer describes the 1370s as "a disastrous decade in which the strains on society culminated in the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1381" (139). High taxation caused by war in France, bad harvests, and the plague of 1374–75 all had a heavy impact on the material well-being of the nation's populace, but events that were further removed from the common hardships of day-to-day life also had tremendous effect on the discontent of the general population.

The monarchy was in transition after (and even before) the death, in 1377, of Edward III, the Black Prince, who had in a practical sense given up ruling the country when, in his dotage, he allowed himself to fall under the influence of his mistress Alice Perrers. The poor leadership of the country made for volatile relationships between the ruling class and the peasantry. Richard II, the boy-prince, succeeded his father in 1377 at the age of ten, and the ruling of the country fell to various councils as Richard matured. The Church, too, was facing a major crisis of authority as the papacy, the visible, earthly spiritual head of the Church, was thrown into question during the Great Schism (1378). The schism was most troubling because leaders in the church itself had elected both pope and anti-pope, leading to uncertainty and upheaval in all of Christendom, shaking the hierarchy to its core and dividing the loyalties of the faithful between Pope Urban VI in Rome and Anti-pope Clement VII in Avignon, while secular leaders of nations were faced with backing (and bearing the consequences of their choices) one or other of the claimants, based largely on factionalism and political alliances.

Meanwhile, Wyclif and the Lollards, along with popular writers of the day such as Chaucer and Langland, were denouncing the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church, its abuses of power and the corruption of its clergy. The intellectual climate at Oxford was also in flux, as various heterodoxies enticed philosophers and theologians down byways of logic and thought that proved dangerous, leading some to reject orthodox doctrines and again call into question the authority and certitude of Church dogma. With all the political and ecclesiastical turmoil of the time period, it is unsurprising that people would turn their imaginative energy towards feeding their eschatological hopes, towards thoughts of the justice and reward that could be brought about only by the overthrow of worldly and tyrannical powers, the instituting of the new heaven and the new earth promised by scripture on the unspecified day of Christ's return. Morton Bloomfield comments on this phenomenon, this renewed interest in apocalypticism—which will be discussed in more depth in chapter four of this dissertation—as a natural outgrowth of the uncertainties of the century:

> . . . there is good reason to associate this century with a new rise in apocalyptic thinking. Furthermore, the political crisis of the century in Western Europe and in the papacy, culminating in two popes hurling anathemas at each other, can only bear out this conclusion. Also, we do

> know of peasant uprisings, the domestication of the Black Death in the West, and an economic crisis caused by a shortage of workers and the concomitant break-down of the feudal system and the rise of the towns. In England, the century saw the forced abdication and murder of two kings. All these events provide much for the spirit of apocalypticism to feed on. ("Fourteenth-Century England" 64)[12]

These are the forces at work on Chaucer's imagination, and it is against this backdrop of civic and ecclesiastical unrest, around 1378, that Chaucer writes his *House of Fame*.

Critical Treatment and Modern Methodological Problems

The relevant critical studies of the *House of Fame*, to paint with a very broad brush, tend in two directions. B. G. Koonce's *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame* (1966) is representative of the first direction, largely ignored in the past three decades, which seeks an understanding of the poem's internal unity in the vein of D. W. Robertson's Augustinian and exegetical literary theory, drawing on the medieval mind's penchant for order and seeking allegorical meaning (and therefore religious significance) in Chaucer's work.[13] The other direction runs opposite to this: Sheila Delany's *Chaucer's* House of Fame: *The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (1972) and the works that follow in its trajectory are a reaction to what one sympathetic critic regards as the "imposing monolith of understanding" figured in the Robertsonian tradition of interpretation (Near ix).[14]

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[12] Cf. Marjorie Reeves' *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* and Curtis V. Bostick's more recent book on Apocalypticism in the time of Wyclif and Chaucer, *The Antichrist and the Lollards: Apocalypticism in Late Medieval and Reformation England*.

[13] Important studies include Tisdale's "*The House of Fame*: Virgilian Reason and Boethian Wisdom," Laurence Eldredge's "Chaucer's *Hous of Fame* and the *Via Moderna*," David L. Jeffrey's "Sacred and Secular Scripture: Authority and Interpretation in *The House of Fame*," P. B. Taylor's "Chaucer's *Cosyn to the Deed*," and Paul G. Ruggiers' "The Unity of Chaucer's *House of Fame.*"

[14] As Rodney Delasanta points out in 1983, the critical response is an attempt to cure by contraries: "commentators, usually in opposition to the Robertsonian refusal to acknowledge the hegemony of singulars in Chaucer's work, have begun to find in Ockhamist epistemology an antidote to the doctrinaire *allegoresis* that they find objectionable in their Augustinian colleagues" ("Chaucer and Problem" 149). Critics who have approached the *House of Fame* in particular from this angle include

Delany's book is dated, but it is significant for this study because it comes near the beginning of the scholarly interest in exploring the literary nominalism contemporary critics are eager to find in Chaucer's poetry, and it serves as a jumping-off point for much of the later criticism in a number of arenas: the contemporary predilection for the clash of difference has led to a privileging of the elements of Chaucer's writing that could indicate skeptical and/or nominalistic tendencies.[15] Later critics often address the same subjects as Delany does while adjusting the definitions of "skepticism" and "nominalism" to include (or exclude) shifts in twentieth-century historians', philosophers', and/or theologians' reevaluation and nuancing of the parameters of particular schools of thought, especially in reference to William of Ockham and those precursors and followers who are significant in their relation to his positions on universals. The shifting and often incomplete definitions make the subject matter more problematic, and in many cases indicate a contemporary, myopic understanding of the philosophical currents. As Russell Peck points out in his review of Delany's book, if Chaucer's views on earthly contingency are classified as "skeptical fideism," as Delany postulates, then St. Augustine and Boethius are 'skeptical fideists' too" (547). Just as often, the criticism, while giving cursory attention to the philosophical underpinnings of the problems being

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Holly Boucher, "Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio," Hugo Keiper, "'I wot myself best how y stonde': Literary Nominalism, Open Textual Form and the Enfranchizement of Individual Perspective in Chaucer's Dream Visions," Lisa J. Kiser, "Eschatological Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame,*" and Katherine Lynch, "The *House of Fame*: Truth Claims, Logic Games."

[15] The efforts to attribute to Chaucer a nominalistic agenda have themselves been treated with skepticism in recent years. Several critics discussed below argue against a deliberate or conscious treatment of the subject by Chaucer, but even those who object to finding nominalistic overtones in Chaucer's works often do so on the grounds of the trendiness of a nominalistic agenda, the imprecision of the terms and parameters of the whole enterprise, and the unsupportable assumptions made as a result. Critics in this vein often also assume that the confusions of the poem are irreconcilable, reverting back to Delany's original work that came before the "literary nominalism" phenomena and attributed to Chaucer an ultimately despairing voice in the poem. These views are still linked together thematically: Chaucer is seen at odds with the tradition and authority of the establishment, the church, in what is purported to be his literary denial that reason can lead us to a right understanding of an unknowable God.

debated during the late medieval period, moves to purely literary ground, to avoid making any apodeictic (and untenable) statements about Chaucer's philosophy *qua* philosophy. These studies present similar difficulties, ultimately "projecting a modern sense of futility onto an exuberant (though highly serious) Chaucer" using literary terms instead of philosophical ones (Peck, Review 547). Scholars operating in this vein attribute to Chaucer these nominalistic, post-modern proclivities on the grounds that such things were in the air: the medieval model is breaking down, the synthesis is being slowly dismantled, authority is eroding, and the waning of the middle ages, the harvest of medieval theology, is at hand.

In a lengthy introduction to a collection exploring "literary nominalism," Hugh Keiper, after addressing the numerous problems with the terms and suppositions of literary nominalism and cautioning against the overuse of the theory, describes the texts that fall into this category:

> . . . such texts would probably be seen to refrain from—or to abandon as futile—the quest for any ultimate source and authority, or for an authorizing, pristine moment of privileged insight or revelation. Very likely, moreover, by taking a questioning stance towards ideological absolutes and hypostasized cultural norms, they would seek to define and locate themselves in iconoclastic opposition to the essentializing drift towards reification of culturally stabilizing, ideologically affirmative discourse formations, and might thus be fantastically heterogeneous, inconclusive and open-ended compounds of plural, a-hierarchically organized discourses, flaunting, as it were, the deconstructive, subversive brand of intertextuality they espouse. ("Literary Debate" 49)

These jargon-laden sentences include a critical majority of the terms used to describe the texts in the purview of literary nominalism: iconoclastic, questioning, inconclusive, heterogeneous, subversive, intertextual, deconstructive. And with just a bit of stretching, this definition could encompass most of the world's literature, for "Nominalism itself, though still recognizable beneath its literary historical glosses, has become an almost chameleonic entity, modifying its definition with the changing emphases of literary and historical scholarship" (Penn, "Literary Nominalism" 182). This chameleonic entity poses problems for the study of the *House of Fame*, both for the conclusions that can be drawn and for the integrity of the entire enterprise of critical study.

William Watts's and Richard Utz's 1993 comprehensive bibliography, "Nominalist Perspectives on Chaucer's Poetry: A Bibliographical Essay," includes all the work done to that date relating to the topic of nominalism in Chaucer's works. The introduction to Utz's later update to this bibliography describes the factionalism in this line of critical exploration:

> Like few other topics in the academic study of medieval literature, the search for the possible parallels between philosophical and literary texts reveals the not always peaceful coexistence among the three basic approaches to the study of medieval literature and culture: While hard-core medieval philologists would not accept any claims for a 'literary nominalism' unless direct textual dependence can be demonstrated, scholars in medieval studies and the comparative study of medieval literature have shown themselves more accepting of investigations which diagnose a certain nominalistic Zeitgeist, mentality, or milieu especially in late medieval culture; and scholars preferring presentist/postmodern approaches have wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity to project their own mindsets into premodern matter.[16]

This projecting of mindsets is clearly problematic, and the interest in nominalism-hunting in the *House of Fame* has waned in the past decade, having proved, for some, to be inconclusive or untenable as more precise definitions of nominalism have made their way from philosophical studies and onto the radar of literary theorists. As Watts and Utz conclude, "there is ample reason to adopt a skeptical attitude toward the notion that Chaucer's poetry is informed by any kind of sustained, consistent, and direct engagement with nominalist thought" (163). It may be, therefore, that Chaucer makes unsustained, inconsistent, or indirect use of the tenets of what is loosely termed "nominalism": as an educated man of his day, Chaucer is addressing the issues that most plague his contemporaries. The ambiguities and apparent fragmentation of *House of Fame* make it a convenient vehicle for carrying the heavily weighted cargo of this modern nominalistic literary theory, but the poem has much more to offer to our understanding of Chaucer than a complex, antiauthoritarian confusion of voices. He is a philosophical poet writing an imaginative vision, using concrete, recognizable allusions that carry with them the force of meaning from their original sources. Granted, he is clearly problematizing the concepts of order, authority, historical reliability, authorial intent, and epistemology, but his questioning of principles integral to the medieval tradition does not need to indicate skeptical or nominalist rejection, or an ultimate fideistic acceptance of truth. The very act of writing the poem (and writing it through the voice of a humble, confused narrator) suggests that he is trying, as all artists do, to fit the pieces of his world together into a coherent whole.

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[16] Utz in a later emendation of this research identifies more precisely the four branches of study that can be identified under this broad heading of "literary nominalism":

a) epistemology (specifically the ontological status of universals and particulars and the consequences for human cognition)
b) the problem of language (specifically its contingency)
c) poetic structure (specifically its inconclusiveness or indeterminacy)
d) the relationship between the human and the divine (specifically literary parallels with God's absolute and ordinate power). ("Medieval Nominalism and the Literary Questions" 1)

I suggest that the support or refutation of the presence of conclusively nominalist philosophy in *House of Fame* is a topic that has perhaps been sufficiently mined. Meanwhile, realism—the staid, stalwart, monotonously orthodox elder sibling in the philosophical family—in Chaucer's work has been given short shrift.[17] William J.

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[17] With the clear exception of Robert Myles' study *Chaucerian Realism*, which does not address the *House of Fame.*

Courtenay incisively identifies the source of this favoritism in his seminal article "Late Medieval Nominalism Revisited": "New intellectual currents that are characterized, whether justly or not, as radical, have always been more attractive to historians than their traditional, less colorful alternatives. So it is that late medieval nominalism continues to be a lively research area, while fourteenth-century realism is largely ignored as an idea whose time was then passed" (159). Because this overlooking of realism has made critical anachronistic interpretations of *House of Fame* more possible, it is Chaucer's realism that is the major concern of this dissertation.

That Ockham had been largely misconstrued by historians and philosophers up through the mid-twentieth century has been proved many times over. Historians (and literary theorists) have been too general in their categorization of Ockham and his contemporaries, demarcating the realist/nominalist divide with too little precision and making sweeping generalizations about nominalism's resulting in the destruction of the medieval synthesis.[18] But overly-careful definitions provide little help for understanding the larger forces at work in the history of ideas. Nominalism, terminism, conceptualism, moderate-realism, and ultra-realism are all stopping points on the continuum of the understanding of universals, but the conflation of these is not a purely modern failing of discernment: Ockham and various of his followers and adversaries were misrepresented during their own time as well. The subtleties of arguments were misunderstood, glossed over, taken out of context, denounced, and argued against as fact even when certain propositions were merely propositions used in scholastic argument exercises.

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[18] William J. Courtenay's scholarship—pertinent articles and monograph listed in the bibliography—does much towards correcting or nuancing earlier errors and generalizations about medieval nominalism.

A. J. Minnis, in arguing that there is no proof for specifically nominalist influence in Chaucer's work,[19] argues that "[t]he Nominalist questions accentuated and elaborated upon issues which had been the currency of speculative theology for generations, but their minutiae did not trouble very deeply the hearts and minds of a wider audience: that dubious privilege rather belonged to Wycliffite thought" ("Looking" 178). It is to Wyclif, then, that we turn our attention. The major source text for the orthodox, realist argument against nominalism[20] during the late-fourteenth century is Wyclif's *On Universals*, which groups together the various shades of this heresy and argues for its ultimately destructive nature; the main concern, then, in this dissertation is not in the technical divisions themselves, but in the reaction to the general concepts. I therefore use the term "nominalism" (by necessity of its common currency) throughout this study in its standard, general sense: the philosophy that stands in opposition to realism, postulating universals to be names only, categories produced by the human mind without any corresponding real, extra-mental existence, while granting particular objects alone the distinction of real existence; nominalism is rooted in empirical knowing, realism in ontological knowing. For the study of Wyclif, nominalism is perhaps more appropriately termed "anti-realism," for Wyclif attacks its basic assumption of the non-existence of universals.

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[19] "In short, as far as Chaucer is concerned, there seems to be no necessity to allege the influence of radical, specifically Nominalist, ideas" ("Looking" 149).

[20] The term is anachronistic in any case; "nominalism" is not used in the fourteenth century to label this philosophical current.

Wyclif's Realism and the Problem of Universals

Connections between Chaucer and Wyclif have been explored elsewhere; though there is no incontrovertible evidence that the two men were personally acquainted, it is certain that they had a number of things in common, including the patronage of John of Gaunt as well as a number of mutual friends and political acquaintances, relationships which planted them in social circles and readerships with vast overlap: as such, David Lyle Jeffrey argues, there are "credible indications that ecclesiastical polity could place the two men squarely in the same camp on a fairly wide range of issues" ("Chaucer and Wyclif" 114). In addition, Chaucer's writing indicates more than mere familiarity with Wyclif as a major (and, later in his career, controversial) fourteenth-century figure: the correspondence of their thought on certain subjects suggests a pattern of "establishable" and "substantially mutual" values shared by the two men (Jeffrey 109).[21]

Wyclif's philosophy has not received much attention from contemporary scholarship, which concentrates on his theological views instead, but Wyclif scholar Paul Spade identifies him as "one of the most important figures in Oxford intellectual life during the second half of the fourteenth century, not only in theological and ecclesiological matters but in philosophy as well" (Introduction ix).[22] J. A. Robson suggests the reason why "Wyclif's metaphysic appeal[ed] so immediately and powerfully to his contemporaries" lies in his assertion that "the existence of God can be proved by infallible proof by a pure philosopher" (142). Laurence Eldredge discusses the philosophical context of the fourteenth century and the skeptics' loss of confidence in the capacity of reason, citing "certain tendencies which seem to undermine both received truth and the intellect's ability to know anything with certainty" ("Boethian Epistemology" 50). In this environment, foundational truth becomes even more important: young scholars, and people in general, were seeking absolute truth, a secure footing during a time of tremendous uncertainty and schism in the church, and it is this absoluteness that Wyclif is defending with his not inconsiderable arsenal of logic and proofs.

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[21] The similar audiences that Wyclif and Chaucer both and their common friends are also noted more recently by Rodney Delasanta in his article "Chaucer and Strode" and by William Kamowski in "Chaucer and Wyclif." As Kamowski points out, ". . . Chaucer of the *Canterbury Tales* followed the reformer by about a decade, when the theologian's notoriety was running high. The well-known Wycliffite agenda was here for expedient appropriation. Thus, it is difficult to imagine our poet—an informed public man and deft borrower from others' works—reiterating Wyclif's notorious criticisms of the Church without some cognizance of the theologian with whom he shared such acquaintances as John of Gaunt and Ralph Strode" (Kamowski 6).

[22] A number of scholars have suggested possibilities for unexplored areas of overlap between Chaucer and Wyclif, areas which remain unexplored partly because of the dearth of literature on Wyclif's philosophical works. David Jeffrey's appendix to his "Chaucer and Wyclif" chapter identifies Wyclif's restructuring of grammar and logic, his theories of interpretation and reader intention, and questions of form and matter as fruitful areas of inquiry. Exploring the complements between the works of both men

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shed light not only on the works themselves, but on the influence the philosophical climate of the time had on literature and literary theory: ". . . the principal preoccupations of Chaucer the poet, reading, interpreting Scripture, and characterizing narrowly personal judgement, make of his use and exaltation of scriptural tradition a worthy complement to Wyclif's own writings. For that reason Wyclif, as the leading English scholar of scriptural tradition during the formative years of Chaucer's writing, should be regarded seriously as a source for insight into Chaucer's literary use of the Bible and literary theory adapted to it" (138). Stephen Penn asserts that the influences between literature and nominalism are, at best, "complex and indirect" ("Literary Nominalism" 189), but that in seeking to bridge the gap "between theory and practice" there is important evidence to be found in scriptural exegesis and commentary of the late fourteenth century: "The writings of John Wyclif, for example, a contemporary of Chaucer and Langland, reveal a deep concern for the effect of nominalism on exegetical practice. The status of allegory, the uses of symbolism and the dangers of attending too closely to the properties of signs are all discussed at length in Wyclif's work, and are related explicitly, in many cases, to the philosophical assumptions which underlie them. Here, moreover, we are able to identify a 'literary' scholar who was deliberately and unambiguously presenting the nominalists in a critical and satirical light. If nothing else, his writings might at least provide a better indication of how the precepts of nominalism could be exploited and exaggerated by its opponents" ("Literary Nominalism" 189). Russell Peck likewise suggests, in his critical review of Delany's book, that the ideas of post-Ockham exegetes and philosophers would be beneficial to study of Chaucer's work: "With a poet like Chaucer, who was labeled by his contemporaries as a philosophical poet and about whose wide range of academic interests we in fact know a great deal simply from the enormous number of academic allusions and satirizations in his works, to say nothing of his profound interest in Boethius, his translation of the treatise on the astrolabe (a text from the arts curriculum, not some popularization he could pick up on the newsstand, as editors sometimes imply), his knowledge of alchemy, his recurrent discussion of free will and his awareness of the academic controversy over grace led by Bradwardine, and, for that matter, his knowledge of 'newe science' in *House of Fame*, and so on and on—with such a poet it would be of particular value to explore his treatment of specific topics such as those dealing with epistemology, perspective, will, natural intention, and the means of progress open to the viator, each in connection with the thoughts of English philosophers after Ockham, expecially Holcot, Bradwardine, and Wyclif, who also saw those topics as the crucial ones of their day" (546).

Wyclif's philosophical position responding to the ongoing controversy over the problem of universals is laid out in *On Universals* [De universalibus] (dated between 1368–69 or 1373–74 by scholars of the work), which is one tractate of the larger work *Summa de ente.* It is neither possible nor necessary to prove that Chaucer read this realist defense against nominalism or understood all the subtleties of the philosophical ground being covered; the work is representative of the conflict between the philosophical schools of realism and nominalism, a conflict which does not truly end even after the theological heresies of nominalism are repudiated by the Church and realism again becomes the dominant philosophy; nominalistic thought had made significant inroads into linguistic and epistemological territory, and was thus instrumental in ushering in the new era. As a representative of the larger concerns about the philosophical errors inherent in the modern approach, *On Universals* expresses objections that were common currency in the contemporary debate. Wyclif's position has been described (perhaps unjustly, as will be discussed later) as "ultra-realism" or "exaggerated realism"; it is this position that makes him most useful to this study since his reaction to anti-realist thought causes Wyclif to lay out the far-reaching consequences of the most indefensibly heterodox of the nominalists' beliefs and clearly identify the implications of this heresy, logically demarcating the metaphysical problems and concepts that Chaucer finds so absorbing and thus works into the plan of *House of Fame.*

In *On Universals,* Wyclif argues for the correctness and existence of universals by criticizing anti-realist theory, pointing out its inherent flaws, and by maintaining that belief in objective truth commits one to belief in real universals.[23] The converse is then true as well: “it is clear that someone who denies universals in the real world, is denying truth” (7.300–02). This concern with objective truth becomes a major theme in *House of Fame* as well, closely related to the idea of authority, and if objective truth were to be rendered impossible within the purview of the poem, Chaucer’s nominalism would be fairly well proven. A denial of real universals has practical consequences for Wyclif: this is not a realm of purely abstract concepts being mapped out for academic purposes.

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[23] See Anthony Kenny's "The Realism of the *De Universalibus,*" which lays out the plan of the work and summarizes its major points.

Wyclif affirms that there is universal, eternal, everlasting truth that is not material, and that there is a supra-sensible faculty of the intellect that can abstract “the universal intention from the phantasm,” or “perishable particulars,” of the world (3.37–45). It requires an act of will, an act of the human will conforming to the divine will, to prefer these superior things to their inferior counterparts, and thus “all envy or actual sin is caused by the lack of an ordered love of universals, as Augustine teaches (*Epistle* 22), because every such sin consists in a will preferring a lesser good to a greater good . . .” (3.145–48). If the will preferred the higher, common good instead of private good, if those “devoted to particulars were more concerned that a well-ordered commonwealth should thrive,” they would not sin (3.153–54). Wyclif can then logically draw this startling conclusion: “Thus, beyond doubt, intellectual and emotional error about universals is the cause of all the sin that reigns in the world” (3.162–64).

Wyclif draws from Augustine that the neighbor should be loved on the basis of his common humanity, not on the basis of particulars: “we are to love common things because of our affection for what is honourable and because of the beauty of truth shining in them; we must not give preference to particular things” (3.112–15). It is on the basis of universal truth and commonality that we are to love others, and this love of neighbor relates directly to the metaphysical issue, for, as Wyclif points out, if a man's reason is "so wrapped up in the images of bodily things" that he does not understand the universals common to them, how can he understand the mysteries of God and of the Trinity?

Disordered love of the particular over the universal and denial of objective truth go hand in hand, then, and are directly related to right action. Wyclif thus outlines the three ways of considering universals. First, the "crude" way of grammarians, who grasp things only in signs. Second—midway between grammar and the higher truth of metaphysics (and thus sharing in the condition of both, treating signs and realities)—is the way of the logicians, who study universals in signified things only, in relation to their being thought of: for the logician, truth is real only if it is knowable by a created intellect; therefore "truth and falsehood are in the mind and not in things" (3.113–14). The "thinkability" of universals, then, is their actuality, with universals having being only in the soul that apprehends them. Third is the way of the doctors of the church (and Wyclif adds "it is on them that I rely") and their metaphysical mode of considering truth. They recognize that the divine intellect makes universals, which are actual whether creatures recognize them or not; there is, therefore, "correspondence between a thing and a word" from the metaphysician's point of view, and the universals have real being outside the created soul (3.232–40).

Truth is available to humanity, Wyclif says, for "there is no uncreated truth believed by the faithful which does not have a trace or likeness in created material to lead us to believe it" (8.617–20), and because creatures bear the traces of God in them, they can detect logical flaws in theological debates. All men are therefore led to universals through the natural order, but it is the privilege of the philosopher to go beyond material signs and grasp the abstract concepts. Wyclif must then take into account the disagreement and error that exists concerning universals among scholastics, for these disputes occur despite the general revelation existing in the created order. The causes of the disagreement include first the worldliness of the reason darkened by a strong attachment to sensible particulars, which prevent the mind rising to the universals; other causes are sophistical reasoning, arrogance, and lack of proper instruction.

These impediments to understanding that Wyclif outlines are quite evident throughout the structure of *House of Fame*. B. G. Koonce relates the three books of *House of Fame* to the three books of Dante's *Commedia* in ascending order; it is an astute and helpful comparison, providing an excellent discussion of the mythological, astrological, and cosmological sources and influences in allegorical levels of the poem, but the structure produces some problems for the final leg of Geffrey's journey: the identification of Fame's temple, the outer court, or the cage of Rumor with Dante's Christian Paradise is fraught with theological difficulty that Koonce only partially overcomes by identifying the scenes as inversion of the Last Judgment. As the most influential three-part dream vision in the medieval west, the *Commedia* is clearly an important source for the *House of Fame*,[24] but structurally it is not an entirely satisfying gloss for Chaucer's project, which is at least in part an intellectual one, concerned with the comprehension that ought to be achieved as a soul is tutored in the course of a conventional dream vision. As such, Wyclif's three levels of comprehension of universals have close analogues in the structure of *House of Fame*. The first level of the grammarians is treated in Book 1, as Geffrey is unable to comprehend the signs with which he is confronted; the second level of the logicians in the figure of the voluble, pedantic eagle; and the third level of the search for metaphysical truth in the house of Fame and her court.

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[24] As I will discuss briefly below, Chaucer's invocations, the use of the eagle as guide and symbol, and the conventions of the dream vision are all indications of Dantean influence, but these allusions are of more interest here indirectly, in connection to their Boethian origins, than in their particular context in the *Commedia.*

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation will explore the ironies of *House of Fame*, for much of the significance of the poem is found in its inversion of standard stories, images, and tropes, and as such the poem requires the reader to fill in what is lacking, drawing from the storehouse of memory to glean truth and wisdom by comparing the contrary counterparts to the inversions Chaucer creates in the poem. The poem can be seen as a psychopharmicon in the tradition of Boethius's *Consolation*, but, if read by an obtuse reader, it fails to heal the soul. As Wyclif points out in his argument for the importance of reader intent, the will must be placed before intellect in order to interpret properly. The burden of interpretation lies with the right-hearted reader, as Geffrey indicates in narrative asides that protest his own ineptitude or laziness throughout the poem, indicating a hermeneutic more in keeping with the purpose-driven medieval model of seeking objective universal truths than with the contemporary regard for randomness and indeterminacy in a confusion of particulars.

Chapter two of this dissertation will explore the similarities in philosophy between Chaucer's own translation of *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Boece*, and the philosophy implicitly and explicitly dealt with in *House of Fame.* The borrowings from and allusions to the *Boece* suggest that Chaucer expected readers to be alert to the comparisons that can be so easily drawn, and thus situates the *House of Fame* against the backdrop of the philosophical realism made so clear by Boethius in his well-read work.

Chapter three will examine Wyclif's realism, as expressed in his *De Universalibus*, and his defense of universals against the forces that seek to undermine the supremacy of Truth in their rejection of real universals. Wyclif's outline of the types of thinkers who approach the question of universals has close analogue in *House of Fame*, and the connections between the two will be explored as an indication of Chaucer's own philosophical realism.

Chapter four will address the apocalyptic overtones of book 3 of *House of Fame*, the inversion of the biblical Last Judgment in Fame's temple, and the sudden coming of the man of authority, all in relationship to the realist stance on Truth. Chaucer's portrayal of the afterlife of words and the concerns of the realists and nominalists are related to each other in as he forges the connection between word and deed in this last book. The chapter will address the implicit standards, contained within the poem, for judging truth and worthiness, both of which are at the heart of Wyclif's defense of universals.

CHAPTER TWO

House of Fame and Boethian Epistemology

Introduction: Chaucer's Use of Boethius

> But considere the jugement of the perdurable
> lawe. For yif thou conferme thi corage to the
> beste thinges, thow ne hast noon nede of no juge
> to yeven the prys or mede; for thow hast joyned
> thiself to the most excellent thing. (Bo4.p4.193–97)

The philosophical tussles in which fourteenth-century scholars are engaged seem often to be concerned with purely academic and esoteric definitions, hair-splitting beyond the interest or comprehension of laypeople. Nonetheless, there are core issues being debated in the universities that quite clearly matter to Chaucer, and it would have been more difficult for a thinker of Chaucer's caliber to stay clear of the debate than to allow his work to be affected by it. Philosophical musings during any period are informed by the immediate controversies, and the question of universals which looms large as fourteenth-century thinkers grapple with the implications of Nominalism has tremendous bearing on the issues of epistemology that Chaucer concerns himself with in varying degrees throughout his work. Many critics have recognized that there are significant philosophical undertones in *The House of Fame*, but the tendency has been to see the poem, as one critic asserts in his study of its Platonic origins, as a "mimicry" or a "playful study of the epistemological problem," a study which is altogether "antiphilosophical and antitheological, even anti-intellectual" in tone (Grennen 262); it is the purpose of this chapter to explore instead the legitimate treatment of philosophy, theology, and intellection in the layers of the poem, presupposing that Chaucer deliberately makes references to standard sources familiar to his educated audience—drawing on the authoritative capital of these source instead of merely parodying them in a search for clarity and resolution. In particular, this treatment of sources purposes to show that the essential assumptions of philosophical realism underlie Chaucer's poetic rendering of a soul's search for meaning, truth, and authority. This chapter will argue that Chaucer enters the philosophical conversation of his time in the *House of Fame*, asserting his essentially realist position through references to and inversions of familiar texts, particularly the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Though Virgil and Dante are clearly influential in the figures and allusive substrate they provide for Chaucer and will be addressed when applicable, the philosophy that animates the *House of Fame* is driven by Boethian arguments, which figure heavily into *The Commedia* and into the medieval appropriation of *The Aeneid*, as seen in the commentaries of Bernard Silvestris and other interpreters.[1]

Chaucer's general use of Boethius is so obvious as to be considered unfashionable, and therefore receives little attention in contemporary scholarship: the desire to see Chaucer as a radical, breaking free from custom and tradition, precludes the acceptance of *Consolation of Philosophy* as a truly productive source for Chaucer. But *House of Fame* shows the extent to which Chaucer's imagination was saturated with

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[1] The allusions to and figures borrowed from *The Aeneid* and the *Commedia* here in the *House of Fame* are most coherent in their common relation to the *Consolation of Philosophy*, and I would argue that it is in this relationship that they exert the most influence in the poem. Boethius draws on Virgil and incorporates elements of Aeneas's journey into the plan of the *Consolation*, both out of reverence for Virgil's mastery of the language and for the story elements that lend themselves so readily to Christianization. Dante has similar intent, and his usage of Virgil is also highly colored by Boethius's appropriation of the same. Since correlations between the *House of Fame* and the *Commedia* have been well-documented (the most comprehensive study being Koonce's *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*), references to Dante will here be noted only by merit of this grounding in Boethian philosophy. And, of course, there is a significant nod to *Consolation* when Virgil disappears in Terrestrial Paradise, having led Dante as far a human reason can go: Dante is left in the care of Beatrice, the female figure of theology who will lead him to the higher things of God just as Lady Philosophy leads Boethius.

Boethian themes and imagery, and the extent to which he accepts Boethius's definition of true philosophy, figured in the person of Lady Philosophy. As Russell Peck asserts, "Issues of philosophy in Chaucer often lurk in matters of tone and method rather than system": though Chaucer is informed by the debates, as a poet he has no obligation to follow a systematic approach when entering the conversation (Review of Lynch 1346). This study therefore does not intend to catalogue similarities neatly, in one-to-one correspondence with source texts, but rather seeks the underlying coherence that Chaucer points towards in the shape and tone of the narrative, the internal coherence that Geffrey—the *viator* hampered by his own personal limitations—seeks, but does not reveal in full to the reader. That this undercurrent of coherence is an essentially Boethian epistemology is evidenced not only by numerous analogues between images, figures, and subjects that appear in both *House of Fame* and the *Consolation of Philosophy*, which Chaucer spent considerable time studying and later translating into his *Boece*, but also by the similar core assumptions about human nature and being. These analogues are hints to the right-minded reader, reminders of the realist schema of the cosmos.

Thematic connections between Chaucer and Boethius have been noted in studies that predate the more modern approaches to Chaucer already discussed. Bernard L. Jefferson's *Chaucer and the* Consolation of Philosophy *of Boethius* (1917;1965) delves into both the *Boece* itself as a work and into Boethius's influence on Chaucer's oeuvre at a deeper level than the "lists of specific verbal borrowings" which had, hitherto that study, comprised the bulk of scholarly interest in that area (Jefferson iii). Jefferson's adept treatment of the Boethian themes that Chaucer assimilated into his works, retaining their original import while recreating them in fresh and original ways, is concentrated on the *Knight's Tale*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *Truth*, the poems which Jefferson identifies as "the highest expression of the Boethian influence" (iii).[2] Laurence Eldredge explores the clear Boethian influence in *Troilus and Criseyde* along similar lines, maintaining that "as a sort of counterpoint to skepticism he [Chaucer] worked a Boethian epistemology into the fabric of the poem, so that the apparent skepticism can be resolved into an affirmation of an old truth" (49).

Bits of direct borrowings from the *Boece* have been noted in studies of the *House of Fame* by both these scholars and others,[3] but there is a larger context that needs to be recognized in this work as well, for *House of Fame* is an inversion of the entire project: the whole of the *Consolation* is turned upside-down in the confusion of what the eagle reduces to empty sounds in the court of Fame, and in the eagle's demotion of philosophy to sophistry, to the level of grammarians and logicians quibbling about this temporal world instead of seeking the truth of the next. The resolution Eldredge identifies as a counterpoint to skepticism is present also in *House of Fame*, and here, too, it is an antidote to the skepticism suggested by the ambiguities and confusions of the poem, which are essentially the same confusions that cloud Boethius's mind before Lady Philosophy sets to work on his wayward reason. In *House of Fame*, Chaucer hearkens back to this foundational text familiar to the literate public of his time, a foundational text that had grappled with many of the difficult questions of Chaucer's own time hundreds of years before and offered answers that were a balm to the psyche, answers that reached toward unity instead of division.

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[2] Jefferson acknowledges Boethius to be such a strong force in the composition of *Troilus and Criseyde* that it is nearly impossible to overstate his importance: ". . . so philosophical a poem is *Troilus*, so much does it abound in Boethian passages, so much does it illustrate the truth of the Boethian teaching, that it is possible even to suppose that Chaucer translated the *Consolation* for the express purpose that *Troilus* might be the better interpreted; at any rate, the two works go hand in hand" (130).

[3] Other astute (though brief) treatments of Boethian themes include P. B. Taylor's "Chaucer's Cosyn to the Dede," B. G. Koonce's *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, Charles Tisdale's "*House of Fame*: Virgilian Reason and Boethian Wisdom," Rodney Delasanta's "Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal," and Christopher Charles Baswell's *"Figures of Olde Werk": Visions of Virgil in Later Medieval England.*"

"Sunt etenim pennae volucres mihi"

The clearest figural connection between *House of Fame* and the *Boece* is the oft-quoted passage from book four, the first prose and meter, in which Philosophy tells Boethius that she will show him the way to get back to his true homeland, the country from which he has banished himself through the self-pity and grief—and through intellectual error that is ultimately revealed to be his misplaced dependence on the capriciousness of Fortune—which have lead his reason astray. Just previous to this prose passage, Lady Philosophy has ascertained from Boethius that he still believes the governance of the world is beyond the bounds of nature, that the diversity of the world can be held in unity only by God's goodness (Bo3.12). Since he knows this truth, Lady Philosophy's cure is nearly complete. Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius once again at the beginning of book four that her intent is to bring him back to his own "hous," whole and sound, to return him, by way of her path and means of transport, to the country of true philosophy where he flourished in his youth:

> . . . I schal schewe the the weye that
> schal bryngen the ayen unto thyn hous; and I
> schal fycchen fetheris in thi thought, by whiche
> it mai arisen in heighte; so that, alle tribulacioun
> idon awey, thow, by my gyding and by
> my path and by my sledys, shalt mowen
> retourne hool and sownd into thi contree. (Bo4.p1.64–70)[4]

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[4] To distinguish between the *House of Fame* and the *Boece* clearly, parenthetical citations throughout this study will use the abbreviations HF and Bo respectively, followed by book number, then, when applicable, the prose or meter number and inclusive line numbers. All quotations from Chaucer are from the Benson edition of Chaucer's complete works, and the citations will include the book number for

This prose passage and the following meter are specifically alluded to by Geffrey as he soars through the elements on the back of his eagle. Looking down on the elements—the clouds, mist, hail, winds, rain, tempests, and even "ayerissh bestes" —below him, the first meter from book four of the *Boece* comes immediately to his mind:

> And thoo thoughte y upon Boece,
> That writ, 'A thought may flee so hye
> Wyth fetheres of Philosophye,
> To passen everych element,
> And whan he hath so fer ywent,
> Than may be seen behynde hys bak
> Cloude'—and al that y of spak. (HF 2.972–78)

The importance of Thought to the poem will be addressed later, but these lines show that Geffrey, even with his limited understanding, considers his flight in this dream vision to be analogous in some way to the flight that is essentially Lady Philosophy's bestowal to the attentive mind. It is Lady Philosophy, we see in the prose passage just previous, who affixes feathers to thought so that it may rise to heights unreachable by its own effort, and it is by her guidance that thought can ascend above the buffetings of the sublunary realm and return to its true country. The similarities are clear, but Geffrey does not comment on the crucial differences in situation between the two flights, doubtless because, in adopting the persona of a dense, limited narrator, he wants to imply that he does not himself recognize them. Chaucer leaves the reader, therefore, to fill in the missing pieces, recalling the substance of Lady Philosophy's wisdom from the original, familiar source.

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reference, even though the line numbers in *House of Fame* are continuous throughout the poem. Line numbers from the *Boece* agree with the University of Maine's eChaucer online concordance, which differs from the Benson edition only in the occasional case of hyphenated words at line endings in the print version.

Several things are implied here by Geffrey's reference to meter 4.1 that are too quickly glossed over. First, the flight on which Geffrey is embarking does *not* take him beyond the aether, does not take him back to the true country that is Boethius's destination, the homeland which is beyond the rule of Fortune, Fame, and Chance. His journey takes him to the midpoint of the world, the temple of Fame in the "myddes of the weye / Betwixen hevene and erthe and see," a place that is neither a familiar, comforting, or rewarding destination (HF 2.714–15). Geffrey will not pass beyond the earthly elements, though the clouds may momentarily be at his back during his flight; the temple of Fame is built on a mountain of ice, subject to melting, erosion, and the buffeting of Eolus's winds. Boethius's intellectual flight will lead him beyond the entanglements of the world to the true Good, to the source of all happiness and power, where all things are bound in harmony and unity, but Geffrey's destination is none of these things: cacophony and discord—the lot of creatures and things thoroughly enmeshed in the sublunary world—await him there instead. The chaos he finds, therefore, need not be, as it often is, interpreted as evidence that Chaucer himself despairs of finding any truth or authority in the sources and tools available to man as he investigates the physical and spiritual world; the eponymous destination in this poem is not the ultimate end of man's intellectual journey. Second, the Eagle is not the equivalent of true philosophy, whose seat is in the mind and who draws out what the mind itself "remembers" of God and Good.[5] The Eagle is an external figure, a character in his own right, sent from elsewhere, and he does not operate on the natural patterns of Geffrey's mind. He is neither a wise nor an astute observer of the human psyche, and his "treatment" for the ailing Geffrey holds little in common with that of Lady Philosophy, who tailors her cure to her patient quite deliberately through the course of her teaching. Third, Geffrey is no Boethius: the persona of Geffrey purports to be incapable of the same critical acumen we see in Boethius's reasoned progression up the ladder of logic that Lady Philosophy prepares for him. These points will be addressed in greater depth throughout this chapter, but it suffices to say that here that the similarities between the two journeys are more striking on a subtextual level than on the literal, and to read the poem without understanding the *Boece* is to wrest it entirely away from its contextual moorings.

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[5] Book 3.m11 refers explicitly to this Platonic recalling of the knowledge that the soul is born with but then forgets. In being taught, we are reminded of what we once had and lost: "And if so be that the / Muse and the doctrine of Plato syngeth soth, / al that every wyght leerneth, he ne doth no / thing elles thanne but recordeth, as men recorden / thinges that ben foryeten." (Bo3.m11.43–47)

What is most noteworthy about Geffrey's reference to this meter from *Boece* is the material he leaves out of his paraphrase, and it is this material that the reader must fill in, for the entire allegory relies upon some basic truths that are made explicit by Lady Philosophy, in this meter and elsewhere, and that are ignored entirely by Geffrey. Allegory must, in fact, "rest on an assumed sense of values," for without a shared understanding of the original system of tropes and conventions the writer works within, as D. W. Robertson explains, readers instead assume modern, contradictory values for the text, "and we are left with 'literal' statements which all too frequently are said to reveal the ineptness, inconsistency, or the quaint and curious prejudices of their authors" (288). We turn our attention, then, to these essential values.

The "myddes of the weye"

The meter alluded to by Geffrey so clearly in *House of Fame*, meter one of book four of the *Boece*, includes some important glosses inserted by Chaucer, glosses which elaborate on difficult points of the translation and give insight into the essential spiritual implications of the passage.[6] The glosses of this meter indicate a much deeper conception of the journey of the soul than the *viator* Geffrey acknowledges or comprehends: Chaucer as author and translator clearly understands the spiritual lessons in which Boethius is tutored in the *Consolation*. Below is the entirety of meter 4.1, punctuated by summary and explication[7]:

> ‘I have, forthi, swifte fetheris that surmounten
> the heighte of the hevene. Whanne
> the swift thoght hath clothid itself in tho
> fetheris, it despiseth the hateful erthes, and surmounteth
> the rowndenesse of the gret ayr; and
> it 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 joyneth
> his weies with the sonne, Phebus, and
> felawschipeth the weie of the olde colde Saturnus;
> and he, imaked a knyght of the clere
> sterre (*that is to seyn, whan the thought is*
> *makid Godis knyght by the sekynge of*
> *trouthe to comen to the verray knowleche of*
> *God*)—and thilke soule renneth by the cercle
> of the sterres in alle the places there as the
> schynynge nyght is ypainted (*that is to*
> *sey, the nyght that is cloudeles; for on*
> *nyghtes that ben cloudeles it semeth as*
> *the hevene were peynted with diverse ymages*
> *of sterres*).’ (Bo4.m1.1–23)

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[6] Bernard Jefferson notes in his chapter on the sources for the *Boece* that Chaucer’s glosses may be influenced by those in the French translation, from which Chaucer borrows quite freely for the main text (9–25). Chaucer’s longer glosses frequently occur at the same places where the French glosses were added and show verbal similarities, but there are also many additions which do not occur in that text, additions which may be traced back to the commentaries of Nicholas Trivet and others, all of which commentaries may have been drawn from a common source no longer extant. Regardless of the influences, the evidence for multiple texts being used indicates Chaucer’s careful consideration of the matter at hand, as Jefferson concludes: “The pains which Chaucer took to investigate different sources for his translation indicates no small desire to be clear and faithful” (15).

[7] Parentheses and italics (in the Benson edition and others) are used to indicate the glosses that Chaucer himself has added to explicate or elaborate on the original Latin text he is translating.

The meter is in the voice of Lady Philosophy,[8] and she refers back to her statement in the previous prose passage, asserting that the mind clothed with the feathers she provides will rise into the heights of heaven, despising the earthly materiality of things, the matter which remains under the sway of Fortune in the sublunary portion of the cosmos. This swift thought clothed in Philosophy's feathers will rise through the air, putting clouds and inclement weather behind it, and ascend. Rising beyond the unstable elements of the sublunary realm (and beyond the powers of the air, the "ayerissh bestes" noted by Geffrey), the soul will journey through the spheres of the stars (in fellowship with Pheobus and Saturn, the outermost ring of the planets), through the firmament (the Primum Mobile, the stable heavens where the stars are housed), and finally come into direct knowledge of God.

Chaucer in his translation glosses the image of the traveler as a knight among the stars in lines 16–17, explaining that thought is transformed into "Godis knight" by seeking truth to come into God's presence through knowledge of Him.

> 'And whan [that] he hath gon there inoghe, he schal forleten the laste point of the hevene, and he schal pressen and wenden on the bak of the swifte firmament, and he schal be makid parfit of the worschipful lyght [or] dredefulle clerenesse of God. There halt the lord of kynges the septre of his myght and atemprith the governementz of the world, and the schynynge juge of thinges, stable in hymself, governeth the swifte cart or wayn (*that is to seyn, the circuler moevynge of the sonne*).' (Bo4.m1.23–33)

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[8] The opening of this meter allows for the possibility that Boethius himself is speaking here, having been given the feathers that enable him to rise, but the rest of the meter suggests that it is Lady Philosophy, addressing in varying second and third person those who would take flight with her.

Passing over or forsaking the last point of heaven, traveling beyond the lower limit of the heavens, this thought-become-knight then sees with awe-inspiring clearness the light of God, realizing with his perfected vision that God is the shining, mighty ruler of all, the stable center who governs and judges all things.

> ‘And yif thi wey ledeth the ayein so that thou be brought thider, thanne wiltow seye now that that is the contre that thou requerist, of whiche thow ne haddest no mynde—“but now it remembreth me wel, here was I born, her wol I fastne my degree, here wol I duelle.” But yif the liketh thanne to looken on the derknesse of the erthe that thou hast forleten, thanne shaltow seen that these felonus tirantz, that the wrecchide peple dredeth now, schullen ben exiled fro thilke faire contre.’ (Bo4.m1.34–44)

Having returned back to the place whence he originally came, the knight will remember it to be his homeland, recognize it as the fair country he has been seeking throughout the *Consolation*. This is the country he desired to return to, the country which he failed to remember earlier, having cast himself into a state of self-exile. In his new clarity of mind, he will choose to dwell here again, and if he looks back to the dark earth he now forsakes, he will see that the tyrants who dominate it, who are feared by many, are in reality exiled from the fair country.

The contrast is striking. Geffrey is indeed flying up with metonymic feathers on a literal level (being astride the eagle), but these are not the feathers of true Philosophy, as evidenced both by the eagle’s conversation and by his destination. The realm Lady Philosophy describes is the realm of God, and the knight’s journey through the cosmos has as its destination the source of unity and light. Boethius has acknowledged by this point in the *Consolation* the central truth that God is the source of all happiness, the *summam bonam*, the helmsman who holds all things together; without Him, the universe would tear itself apart. Geffrey does not articulate or demonstrate any comparable understanding of the order of the universe, and the destination at which the eagle deposits him is not the far/fair country of which he has heard tales. The eagle instead carries Geffrey to Fame's palace, which is in the midpoint of the sublunary world, not the center of the universe. This is the home of sound, the place to which all sound returns:

> Hir paleys stant, as I shal seye,
> Ryght even in myddes of the weye
> Betwixen hevene and erthe and see,
> That what so ever in al these three
> Is spoken, either privy or apert,
> The way therto ys so overt,
> And stant eke in so juste a place
> That every soun mot to hyt pace; (HF 2.713–20)

The House of Fame is a kind of recording studio, not the true country that the soul seeks; it is neither Geffrey's home nor his true good.

Dante, too, is carried away by Lady Philosophy's metaphor in *Purgatory* canto 9, but to better effect: as Dante sleeps in ante-Purgatory and his mind "wanders free, / far from the flesh" and caught up in visions "almost divine," St. Lucy in the form of a golden eagle falls upon him "terrible as a thunderbolt" and carries him up the mountain to St. Peter's gate, where he will come among the company of the blessed (*Purg.*9.16–31). Geffrey's eagle appears in a similar fashion, swifter than "dynt of thonder" (HoF 2.534). Chaucer is clearly borrowing the image from Dante, but Geffrey is not being "swept upward to the rings of fire" as Dante is, consumed by searing blazes in his mind as he ascends (*Purg.*9.30). More similar to Geffrey's position is Dante's lamenting of his mental limitations near the conclusion of *Purgatory*. Dante asks Beatrice why her words "soar to heights [his] mind cannot attain," and she responds that the words soar precisely for that reason: that he may perceive how far from the divine lie the pathways he has followed up to this point, the schools of worldly knowledge which cannot lead the mind to God (33.82, 33.85–90). The implication is the same: the *viator* is traveling to the higher things of God, beyond earthly comprehension, and the mind must be freed from the chains of earthly care in order to make the journey. Dante will succeed in this; Geffrey will not.

As they fly toward the House of Fame, the eagle calls attention to the earth below, and to Geffrey who stares down at it, the world seems no more than a "prikke," or pin-point. With the help of their guides, both Boethius and Scipio (whose dream is also referred to briefly by Geffrey in ln. 514 as being a less "sely" [happy or fortunate] dream than the one he is about to relate) see in their visions the smallness of the place from which they have come, realizing that their own fame and even the exploits of Rome will not circumnavigate the globe, and are compelled from their vantage point to recognize the relative insignificance of ephemeral earthly affairs against the backdrop of the eternal heavenly spheres. To Geffrey, too, the world seems a prikke, but there is more ambiguity here: it is the indeterminacy of his vision that is emphasized, not eternal truth.

> But thus sone in a while he
> Was flowen fro the ground so hye
> That al the world, as to myn ye,
> No more semed than a prikke;
> Or elles was the air so thikke
> That y ne myghte not discerne.
> With that he spak to me as yerne,
> And seyde, 'Seest thou any [toun]
> Or ought thou knowest yonder doun?'
> I sayde, 'Nay.' (HF 2.904–13)

Geffrey cannot see the larger picture, even from the perspective afforded him. It may be the air is so thick that he cannot rightly discern the relative size of the earth below him, but his vision is obscured not only by clouds and fog, but also by the clouds in his mind. Geffrey is not encouraged by his guide to look back at earth and despise it, to come to a broader realization of its transitory nature or of the ultimate end of the tyrants and the unjust. He is led merely to acknowledge that he is either so high or surrounded by such thick air that he cannot discern topographical details below. No true clarity is afforded him here. The eagle goes on to say, incorrectly, that their vantage point puts them beyond the range of Scipio, who saw in his dream "Helle and erthe and paradys" (HF 917). The dwelling of Fame that they are heading to is, in contrast, "set amyddys of these three, / Heven, erthe, and eke the see" (HF 845–46). This dream destination is as opposite to that of Boethius as is the ability of the two knowers to comprehend the significance of their respective surroundings.

In books four and five of the *Boece*, Philosophy discusses the nature of knowing, correcting the mistake made in thinking that knowledge depends upon the nature of the object to be known, that intelligibility lies within the thing being perceived. Rather, things are comprehended according to the ability of the knower.[9] It is the superior manners of intellect which recognize the nature of a thing beyond the sensible, material elements of its composition, which can extrapolate, analyze, and synthesize.[10] Because Lady Philosophy's project through the course of the *Boece* is to restore Boethius to his former state of knowing, to his better intellect which has been blinded by worldly cares and grief, she rejoices when he reaches the central truth, the midpoint which she refers to as the "myddel symplicite," the center of the concentric circles of the ordered universe. This unmovable point around which everything else revolves is the "firste thought of God," and as the central point it is beyond the reach of "destyne" or fate, figured in concentric circles rippling outwards from the center.

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[9]

> . . . it is al the contrarye;
> for al that evere is iknowe, it is rather
> comprehendid and knowen, nat aftir his
> strengthe and his nature, but aftir the
> faculte (*that is to seyn, the power and the
> nature*) of hem that knowen. (Bo5.p4.136–41)

[10] The faculties of the rational mind are divided by Boethius into four categories, from lowest to highest: wit (sense-perception), ymaginacioun, resoun, and intelligence (the most exalted form of knowing, which recognizes universals).

> . . . yif ther be any thing that knytteth and felawschipeth hymself to thilke myddel poynt, it is constreyned into simplicite (*that is to seyn, into unmoevablete*), and it ceseth to ben schad and to fleten diversely; ryght so, by semblable reson, thilke thing that departeth ferrest fro the firste thought of God, it is unfolden and summittid to grettere bondes of destyne; and in so moche is the thing more fre and laus fro destyne, as it axeth and hooldeth hym neer to thilke centre of thinges (*that is to seyn, to God*); and yif the thing clyveth to the stedfastnesse of the thought of God and be withoute moevynge, certes it surmounteth the necessite of destyne. (Bo4.p6.125–39)

As Lady Philosophy explains, a thing that departs from the thought of God is subjected to greater bonds of destiny, but if the thing cleaves to the thought of God, it is beyond the reach of destiny. Thus a man's intellect is more free in the contemplation of the Good and less free in wickedness, which makes his entire being, not just his physical condition, but his mind and soul as well, prey to the whim of Fortune. And in the case of the poet, historian, or story-teller who seeks continuance through Fame's favor, who seeks a reputation and name that will endure, the words which are the stock of his trade become entangled in the same snare.

As a poet who reverences love and its servants, who serves fair Venus and blind Cupid "trewely" (615) and "ententyfly" (616), with "labour and devocion" (666), Geffrey is bound by the "phantasms" and "perishable particulars" of bodily and earthly loves, the follies and enticements that originally lead Boethius away from his true country. As St. Thomas explains in his *Summa Theologica,* the work of the active life aids the contemplative life by quelling interior passions, those loves which give rise to the phantasms that hinder contemplation (2.2.182).[11] Geffrey's own inactivity and idleness are apparent from the inception of the poem, and his intellectual sloth and disordered loves in service to Venus make him susceptible to the very deception and illusion he prays to be delivered from, as the first proem of the vision, a counter-intuitive invocation of Morpheus—the god of sloth, sleep, and forgetfulness, who will presumably have little positive effect on the reception of the poem by the souls who ought to be affected by it—indicates. Geffrey's intellect is not whole. And, in juxtaposition to Lady Philosophy, Geffrey's guide will not be able to restore him to unity or lead him to this central truth of the cosmos. Instead, the eagle will provide him with empirical evidence—appealing to the lower order of intelligence, wit—to prove the nature of sound, which inclines toward the house of Fame in concentric circles multiplying outwards from their source as ripples in water:

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[11] "Article 3. Whether the contemplative life is hindered by the active life? . . . The active life may be considered from two points of view. First, as regards the attention to and practice of external works: and thus it is evident that the active life hinders the contemplative, in so far as it is impossible for one to be busy with external action, and at the same time give oneself to Divine contemplation. Secondly, active life may be considered as quieting and directing the internal passions of the soul; and from this point of view the active life is a help to the contemplative, since the latter is hindered by the inordinateness of the internal passions. Hence Gregory says (Moral. vi, 37): 'Those who wish to hold the fortress of contemplation must first of all train in the camp of action. Thus after careful study they will learn whether they no longer wrong their neighbor, whether they bear with equanimity the wrongs their neighbors do to them, whether their soul is neither overcome with joy in the presence of temporal goods, nor cast down with too great a sorrow when those goods are withdrawn. On this way they will known when they withdraw within themselves, in order to explore spiritual things, whether they no longer carry with them the shadows of the things corporeal, or, if these follow them, whether they prudently drive them away.' Hence the work of the active life conduces to the contemplative, by quelling the interior passions which give rise to the phantasms whereby contemplation is hindered."

I preve hyt thus—take hede now—
Be experience; for yf that thow
Throwe on water now a stoon,
Wel wost thou hyt wol make anoon
A litel roundell as a sercle,
Paraunter brod as a covercle;
And ryght anoon thow shalt see wel
That whel wol cause another whel,
And that the thridde, and so forth, brother,
Every sercle causynge other
Wydder than hymselve was;
And thus fro roundel to compas,
Ech aboute other goynge
Causeth of othres sterynge
And multiplyinge ever moo,
Til that hyt be so fer ygoo
That hyt at bothe brynkes bee.
Although thou mowe hyt not ysee
Above, hyt gooth yet alway under,
Although thou thenke hyt a gret wonder.
And whoso seyth of trouthe I varye,
Bid hym proven the contrarye.
And ryght thus every word, ywys,
That lowd or pryvee spoken ys,
Moveth first an ayr aboute,
And of thys movynge, out of doute,
Another ayr anoon ys meved;
As I have of the watir preved,
That every cercle causeth other,
Ryght so of ayr, my leve brother:
Everych ayr another stereth
More and more, and speche up bereth,
Or voys, or noyse, or word, or soun,
Ay through multiplicacioun,
Til hyt be atte Hous of Fame—
Take yt in ernest or in game. (HF 2.787–822)

The concentric circles in the eagle’s analogy lead away from the center, sounds radiating out, separated from their original cause as they are moved onward by the circles before them, which multiply, magnify, and distort. Heading outward toward the house of Fame to join in the cacophonous mix of rumors, truths, and lies, the sounds and speech are thus submitted to greater entanglement in earthly affairs. Instead of the central point of unity and simplicity, the Unmovable mover who is stable and just, and who sets all the planets into motion in their circular orbits, causing the music of the spheres to sound forth in perpetual harmony, the central point to which the eagle's discourse and flight lead is one of discord and disunity. At this water's edge is an earthly judge, Fame, the arbiter of earthly reputation, and as words move towards her, leaving their center of sothfastness, they are bound with increasing strength to the workings of the world.

As Lady Philosophy explains, foolish men believe that they have achieved "a perdurablete," or immortality, in earthly fame, thinking that their name will last in time to come, but fame is brief, a mere moment when compared with the "endles spaces of eternyte" (Bo2.p7.96). Therefore,

> Whoso that with overthrowynge thought
> oonly seketh glorie of fame, and weneth that
> it be sovereyn good, lat hym looke upon the
> brode schewynge contrees of the hevene, and
> upon the streyte sete of this erthe; and he schal
> be asschamed of the encres of his name, that
> mai nat fulfille the litel compas of the erthe. (Bo2.m7.1–7)

The cure for this delusion is for the one whose reason has been overthrown by a desire for Fame's glory, who has made it his hope and his sovereign Good, to look on the vastness of the heavens and compare it to earth, and be ashamed: his name will not fill even that small space. These "proude folk" who lift up their necks "on idel in the dedly yok of this world" will, though their renown may be passed along by many tongues, find their names despised by death, which is the great equalizer (Bo2.m7.8–10).

> . . . Where
> wonen now the bones of trewe Fabricius?
> What is now Brutus or stierne Catoun? The
> thynne fame yit lastynge of here idel names
> is marked with a fewe lettres. But althoughe
> that we han knowen the fayre wordes

> of the fames of hem, it is nat yyven to knowen
> hem that ben dede and consumpt. Liggeth
> thanne stille, al outrely unknowable, ne fame
> ne maketh yow nat knowe. And yif ye wene to
> lyve the lengere for wynd of yowr mortel name
> whan o cruel day schal ravyssche yow, than is
> the seconde deth duellynge unto yow.
> (*Glose. The first deeth he clepeth here departynge*
> *of the body and the soule, and*
> *the seconde deth he clepeth as here the styntynge*
> *of the renoun of fame.*) (Bo2.m7.19–33)

This "wind" of the mortal name is literalized in *House of Fame,* where names are reduced to idle or vain talk in Fame's court and the house of rumor, and Eolus blows Fame's proclamations about with his trumpet. Seeking the rewards of Fame, the "smale wordes of straunge folk," and acting for the sake of the "audience of peple and for idel rumours," a man "forsakes the grete worthynesse of conscience and of vertu" (Bo2.p7.115–20). Whoever then seeks with impetuous thoughts worldly renown, know that although fame may be spread to even foreign parts, it is able neither to make one *good* nor to make one *known*. Those who trust in fame will be subject to a second death, as Chaucer reiterates in his gloss: the first death is the parting of body and soul and the second death will be the stopping of fame's renown.

The theme pursued here in Chaucer's gloss has significant implications for *House of Fame,* which dramatizes an afterlife of words, according to their nature. Many have argued that this treatment expresses Chaucer's affinity for the nominalist conception of words and their end, but as we shall see in the following sections, the poem is a vision of the first and second death that Lady Philosophy refers to, the death awaiting those who trust in Fame for their eternal security, as will be demonstrated in eagle's rambling discourse on sound and Geffrey's subsequent observations in the environment surrounding Fame: this enactment of the first and second death leads not to an acceptance of the nominalistic accounting of words, but rather to a challenge of it, as the reality that Geffrey witnesses in Fame's temple is not entirely in accord with the eagle's suppositions and fails to provide any satisfactory conclusions. That it is fitting to use the wisdom of Philosophy to provide apocalyptic context for the words and sound that travel to Fame's house is evident in the deliberateness of the apocalyptic signs from the book of Revelation found in Fame's temple in Book Three, but it requires no stretch of the imagination to see the Boethian influence in Book Two of the poem as well; the understanding of kyndely enclyning, instinct, and the nature of all created things relayed in the eagle's speeches as we wend towards the house of Fame are all imported—though tailored to suit the particularities of sound—from the *Boece*, particularly Book Three, prose and meter 11, with modifications and significant omissions that would be lost only on the densest of observers (Geffrey, happily, fills this role for us).

"*Kyndely Enclynyng*"

En route to their destination, as the eagle treats Geffrey to an extended discussion of the nature of sound and the physics behind its production and propagation, he explains the concept of "kyndely enclynyng." The references to the proper, essential, or inherent nature of things are conspicuous in these lines: the word "kynde" and its variations "kyndely" and "kyndelyche" are repeated frequently in the eagle's speech, which, far from being merely digressive or amusing pedantry, communicates philosophical grounding for the matter of the poem. In ostensible preparation for what they will see in Fame's court, the eagle reminds Geffrey of this innate or instinctual quality of all matter to return to its "kyndely stede," the natural place to which it is attracted.

> ‘Geffrey, thou wost ryght wel this,
> That every kyndely thyng that is
> Hath a kyndely stede ther he
> May best in hyt conserved be;
> Unto which place every thyng
> Thorgh his kyndely enclynyng
> Moveth for to come to
> Whan that hyt is awey therfro;’ (HF 2.729–36)

It is the innate desire of every thing, of all matter, to return to its proper place, to seek stability, and to ensure its own preservation. The eagle does not specifically extend this kyndely enclynying to include, as Boethius, Augustine, Dante, Bonaventure, and countless other medieval luminaries do, its influence on mankind, the yearning and instinctual drive that draws the spiritual nature back to its Creator and central Good, seeking the unity and stability that can be found only in eternal being. He focuses instead on explaining the physical phenomena that Geffrey should be able to verify himself upon reaching the house of Fame. The eagle’s particular subject here is the home to which all speech and sound are drawn, for the dwelling place of Fame is set in the midst of heaven, earth, and sea, in the location that is “most conservatyf” of sound (HF 2.846).

> Thus every thing, by thys reson,
> Hath his propre mansyon
> To which hit seketh to repaire,
> Ther-as hit shulde not apaire. (HF 2.753–56)

Each thing is thus drawn to the “mansyon” where it will best be protected and conserved, reverting or returning to the place where its proper, whole condition will be safe from degeneration or diminishment. All things, words, and men seek to avoid destruction. Thus the drive for propagation, the continuance of the species, multiplication and generation: the love of self and the desire for preservation is a natural one.

In Book Three, prose 11, Philosophy discusses instinctive motions to unity, which grow out of the desire for self-preservation. Many among the groups of petitioners in House of Fame are seeking to preserve their names, and, in doing so, their being or wholeness. All things out of natural love for themselves desire to live and endure, and therefore "requiren naturely the ferme stablenesse of perdurable duellynge, and eek the eschuynge of destruccioun" (Bo3.p11.185–87). Things seek by nature the stability of a "perdurable dwelling." Things are therefore compelled to engender more of their kind, to ensure their continuance. The seeming generation, multiplication, and enlargement of sound is made much of in Fame's house and court, but the scene is again at odds with the eagle's original observations. The eagle points out that the air which *is* speech stirs the air around it, and each ripple of air stirs the next, "and speche up bereth, / Or voys, or noyse, or word, or soun, / Ay through multiplicacioun, (HF 2.818–20), till it reaches the house of Fame, the place at which it desires to arrive according to its "pure kynde" that draws it upwards to its "kyndelyche stede," its mansion in the sky. Philosophy's summation of great "diligence of nature" working in each thing to conserve its being emphasizes the efficacy and reliability of this method (Bo3.p11.122):

> for alle
> thinges renovelen and publysschen hem with
> seed ymultiplied, ne ther nys no man that ne
> woot wel that they ne ben ryght as a foundement
> and edifice for to duren, noght oonly for a tyme,
> but ryght as for to dure perdurably by
> generacion. (Bo3.p11.123–28)

All things "renovelen"—revive, repair, rebuild, restore, or maintain their reputations—and "publishen"—make known, announce, multiply, populate, or proclaim—themselves: according to their nature, things seek to conserve their being and enduring. This natural process of engendering is truly, as all men know, a “foundement” and “edifice” to endure not only for a time, but perdurably. This foundation and metaphorical dwelling place Philosophy speaks of is a true one, solid and authoritative.

The multiplying of speech *en route* to Fame’s domain, however, does not ensure its enduring. Sound forevermore goes out from the source, rippling through the air, until it arrives at the House of Fame, where the water ripples of the eagle’s analogy meet the shores of the frozen mountain of ice, upon which names are etched. According to the eagle, sound naturally seeks this place in order to “repaire” there, to preserve itself, but Fame’s house is an edifice built on “feble fundament,” and even the etched words that seem to be frozen into permanence are susceptible to melting or erosion. Instead of inspiring wonder and awe at the painstaking efforts of Nature to preserve its own, the rock of ice that is the foundation for Fame’s edifice quickly moves Geffrey to a criticism of those who build there:

> This were a feble fundament
> To bilden on a place hye.
> He ought him lytel glorifye
> That hereon bilt . . . (HF 3.1132–35)

It is a feeble foundation, he says, echoing the parable of the foolish man from the gospels of Matthew and Luke, who builds his house on shifting sand instead of solid rock, and those who build here have little cause to congratulate themselves.

Words are not safe here. While sound may continue for a time in the house of Fame in the “grete swogh” of noise that overwhelms Geffrey as they approach, the magnification of the sound does not lengthen the life of the words themselves: their meaning is indiscernible in the initial cacophony, and their duration will be determined arbitrarily by Fame. Some will be granted duration and others will be consigned to silent oblivion. The "multiplication" that occurs in Fame's domain is a false one, resulting in what seems at first to Geffrey a mass of featureless sound, in contrast to the natural mechanics of generation that, as Philosphy points out, results in the continuance of particular kind and species. Also, Geffrey will here witness to the counterintuitive behavior of words of those who do *not* desire continuance: the fourth and fifth companies of petitioners ask of Fame to be granted no reputation, thus requesting an end to their nominal existence. These petitioners recognize a higher good, having wrought their works for "bountee" (for goodness's sake) and for "Goddes love," putting no stock in Fame's foundation. Geffrey, too, desires perdurable dwelling, searches for it, and will recognize that it is not to be found in the Fame's bestowal of earthly reputation: this is not what he came for. He seeks to preserve not his mere physical being or his poetic reputation, but something more lasting.

The Eagle's explanation of kyndely enclynyng closely parallels Lady Philosophy's discussion of the same in book 3, but, as we shall see, it is lacking the important understanding of "proper kynde" as completion, wholeness, or internal integrity of the thing, the principle that Philosophy most emphasizes in her teaching:

> Alle thynges seken
> ayen to hir propre cours, and alle thynges
> rejoysen hem of hir retornynge ayen to
> hir nature. Ne noon ordenaunce is bytaken to
> thynges, but that that hath joyned the endynge
> to the bygynnynge, and hath maked the cours
> of itself stable (*that it chaunge nat from his
> propre kynde*). (Bo3.m2.39–46)

Lady Philosophy explains that all things seek their proper course and rejoice to return again to their own true nature, their proper kind, a course which joins the ending with the beginning in a stable, unbroken ring. This stability and unity, to which all things seek to return, is the focus of her entire lesson; herein is the only true happiness and beatitude available for mankind.

Philosophy's hymn of praise in book 3, meter 9 reiterates that unity, rest, and happiness are located in God, who is the "welle of good" (41), the "bygynnynge, berere, ledere, path, and terme" of man (Bo3.m9.47–48). Good itself, therefore, is the end of all things, Boethius the *viator* realizes.

> For eyther alle thinges ben
> referrid and brought to noght, and floteren
> withouten governour, despoyled of oon as
> of hire propre heved; or elles, yif ther be any
> thing to whiche that alle thinges tenden and
> hyen to, that thing muste ben the sovereyn good
> of alle goodes. (Bo3.p11.209–215)

It is now clear that there are only two logical options: either all things are nothing and float without a governor, without any unity, or they are all tending toward, moving toward, the Good. Philosophy replies, "I have greet gladnesse of / the, for thow hast fycched in thyn herte the / [marke] [of] [the] myddel sothfastnesse, (that / is to seyn, the prykke) (Bo3.p11.218–20). In Boethius's response she can see that he has found in his heart the central truth upon which correct apprehension of reality depends: Good is the "the thyng that every wyght desireth," and "the fyn of alle thinges" (Bo3.p11.224–30).

Here is again an important division that the eagle misses in his discourse. Lady Philosophy treats at different points in her teaching both natural things and the human will, which parallel each other in their enclyning toward their Good. The willful moving of the knowing soul she does not address in this discussion of natural movement, Philosophy says, but it has been referred to earlier in talk of the far country, which souls must deliberately will in order to be citizens of it: here, she speaks specifically of "the naturel entencioun of thinges" (Bo3.p11.155). The eagle, however, in making the movement of sound analogous to the movement of natural things, disregards the meaning under the surface of the movement—he refers to purely natural, instinctive desire, and avoids coming to conclusive truths about the ultimate cause of the desire and the engaging of the will. He comes to no conclusions, as Lady Philosophy does, about the "goodness" of the *desiratum*. The Eagle's discussion of kyndely enclyning hinges on the natural movement of physical things only, which further complicates his account of the nature of sound:

> As thus: loo, thou maist alday se
> That any thing that hevy be,
> As stoon, or led, or thyng of wighte,
> And bere hyt never so hye on highte,
> Lat goo thyn hand, hit falleth doun.
> Ryght so seye I be fyr or soun,
> Or smoke or other thynges lyghte;
> Alwey they seke upward on highte,
> While ech of hem is at his large:
> Lyght thing upward, and dounward charge.
> And for this cause mayst thou see
> That every ryver to the see
> Enclyned ys to goo by kynde . . . (HF 2.737–49)

This passage has close analogues with Lady Philosophy's treatment of the same: she too references stones, trees, rocks, water, air, fire, affirming that the places and movements of things are suitable to their nature: everything keeps to what is proper to it, as the lightness of flames are born up and the weight of earth presses down. Hard things such as stones hold together and are not easily separated, while soft things, specifically water and air, "departen lyghtly," giving way to the thing that divides them, but quickly returning to their original condition again, reuniting their parts easily (Bo3.p11.134–52).

Dramatically different is the Eagle's discourse on the violent twisting and rending of air that occurs when words are spoken; "spech is soun," he begins, separating word and meaning from the outset, and

> Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken;
> And every speche that ys spoken,
> Lowd or pryvee, foul or fair,
> In his substaunce ys but air;
> For as flaumbe ys but lyghted smoke,
> Ryght soo soun ys air ybroke.
> But this may be in many wyse,
> Of which I wil the twoo devyse,
> As soun that cometh of pipe or harpe.
> For whan a pipe is blowen sharpe
> The air ys twyst with violence
> And rent—loo, thys ys my sentence.
> Eke whan men harpe-strynges smyte,
> Whether hyt be moche or lyte,
> Loo, with the strok the ayr tobreketh.
> And ryght so breketh it when men speketh.
> Thus wost thou wel what thing is speche. (HF 2.765–81)

The eagle makes no mention of verbal or material unity of any sort, concentrating only on forcible division: air is "twyst" with violence and "rent," torn, struck, broken. He claims here to have captured the essence of speech in its entirety; speech is sound and sound is nothing more than broken air, and in understanding this seemingly simple fact he lays before us, we know well the nature of speech. According to the eagle, it is a physical assault of air on air, opposite to Lady Philosophy's description of air, which parts and reunites with itself easily. The eagle's metaphor attributes corporeal body to the words and sounds, raising many philosophical problems for the understanding of sound that the eagle will not attempt to explain.

In equating speech with air, the eagle echoes a number of standard sources in a literal, topical way, conflating important categories and ignoring their context and nuances.[12] Debates by medieval grammarians on this point led to a rejection of the defining of *vox* as merely a *substance*, as mere air; the proper interpretation of grammatical theory behind this is instead related to the percussion of air as the *cause* of a sound, the means by which it is audibly transmitted, not its simple substance (Irvine 864). Prior to the percussion of air, though, the originary point is in the mind of the being who spoke the word. Speech is not just sound, as anybody cognizant of language through the simple use of it can intuit. A word is distinct from a sound because it can signify, and signification is possible because of convention of language, the system of meaning that is common to all who use it. Here again the ability of the knower is paramount: *vox* (spoken utterance) becomes *dicto* (word) both through the recipient mind's ability to apprehend its signification and through the original shaping of the words by the speaker himself. Meaning is both created and received. The simple substance of words is then not air, but the meaning that is conveyed by them.

When Geffrey cannot discern Truth in the images presented on the walls in the temple of Venus, he walks out into the desert, looking for information about the creator of the images. And as they approach the House of Fame, Geffrey's question to the eagle is again source-related; he wants to know if the house contains the living beings who have created the sounds, the sources and *auctors* of the words. The eagle does not actually address Geffrey's original conceptual sticking point, his difficulty in reconciling the reality he knows with the false semblances and reports that are authenticated by history, those reports that are not in truth what they appear to be. Understanding the nature of sound itself is not Geffrey's goal, nor was it the goal of the medieval trivial arts in general, or even specifically of theoretical or speculative *grammatica*.

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[12] John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon,* Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* (and later glosses and tractates on Priscian), Peter Helias's *Summa super Priscianum*, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, and Boethius's *De musica* are among the most ubiquitous works that include analogies and explanations similar to those used here by the Eagle, as Martin Irvine points out in his comparative study "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*."

Philosophy of language is inextricably related to ontological and epistemological disciplines, and the purpose of analyzing the structure and function of language was to achieve a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of reality itself (Perler 488–94). The eagle's "spech is soun" assertion, then, is also not what it appears to be; it is too reductive and simple to be an accurate representation of the reality of language. But as an ontological and epistemological statement, the eagle's seeming digression fits more significantly into the larger context of the poem. The eagle's treatment of sound also recalls the theories of Roscelin of Compiègne, who in the twelfth century introduced extreme nominalism, a system which was largely ignored until the fourteenth century when William of Ockham reinvented it, becoming the catalyst for the academic debates over the nature of universals. In Roscelin's formulation, as rehearsed by Anselm, Abelard, and John of Salisbury, who later attacked Roscelin's theories as dangerous challenges to orthodox faith, all universals exist only in language, not as real entities with ontological status, but in words or terms only: "*flatus vocis*." Only particular things therefore have existence, and there are no metaphysical entities that are distinct from the properties or dispositions of a thing: wisdom, then, is nothing other than a man's soul, as it has no real counterpart outside its existence in a particular man (Kluge 406–7).

The nominalist difficulties will be addressed in more detail in chapter three, but it suffices to say here that the eagle's understanding of "kyndely enclyning" reveals a type of linguistic nominalism that cuts words loose from the metaphysical moorings that protect their ultimate ground of meaning, for meaning, as Augustine says, resides finally in the person who makes the sign and the cultural consciousness that accepts the sign as a representation of a thing, not in the sign per se. Meaning is the only thing that distinguishes word from sound, and words must be more than "broken air" to endure: they are substantially more than air. In the eagle's formulation, sound is unrelated to its true cause, its human origin, and its true substance; separated from its meaning, source, and foundation, it multiplies in order to continue to exist as mere noise, to perpetuate itself and return to the house of Fame in uncertain hopes of perdurable dwelling in a place where words are no longer words at all.

The End of Unity and Being: the First Death

Lady Philosophy reminds Boethius of the nature of *being* as she builds her way up to the central point of Book Three, prose 11.

> 'Hastow nat knowen wel,' quod sche,
> 'that alle thing that is hath so longe his
> duellynge and his substaunce as longe as it es
> oon, but whanne it forletith to be oon, it moot
> nedys deien and corrumpen togidres?' (Bo3.p11.50–54)

As long as the dwelling place and the substance which inhabits it are one, a thing *is*. Its existence inheres in its unity. A thing *is* when it holds to the proper order, when it retains its own nature, but when it fails to do that, when it forgets the natural order, it forsakes its essential being.

> For thilke thing that withholdeth
> ordre and kepeth nature, thilke thing es, and
> hath beinge; but what thing that faileth of
> that (*that is to seyn, he that forleteth naturel
> ordre*), he forleteth thilke beinge that is set in his
> nature. (Bo4.p2.201–06)

Unity and goodness are the same thing: all things desire happiness, therefore goodness, therefore unity, for only in unity can they continue to exist as themselves. Philosophy goes on to use this as foundation for the soul's natural inclination towards God, who is both Unity and Good. If unity is destroyed and parts of the body are severed and divided, then the body ceases to be what it was before: "every thing is in his substaunce as longe as it is oon; and whanne it forletith to ben oon, it dyeth and peryssheth" (Bo3.p11.71–73). When the unity of soul and body are severed, it is a dead thing.

Returning again to Chaucer's gloss on the apocalyptic significance of this separation (Bo2.m7), the first death denotes the parting of the body and soul, while the second death is the stopping of Fame's renown. In the book of Revelation, the second death will be the punishment reserved for the spiritually dead, those who were divided from the Truth in life and will continue to be so for eternity, after the Last Judgment. The first death, then, is separation (not extinction or annihilation), coming with the ending of bodily unity. In the *House of Fame*, this first death occurs when words leave their source and become sound and noise only; having no real meaning, they are declared to be only broken air: without meaning, the words have no *being*. Moving out from the central point, the origin or cause, utterances are subject to the bonds of destiny, to the chains of the world which are in the hands of Fortune and her sister Fame. Since ephemerality is the nature of utterances removed from the stability of the central truth, their destiny will thus be determined according to Fame's whim in the second death, the separation of soul and God (figured in the scene by Fame), as word-souls are rejected arbitrarily and denied a place in her mansion. This second death will be discussed later in chapter four, which centers around the apocalyptic signs of in the third and final book of the poem. Here, though, the focus is on the disunity of word and meaning, the parting of the body and soul of language. Using the principles outlined in the *Boece*, Chaucer is hinting at an ontology of words, of language, which is the particular tool of poets.

Lady Philosophy addresses the unity of word and thing, sign and signifier as a linguistic realist, who sees meaning inhering in a thing:

> 'Certes,' quod sche, 'yif any wyght
> diffynisse hap in this manere, that is to seyn that
> "hap is bytydynge ibrought forth by foolisshe
> moevynge and by no knyttynge of causes," I
> conferme that hap nis ryght naught in no wise;
> and I deme al outrely that hap nis but an idel
> voys (*as who seith, but an idel word*), withouten
> any significacioun of thing summitted
> to that voys. (Bo5.p1.31–39)

Lady Philosophy explains that there is no such thing as the phenomena that men call "hap" or "chance," for there is no opportunity for randomness if the order of Providence prevails over all things. Therefore if "hap" is defined as events that happen completely randomly, with no knitting or ordering of causes, then the word "hap" itself is an idle word, an empty word, because it signifies no *thing* that exists. The idleness of this particular word is located in its disassociation with the real.

This ontology is challenged by the doctrines of nominalism, appearing most prominently in *House of Fame* in the speeches of the eagle which address (imperfectly) physical phenomena only; the eagle cannot or will not answer the questions that most concern Geffrey throughout the course of the poem, as, from the very beginning, he attempts to find the truth of words that may be concealed under false semblances.

In the opening scene of his vision, Geffrey contemplates the pictures on the walls of Venus's temple, sentimentalizing the scene in front of him and wondering about the veracity of the accounts history records for posterity. Geffrey takes a moment (roughly 200 lines) for digression from the larger narrative of Aeneas's journey depicted on the wall. Speaking extemporaneously—for he strays from the "Ther saugh I" introduction that preceded the description of each painted scene up to this point and instead makes the summary comment "Allas! what harm doth apparence, / Whan hit is fals in existence!" (HF 1.265–66) before proceeding into a moralizing lament that makes no reference back to the ekphrastic depiction he uses as his source—he discusses Aeneas's fault, for he betrayed Dido "And lefte hir ful unkyndely" (HF 1.295). The subsequent listing of all the men who have betrayed women is entirely one-sided: the numerous historical and mythological betrayals committed by women, which were widely disseminated in misogynist literature of Chaucer's time, as in Jankyn's infamous book that the Wife of Bath finds so offensive, are not mentioned here.

"Hyt is not al gold that glareth" (HF 1.272), Geffrey reminds us, and every woman will find that "som man" will show outwardly his fairest face, covering his vices until he gets what he wants and then reveal his true nature, "his pure kynde" (HF 1.280). Aeneas's words to Dido are "unkynde," unnatural, untrue, divorced from his true *entente*, and in Dido's embittered and emotionally-fraught monologue before her suicide (a product of Geffrey's imagination, aided by Virgil and Ovid), she recognizes that men's words may be untrustworthy and thus advises that though love may last for a season, a woman must "Wayte upon the conclusyon" instead of putting her trust too hastily in a man (HF 1.342). Dido's fault was in loving a stranger too soon, but Aeneas's fault is in Geffrey's eyes more serious in its deliberateness. Some words lack integrity; in the division between sign and meaning, words become false.

Chaucer is concerned with this elsewhere, explicitly and implicitly in his poems and longer works, and refers back several times to the Platonic formulation made explicit in the *Boece*:

> . . . thow hast lernyd by the sentence
> of Plato that nedes the wordis moot be cosynes
> to the thinges of whiche thei speken. (Bo3.p12.205–07)

Words must be cousin of the deed, says Lady Philosophy,[13] her particular concern at this point being that the arguments, assertions, and reasons used in discussing a thing must not be purely rational or demonstrable ones that come from outside matter and may therefore wrest the meaning from its actual context, but that the words used must rather have the appropriate relationship to the subject at hand. Variations of the line appear elsewhere, in the *House of Fame*, as we see above in Geffrey's criticism of Aeneas, and throughout the entire body of his work, attesting to Chaucer's deep concern for the relation of word to deed.

In the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer lays bare his ostensible responsibility as fictive pilgrim and narrator: whoever tells a tale that belongs to another must rehearse it accurately, word for word; if he does not his tale will be inaccurate, perhaps even untrue, feigned. There is no villainy in using the vulgar words as well as the polished ones being represented, then, for "Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ" (GP 739), and as "Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede, / The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede" (GP 741–42). Again in the "Manciple's Tale":

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[13] "quodsi rationes quoque non extra petitas sed intra rei quam tractabamus ambitum collocatas agitauimus, nihil est quod ammirere, cum Platone sanciente didiceris cognatos de quibus loquuntur rebus oportere esse sermones." Chaucer translates the Latin "cognatos" (blood relatives, kindred of the same line) as "cosynes," a closer, more specific relationship ("cousines" is also the term used in the *Roman de la Rose*, which appropriates the same Boethian passage: Chaucer doubtless draws his usage from this version). A number of scholars have commented on the pun they find in Chaucer's cosyn/cozen, using this as support for ambiguity and equivocations that belie the serious interpretations of Chaucer's motive, but there is no evidence in either the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *Middle English Dictionary* that the noun cozyn would have been understood in the late fourteenth century to mean deception or trickery.

> The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede,
> The word moot nede accorde with the dede.
> If men shal telle proprely a thyng,
> The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng. (MancT 207–10)

Accordingly, the proper use of a word puts it into direct relation with the thing it is speaking. Lady Reason in Chaucer's translation of *Romaunt of the Rose* explains to the dense lover that love in friendship, grounded by God's ordinance, is whole, without discord, and seeks to help the other in need,

> And wisely hele bothe word and dede;
> Trewe of menyng, devoide of slouthe,
> For witt is nought withoute trouthe; (RR 5214–16)

The wise "healing" of word and deed makes them true of meaning, and without truth, nothing can be known. Fals-Semblant, meanwhile, identifies himself proudly as a "fals traitour," enumerating his hypocrisies and unperceived falsehoods and concluding: "Unlyk is my word to my dede" (RR 6360). And again in "Lak of Stedfastnesse" the poet laments that though the world was once steadfast and stable and a man's word was a binding obligation, now, in his degenerate time, the world is so false and deceitful "That word and deed, as in conclusioun, / Ben nothing lyk" (ll. 4–5). The common theme of all these examples indicates that the subject of Truth was much more than a passing concern for Chaucer. This insistence on the direct relationship of word and thing is best understood in the context of philosophical realism.

"*Whoso wol seke the depe ground of soth in his thought*"

The numerous parallels with, borrowings from, and allusions to Boethius in *House of Fame* suggest more than a casual relationship between the two works, and as I point out above, the familiarity of the text in Chaucer's time suggests that he intended for this to be noticed, and that it is necessary for the appropriate context or teaching from the text to be supplied by readers when Geffrey himself fails to do so. The philosophical underpinnings of the poem, too, require recourse to Boethius if they are to be properly understood. Here is perhaps where the *Boece* becomes most useful to this study (it is also the area of connection that has been little explored in scholarly work on this poem). The proper nature of universals is elaborated in book five of the *Boece*, and though it is not the primary concern of that section to outline a realist schema of universals, it is a truth which is woven into the fabric of the Boethian cosmos inextricably.

One of the central points of nominalism being so heatedly debated at university was its denial of the ontological or real existence of the universal, and Boethius's discussion of universals here in *Consolation* and in his *Commentary on Pophyry* is foundational to the fourteenth-century debate, thus contributing to the realist position articulated by Wyclif, as the next chapter will discuss. In the *Boece*, therefore, we have numerous instances of Chaucer translating and glossing a realist, orthodox doctrine of universals, delving into the complexities of communicating philosophical concepts that have real connections to his own interests. As Rodney Delasanta points out in his "Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal" (the only article to date that specifically addresses Chaucer's translating of the Boethian passages on universals), the *Consolation of Philosophy* offers "consolation, above all, in an epistemology that assumed the accessibility and transmissibility of truth by a process of intellection that adequated generic universals to discrete singulars" (Delasanta, "Chaucer and Problem" 155). In an age of intellectual turmoil, an age in which the *via moderna* of nominalism and skepticism was making a significant impact on the intellectual climate, Chaucer pauses in his creative output to translate this text: it takes no stretch of the imagination to conjecture that his doing so indicates some affinity with or desire for the philosophical consolation that it had to offer.

To establish Boethius's realist position on universals, we look first at his oft-quoted "Stoics of the painted porch" meter (5.m4), in which Boethius makes clear the shortcomings of an epistemology that considers the human mind to be a passive receiver, blank and impressionable, having no concept of universal forms that await recognition in all external objects. The objections Platonic realism has to the anti-realist conception of knowledge acquisition are delineated here:

> The porche (*that is to seyn, a gate of the toun of Athenis there as philosophris hadden hir congregacioun to desputen*)—thilke porche broughte somtyme olde men, ful dirke in hir sentences (*that is to seyn, philosophris that hyghten Stoycienis*), that wenden that ymages and sensibilities (*that is to seyn, sensible ymaginaciouns or ellis ymaginaciouns of sensible thingis*) weren enprientid into soules fro bodyes withoute-forth (*as who seith that thilke Stoycienis wenden that the sowle had ben nakid of itself, as a mirour or a clene parchemyn, so that alle figures most first comen fro thinges fro withoute into soules, and ben emprientid into soules*); (Textus) ryght as we ben wont somtyme by a swift poyntel to fycchen lettres emprientid in the smothnesse or in the pleynesse of the table of wex or in parchemyn that ne hath no figure ne note in it.' (Bo5.m4.1–20)

The Stoic philosophers, Lady Philosophy says, understood the soul as a blank sheet waiting to be written on, or a mirror, reflecting that which is placed before it: the soul is “nakid,” blank, smooth, and receives all “figures” that are imprinted on it as impressions made by bodies external to itself. The “*ymaginaciouns*” of sensible things, the mental representations of them or the forming and retaining of mental images, would then all come from things without, from external forms and figures that imprint themselves upon the soul through the agent of the senses, as Chaucer glosses. The argument then turns to Boethius’s rebuttal:

> (*Glose. But now argueth Boece ayens that opynioun and seith thus:*) But yif the thryvynge soule ne unpliteth nothing (*that is to seyn, ne doth nothing*) by his propre moevynges, but suffrith and lith subgit to the figures and to the notes of bodies withoute-forth, and yeldith ymages ydel and vein in the manere of a mirour, whennes thryveth thanne or whennes comith thilke knowynge in our soule, that discernith and byholdith alle thinges? (Bo5 m4 20–30)

Boethius argues against the Stoic philosophy, asking how it is that knowledge can come to the soul if the soul is passively subjected to the influence of outside bodies and does nothing out of its own nature. If the soul can only reflect, as a mirror, the idle and empty images that are impressed upon it, then whence comes the true understanding and discernment which is characteristic of the human soul?

> And whennes is thilke strengthe that byholdeth the singuler thinges? Or whennes is the strengthe that devydeth thinges iknowe; and thilke strengthe that gadreth togidre the thingis devyded; and the strengthe that chesith his entrechaunged wey? For somtyme it hevyth up the heved (*that*

> *is to seyn, that it hevyth up the entencioun*) to ryght heye thinges, and somtyme it descendith into ryght lowe thinges; and whan it retorneth into hymself it reproveth and destroyeth the false thingis by the trewe thinges. (Bo5.m4.30–42)

The rhetorical questions continue, again asserting the realist position on the question of universals: whence comes the ability to recognize singular, particular things? And the ability to categorize, to divide and gather together, to choose alternate paths to a conclusion? This mental ability is a strength that can lift up the mind's purpose or inclination and turn itself to philosophical speculation, or that can descend into low things, but when it returns to itself, synthesizing all it sees, it can determine what things are false, condemning or destroying the false image or concept by comparing it with what is true.

> Certes this strengthe is cause more efficient, and mochel more myghty to seen and to knowe thinges, than thilke cause that suffrith and resceyveth the notes and the figures empressid in manere of matere. Algatis the passion (*that is to seyn, the suffraunce or the wit*) in the quyke body goth byforn, excitynge and moevynge the strengthes of the thought, ryght so as whan that cleernesse smyteth the eyen and moeveth hem to seen, or ryght so as voys or soun hurteleth to the eres and commoeveth hem to herkne; than is the strengthe of the thought imoevid and excited, and clepith forth to semblable moevyngis the speces that it halt withynne itself, and addith tho speces to the notes and to the thinges withoute-forth, and medleth the ymagis of thinges withoute-forth to the foormes ihidd withynne hymself. (Bo5.m4.42–60).

Surely this strength is an active one, much stronger and more effectual in the knowing of things than the passive intellect that would only receive figures impressed upon it from outside matter. The vigorous wit of the living man goes beforehand, exciting the strength of thought; just as light strikes the eye and voice or sound the ear, moving him to see and hear, so the active wit in the mind when roused calls forth the universal species it knows to similar movement, fitting together the things outside with the forms hid within itself. The Boethian interrogation of the anti-realist position on universals raises some of the same questions that are integral to Geffrey's own mental and poetic journey, as he works to correlate the figures and images with which he is confronted with the forms that are hid within himself and the reader; this vigorous, active wit is required in the reading of the poem, to recognize the falsity of his environment by comparison with the True.

Book Three, meter eleven of the *Boece* contains both Chaucer's longest gloss in the work (ll. 13–27) and another hefty gloss (ll. 38–43): a total of 22 of the 47 lines of the whole are Chaucer's explication of this short but important meter. This passage is noteworthy for not only the length of its exposition, but for its theme and the unique phrasing Chaucer uses to express it. The meter comes just after Philosophy has expressed her "greet gladnesse" of Boethius, for he has found in his heart the "myddel sothfastnesse," the "prykke": he assents to the conclusion that all things "tenden and hyen" to the "sovereyn good of alle goodes," and, since good is the thing desired of all, it is also the "ende" of all things (Bo3.p11.208–30). Meter eleven begins:

> 'Whoso that seketh sooth by a deep thought,
> and coveyteth not to ben disseyvid by no mysweyes,
> lat hym rollen and trenden withynne
> hymself the lyght of his ynwarde sighte; and
> let hym gaderyn ayein, enclynynge into a compas,
> the longe moevynges of his thoughtes; and
> let hym techyn his corage that he hath enclosid
> and hid in his tresors al that he compasseth or
> secheth fro withoute. And thanne thilke
> thing that the blake cloude of errour

> whilom hadde ycovered schal lighte more
> clerly than Phebus hymself ne schyneth.' (Bo3.m11.1–12)

The translation explains that he who seeks truth deeply, who does not allow himself to be distracted or deceived by the "mysweyes" of false paths or mistaken notions, can teach his heart to look within the treasury of his thought, in which is hidden all that is necessary for understanding. Finding within what he has searched for outside of himself, the seeker can examine the true nature of a thing by the light of his inward sight. The true nature of his hidden sight will then put to rout the black cloud of error that covered it and shine more clearly than the sun itself. The gloss follows immediately after:

> (*Glosa. Whoso wol seke the depe ground of*
> *soth in his thought, and wil nat ben disseyvid*
> *by false proposiciouns that goon amys fro the*
> *trouthe, lat hym wel examine and rolle withynne*
> *hymself the nature and the propretes of*
> *the thing; and let hym yet eftsones examinen*
> *and rollen his thoughtes by good deliberacioun*
> *or that he deme, and lat hym techyn*
> *his soule that it hath, by naturel principles*
> *kyndeliche yhud withynne itself, al the trouthe*
> *the whiche he ymagineth to ben in thinges*
> *withoute. And thanne al the derknesse of his*
> *mysknowynge shall [schewen] more evydently*
> *to the sighte of his undirstondynge then the*
> *sonne ne semeth to the sighte withoute-forth.*) (Bo3.m11.13–27)

There are some subtle but noteworthy differences between the original translation and the gloss. The translation opens addressing the one who seeks truth by thinking deeply, who "seketh sooth by a deep thought . . ." The gloss is more specific about the location, the ground in which the truth is sought. This seeker will "*seke the depe ground of / soth in his thought*": the mining for truth occurs within the seeker himself, and could be a delving into the bedrock, the foundation of truth, of his own epistemology, which is the way by which he discovers truth in things exterior to himself as well. The seeker must avoid deception and false propositions, turning and rolling about in his inward reason the light of his own knowing, "the lyght of his ynwarde sighte," directing the reaches and impulses of his thoughts into a concentrated area.

The gloss is again more precise on this point: the seeker is to examine well and tumble about within himself the "*the nature and the propretes of / the thing*"—the substance or essence of it—being considered. Rolling this knowledge of the thing around with good consideration, deliberation, or judgment, he can in the same way teach his soul "*by naturel principles / kyndeliche yhud*" in itself. The natural properties and principles "kyndeliche" hid of course correspond with the explanation of "kyndely enclynyng" which draws every "kyndely thyng" to its "kyndely stede" in *House of Fame*, and the use of this language in the gloss indicates that Chaucer had a particular emphasis in mind here. It is the natural principles "yhud," concealed or protected, within the inward sight or understanding that are the focal point in the gloss; it is the principles inhering within and not the inward sight itself which holds the truth.

Chaucer makes no specific comment or inferences in his glosses here to the Platonic understanding of learning (which is spelled out by Lady Philosophy in the last few lines of the meter, directly after Chaucer's last gloss below) as a process of remembering truth that already exists within the intellect; his glosses tend toward supporting not that the inward sight of man *is* truth, but rather that the truth exists *within* the inward sight.[14] The operation of the mind looks to the hid principles "*withynne itself*" that correspond with the truth found "*in thinges withoute*," in the "nature" or essence of the thing. The mind then knows truth only when it connects the reality within to the reality without. The powerful language used by Chaucer indicates both interest in and understanding of the universal Ideas, accessible to the mind of man who abstracts the universal *post rem*: the knower knows necessarily only after the universal *ante rem* is expressed by God in his ordered creation, and infers universality from it, recognizing its origin in the mind of God. Book three, meter nine—a hymn of praise to the Father who governs the world "by perdurable resoun," commanding all time from the beginning and having put all things in motion while remaining himself "stedefast and stable"—refers explicitly to these universals:

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[14]

> And if so be that the
> Muse and the doctrine of Plato syngeth soth,
> al that every wyght leerneth, he ne doth no
> thing elles thanne but recordeth, as men recorden
> thinges that ben foryeten. (Bo3.m11.43–47)

> Thow, that art althir-fayrest,
> berynge the faire world in thy thought, formedest
> this world to the lyknesse semblable of
> that faire world in thy thought. Thou drawest
> alle thyng of thy sovereyn ensaumpler and
> comaundest that this world, parfytely ymakid,
> have frely and absolut hise parfyte parties. (Bo3.m9.11–17)

The Father bears the world in his thought and forms the things of the world in "lyknesse semblable" of those divine ideas, drawing all things from the "sovereyn ensaumpler," or archetype. Universality is then perceptible to the knowing or thinking observer's intellect, not to the senses, which rely solely on phenomenal evidence.

The latter third of the translated meter (3.11), following immediately after the gloss discussed above, begins in a more Platonic vein, explaining that the material body encourages man to forget the clearness of truth, thus impairing his ability to know, but it cannot altogether veil the light of truth:

> for certeynli the seed of soth haldeth and
> clyveth within yowr corage, and it is awaked
> and excited by the wynde and by the blastes
> of doctrine. For wherfore elles demen ye of

> your owene wil the ryghtes, whan ye ben axid,
> but if so were that the norysschynges of resoun
> ne lyvede yplounged in the depe of your herte? (Bo3.m11.31–37)

The seed of truth adheres to the heart, awakened by the winds of intellection or teaching: how else could a man determine on his own what is a true answer to any inquiry, if it were not for the nourishing of reason which is plunged deep in the heart?

> *(This to seyn, how schulde men deme the sothe*
> *of any thing that were axid, yif ther nere a*
> *rote of sothfastnesse that were yploungid*
> *and hyd in the naturel principles, the*
> *whiche sothfastnesse lyvede within the depnesse*
> *of the thought?)* (Bo3.m11.38–43)

Chaucer's gloss again shifts to emphasize "*naturel principles*"; the natural principles within and without a man contain the root of truth, the same truth which is plunged and hid within the deepness of the thought. In these excerpts, we see Chaucer taking pains to gloss some foundational principles: Truth does exist, and it can be found by the seeking mind, though the seeker can be deceived by false propositions that teach him "amys."

In book five, Lady Philosophy identifies the hierarchy of cognition: the Boethian hierarchy of the cognitive faculties accords a higher place to intelligence, which belongs to the divine nature and knows all of the things that are apprehended by the lower faculties.

> But the ymaginacioun cometh
> to remuable bestis, that semen to han talent to
> fleen or to desiren any thing. But resoun is al
> oonly to the lynage of mankynde, ryght as
> intelligence is oonly the devyne nature. Of
> whiche it folweth that thilke knowynge is more
> worth than thise oothre, syn it knoweth by his
> propre nature nat oonly his subget (*as who*
> *seith, it ne knoweth nat al oonly that apertenith*
> *properly to his knowinge*) but it knoweth
> the subjectz of alle othre knowynges. (Bo5.p5.32–42)

The understanding of universals is at the top of this four-fold division, while sensory experience occupies the lowest place. The wit (senses) comprehends the material body of the subject; imagination comprehends the shape of the thing without its matter; reason rises above imagination and comprehends "by an universel lokynge" the "comune spece" that is in particular instances.

> But the eighe of intelligence is
> heyere, for it surmountith the envyrounynge of
> the universite, and loketh over that bi pure
> subtilte of thought thilke same symple forme of
> man that is perdurablely in the devyne thought. (Bo5.p4.162–66)

It is the higher intelligence that surmounts the sphere of cosmos and sees the simple form of the thing, the universal idea contained in the divine intellect. The phrase "perdurablely in the devyne thought" does not appear anywhere in Boethius's text, and may be original with Chaucer: again, the reality of the *Idea* is asserted here.

In Book Five, prose five, Philosophy hypothesizes an argument between the faculties: supposing that wit and imagination strive against reason and deny the existence of the universals that reason thinks she sees, essentially rendering reason useless—for if the wit an imagination were correct, either she sees nothing sensible at all, or she is mistaking the particular for the universal—

> thanne is the concepcioun of resoun veyn and
> fals, whiche that lokith and comprehendith that
> that is sensible and singuler as universel. (Bo5.p5.53–55)

Mistaking the sensible particular for a universal is not merely a limited perspective, but a vain and false one. But a true understanding grants that reason "lokith and comprehendith, / by resoun of universalite" (Bo5.p5.59–60) the sensible matter that is accessible to the faculties of wit and imagination. It is beyond the power of wit and imagination, though, to stretch themselves to the comprehension of universals:

> [They] ne mowen nat strecchen ne
> enhaunsen hemself to knowynge of universalite,
> for that the knowynge of hem ne mai exceden ne
> surmounten the bodily figures: certes of the
> knowynge of thinges, men oughten rather yeven
> credence to the more stidfast and to the mor
> parfit jugement; in this manere stryvynge,
> thanne, we that han strengthe of resonynge
> and of ymagynynge and of wit . . .,
> we scholde rathir preise the cause of resoun . . . (Bo5.p5.63–73)

The knowledge that rises beyond the bodily figures is the "more stidfast" and "mor parfit jugement." We should therefore praise reason's "cause," or argument, for it is the superior one, proffered by the superior faculty. This is not a merely academic debate, for this same principle is the basis for our submission to the divine thought, which is superior to man's reason, and only by recognizing the hierarchy of intelligences can we keep from going astray from the truth.

> But
> certes yif we myghten han the jugement of
> the devyne thoght, as we ben parsoners of
> resoun, ryght so as we han demyd that it
> byhovith that ymaginacioun and wit ben
> bynethe resoun, ryght so wolde we demen that
> it were ryghtfull thing that mannys resoun
> oughte to summytten itself and to ben bynethe
> the devyne thought. For whiche yif that we
> mowen (*as who seith that, if that we mowen,*
> *I conseile that*) we enhaunse us into the heighte
> of thilke soverein intelligence; for ther schal
> resoun wel seen that that it ne mai nat
> byholden in itself, and certes that is this:
> in what manere the prescience of God
> seeth alle thinges certeins and diffinyssched,
> althoughe thei ne han no certein issues or
> bytydyngis; ne this nis noon opinioun, but it is
> rather the simplicite of the soverein science,

> that nis nat enclosed nor ischet withinne none
> boundes. (Bo5 p5 87–107)

The simplicity of divine knowing is boundless, seeing all things through certain knowledge. As partakers of reason, we rightly recognize the limitations of wit and imagination and should therefore subordinate them to the higher; just so, in our finite reason we must also recognize the higher claim of divine intelligence and yield to it. This conclusion offered again illustrates the hierarchy of knowing and accords a higher place to the comprehension of universals, the "symple forme" which exists eternally in the divine thought and is also accessible to the reason, which can trace from the phenomenal signs in creation back to the divine Ideas: ours is a created world infused with universal truth, goodness, and beauty, Ideas which transcend physical accidents, which exist outside mental categories and concepts, and inhere in the essential substance of a thing's being.

Synopsis

Observing Chaucer the poet "hard at work Englishing the traditional epistemology," translating "complex passages from the *Consolation* that reveal him in lengthy and ostensibly sympathetic involvement with traditional epistemology," gives us ample reason to question interpretations that posit Chaucer as a nominalist, fideist, or skeptic committed to the ambiguity and equivocity of the *via moderna* which, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the major threat to orthodoxy in the fourteenth century (Delasanta, "Chaucer and Problem" 157, 156).[15]

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[15] Delasanta's article, though it, too, points out passages on universals that Chaucer translates in the *Boece*, spends considerable time discussing proofs for Chaucer's "unorthodox intuitions about reality" (154), going so far as to suggest that the "*urstoff* of Chaucer's poetic in the *Canterbury Tales* involved a necessarily unreliable narrator lolling in an Ockhamist universe of splendidly unnegotiable singulars"

Setting, circumstance, allusion, narrative frame, and dialectic in *House of Fame* all contain hints of Boethian themes. Phrases that are repeated in the *Boece* crop up throughout, not as parodic mockery of authoritative sources, but because Chaucer is in this poem presenting a picture of a world that has given itself over to the teaching and sophisms of the "modern" way, a degenerative, weakened philosophy that no longer seeks to attain higher, metaphysical truth, but is lodged instead solely in the sublunary, sensory world, treating subjects and objects without considering their ends.

This sophistical philosophy of the fourteenth century has little in common with Lady Philosophy—it is neither consoling, nor stable, nor wise, nor curative. The *Consolation* is a source of comfort, working to reconcile man to the ephemerality of earthly existence. Lady Philosophy answers the questions of life by using rational analysis, to reconcile man to the apparent capriciousness and injustice of sublunary life, which seems to be ruled by Fortune, and reminds Boethius that the world is ruled by God, not by chance, that the God of orthodox Christianity is, in contradistinction to Fortune and Fame, not capricious. Lady Philosophy's cure is an ontological one: her central aim is to lead Boethius back to his true country, and in order to be capable of this return, he must relearn the philosophy he was nursed by in his youth, entailing a right understanding of the universe and the sublunary world, of knowledge and of man's place in the cosmos, the cause and nature of all things, and the reality of universals.

The journey in *House of Fame* does not seem to lead Geffrey to a right understanding of the world, of man and his end, but that does not mean there is no truth to be found. Instead, hints dropped are to point the astute reader in the direction of true

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(155). Nonetheless, he leaves open the possibility that "Chaucer's motives for translating Boethius could have been related in some way to the antinominalist efforts of these latter-day realists [Wyclif and Thomas Bradwardine]" (159).

philosophy, which alone is able to provide answers and to connect word and deed, name and thing, together, instead of pulling apart the known universe in sophistical questioning, degrading the mind of man by confining it to the earthly realm altogether and denying it larger, universal perspective by undoing the connection between language and meaning. Finding this "true philosophy," however, may have little to do with finding Fame.

CHAPTER THREE

Chaucer, Wyclif, and the Apprehension of Universals

Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things.
—Benedict XVI*, Caritas in Veritate*

Introduction: Fourteenth-Century Intellectual Climate

Trouthe is put doun, resoun is holden fable;
Vertu hath now no dominacioun;
Pitee exyled, no man is merciable;
Through covetyse is blent discrecioun.
The world hath mad a permutacioun
Fro right to wrong, fro trouthe to fikelnesse,
That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse.
—Geoffrey Chaucer, "Lak of Stedfastnesse" (lines 15–21)

Truth is put down and reason is considered to be a fiction. Virtue, pity, and mercy hold no sway over man. The power to judge, to discern between right and wrong, is blinded. The world has made a "permutacioun," and now forsakes right for wrong, stable truth for fickleness. All is lost, says the poet, for lack of stability, firmness, fidelity. And "[w]hat maketh this world to be so variable / But lust that folk have in dissensioun?" (ll.8–9). The instability and inconstancy of the world exists not because infinite variety and disunity is a good to be desired for its own sake, but because people in their "wilful wrecchednesse" (l.13) perversely take joy in dissension and disharmony. Here seems to be the critical plumb line for readings of *House of Fame*, and for that matter, for readings of the entirety of Chaucer's work: just as in the fourteenth-century philosophical debates between the advocates of what the fifteenth century later labeled as the *via moderna* and the *via antiqua*,[1] a privileging of either the many or the one lies at the heart of interpretation.

Katherine Lynch comments in her book on Chaucer's dream visions that, despite his philosophical sophistication, the poet "remains a poet and not a philosopher in the *House of Fame.* His mode of discourse is playful, evasive, and generally parodic: it does not devolve into certainties"[2] (78). This perspective reveals a disturbing prejudice, for there has developed a bad habit among modern sophisticates of assuming that "certainties" are something rather stupid, sought only by the simple or the unenlightened; only doubt and dissonance are honest, and the elements to be appreciated in a work are those which do the most to challenge, evade, question, and mock the conventions of the context in which the work was created. Aesthetic delight then comes from the fragments and irreconcilable singulars that attest to the ultimate amorality of art. Seeking, finding, or tending toward "certainties" here has entirely negative connotations: certainties are presumed to be literal, prosaic, univocally reductive kill-joys, and a work that had aesthetic promise and merit at the outset may "devolve," degenerate, if it lowers itself to a simplistic concern with them.

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[1] The accuracy and usefulness of the terms *via moderna* and the *via antiqua* has been disputed. I use them here and elsewhere in the same broad sense as Laurence Elderedge does in his article "Chaucer's *Hous of Fame* and the *Via Moderna*," as the two more or less opposing philosophical factions (although, as Eldredge acknowledges, "neither *Via* was unencumbered with detritus from the other" [107]) of the fourteenth century, the *via moderna* loosely associated with Ockham and his various followers and the *via antiqua* with adherents to the Augustinian tradition. But as Neal Ward Gilbert points out in his thorough study of this terminology ("Ockham, Wyclif, and the 'Via Moderna'"), these special senses of *via moderna* and *via antiqua* used to describe the philosophical rivalry of the fourteenth century are anachronistic, and did not have this highly charged meaning until taken up by scholars in the fifteenth century: *moderni* in the fourteenth century was a neutral term for "contemporaries." As we will see below, Wyclif's use of the term in his polemics colors later interpretations of it.

[2] She continues: "Indeed, given the poem's cagey refusal to embrace a single abstract truth, the conclusion that Chaucer consistently prosecutes the Wyclifite case against nominalist logic would be surprising. . . . it is hard to see him as an advocate of any kind of pure realism in the *House of Fame*" (78). I argue that it is much harder to see Chaucer as an advocate of any kind of pure nominalism, given his representation of the House of Fame, the eagle guide, and his own narrator.

The poem above, however, does not reveal the voice of a poet who eschews certainties, who considers it a "devolving" or an intellectual and artistic failing to seek stability in a degenerate age. Rather, this is a lament, a poem that mourns and longs for certainty, a poetic voice which aspires to certainty. Nor is his a lone voice advocating a return to solid ground amidst the storm of uncertainties in the late fourteenth century.

J. A. Robson in his influential book on Wyclif and the schools traces the powerful appeal and efficacy of Wyclif's metaphysic back to its two vital features, expressed succinctly in the marginalia left by an unknown Oxford student in the 1360s: "That the existence of God can be proved by infallible proof by a pure philosopher" (142). Wyclif's teaching in logic and metaphysic, despite the later condemnations of his theology, were attractive to students and masters alike; asserting—with a daring disregard for his contemporaries' academic affinity for possibilities and ambiguities of logic—that certainty *is* possible and that it can be found by pure philosophy, Wyclif positioned himself as a defender of absolutes in an age of intellectual fragmentation and upheaval.

The "adversaries" Wyclif argues against in his treatise *On Universals* are for the most part left unnamed, and though a few individuals are briefly referenced by name, including Ockham, they are not labeled as a group of adherents to one defined set of doctrine[3]; Wyclif himself never uses "nominales"—a term which had largely disappeared out of currency after Roscelin's views were debated (and rejected) in the twelfth century—but what this group of adversaries certainly has in common is their rejection of real universals. In 1474, nearly a century after the writing of Wyclif's treatise, the Parisian nominalists issued a defense statement in which they define themselves as *nominales*, Doctors who "(1) refused to multiply things (*res*) according to the multiplication of terms, and (2) applied diligence and study to knowing all the properties of terms 'on which truth or falsity of speech depend.' . . . The Realists, however, neglect all these topics and scorn them . . . saying, 'We go straight for the things, we care naught for the terms'" (qtd. in Gilbert 95). The Parisian nominalists identify Ockham as their leader, but affirm their *approach* to truth rather than seeking to identify any particular doctrine as the defining characteristic that links them together.

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[3] Wyclif begins to pit the ancient tradition and the modern logic against each other in his criticism of the "modern" Doctors and sophists, arguing that the basis of authority is in the Ancient of Days, the source of truth, and in scripture, which contains the only eternal logic (Gilbert 102), but "[b]efore Wyclif the term '*modernus*' was in itself emotively neutral," meaning simply a contemporary (Gilbert 110). *Moderni* is only later associated specifically with the *nominales*, coming to be used as a pejorative term for the nominalists, whose work was eventually viewed as "as the destructive efforts of a crew of wreckers, deliberately setting out to destroy the structure of established tradition, that of the '*antiqui,*'" while *antiqui* was associated with *reales*, realists who were the safe, sound defenders of the broad Augustinian tradition which carried the weight and authority of centuries (Gilbert 86–87).

Integrity in the approach to truth had been Wyclif's major concern in his century as well. Nominalism had serious implications for theological questions and doctrine: for the Trinity, the Real Presence in the Eucharist, the Incarnation, for God's exercise of power and his ultimate knowability, and also for man's perception and ability to know anything at all. It led some thinkers to the untenable conclusion that the Trinity itself was merely a mental classification, that it was on a conceptual level alone that the three substances, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, were unified, by virtue of cooperation in their functional relation to mankind, despite their essential difference. The Church condemned this as theological heresy, but Wyclif challenges the subtler epistemological, philosophical, and linguistic claims of nominalism, the concomitant danger being that its methodology, as one Wyclifian scholar summarizes, "would make the virtues but classifying words of no essential reality apart from individual agents, and the mysteries of the Christian religion would be subjected to a logical examination whose result would certainly be the undermining of all faith" (Thomson 94).

Wyclif has only recently begun to be reconsidered in his role as a philosopher; though many scholars have recognized his tremendous appeal and following during his day, he has most often been labeled as an "extreme" or "ultra" realist, the implication being that his brand of philosophical realism was something unusual for the late fourteenth century. But Wyclif is not so "ultra" a realist as he has been depicted in studies (even recent ones) that rely on older histories of ideas to supply their definitions; in and after the 1930s, scholars begin to re-examine fourteenth-century nominalism, and in so doing found how varied are the ideas that had been lumped under that heading: more nuanced definitions and categories were necessary. The realist response, then, has also been mischaracterized, affecting our perception of Wyclif, the most vocal proponent of realism in the late fourteenth century. Wyclif recognizes the Divine Ideas, "the eternal notion or exemplar idea in God" (2.168, p.13),[4] as the foremost kind of universals, but "there is nothing especially extreme or radical about positing Divine Ideas and recognizing them as general exemplary causes of creatures; indeed, that was the normal view in the Middle Ages" (Spade, "Universals" 116–17). The doctrine is of course a continuation of Augustinian realism, and Paul Spade goes so far as to say, after an examination of Wyclif's basic outline of his theories in *On Universals*, "In the end, we have not yet found any reason to think of Wyclif's theory of the universals as 'ultrarealist' or as particularly extreme in any way except for the urgent rhetoric he uses to insist on it" ("Universals" 123).[5] The extreme rhetoric he uses, then, signals not the extremity of the realist philosophy itself, but the perceived urgency of the debate; left unchallenged, nominalist philosophy, Wyclif fears, will subvert the cause of Truth.

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[4] Quotations from Wyclif's *On Universals* [*Tractatus de universalibus*] are from the 1985 Anthony Kenny translation; parenthetical citations will include the chapter and line number from that volume, followed by page number.

The more controversial elements of his theology, his proto-reformation inclinations, and the heresies that marred Wyclif's reputation for years after his death have tended to overshadow the importance of his philosophy for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but contemporary scholars have begun to rectify this slight, giving Wyclif his due as "the outstanding philosopher of his generation at Oxford" (Robson 17). And his philosophy and logic had staying power. Though Wyclif became a controversial figure in the late 1370s, and formal action was taken towards identifying and condemning his theological missteps in the condemnations of 1377 and 1381–82, even then, ". . . the specific censures upon Wyclif in his lifetime touched hardly at all on his purely academic philosophy" (Robson 219). After Wyclif's death, in the backlash against his work and that of the Wycliffites, even books that had not been repudiated or formally condemned were indiscriminately destroyed in various purges in the early fifteenth century, and though there is little surviving evidence from Oxford during this period, protests have survived from masters in Prague, who wrote in defense of the philosophical writings of the "Doctor Evangelicus," arguing that his realism was "irrelevant to his heresies" (Robson 223); his philosophical works continued to be read and circulated at Oxford, and realism continued as the dominant philosophy taught by orthodox masters and absorbed by students (Robson 220–46).[6]

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[5] "The existence of ideas; the realist argument on the nature of predestination; the limits placed on the operation of God's *potentia absoluta*: all these theses of the early Wyclif could legitimately be sustained by orthodox masters of the generation that had been so greatly influenced by Wyclif as a teacher of philosophy" (Robson 221).

William J. Courtenay's overview of England's intellectual landscape after 1350 in his *Schools and Scholars* puts the age of Chaucer and Wyclif in contrast with the scholastic tenor of the first half of the century, after which "Oxford seemingly entered an intellectual limbo," losing its academic prominence and not recovering it until the introduction of the humanism of the late fifteenth century (327). Courtenay suggests that Wyclif's repeated attacks on the "doctors of signs" could have been directed towards the logic and theology of the previous two generations of scholars at Oxford, instead of ostensible nominalists of his own day, for the shift back to realism had already been made by the latter half of century and was well-established by the end of Wyclif's career: "Thus the sole prominent figure at Oxford or Cambridge in the second half of the fourteenth century displays [philosophical] interests and attitudes that contrast sharply with those of the previous half century," but not so sharply with those of his own (327).

Chaucer's contemporaneous philosophical influences for *House of Fame*, then, are more likely to be realist than nominalist ones, for "[t]he spirit of the age in England was clearly in the direction of realism" (Courtenay, *Schools* 379). Though the dividing line between orthodoxy and heresy was blurred and shifting (as could only be expected in such a time of upheaval and schism in the Church, with rival popes competing for adherents from Rome and Avignon), realism was safely within the bounds of orthodox

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[6] The condemnation could not be complete, considering both the orthodoxy of his early works and the number of devotees he had fostered: though Wyclif's eucharistic teaching had been branded as heresy, many "sound conservative teachers" among his contemporaries, old colleagues "who were bound to Wyclif by ties of respect and affection formed over many years," were reluctant to believe (before his open heresy on transubstantiation in 1381) that Wyclif was irrevocably committed to this path (Robson 222). Also, despite the condemnations of the particular areas of Wyclif's theology, there was also still a "considerable area of overlap between orthodox and Wycliffite discourse on many ethical matters" (Knapp 92).

Church doctrine, and interest in nominalism as a viable doctrine doubtless waned as it became apparent that tracing certain of its principles to their extreme ends resulted in either skepticism or fideism. "If there are any *contemporary* philosophical or theological influences, therefore," Courtenay concludes, "of the late fourteenth-century schools on the language and content of English literature, they should probably be sought in realism, simplified logic, and practical theology, not in the direction of Ockham or nominalism" (*Schools* 379). Regardless of the exact time in which his adversaries presented the greatest challenge, Wyclif sees sufficient need to defend the reality of universals in his *Tractatus de universalibus* in the 1360s or early 1370s, indicating that the emphasis on the ultimate superiority of realism over its upstart challengers was still a subject of considerable contemporary interest.

House of Fame, then, in addition to being written near the time of Chaucer's translating of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, was created during a time in which realism was again the prominent discourse in the schools, a time in which the dangers of using nominalistic epistemological inquiry were becoming glaringly apparent, a time which saw "[t]he recovery of orthodox teaching at Oxford and the renewed vigour of traditional theology, stimulated by Wycliffite and Lollard criticism . . ." (Robson 218). The confusions of Chaucer's poem, I argue, are therefore more indicative of the turmoil created by the ideas of Wyclif's *moderni* (the ideas he sees as posing a serious danger to reason, faith, and Truth), than of Chaucer's own philosophical leanings toward those ideas. Far from supporting the nominalistic views that might be noticed in the poem, the poet in fact paints the consequences of nominalism in such undesirable and ironic tones as to encourage a philosophical realism in reaction to it, for it is realism that is the basis for the authentic approach to a sustainable metaphysic.

Wyclif's possible influence on fourteenth-century literature has been repeatedly questioned by literary critics, in reaction to previous ill-founded attempts to identify Chaucer as a proto-Protestant, based largely on his criticisms of the church and the clergy, criticisms that overlap considerably with those of the Wycliffites.[7] Also, the literary ethic of the later Wycliffites holds little regard for the aesthetics of poetry, as we see demonstrated in the person of Chaucer's Parson—painted to suggest affinities with Lollardy (or at least with some of the central concerns of the Lollards)—who cannot rhyme or alliterate and who refuses to tell a fiction or a fable or any "swich wrecchednesse," reproving fables (on the authority of St. Paul) as a quitting of truth-telling. Wyclif's own precepts of language concern themselves less with aesthetic appreciation than with truth-telling and right interpretation, to the point of cautioning against (as Augustine does) and even rejecting the kind of verbal flourishes and embellishments that can obfuscate the simple truth and lead hearers to be impressed with eloquence rather than the truth of words.

The possibility of this view's being used to promote poetry and fiction as vehicles for doctrine does not sit well with purely aesthetic sensibilities, and the result in Chaucer studies has been, in efforts to "protect" the artistic integrity of the poet, an overemphasis on the distance between Chaucer and Wyclif and the lack of incontrovertible evidence to link the two. There is, however, substantial textual evidence to support Chaucer's being familiar with Wyclif's work and Wycliffite doctrine, and it is entirely possible to accept Wyclif as a legitimate influence on Chaucer's philosophy and theology without sacrificing his claims to poetic genius. It is also possible, though many among our contemporaries may not believe it, to search for and to speak of certain truth with artistry and beauty, without dogmatism or didacticism, and to thus create art worthy of the name. The past few decades of Chaucer scholarship has explored the thematic connections to Wyclif with slightly more interest, though still cautiously, but there remains much to be mined from the philosophy of the reformer.

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[7] John Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs* "marvels" that Chaucer's works were not suppressed, for Chaucer "seemeth to be a right Wicklevian, er else there was never any" (37). Cf. Peggy Knapp, in *Chaucer and the Social Contest*, who denies "any connection between Chaucer and an organized sect" (63–64), and dismisses the possibility of any direct influence on Chaucer by Wyclif or the Lollards. A more moderate approach is to acknowledge, as Anne Hudson does in *The Premature Reformation*, that many Lollard ideas coincided with intellectual interests in Chaucer's time period, so thus Chaucer's use of so-called "Lollard themes" does not necessarily indicate that he had a bias towards Lollardy; she notes that it is true "to say that Chaucer is not a Wycliffite," but qualifies this by adding that too rigid a separation between the two may result in some of the more interesting issues being given short shrift (394).

Wyclif's Universals

The three general kinds of universals debated in the schools can be summarized in relation to Wyclif's thinking as follows:[8]

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[8] Alessandro Conti's article on Wyclif in the *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (section 2.3) identifies these three types of universals below as a concise summary of Wyclif's main types of universals. I use them here as broad terms, with some reservation, and with my own definitions cobbled together from Wyclif's *De Universalibus* text only: the *ante rem, in re,* and *post rem* labels are typical ones used to describe medieval positions on universals, but they, too, are shifting terms on the continuum between realism and nominalism, and Wyclif's own definitions are not always so clear as those outlined below. These concepts appear in several different forms throughout *De Universalibus*, as he makes many distinctions and logical divisions, dissecting larger concepts and addressing arguments with point and counter-point. Systems from other philosophers—including Aristotle, Avicenna, Boethius, Porphyry, and Grosseteste (all of whom he identifies as realists), to name a few—are adopted and adapted by Wyclif to both defend and define real universals, and do not often correspond neatly with each other. Wyclif begins his first chapter by identifying three "general" kinds of universals: universal by causality (God being the first cause and all created things taking in order their origin from Him); universal by community (a thing shared by many individual entities); and universal by representation (the signs which are analogies for the real) (1.5–23, p.1). Later, Wyclif uses the three-fold division of Avicenna, from *Metaphysics* V.1, of actual, potential, and mental universals to support real universals (4.172, p.30), and elsewhere follows Grosseteste's five-fold division of types. He attempts to reconcile apparent contradictions within those works themselves and to apply at the same time the principles to his own arguments. Near the beginning of the treatise, while comparing and contrasting some of the opinions of ancient and contemporary philosophers, he describes his own position as "a middle way" that "reconcil[es] the extremes" (4.56–57, p.28). He addresses linguistic and formal analyses of the issues, theories of grammar and predication and the real, extramental existence of universals, and though his arguments tend to overlap and become

universalia ante rem, universals before the thing, are the ideas in God, the exemplars which are the patterns or archetypes of all things that exist: they effect all things;[9]

universalia in re, universals in the thing, are the formal universals caused by the ideas in God, the universal natures that are common to individual things;[10]

universalia post rem, universals after the thing, or "intentional universals," are the mental or notional signs by which we infer universality *in re* from the order observable in the phenomena of Creation.[11]

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convoluted, his over-arching theme remains the same throughout the maze of scholastic reasoning: "the properties of universals are everywhere to be explained in a realist sense" (2.144, p.13).

[9] Wyclif: "It is clear to any friend of truth that before the creation of the world it was eternally a truth that God is, by absolute necessity, the creator of the universe of things, and consequently that each and every creature is by absolute necessity capable of creation. This capability is an idea, which undoubtedly, by absolute necessity, is in God. And thus an idea is an eternal form in the divine mind, which God uses as a pattern in the production of creatures. But as a form or eternal guiding light, it must be noted, that it is not the material being of the creature, but a principle which effects the existence of the creature. And because the creature is capable of being produced according to this pattern, it is clear that it is supreme being, because the mental being of the creature is not God's power to produce, but the creature's power to be produced" (15.440–54, p.176). Wyclif also quotes Augustine, from the *Eighty-Three Questions*, in support of the divine ideas: "The Ideas are certain principal forms, or stable and unchangeable notions, which were themselves neither formed or made and are therefore eternal and unaltered"; Wyclif concludes, "[t]hat there are exemplar forms is beyond doubt" (15.456–60, 468, p.176).

[10] Wyclif quotes Anselm, from the *Monologian*: "The universal is the one [substance] which is common to many substances, as being a man is common to individual men" (3.187–89, p.23). Wyclif is careful to explain Aristotle's position on this as well, for Aristotle speaks of a "common nature rooted in its supposits" (2.236, p.15) which suggests a reversal of the order of causality that Wyclif supports: "Universals, on the other hand, take precedence in the order of origin, in which, both formally and finally, they cause their supposits" (2.238–40). The common natures are beings in "potentiality," abstracted by the intellect, not by the senses, and therefore philosophers say that the intellect is needed to bring the "thinkability" of the universal into actuality. This concept has led astray a number of "doctors of signs," and Wyclif here names Ockham in particular, causing them to "give up real universals" because they did not grasp the true meaning of the philosophers. The metaphysicians, however, understand that the common nature is first thought of by God, and "in this way, universality or metaphysical truth does not depend on any created intellect, since it is itself prior, but it does depend upon the uncreated intellect which uses its eternal intellectual knowledge to bring everything into effective existence" (2.235–331, p.15–17). Universals are not, as some doctors have interpreted Plato (mistakenly, Wyclif thinks) to mean, "self-subsistent substances, separate from God and from individuals": this concept of universals as existing in material form outside the mind of God or the individual things is an unintelligible one, Wyclif insists, for "such things would be superfluous monstrosities" (2.191–205, p.14). Wyclif follows Augustine's explanation from Question 46, "On the Ideas," of *Eighty-three Different Questions*—which question (46) Wyclif will reference specifically (mistakenly and consistently labeling it as question 47 throughout the text) as representative of Augustine's doctrine of universals several times in *On Universals*, in support of the Catholic Church's timeless orthodox realism—here: as Augustine says, universals "must be thought to exist nowhere but in the very mind of the Creator. . . . they are themselves true because they are eternal and because they remain ever the same and un-changeable. It is by participation in these that whatever *is* exists in whatever manner it does exist" (81, emphasis mine). Real universals, then, are not outside the mind of God, and they are not separate from individuals: "the universal substance *is* what each of them is" (2.208–26).

[11] Wyclif: ". . . neither the possibility nor the fact of assigning a term can cause extramental things to resemble each other more or less. The specific resemblance or difference between things is based

For nominalists, only *post rem* universals exist, for universals, they posit, are nothing more than mental concepts extrapolated from individual things, mere terms based on similarities among groups and shared among people of a culture by common language. For realists, however, these universals represent the order of causation; the exemplar ideas in God cause the formal universals, which in turn cause the intentional universals. The mind of man is posterior to the archetypal, originary universals: the knowing or thinking observer necessarily knows only after the act of God expresses the Ideas in his Creation; he is then able to infer universality from the order observable in Creation, recognizing its origin in the mind of the Creator and expressing that universality in representational signs. For, "just as every thing says itself, so also every inferior thing foresays its own superior" (1.102–5, p.3). Realists, in keeping with the Augustinian tradition, recognize that "the divine intellect makes universality in things, and makes them supremely actual" (3.235–36, p.24).

As a realist with a particularly proto-Protestant view of Scripture, Wyclif's chief concern is to defend revealed Truth, in the created world and in Holy Scripture: his doctrine of universals is closely bound to this desire to preserve, in the harmony of faith and reason, the principles that exist beyond the material signs, both textual and creaturely.[12] Truth, Wyclif insists, exists as a product and intent of the divine nature, *in* God, and thus cannot be the result of human agency: it is not the human intellect's

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essentially on the constituents of the things and not on signs . . . in the first and principal place you have to look in the things themselves for specific resemblances and differences, and only subsequently in their signs" (1.423–31, p.9). Meanwhile, the "doctors of signs," logicians, or sophists, "hold universals to be spoken or written symbols, and the metaphysicians hold them to be common things in external particulars" (2.327–28, p.16–17).

[12] As one critic puts it, "The doctrine of universals, like scriptural metaphors, acted as a bridge between the known properties of the created world and the ineffable simplicity of divine nature" (Penn, *Truth* 47).

appropriation or creation of a principle from the world of experience that determines a truth. Though the arguments Wyclif makes in *De Universalibus* are directed towards the correction of scholastic, academic errors among the intellectual elite, and even perhaps towards those errors which no longer had a stronghold in the Oxford of his day, Wyclif emphasizes throughout the treatise the consequences of those errors for the entirety of the Church body, present and future. The philosophical denial of universals involves a crucial misunderstanding of the nature of analogy and metaphor,[13] the relationship between the human and divine nature, thus leading to a misunderstanding of the essential nature of the Trinity[14] and ultimately undermining Holy Scripture, as the authority of texts and the reliability of hermeneutic principles themselves are being slowly eroded. It is Truth itself that is under siege.

Counter-intuitively for his readers today, perhaps, Wyclif identifies error about universals as being essentially a problem of love. Love, after all, is to be directed toward the Good; therefore, as Augustine teaches, our love of neighbor should be based on our affection for the good that is in the common human nature, which existed before the particular person, our love of neighbor should be for "the beauty of truth shining in them," and not for private convenience or pleasure. An overemphasis on the particular accidents of the individual is an error in regard to universals, a "lack of an ordered love" of universals, which in turn is “the cause of all the sin that reigns in the world.” In the hierarchy of being, universals are prior to the particular things, and are thus “a greater object of concern to God,” just as the “maintenance” of the Idea of humanity is more essential than the existence of any one particular man. It is the duty of the believer to love “the superior truth more than the inferior truth,” and thus to conform his will to the will of the Divine. True philosophers, then, are those who raise “the eye of their intellect” to higher things, beyond the material, sensory world which alone is the object of the lesser faculties (3.112–78, p.21–23). The journey in *House of Fame* is a search for these higher things, and thus requires a reordering of loves.

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[13] Stephen Penn, in one of the few book-length studies of *De Universalibus*, writes that, for Wyclif, "God and the created world can be considered together *only* in terms of analogy. . . . The assumption that analogy could lead the mind from the created world to an understanding of God was a convenient medium between extreme skepticism and the belief that man could know God in His perfection": analogy expresses in common terms the proportional likeness between Creator and creation (*Truth* 35–36).

[14] Wyclif references Anselm's *On the Incarnation of the Word* for support: "if a man has his reason so wrapped up in the images of bodily things that he does not understand how many men are in species a single man, how can he comprehend how in that most secret and most exalted nature several persons, each of which is perfect God, are a single essence?" (3.178–83, p.23).

House of Fame *and the Apprehension of Universals: Three-part Journey*

Throughout *De Universalibus*, Wyclif uses representative remarks from various earlier philosophers who sought the Good, emphasizing the harmony among them, for, he asserts, “almost all those who have rightly philosophized in this matter have spoken in conformity with each other” on the subject of universals (3.192–93). These philosophers have spoken as truly on these matters as “our theologians” and “our doctors,” the timeless authorities of the Church. The doctors of the Church, however, are those who leave “aside all consideration of human thought” and speak “more plainly and easily” than the ancient philosophers did; they are in essential agreement with these philosophers, but also surpass them in their “profoundly metaphysical treatment” of the matter (3.194–211, p.23). Above all, true philosophers recognize that the Truth is not divided. The holy doctors, therefore, who are members of Christ, in whom there are no divisions, “pay little attention to grammatical nicety in the accidents of terms”; as a result, there is occasion for the ignorant to see contradictions in their works instead of understanding that there “is no discord in the sense, but a mere verbal disgreement [*sic*] as a result of an ambiguity" (12.97–103, p.127).

Wyclif concludes that there are three basic ways of considering universals, which, essentially, are ways of considering the nature of truth. They are as follows:

> The first is the crude way of the grammarians, who grasp things in their signs only.
>
> The second way is that of the logicians, who study universals in the things signified, but in relation to their being thought of, so that the thinkability of universals is brought into actuality for them. And they call this 'the formal and actual being of universals', which has being only in the soul. And the same universal has as many ways of formal being in the soul as the soul has ways of thinking . . . There are many such remarks of logicians, varying not so much in content as in ambiguities and verbal arrangement.
>
> The third manner of speaking is that of the doctors of the church, and it is on them that I rely; it is the metaphysical way of looking at the matter. They say that the divine intellect makes universality in things, and makes it supremely actual. It is a fact that being man is common to every man, whether the creature thinks of this or not; and similarly, by the divine intellect, there is common that humanity which is the species or nature of every particular man. (3.213–240, p.23–24)

The "natural way of knowing," the way of knowing that attracts us first to the more universal things, then later to the singulars, is inborn, Wyclif says, but though it is the privilege of the true philosopher to know of universals at a level deeper than what is gathered through the senses, there remains much discord among "the scholastics" and "sophists" about universals, caused by darkened reason, a worldly fixation on sensibles, intellectual hypocrisy, arrogance, or lack of proper teaching (3.241–68, p.24). There are some doctors "who never leave the first stages of grammar, never turning the gaze of their minds away from signs"; this is an attitude arising from "corrupt custom," and it has caused philosophical error, indicating that these doctors who profess to follow the ancient theologians and yet have fixated their minds on the lesser objects of contemplation have childishly let those ancient teachings “slip from their memories” (1.117–26, p.3). The hierarchy of knowing, then, ascends from the grammarians, who are fixated on the signs, to the logicians, who argue that signs are mere concepts in the mind, to the metaphysicians, who relate the signs to being and meaning.

Because of Chaucer’s clear epistemological interests throughout *House of Fame,* the close analogues between Wyclif’s three levels of comprehension of universals and the structure and matter of the poem itself are of particular interest in exploring the philosophical complexities that Chaucer introduces. More clearly than the connections to Dante’s Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise that Koonce pursues in the tripartite classification of his book-length study, the poem suggests affinities with Wyclif’s divisions of philosophers into grammarians, logicians, and metaphysicians. The book divisions of the poem correlate well with these categories, for here, too, those who claim to seek truth in intellectual ascent are evaluated according to their use of language and their ultimate respect for Truth: Book 1 is devoted to the grammarian Geffrey, who cannot move beyond signs; Book 2 is fixed on the logician eagle, who toys with language and concepts but has no capacity to illuminate; and Book 3 leads us to the metaphysical, figured in the anti-exemplar of Fame herself and in the man of great authority, who appears as a suggestion of eschaton in direct contrast to the unfulfilled hopes and incomplete justice in Fame’s house. The poem’s concern with the nature and knowability of reality, with language and authority, with the use of rhetoric, and with the existence and accessibility of Truth itself, indicates that the poet himself is not satisfied with mere verbal games.

Geffrey as Grammarian

Katherine Lynch labels *House of Fame* the most disturbing of Chaucer's dream visions, "for it suggests that even for a soul with insight and stability of purpose the world may be so singular, so diverse, so confusing, that knowledge and the dissemination of truth may still not be possible" ("House of Fame" 82). To see *House of Fame* as a "disturbing" vision takes no great stretch of the imagination, but this characterization of the persona Geffrey as a man of "insight" and "stability of purpose" is highly problematic: taking the poem at face value as a negation of certain truth based primarily on the confusion of the unreliable narrator takes considerable liberties with the text.

William S. Wilson explores the first book of Chaucer's poem in "Exegetical Grammar in the *House of Fame*," explaining that though Geffrey's version of the *Aeneid* is a poor imitation of the original, it "is a perfect imitation of exegetical grammar at work on a classical poem" (245), and evidence that Chaucer understands the "comic and critical uses of telling a story ineptly" (245). The limitations of the purely grammatical treatment of a subject are here brought to light, as the basic requirements—inclusion of translation, *dictiones ethicae* (imagined soliloquies invented for historical and mythological figures), moral disquisitions, and paraphrase—are stylized by Chaucer for a comic effect. The faults of Geffrey's version of the *Aeneid* are therefore "the faults of such grammar" (245), evident in the tragic-comic lament of Dido in Geffrey's seemingly earnest moral digression and the absurdity of the elided version of the story: "if [the translation] is read in the tradition of medieval grammatical exercises, then Geffrey is simply doing what grammar taught students to do" (247). Having exited the temple, Wilson writes, the love-poet finds himself in the desert of creative sterility, having plumbed the depths of medieval exegetical grammar in his extemporaneous study of the *Aeneid* and come up with unsatisfactory poetic results. The elementary linguistic art of grammar proves insufficient for his poetry, and thus insufficient for the entirety of the journey.

In the spiritual context of Wyclif's schema, too, Geffrey is a grammarian, for he reaches for signs only, and is largely unable to make sense of them.[15] The confusions he is faced with and his ultimate failure to achieve transcendence are therefore entirely predictable: as Wyclif points out, "How futile are the mazes you enter into if you pay attention only to signs . . ." (1.355, p.8). The inconclusive verbal mazes in which Geffrey finds himself wandering will prevent him from achieving true clarity in the poem.

The prologue of *House of Fame* opens with the invocation "God turne us every drem to goode!" (HF 1.1). We quickly discover that this is not so much an indication of Geffrey's fervent devotion, but rather an open admission of his narrative persona's blunt wit and intellectual apathy: "For hyt is wonder, be the roode, / To my wyt, what causeth swevenes" (HF 1.2–3). Geffrey's initial expression of confusion about dreams and their causes has to do with the dream terminology. He cannot relate the name to the thing, cannot pinpoint the characteristics of kind that group each dream type together. He hastily summarizes the different dreams that have been identified commonly by the multitude of authoritative discursions on dream theories, and then dismisses them all, unable to determine for himself the name that belongs to the dream he is about to relate.

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[15] In the prologue to the Wycliffite Bible, the dangers of reading scripture as a grammarian does, with eye only for the letter instead of noting the figurative language, are listed with a warning of dire consequences. The grammarians' reading of the letter slays the spirit, the spiritual meaning of the word. The spirit of the words quickens, gives life, while the obtuse, willful disregard for figures results in spiritual death: "Also Holy Scripture hath many figuratif spechis, and as Austyn seith in the iij. book Of Cristen Teching, that autouris of Hooly Scripture usiden moo figuris—that is, mo fyguratif spechis—than gramariens moun gesse, that reden not tho figuris in Holy Scripture. It is to be war, in the bigynnyng, that we take not to the lettre a figurative speche, for thanne, as Poul seith, the lettre sleeth but the spirit, that is, goostly undirstonding, qwykeneth; for whanne a thing which is seid figuratifly is taken so as if it be seid propirly, me undirstondith fleschly; and noon is clepid more covenably the deth of soule than whanne undirstonding, that passith beestis, is maad soget to the fleisch in suynge the letter."

> . . . whoso of these miracles
> The causes knoweth bet then I,
> Devyne he, for I certeinly
> Ne kan hem noght, ne never thinke
> To besily my wyt to swinke
> To knowe of hir signifiaunce
> The gendres, neyther the distaunce
> Of tymes of hem, ne the causes,
> Or why this more then that cause is— (HF 1.12–20)

Those who know the science of dreams better than Geffrey does are left to divine these things, for Geffrey himself has no hope of figuring out on his own how properly name the dreams: he does not like to make his own wits do hard work, so this mystery is best left to the clerks, the thinkers who already understand such things. But Geffrey's apathy extends beyond the confusing dream terminology which occupies this first section of his musing on the subject. More tellingly, he has no interest in figuring out the significance of the types or their causes. Dreams are signs, revealing meaning only through proper interpretation, based first on examination of causality. But Geffrey here refuses to interpret. After listing numerous possible causes and occasions for dreams, he makes mention of his final speculation before giving up altogether:

> 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 aventures
> Be avisions or be figures,
> But that oure flessh ne hath no myght
> To understonde hyt aryght,
> For hyt is warned to darkly—
> But why the cause is, noght wot I. (HF 1.43–52)

It may be, he postulates, that the soul of "propre kynde"—the pure soul or essence of a man—attempts to warn or remind us each through the figures of a dream of the things that it foreknows. There is here a tacit assumption of the reality of a soul whose existence and understanding does not depend on the body in which it is housed; rather, the soul in its proper nature is unhindered by the flesh, and thus has a more reliable apprehension of truth and reality, able to foreknow (or recall, in Platonic fashion), right understanding, while the flesh has no such power, for it is unable to read these signs correctly, as its understanding is darkened by its materiality and dependence on sensory perception.[16] The naming of dreams thus belongs to the "grete clerkys," who apparently have purer souls, and Geffrey happily leaves it to them, mentioning no opinion of his own, but returning to his original invocation by appealing to the power of the cross, that "the holy roode / Turne us every drem to goode!" (HF 1.57–58). He appears to not be bothered by his inability to read the signs the forthcoming dream provided him, and his last suggestion that the flesh is warned too "darkly" by the soul, not given visions clear enough to overcome the hindrance of the flesh that darkens the intellect, is perhaps the truest for his situation. Through his own indolence and worldliness, Geffrey is unable to name things properly, and thus cannot grasp significance or extrapolate the truth necessary for interpretation of his vision.

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[16] Augustine's Question 46 of *Eighty-three Different Questions* discusses this principle in similar terms. Augustine reiterates that it is only the rational soul that has the power to contemplate the universal ideas postulated by Plato, and known by us to be the stable, unchanging forms in the mind of God. "This [contemplation] the rational soul can do by that part of itself wherein lies its excellence, i.e., by the mind and reason, as if by a certain inner and intelligible countenance, indeed, an eye, of its own. And indeed, not any and every rational soul is prepared for that vision, but rather, the soul which is holy and pure. It is this soul which is claimed to be fit for that vision, i.e., which has that very eye with which the ideas are seen—an eye sound, pure, serene, and like those things which it endeavors to see" (80). Not every soul is capable of this clear vision: it belongs to those who are closest in nature to the stable and unchanging Good they wish to see.

Chaucer thus complicates his vision with the problem of the unreliable narrator, assuming that the astute reader will recognize the narrator's limitations and culpability and then apply a corrective of contraries: just because the persona does not reach transcendence does not mean there is no truth to be found. Instead, the reader needs to look beyond signs and extrapolate the interior meaning, separating the fruit from the chaff. In the same way, the problem of misinterpretation, as Wyclif had suggested, lies with the will of the reader who does not read signs correctly.[17] Truth, in dreams and in reality, can be found only by a well-ordered mind; the will of the dreamer/interpreter, therefore, plays a central role in consenting to be deceived. Lacking a poetic guide who dispenses a conveniently packaged or conventional wisdom, the burden of interpretation is then placed upon the literate reader, who must participate fully in the vision, applying to the narrator's limitations the correctives brought to mind by the parodies and inversions of what ought to be.

Looking again to the *Boece*, the prototypical philosophical dream vision, we can compare Geffrey and Boethius to good purpose: since each is a *viator* seeking visionary truth, the near opposite depiction of their persons, mental acuity, and reactions invite such a comparison. At the outset of the vision, Boethius is revealed to be a civil servant imprisoned, wasting away to skin and bones, made weak with lament. He is prey to the poetic muses who have clouded his judgment and who will soon be chased away by his liberator, Lady Philosophy, whose precepts are still lodged somewhere in the far recesses of his mind. Geffrey, too, is a civil servant, a narrator identified by name as a representation of the author himself, inviting humorous comparisons between the two, but he is still at the top of his game—Fortune's wheel has not yet turned on him. He as yet has the respect of position and personal autonomy, the very things of which Boethius has been robbed, and yet he has holed up in his quarters with books, forsaking the company of neighbors and creating poetry of poor quality, in a self-imposed exile. He is not visibly grieving over his condition, though by Jove's pity, conveyed through the eagle, we understand that he *should* lament his condition. Geffrey's mind is also clouded by the poetic muses, as he dedicates himself to fruitless verse, but his primary devotion to Venus and Cupid, to cupidinous pursuits of the flesh, is emphasized throughout the poem. This, combined with his intellectual apathy, will result in his inability to rise to higher thoughts as Boethius does.

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[17] Cf. David Jeffrey, "Authorial Intent and the Willful Reader," especially pp. 174–84 in *People of the Book*, and "John Wyclif and the Hermeneutics of Reader Intention."

In Book 1, at the outset of the vision itself, Geffrey is faced with signs—visual, but by extension first verbal, as indicated by the inscription on the table of brass that parrots Virgil's opening lines of the *Aeneid*: "I wol now synge, yif I kan, / The armes and also the man / That first cam, thurgh his destinee, / Fugityf of Troy contree, / In Itayle, with ful moche pyne / Unto the strondes of Lavyne" (1.143–48)—signs that he cannot understand. From the very beginning of the narrative, we are presented with the problem of interpretation. As Geffrey contemplates the artwork on the walls of the glass temple of Venus, he is a clear analogue to Aeneas, who observes the story of Troy and his own participation in it played out before him in the temple artwork in Book I of the *Aeneid*. Faced with his own story, Aeneas immediately connects these pictorial representations to fame, and sees in the recording of these events an auspicious reception for the Trojans. Aeneas trusts in *fama*, saying to his companion as they view their history: "Even so far away / Great valor has due honor; they weep here / For how the world goes, and our life that passes / Touches their hearts. Throw off your fear. This fame / Insures some kind of refuge" (I.627–31).

For Aeneas, the authenticity or accuracy of the portrayal itself is not in question: the pictures represent history truly, and as such cause him to weep at the plight of his people, the history playing out before him, in sympathy and sorrow. Aeneas believes that the fame of the Trojans will result in their being treated justly, that there will be refuge for them in a place that has immortalized their story. This fame is in contrast to the ephemeral, earthly pronouncements of the whimsical goddess Fame that Geffrey will observe in Book 3. Of course, the scenes that Aeneas sees are painted inside the temple of Juno, dedicated to the very goddess who hates the Trojans and who would rejoice in their destruction, and the prophecy that the Trojans will eventually bring the Carthiginians to ruin doubtless does not earn them high marks among the inhabitants of the country in which they seek refuge. Nonetheless, Dido valorizes Aeneas's feats of bravery and promises refuge for his people based on their reputation; she is blinded by Amor, through whose agency Venus instigates her passion for Aeneas, and she will be led to abandon her right reason and commit herself to a foolhardy course that will be destructive to both herself and her people.

The scenes from the story of Aeneas that are depicted on the temple walls are from Virgil's *Aeneid*, but Geffrey's sympathy for Dido is primarily Ovidian, her lament in *House of Fame* being similar to the letter from Dido to Aeneas in Ovid's *Herodides* (7), and Geffrey refers readers to both Virgil and Ovid for more particulars of the story (HF 1.378–9). The perspectives of these two authors are of course at odds with each other; in *Metamorphoses,* Aeneas wanders through the story without a sense of divine destiny, with little attention given to the prophecies to be fulfilled. Ovid shows little interest in Aeneas, and even less interest in Aeneas's role as the divinely appointed Rome-bearer; his is a less heroic tale, with concentration on storylines tangential to the metanarrative of Virgil's *Aeneid*, more about love than about an overarching grand plan. Virgil's history of Aeneas involves the prophetic transcendence of history in order to see the whole of the story, events working themselves out according to the divine plan; it is an interpretation of history, related with emphasis on the true significance of events and people and the divine ordering of all things to fulfill their ultimate destiny. It is this framework that gives final and eternal meaning to all the details, making sense of past, present, and future, a vision of the world approaching the fullness of time. Readings of the *Aeneid* in the Middle Ages attempted the same project, fitting the events of Aeneas's journey and the destiny that drives him into Christian history, emphasizing the larger import of the founding of Rome in the grandnarrative of the Church, and allegorizing the elements of the story as demonstrations of human nature and Christian truth.

In Virgil's version, it is here, as Aeneas marvels at the handiwork and toil of the "artificers," walking from one wall of the temple to another, that his fears are calmed: "Here for the first time he took heart to hope / For safety, and to trust his destiny more / Even in affliction" (I.612–15). He takes comfort in his destiny, seeing the larger picture of history spanning in front of him, a comfort that Geffrey is unable to receive because he cannot see a unifying purpose in the images before him, even though the whole story, from the beginning of Aeneas's journey to the resolution of the *Aeneid*, with "alle the mervelous signals / Of the goddys celestials" (HF 1.459–60), is laid out before him, and it is clear that Aeneas, despite the setbacks introduced by June, in the end "Acheved al his aventure" (HF 1.463). Geffrey, too, "rome[s] up and doun" (HF 1.140) in his temple, marveling at the "queynte maner of figures / Of olde werk" (HF 1.127), the intricacy and richness of the forms, but unlike Aeneas, Geffrey is fixated on the particular details of the story instead of the narrative arc. Geffrey in fact abandons the larger story altogether in his flight of fancy about Dido. As he sympathizes with Dido's plight, he claims to follow no authority ("Non other auctour alegge I" [1.314]) and leaves the narrative images behind, introducing his lengthy, extemporaneous tangent about Dido and various other women who have been betrayed throughout classical history with the lament, "Allas! what harm doth apparence, / Whan hit is fals in existence!" (HF 1.265–66). This digression is not a description of the images in front of him, but rather a product of his own indignation. He goes on to moralize about Dido's unfortunate position after being duped by Aeneas, who was "fals" and "double" in his dealing with her, reading the history as unfairly prejudiced towards Aeneas at Dido's expense.

Geffrey's sympathy toward's Dido's plight has an air of the ridiculous about it; his valorization of Dido is unconventional, having little in common with the traditional readings of the story. The moralizations of the *Aeneid* by Fulgentius and Bernard Silvestris, in their commentaries on the ages of man and the stages of Aeneas's journey, both note the foolhardiness of Dido's and Aeneas's love affair, weighing in on Aeneas's side. Dido is interpreted, as was common for the Middle Ages, as a symbol of immoderate love, a distraction to Aeneas and a detriment to Carthage. Bernard Silvestris notes that with a woman ruling them, the Carthaginians are "enslaved, because in this world such is the confusion that desire rules and virtues are oppressed. We understand the Carthaginians, brave and upright men, as virtues, and thus men serve and a woman rules. Therefore in divine books the world is called the city of Babylon, that is, the city of confusion" (13–14). As a woman in power, Dido represents the rule of unbridled passions, subjugating the virtues to her desire, and the city of Carthage is a place of moral lethargy, where Aeneas is led astray from his divinely appointed mission, failing in his duty to kin, country, and gods. Bernard Silvestris defends Aeneas's actions, for it is essential that Aeneas leave Dido behind to continue to his destiny: "With a speech of certain censure, Mercury chides Aeneas, who leaves Dido and puts passion aside. Having been abandoned, Dido dies, and, burned to ashes, she passes away. For abandoned passion ceases and, consumed by the heat of manliness, goes to ashes, that is, to solitary thoughts" (27). Dido's death, then, is necessary: in the Christianized allegory, she is not a character to be sympathized with, but a hindrance to be overcome.

Virgil shows Aeneas to be enthralled by the scenes painted in the temple, and after his comments to his companion Achatës, Aeneas is silent, breaking off his speech "[t]o feast his eyes and mind on a mere image, / Sighing often, cheeks grown wet with tears" (I.632–34). The images seem so real that he stretches his hands out to them in his grief. There is an element of danger here, both in Virgil's original and in the commentaries, for it is clear that the artifices have a powerful appeal. Bernard Silvestris quotes this line from the *Aeneid*—"Aeneas 'feasts his eyes on empty pictures'" (13)—and uses it to prove Aeneas's youthful ignorance (symbolized by the cloud in which he is wrapped) and his attraction to the entrapments of the world that Boethius warns against in the *Consolation*. Bernard says Aeneas

> does not understand the nature of the world; therefore these [pictures] please him, and he admires them. We understand his eyes as the senses, some of which are true and some false; just as there is a right eye and a left one, so too we know certain senses are true and others false. We

> understand the pictures to be temporal goods, which are called pictures because they are not good but seem so, and therefore Boethius calls them 'images of true good'" (13).

The representations are misleading, for they are not the *thing* themselves, but the comfort Aeneas takes from them is very real, and Bernard interprets this in his allegory as an attachment to worldly things, which are only images of the true Good: soon after in the story Aeneas will be led astray, off of the path of destiny and into Dido's arms, sacrificing the greater good for the lesser good of immediate pleasure.

Geffrey's intellect is similarly clouded by disordered affections. In the temple of glass, a product of the sterile sands[18] in which it is set, Geffrey admires the images, sees the story being rehearsed before him, and yet he cannot comprehend the significance of the images, cannot encounter the past truly because the universality of the Trojan history is not clear to him. The signs are empty for him as well: he is apparently unable to allegorize, to extrapolate meaning from signs, images, and artifices that exist solely to communicate meaning. Geffrey is searching for understanding; his seemingly skeptical refusal to rely on his own intellect to divine the causes and meanings of dreams or to generalize about their validity in the prologue is contradicted here in practice as he looks away from the images and contemplates human nature, "man, of his pure kynde," and his propensity to deception, as in the case of Aeneas, who leaves Dido "unkyndely," and in similar cases of lovers throughout history (HF 1.280, 295). The nature of man exists outside of the individual instances of his betrayals that Geffrey calls to mind, and though he is engaged in the very human activity of trying to figure out, to order, some universal truths about humanity, he will be unsuccessful: his enumeration of the wrongs done to womankind takes no circumstances or context into account, and his list is a limited one, based on his own prejudices of the moment and including only tales about false men and wronged women, neglecting the numerous tales of deceptive women who have led men to their doom.

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[18] The "sond" here is compared explicitly by Geffrey to the sandy shores of Libya upon which Aeneas, "duty-bound," washes up after their hard journey. An exile in the wilderness of Libya, Aeneas describes himself as destitute and unknown by the inhabitants of this land, though he, in his piety, is "known / Above high air of heaven by [his] fame" (*Aen* I.519–20).

In his befuddled state, Geffrey sees the story of Aeneas and the fall of Troy as a particular, an individual story which he cannot relate to larger universal truth; he cannot see himself in the story, cannot see the commonality of all of humanity that is expressed in the myth. He sympathizes with Dido on a purely sentimental level, but the larger questions and implications of the Trojan myth that would have been readily apparent to a literate person in the Middle Ages are lost on him. The story of Aeneas depicted on the temple walls signifies, but Geffrey does not know what to make of it: he does not recognize the author of the images or the country in which he finds himself. Disturbed by his own incapacity to make sense of his surroundings, he abandons the story altogether and heads out of the temple into the desert:

> ‘A, Lord,’ thoughte I, ‘that madest us,
> Yet sawgh I never such noblesse
> Of ymages, ne such richesse,
> As I saugh graven in this chirche;
> But not wot I whoo did hem wirche,
> Ne where I am, ne in what contree.
> But now wol I goo out and see,
> Ryght at the wiket, yf y kan
> See owhere any stiryng man
> That may me telle where I am.’ (HF 470–79)

He is now looking for a “stiryng man,” someone *living* who can explain to him where he stands in relation to his surroundings. But “no maner creature / That ys yformed be Nature / Ne sawgh I, me to rede or wisse” (HF 1.489–91). There is no creature present who can guide or teach him, no one to “rede,” interpret, or discern the meaning of the signs, and, set loose to meander in the desert, Geffrey will be an easy target for the eagle about to descend on him.

Unable to read the signs, even in this highly referential and allusive context, Geffrey at the end of Book 1 moves in the right direction, looking away from the empty signs to find something real, someone who can guide him in his confusion: as a grammarian, he cannot himself see beyond the signs to the meaning to which they point. Lost in this wilderness, his confusion and vulnerability is obvious to readers in his directionless wandering in the desert. Aeneas, too, loses his way in the wilderness of the world, as do Boethius and Dante, in mimesis of Virgil’s story, and it is at this point in the stories that a messenger from Jove/Jupiter/God is sent, ostensibly to put each of our heroes, the *viators*, back on the right track. But in comparison with the rhetorical powers of Mercury, St. Lucia, Beatrice, and Lady Philosophy, who have the Truth of prophecy and scripture behind the force of their words, the eagle’s loquacious exposition is a pale, though humorous, imitation of wisdom.

The Eagle as Logician

Laurence Eldredge sees this dream vision’s striving for and failing to attain transcendent wisdom as the result not of Chaucer’s tacit admission of the ultimate unknowability of Truth or of the poet’s own “ineptitude[,] but rather [of] his careful consistency in working out the philosophical problem he has undertaken” (“Chaucer’s *Hous*” 106). The poem is certainly marked by philosophical currents, he insists, and “at least in one dimension it amounts to a rejection of a mode of thought known then as the

Via Moderna" (106), a categorical rejection of the methods used and conclusions reached by those whom Wyclif terms the logicians.

Wyclif particularly takes to task these philosophers who consider knowability to be dependent on the mind of the knower, the philosophers who reject mind-independent reality in their denial of universals. These philosophers Wyclif labels as sophists and "logicians"; those who understand the remarks of Aristotle in *Metaphysics* VI.8 to mean "that truth and falsehood are in the mind and not in things . . . in respect of their being in awareness" (2.113–15, p.12). They consider Truth to be an invention of the individual knower, instead of uncreated reality, independent of man: "For truth is grasped by a logician to the extent that it is knowable by a created intellect. Nor would it be real for the logicians unless there were a soul actually apprehending it" (2.115–18, p.12). Truth for the logician, in other words, does not exist outside of the individual soul who has grasped that truth.

In the nineteenth century, Gerard Manley Hopkins[19] writes in "Hurrahing in Harvest" of the Book of Nature that lies open, waiting for an observer to come along and "glean" from the land and skyscape the truth of Christ, in richly allusive mimesis of the medieval literary principle of separating the fruit from the chaff. After describing the beauties of the harvest scene around him and rhapsodizing about the love greetings that are being spoken to him through nature, the narrator muses about the availability of the truths he is witnessing, saying "These things, these things were here and but the beholder / Wanting" (ll.11–12). The Truth of the Savior that he has gleaned from the sky and the harvested fields was present before he walked upon the scene and it will remain afterwards: the beholder is not necessary for the Truth to *be*; he does not cause or invent the Truth himself. Rather the soul finds Truth and becomes the beneficiary of it, gathers it to himself and reacts to it, "rears wings" and "hurls" himself into the sky in an ecstatic expression of joy at the poem's end. It is an essentially orthodox, medieval realism at work in perceiving the world external to man. A realism that recognizes the existence of universals and can thus see, amidst all the particular details and things of the sensible world, traces of God, available to those who can read the signs.

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[19] Hopkins was heavily influenced by the genius of the thirteenth-century philosopher-theologian Duns Scotus, the "Subtle Doctor," whose philosophical conceptualism falls somewhere between realism and nominalism in regards to the problem of universals. Wyclif also rejects conceptualism as a whole, but speaks approvingly of pieces of Scotus's philosophy and logic.

Wyclif's logicians, on the other hand, do not accept extramental reality on the same terms, and use the works of Aristotle ("the Philosopher") as proof for their position, denying that Aristotle's references to "universal substance" refer to extramental reality.[20] But "to concede the real sense of the words as they stand is more in accord with the words of the Philosopher, more real, less long-winded and less complicated than to use lengthy and tangled heaps of words to expound everything as being principally about signs. For once you know what is signified, knowledge of the signs follows on" (2.39–45). The tangled heaps of words used by the logicians are a circuitous route around what Wyclif perceives to be the simpler meaning of Aristotle's teaching: Aristotle's words about universal substances in this case are to be taken as they stand, communicating their real sense in their simplicity. The logicians must twist and expound at length to make Aristotle's understanding of universals into a nominalist one, in which the signs alone exist and universals are denied real being. Logicians are therefore again defined as those who "use common sophisms to empty of force the reasons offered to establish universals" (6.14–15, p.40).

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[20] Wyclif spends some time in this chapter explaining Aristotle's actual position on universals; though it appears that Aristotle argues against universals in the real world, and even to the point that it seems "in every one of his books he denies universals either implicitly or directly" (2.161–62, p.13), Wyclif notes that it is primarily the ideal universals postulated by Plato which Aristotle is rejecting wherever he argues against them in his texts or approaches them "in a hostile sense" (2.179, p.13). Others among the great doctors have done the same, Wyclif reminds us, including Thomas and Scotus.

This second level of the logicians enters our story at the beginning of Book 2, in the figure of the dialectical eagle, who shines as brightly as gold in his descent, but whose reflected light will not dispel the clouds that surround Geffrey. We are led to expect much of the eagle, who acts as a messenger and snatches Geffrey up at a juncture in the story similar to that of Mercury's visit Aeneas, at the point when their purely emotional, supra-rational sympathy for Dido might lead them too far astray from the destiny in store for them. But the eagle's tangled heaps of words, pleasing only to his own ears, do not serve to answer any of the significant questions that Geffrey poses. It is no coincidence that his entrance occurs soon after Geffrey reminds us of the proverb "Hyt is not al gold that glareth"—having extrapolated from the story of Dido's destruction that outward shows of fairness can mask internal falsity and vice—and then cautions against trusting the unknown too quickly, following up with another proverb, "That 'he that fully knoweth th' erbe / May saufly leye hyt to his ye'" (HF 1.290–91). The sense of the proverb is most evident here when considering the eagle in juxtaposition to Lady Philosophy, who works a cure upon Boethius by using a combination of mild and strong remedies in the course of her teaching. The properties of the proverbial herb should be known before it is used as a cure for the "eye," which is the faculty through which immoderate desire or irrational cupidity enters into the heart; in Dido's case, the affliction is the desire instigated by Venus, the desire that enters into her as she gazes upon young

Iulus at the feast for the Trojans, and the "cure" for her longing will prove ultimately more destructive than the illness itself.

The eagle is a limited guide, one whose "cure" will be entirely insufficient for the maladies that afflicts Geffrey: his instruction on signs addresses only the things themselves, not their meaning—he will not or cannot answer metaphysical questions—and he takes Geffrey only to the midpoint between heaven and earth. He does not ascend to the heavens, as would be expected from the precedent set by the dream visions of Dante and Scipio, and from Boethius's poetic description of the thought that clothes itself with "swifte fetheres that surmounten the heighte of hevene" and that, by seeking truth, "comen to the verray knowleche of god" (Bo4.m1). The eagle instructs Geffrey on the nature of things in the observable universe, their kindly inclining, and how sound travels, but unlike the traditional wisdom figure, he does not discuss the significance of these natural signs. He can take Geffrey to the house of Fame and the cage of Rumor, to the confusion and multiplicity of tales, events, lies, intrigues, but not to anything higher, and he leaves Geffrey without any apparatus for making value judgments concerning the scenes he is about to observe.

Returning again to the *Boece*, the stark contrast between Lady Philosophy and the eagle puts his feathered authority as a philosopher into question, starting with the very intent of the journey upon which they are embarking. Philosophy had begun by chiding Boethius for his waywardness, for it is through his own fault that his intellect has been breached. He has been seduced by the poetic muses, thus darkening his intellect and overpowering his ability to extrapolate the philosophical meaning of his circumstances, consequently reducing him to the weeping, impassioned, skeletal mess she finds upon her return. Philosophy then guides him back to the correct intellectual path, leading him through a progression of teaching and questioning and correcting. The eagle, on the other hand, says he has come (by the order of Jove) to reward Geffrey for this very service to worldly loves, to reward the worldly concupiscence and apparent sloth that likewise darkens his intellect and keeps him from understanding the significance of the signs presented to him. The eagle monologues, conveys—he does not teach—and acts as a simultaneous mode of transportation and a tour guide to what he assumes to be Geffrey's corrupted heart's desires.

Lady Philosophy leads Boethius out of his self-pity, but the eagle encourages it in Geffrey, listing Geffrey's grievances as reason for Jove's pity and attention:

> . . . [Jove] hath of the routhe
> That thou so longe trewely
> Hast served so ententyfly
> Hys blynde nevew Cupido,
> And faire Venus also,
> Withoute guerdon ever yit . . . (HF 2.614–19)

Without reward Geffrey has served the goddess of love, setting his small wit (which is "lyte" in his head) to the writing of poems, books, songs, and ditties as best he can,

> . . . 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. (HF 2.624–28)

Jove therefore considers it a mark of Geffrey's humility and virtue that he studies each night with an aching head and writes of Love, in honor and praise of Love and his followers, though he has no part in love himself, and instead must associate "in the daunce" of love with those whom Love has no interest in advancing. Also,

> . . . 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;
> 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 . . . (HF 2.644–58)

Geffrey has no tidings, not from far away, or from his own neighbors, for when his calculations are done and his workday is over, he goes home to read himself into stupor each night, pouring over books instead of getting rest or receiving news.

This lack of tidings has greater significance than the eagle admits: the elusive love tidings that Geffrey seeks, that he has been promised, are essential to understanding the vision. Geffrey is to be rewarded for his faithful (though ineffectual and small-witted) poetic service to Venus, the goddess of love. He has experienced no love tidings of his own, and the eagle tells him in his upward flight that Jove has decreed a reward: to be taken to the house of Fame to see there the love tidings that he has been lacking. These tidings are usually interpreted as the matter for his poetry, for, shut up in his rooms, poring over books with no news of his neighbors, experiencing no love of his own, Geffrey is running low on material for his poetic art. But only to *observe* love tidings in the vision seems a poor reward, illogical and even anticlimactic. And the tidings themselves, reverberating in a whirling cage of twigs (shades of Paolo and

Francesca, perhaps, buffeted by the winds in the second circle of the Inferno), are a mix of true and false, including the unlovely and trivial, discords, jealousies, deceptions.

There is an implicit promise of something better, something significant, with references throughout the poem to "new" tidings that Geffrey seeks, to the tidings of some far country that other people can tell of better than he. And since Geffrey in his confusion leaves the temple of Venus behind to look for the author or artist who created the images he saw there, to find out what country his is in, to get his bearings, we sense that he is looking for more than what the eagle has promised him. Tidings are events, happenings, reports, announcements, or prophecies, and all these definitions are correct here, but the third and final definition of tidings in the *Middle English Dictionary* may also be applicable: tiding as a "word or statement," "an indication or a sign" (the OED puts this definition further down the list, and includes "traces" in this definition). Understanding tidings as possible traces, indications, or signs of love lends more profound significance to Geffrey's journey. All created beings contain traces of this new, charitable love, which is completely at odds with the old loves of Geffrey, old loves suggested by his devotion to Venus and his sentimental sympathy for the character of Dido. Rather than allowing the reader to settle for seeking the tabloid-quality scandals, lies, and discord of the court of Rumor, Chaucer suggests throughout Geffrey's journey the potential for attaining something more, moving beyond signs and logic to the real things themselves.

Wyclif's "love tidings" are gleaned from Augustine, who teaches that "we are to love common things because of our affection for what is honourable and because of the beauty of truth shining in them" (3.113–14, p.21): it is the common nature of man—the perdurable “goodness in common” that, by the very definition of a universal, cannot cease to exist—that should be loved, rather than the lesser goods of particulars. Since Wyclif postulates a “universal abstract truth” that exists beyond matter—truth which is not itself bodily or material—there must be a faculty of intellect in man that is able to discern and consider it, a faculty that can conceive “the universal intention.” This faculty abstracts “everlasting eternal truth” from the “phantasm,” from the mental images created in the imagination, and “from perishable particulars” (3.38–47, p.19–20). Geffrey intuits this process as he stands in the desert, praying to Christ, who is the Christian figure of everlasting Truth, to protect him from deception:

> ‘O Crist,’ thoughte I, ‘that art in blysse,
> Fro fantome and illusion
> Me save!’ And with devocion
> Myn eyen to the hevene I caste. (HF 1.492–95)

He has just been looking upon the images that seem deceitful in their defense of Aeneas, and recognizes that the phantoms produced by his own clouded mind may not be the most reliable guide. There is a clear concern here with man’s cognitive ability and the objects of its consideration.

In the invocation to Book Two, Geffrey apostrophizes to his own 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 kythe thyn engyn and myght! (HF 2.523–28)

In the treasury of his brain is enclosed information and ability, and this invocation of thought treats the thought as memory only, as a recording device shut up within his brain; Geffrey makes no suggestion here that he is looking within the treasury, as Philosophy advises Boethius, to find the hidden root of truth (the universal) that reveals all that is necessary for understanding. Writing about the dream after the fact, Geffrey makes little comment on the actual import of it, comes to no definite conclusion about its spiritual implications or its real value, and in fact professes contentment with his ignorance on these matters. The virtue of his thought that he extols here in the invocation is its power to recall, not its power to investigate truth under the surface. On an ironic level, of course, it will be evident to astute readers that there is very little virtue in Geffrey's thought, for it seems to get precious little exercise in the later act of writing of the poem. During his flight, however, he has introspective moments, and muses upon possible connections between what he witnessing and what he already knows, attempting to abstract some truth from the particulars he is experiencing; it is significant that he is interrupted and chastised by the eagle, the figure of the *via moderna*, when he does so.

When Geffrey comes to his senses after the eagle has snatched him up—responding to the eagle's command that he "Awak!"—he tries to make sense of his current situation:

> And therwith I
> Gan for to wondren in my mynde.
> 'O God,' thoughte I, 'that madest kynde,
> Shal I noon other weyes dye?
> Wher Joves wol me stellyfye,
> Or what thing may this sygnifye?
> I neyther am Ennok, ne Elye,
> Ne Romulus, ne Ganymede,
> That was ybore up, as men rede,
> To hevene with daun Jupiter,
> And mad the goddys botiller.'
> Loo, this was thoo my fantasye. (HF 2.583–93)

He runs through the possibilities he knows of, from classical mythology and biblical stories, imagining his death, the end of his human form, to be immanent, and amidst his speculation, he asks himself what else this experience might mean: "what thing may this sygnifye?" The eagle at this point breaks into what Geffrey identifies as his "fantasye," interrupting his musing:

> But he that bar me gan espye
> That I so thoughte, and seyde this:
> 'Thow demest of thyself amys,
> For Joves ys not theraboute—
> I dar wel putte the out of doute—
> To make of the as yet a sterre;
> But er I bere the moche ferre,
> I wol the telle what I am,
> And whider thou shalt, and why I cam
> To do thys, so that thou take
> Good herte, and not for fere quake.' (HF 2.594–604)

To calm Geffrey's fears, the eagle says, he will correct his misconceptions by identifying himself to Geffrey, explaining who he is, where they are going, and why he came. He will *not*, as we see here and throughout their flight, answer Geffrey's questions about meaning or significance. He will instead, through his linguistic maneuverings, tell of the facts of the case, using "propre skill" and "worthy demonstracion" to explain his version of the reality Geffrey will witness in the House of Fame, a version of his own imagining:

> 'Now herkene wel, for-why I wille
> Tellen the a propre skille
> And a worthy demonstracion
> In myn ymagynacion. (HF 2.725–28)

He follows this with his lengthy explanation of the commonplace workings of "kyndely enclynyng" and the power it exerts on material things, punctuating his explanations with assertions of his own unimpeachable authority and of the authoritative proof of experience, which is also represented in the figure of the eagle: "Ryght so seye I" (742); "as I fynde" (750); "I preve hyt thus—take hede now— / Be experience (787–88); "what y wol the lere" (764); "loo, thys ys my sentence" (776); "whoso seyth of trouthe I varye, /

Bid hym proven the contrarye" (808); "wel I preve" (826); "As I have before preved the" (839).

The eagle's off-hand self-promotion and self-certainty remind us that he is relaying to Geffrey his own version of workings of the world, and that he is using the art of rhetoric to promote this vision, adapting his speech to make it accessible to Geffrey's small wit. But though he congratulates himself on his style, on having avoided the use of technical terms and figures and verbal flourishes, and asks Geffrey to compliment him as well, to affirm that he has proved his argument "symply"—"Withoute any subtilite / Of speche, or gret prolixite / Of termes of philosophie, / Of figures of poetrie, / Or colours of rethorike?" (HF 2.854–59)—he is quite conscious of the art he is practicing in using the standard techniques of rhetorical analysis.[21] His "proof" for his argument about the movement of sound towards the House of Fame includes an appeal to the authority of the philosophers and learned clerks:

> Loo, this sentence ys knowen kouth
> Of every philosophres mouth,
> As Aristotle and daun Platon,
> And other clerkys many oon;
> And to confirme my resoun,
> Thou wost wel this, that spech is soun,
> Or elles no man myghte hyt here;
> Now herke what y wol the lere.
> 'Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken;
> . . . .
> But this may be in many wyse,
> Of which I wil the twoo devyse,
> As soun that cometh of pipe or harpe.
> For whan a pipe is blowen sharpe
> The air ys twyst with violence
> And rent—loo, thys ys my sentence.' (HF 2.757–65, 2.771–76)

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[21] William S. Wilson explores the components of the eagle's oration in his analysis of book 2 of *House of Fame*, "Eagle's Speech in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," likening them to the techniques of Ciceronian persuasive rhetoric. Wilson identifies the eagle as an "orator" whose effect on the poem is to "separate poetry and persuasive rhetoric as intellectual methods" (158).

Like unto the techniques of the logicians Wyclif rebukes, the eagle invokes the writings of the philosophers, but twists them to support his own theories. Plato and Aristotle and many others do subscribe to type of kindly inclining, as the eagle indicates, but the eagle goes farther, using this concept as a stepping stone to his assertion that speech is nothing but sound, and that sound is nothing but air. He has created his own *sentence*.

> 'Thou shalt have yet, or hit be eve,
> Of every word of thys sentence
> A preve by experience,
> And with thyne eres heren wel,
> Top and tayl and everydel,
> That every word that spoken ys
> Cometh into Fames Hous, ywys,
> As I have seyd; what wilt thou more?' (HF 2.876–83)

He assures Geffrey that every bit of his explanation of the sounds that head toward the House of Fame will be proved by Geffrey's own experience when he gets there, and the eagle sums up with a purely rhetorical question, "what wilt thou more?" But Geffrey *does* want more than to merely witness the actuality of the eagle's facts; as he has indicated before, he is looking for significance, for a living being that can explain to him the meaning of the signs he sees. The eagle will not respond to those requests.

Geffrey thinks upon the wonders of creation—'O God,' quod y, 'that made Adam, / Moche ys thy myght and thy noblesse!' (HF 2.970–71)—and recalls Boethius, who flew up past every element on the feathers of Philosophy. Unsure still (in keeping with the prototypical vision of St. Paul) about whether his material body has accompanied him on this flight—clarity, "clere entendement," has not been afforded him even by the time of his writing of the poem—Geffrey then begins to muse on the epistemological significance of seeing the things about which he has read.

> And than thoughte y on Marcian,
> And eke on Anteclaudian,
> That sooth was her descripsion
> Of alle the hevenes region,
> As fer as that y sey the preve;
> Therfore y kan hem now beleve.
> With that this egle gan to crye,
> 'Lat be,' quod he, 'thy fantasye!
> Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?' (HF 2.985–93)

Geffrey concludes that he can now believe these authorities in *toto*, seeing now, within the limited range of his own vision, that Marcian (Martianus Capella, author of *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*) and Alain de Lille (author of the *Anticlaudianus*) in their allegorical treatment of the sciences were correct about those things now accessible to him, and thus assuming their veracity for the things beyond his vision as well. Since both authorities take pains to show that eloquence unmarried to wisdom is empty wind, it is appropriate that they come to Geffrey's mind while he is under the eagle's tutelage, for the eagle's verbosity, too, is empty wind, not wisdom. The eagle chooses this moment to interrupt his thought process again, directing his attention instead to the things around him, to the stars and the constellations that the eagle can name for him, thus adding to Geffrey's factual and experiential knowledge of the material objects in the universe, but not to his actual understanding of it: the eagle is not concerned with his ability to abstract and order truths obtained from sensory perception. He uses here the term "fantasye"[22] to describe Geffrey's attempt to understand the significance of this journey. The word has numerous applicable meanings, for it can indicate false apprehensions—delusion, illusion, or imaginative phantoms—or the very operation of the imaginative faculty of mind in recalling, speculating, or creating. The eagle's full meaning is not entirely clear, but the indication is that the eagle considers the significance Geffrey seeks to be the creation of his own mind, not a reflection of reality.

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[22] The MED's relevant definitions for fantase (n.): 1.(a) One of the mental 'faculties' or 'bodily wits,' variously classified in scholastic psychology and literary tradition as to its supposed location in the brain and its functions, whether the imagined apprehension and recall of sensory data, the formation of delusive images or ideas, musing about the past or speculation about the future, the devising of works of art, etc.; the imagination (in various of its functions) . . .

2. (a) A mental image or a notion produced by fantasie; (b) a deluded notion or false supposition; an unfounded speculation or suspicion; hence, untruth, a lie.

3. (a) A projection of deluded or illusory imagination, a figment of the imagination; an appearance not having reality, an apparition, a phantom; (b) a product of the creative imagination or fancy; an artistic or artful creation.

In his final exchange with the eagle, Geffrey makes a last request before being dropped off in front of the mountain where the eagle will leave him:

> 'Now,' quod I, 'while we han space
> To speke, or that I goo fro the,
> For the love of God, telle me—
> In sooth, that wil I of the lere—
> Yf thys noyse that I here
> Be, as I have herd the tellen,
> Of folk that doun in erthe duellen,
> And cometh here in the same wyse
> As I the herde or this devyse;
> And that there lives body nys
> In al that hous that yonder ys,
> That maketh al this loude fare.'
> 'Noo,' quod he, 'by Seynte Clare,
> And also wis God rede me;' (HF 2.1054–67)

It is a serious appeal Geffrey makes, "for the love of God," asking again if he can expect to find a living being in the scene before him. The eagle does not want to repeat himself, he says, and thus refuses to answer Geffrey. He has already told Geffrey about the sound that collects in the House of Fame, true, but he ignores the second part of the question: Geffrey wants to know if there is anything *real* within the temple. The eagle's only answer is to alert him to a marvel he is about to see; the words will all be represented in human form, in the form of the one that spoke the words. We are left to assume that the figures Geffrey will see in book 3 are not living, for in the eagle's perception, they are mere words, sounds only, composed of air and not of meaning, which echo and are spread abroad.

The eagle's continued references to the falsity and confusions—we will see "fals and soth compouned," "lesinges," "chidynges," "discordes," "jelousies," "murmures," "dissymulacions," "feyned reparacions," and "moo berdys [disguises]" in this brief vision then there are grains of sand—that Geffrey will see at his destination doubtless color Geffrey's perception of the scene, and are in implicit opposition to realist dogma. The realist postulates that the signs around us are necessarily reliable, as is our reason, "[f]or," as Wyclif insists, "it is impossible for any logical form to fail on a theological topic without the flaw being detectible in the creatures which bear the traces of God; just as there is no uncreated truth believed by the faithful which does not have a trace or likeness in created material to lead us to believe it" (8.616–20, p.74). All signifiers, linguistic and material, must *mean*, and the unhindered reason can find within signs and creation the traces of uncreated Truth. "Sophistical forms" will reveal their impossibility when applied to the divine essence and to real figures (8.612–15). In the realm of language, this means that the faculty of reason, which bears the divine imprint, is capable of detecting falsity or flaws in the logic of theological arguments. In the realm of metaphysical Truth, the universals that are believed in by the faithful are abstracted from the traces of God (and the divine ideas that exist within God), that are found within created material. Deep calleth unto deep, and universals can be believed in because the traces of God exist both in man's reason and in the objects about which he reasons. "So," Wyclif concludes, "the knowledge of universals is the principal step on the ladder of wisdom towards the exploration of hidden truths" (8.623–27, p.74).

As in the *Boece*, in keeping with Lady Philosophy's instruction, abstraction of universal truths is a higher order of thinking, bringing one closer to the mind of God and the divine ideas. The freer the mind is from particulars, then, the higher thought rises in the hierarchy of being and knowing. In this realist metaphysic, consolation is found in unity, the cosmic love at the center of all things. This is both a metaphysical and a linguistic function, for language mimics the conceptual process. What is first required is that we leave the "byways" and tangled language of the logicians, for "what the philosopher must first do is to grasp the real universal. . . . And it is clear that it is easier to speak in the language of the philosophers than in the language of the moderns, because truth is its own best ally" (1.440–45, p.9).

The eagle's flight should take Geffrey beyond the level of thinking and comprehension he was able to achieve on earth, but it does not. Geffrey is not capable himself of navigating this course, but his guide is also not capable, not being a true philosopher of Wyclif's school—he will not explore the higher metaphysical truth. Geffrey chooses to be entangled in the affairs of the world, or reports of them, anyway, not abstracting the vital things, not understanding or seeking the significance of the signs. The new tidings he is subjected to, the things he thinks he seeks, will not be reflections of the true Love that moves heaven and stars at the cosmic center of the universe. The ascent should lead Geffrey to achieve a higher epistemological perspective, but it does not—he finds only confusion instead, which is the only thing that he has been prepared to receive.

Geffrey will see his eagle once again, briefly, at the end of book 3, immediately after finding the cage of Rumor, a house comparable to that of "Domus Dedaly, / That

Laboryntus cleped ys"; this reference also recalls the *Boece* (though in less explicit terms than the earlier allusion to the feathers of Philosphy) to notable effect, as we see in the corresponding passage in which Boethius speaks to Lady Philosophy:

> "Scornestow me," quod I, "or elles, pleyestow
> or disseyvistow me, that hast so woven
> me with thi resouns the hous of Didalus,
> so entrelaced that it is unable to ben unlaced,
> thow that otherwhile entrist ther thow issist,
> and other while issist ther thow entrest?
> Ne fooldist thou nat togidre by replicacioun
> of wordes a manere wondirful sercle
> or envirounynge of the simplicite devyne?" (Bo3.p2.154–62)

Boethius asks Lady Philosophy if she is playing with him, deceiving him in weaving together the labyrinth of reasons in and out of which she easily twines herself. But the voice of true rhetoric has here folded together for him the circle of divine simplicity with her replication of words. The false philosophy of the eagle in *House of Fame*, however, has created a similarly intricate cage for Geffrey; he is placed inside the whirling cage of twigs by the eagle, who is capable of entering and exiting the cage, while Geffrey is powerless to do so on his own. It is a cage that surpasses the wonders of Dedalus's Labyrinth, and it moves as swiftly as thought.

> Tho saugh y stonde in a valeye,
> Under the castel, faste by,
> An hous, that Domus Dedaly,
> That Laboryntus cleped ys,
> Nas mad so wonderlych, ywis,
> Ne half so queyntelych ywrought.
> And ever mo, as swyft as thought,
> This queynte hous aboute wente
> That never mo hyt stille stente. (HF 3.1918–26)

The swift thought that moves *this* structure, though, is unlike the thought that affixes the wings of Philosophy to itself and flies in a straight line to its creator. It is a confused, swirling wind that blows the cage about in continual disordered and purposeless motion. The cage is a tangled trap created by rhetoric, woven with words, containing words, admitting and releasing words, and it stands in contrast to the labyrinth that is mastered by true philosophy.

Synopsis

The second stage of Geffrey's journey shows the confusion and limitations of a "philosophy" that uses logic to poor effect, fixated only on linguistic signs and the grammar of things instead of exploring the nature and existence and origin of realities, as philosophy ought. The consequence is confusion, indeterminancy, and ultimately a dead-end choice between philosophical fideism or skepticism. The final lines of the poem, however, present another option.

Metaphysical speculation is discouraged by the nominalists as empiricism takes central stage in the history of ideas, for metaphysical truths cannot, they argue, be proven empirically. Wyclif counters this teaching by postulating "another way of considering truth, a higher, metaphysical mode: as the correspondence between a thing and a word, as Augustine has it. And in this manner it has real being outside the soul in the uncreated intellect, which is a mind filled with truth. It is thus that the metaphysician considers truth from a more fundamental point of view . . ." (2.112–27, p.12). This correspondence between thing and word is the object of the metaphysician's study, and the metaphysician has access to the truth of *being* because he studies universal knowledge, which survives the destruction of every particular, while sense knowledge has its terminus in perceptible, perishable objects (7.528–52). This third level of the metaphysical quest appears in *House of Fame* as an inversion of what ought to be: Geffrey's darkened and untutored intellect is not able to comprehend the eschatological significance of the judgment scene being enacted in Fame's court. His thoughts cannot ascend to that height, because he is hindered by both the limitations of the arrogant and sophistical reasoning of his guide and the limitations of his own intellect.

CHAPTER FOUR

Irresistible Authority: Apocalyptic Overtones in Fame's Court

Fame and Fortune

> This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,
> As wele or wo, now povre and now honour,
> Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun
> Governed is by Fortunes errour.
> But natheles, the lak of hir favour
> Ne may nat don me singen though I dye,
> *Jay tout perdu mon temps et mon labour*;
> For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye.
> Yit is me left the light of my resoun
> To knowen frend fro fo in thy mirour.
> So muchel hath yit thy whirling up and doun
> Ytaught me for to knowen in an hour.
> But trewely, no force of thy reddour
> To him that over himself hath the maystrye. (lines 1–14)
> . . . .
> Lo, th' execucion of the majestee
> That al purveyeth of his rightwysnesse,
> That same thing 'Fortune' clepen ye,
> Ye blinde bestes ful of lewednesse.
> The hevene hath propretee of sikernesse,
> This world hath ever resteles travayle;
> Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse.
> In general, this reule may nat fayle. (lines 65–72)
> —Geoffrey Chaucer, "Fortune"

In Chaucer's short poem "Fortune," Fortune speaks up for herself, responding to the foolishness of men who—with beastlike ignorance and blindness—consider the just and righteous workings of Providence as part of her purview, and thus mistakenly call God's oversight by Fortune's name. This world—she reminds the "pleintif" who speaks bitterly against her in his complaint—is a world of restless travail. Everyone born under her "regne of variaunce" must spin with all the rest of humanity on her wheel (46). But her reign of mutability lasts only for a time: without fail, her interest in a man ends on his "laste day," and by extension, will end altogether on the final day, the Day of the Lord, when the heavens shall pass away and the mountains melt like wax. This law will not fail. Chaucer's concern with Fortune is evident in a number of his works, and his narrative personas remind readers in uncompromising terms of the fickle nature of the earthly pilgrimage. As Chaucer writes explicitly in his "Truth: Balade de Bon Conseyl," Fortune is not to be trusted, but neither should she be fought against, for

> The wrastling for this world axeth a fal.
> Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
> Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
> Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
> Hold the heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede,
> And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede. (lines 16–21)

The pilgrim on his journey must remember that the world is not his home. Again drawing on Lady Philosophy's teachings on the unreliability of Fortune and the true home of the soul, the narrator exhorts the pilgrim to leave the bestial concern with this world behind: "Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al" (19). Recognizing that his true country is in God, and that it is found through the high way of Truth, the pilgrim will experience deliverance. He who has mastery over himself will thus be saved from the error of entrusting himself to Fortune in this world, a fatal entanglement which, unchecked, would lead to the pilgrim's downfall.

Fortune is mentioned by name only twice during the course of *House of Fame* itself. In the final book of the poem, the eagle makes himself available to Geffrey again and places him into the whirling house of rumor with a pitying speech to remind Geffrey of his wretchedness, returning to the same litany of grievances he enumerated in the first leg of their journey together:

> And [thou] wost thyselven outtirly
> Disesperat of alle blys,
> Syth that Fortune hath mad amys
> The [fruit] of al thyn hertys reste
> Languisshe and eke in poynt to breste— (HF 3.2014–18)

Geffrey's sufferings have left him hopeless, without happiness, his eagle reminds him. The fruition of his heart's rest has been thwarted by Fortune, and his desire for earthly comfort left to languish or burst: the whole journey is purportedly a reward to make up for the slights he has experienced at Fortune's hand. Geffrey's familiarity with the goddess's ways is made evident also in book 3 in the temple of Fame, where Geffrey (*sans* eagle) sees the initial group of petitioners approaching Fame's throne and comments on their nature and desserts:

> They hadde good fame ech deserved,
> Although they were dyversly served;
> Ryght as her suster, dame Fortune,
> Ys wont to serven in comune. (HF 3.1545–48)

These petitioners deserved good fame, but Geffrey points out that they will be served by the goddess Fame in the same arbitrary way that her sister, Fortune, deals out her favors. Here Fame and Fortune are closely linked, but not just as sisters, kin, or kind: they are related to each other more tellingly in their behavior and activity. The connection is clearly deliberate. Fame is to the poetic arts and the historical record what Fortune is to the vicissitudes of the lives of men, and thus takes center stage in Geffrey's vision as he attempts to reconcile art and artifice with reality. As we see in the *House of Fame,* the historical record is essentially a recitation of deeds, an implicit evaluation of the success or failure of the relationship between word and deed: how well did each nation, era, or figure live up to its stated purpose, its ethos? The biographies of men are a record of deeds, a compilation, and reveal how well or badly an individual lived his words, but it is up to the whim of the two sisters to determine in their respective realms who will be granted favor and who will be denied, and their judgment is not based on sound criteria. Though the relationship of word to deed is what will be entered into the record, the success or failure of this relationship does not factor into the sisters' decisions: they are neither discerning nor just, and they work their will with complete indifference.

The focus on Fame as opposed to Fortune again puts Chaucer's interests in line with those of Wyclif, who is concerned (to some degree in all his works, but most centrally in *De Universalibus* and *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*) with the correspondence between word and thing, a correspondence which is the essentially the relationship of words to truth, or of human words to the Word. Without this correspondence, neither justice nor judgment is possible, as we see in the working of Fame and in Geffrey's ultimate rejection of her. In book 3 of *House of Fame*, the eschatological implications of the entire vision and the underlying philosophical positions hinted at in books 1 and 2 are made evident. The court of Fame is an apocalyptic inversion of Revelation and the Last Judgment, with Fame—parodying Christ, the true judge—enthroned in an elaborate gothic cathedral pronouncing the final judgment of history upon those who bring their petitions before her, thus sealing the future of their worldly reputations: they will be remembered or forgotten according to her whim.[1]

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[1] Specific connections between the Revelation of John and *House of Fame* have been most extensively treated in Leo J. Henkin's explication "The Apocalypse and Chaucer's *House of Fame*" (originally published as "The Apocrypha and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," corrected in the errata of volume 60.8 of *Modern Language Notes*), in Robert Boenig's "Chaucer's *House of Fame*, the Apocalypse, and Bede," and in Koonce's *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*. Critics of the poem typically admit the apocalyptic overtones but treat the parodic or satirical elements as evidence of either Chaucer's playful unconcern with or his deliberate rejection of this aspect of the Christian grand-narrative. Lisa Kiser, for example, in her discussion of "Eschatological Poetics," says "Chaucer's comic eagle ride on the way to Fame's house and Fame's grotesque parody of God's judicial role are only two examples of the scenes that militate against the interpretation of *The House of Fame* as a serious work in the Christian visionary tradition. The many, significant differences in tone and in content between Chaucer's poem and the works

Fame's caprice knows no justice, and she mercilessly and indifferently publishes true or false accounts to become part of the historical record, but, as various among the groups of petitioners recognize themselves, her pronouncements have no eternal consequences: they are a mere counterfeit of the Book of Life, the ultimate Domesday book, which lists only the faithful and is the final determination of the eternal home of the soul.

Fourteenth-century Apocalypticism

The picture of Fame's icy mountaintop in book 3 recalls Jesus's parable of the wise man's house built upon the rock of the Word, a house which did not fall when buffeted by the winds and storms, in contrast to the foolish man's house, which was built upon the sand and fell under the pressure of the elements that assaulted it (Matt 7:24–27). The image is expanded by Lady Philosophy in book 2, meter 4 of the *Boece*, with descriptive language that finds its way into *House of Fame*:

> What maner man stable and war, that wol
> fownden hym a perdurable seete, and ne wol
> noght ben cast doun with the lowde blastes of
> the wynd Eurus, and wole despise the see
> manasynge with flodes; lat hym eschuwen to
> bilde on the cop of the mountaigne, or in the
> moyste sandes; for the felle wynd Auster tormenteth
> the cop of the mountaigne with alle
> hise strengthes, and the lause sandes refusen
> to beren the hevy weyghte. And
> forthi, yif thow wolt fleen the perilous
> aventure (*that is to seyn, of the werld*) have
> mynde certeynly to fycchen thin hous of a
> myrie sete in a low stoon. For although the
> wynd troublynge the see thondre with overthrowynges,
> thou, that art put in quiete and
> weleful by strengthe of thi palys, schalt leden
> a cler age, scornynge the woodnesses and the
> ires of the eyr. (Bo2.m4.1–19)

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he is imitating prevent us from seeing this poem as anything but a kind of antivision, a parody of solemn medieval attempts to describe the otherworld to earthbound readers" (100).

The wise man will reject both the mountaintop and the sands, which are uncertain foundations that will bring a palace to ruin. He will flee the perilous adventure of the world and instead fix his house on a low, solid foundation, where the frenzied turbulence, the "woodnesses" (derangement or illusions), and the "ires" (fury or assault) of the air cannot disturb his calm. The dwelling places described in *House of Fame* certainly allude to the parable, importing language and images from the *Boece* passage, as Geffrey continues from one unstable house to another in the course of the three books; the first is built on sand, which cannot support weight, the second on a mountaintop of ice, subject to the battering winds and the heat of the sun, and the third in air, where the cage of Rumor whirls about haphazardly.[2] Foundations become progressively less solid during Geffrey's journey, as he himself recognizes, commenting as he climbs the ice that the builder who chooses such an untrustworthy "fundament" upon which to construct has no cause for glorying in his accomplishment:

> "By Seynt Thomas of Kent,
> This were a feble fundament
> To bilden on a place hye.
> He ought him lytel glorifye
> That hereon bilt, God so me save!" (HF 3.1131–35)

As in the parable, the literal edifices and foundations Geffrey explores are representations of the state of souls. The "woodnesses" and "ires" of the air, the unpredictable tempests of the winds, are the hardships of the earthly realm experienced by those who put themselves in Fame's hands; Eurus (the East Wind) and Auster (the South Wind) are both under the rule of Eolus, who spreads the proclamations of Fame to the corners of the earth, and when the winds are set loose, the things of the world are at their mercy. The wise man, however, will be protected by the strong walls of his palace; his is the "perdurable seet," the eternal security in God that is sought by the faithful. The passage has both immediate and eternal implications, as do the final lines of the *Boece*, which remind the reader to be vigilant, for his deeds and works are continually "byforn the eyen of the juge that seeth and / demeth alle thinges" (Bo5.p6.309–10).

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[2] Alan of Lille's description of Fortune's abode in the *Anticlaudianus* also closely parallels Geffrey's portrayal of Fame, as both are drawing from Boethius (among other sources): "There is a rock mid-ocean on which the sea forever beats, which the conflicting waves charge, which is harassed in various ways and pounded with a never-ending assault . . . The house of Fortune, clinging on high to a sheer rock and threatening to tumble down, sinks into a steep slope. It is subject to every raging wind and bears the brunt of every tempest of heaven. . . . One part of the house sits atop the mountain rock, the other crouches on the rock's base and as though on the verge of sliding off, shows signs of falling. . . . Here is Fortune's abode, if indeed the unstable ever abides, the wandering takes up residence, the moving becomes fixed. For Fortune complete rest is flight, permanence is change, to stand still is to revolve, to be in a fixed position s to run to and fro, a fall is an ascent. For her reasoned procedure is to be without reason, reliability is to be reliably unreliable, devotion is to be devotedly undevoted. She is fickle, unreliable, changeable, uncertain, random, unstable, unsettled" (VII.394–VIII.24, p.186–89).

Book Five of the *Boece* emphasizes the reality of the final judgment as Philosophy draws to conclusion the discussion about the perceived conflict between God's foreknowledge and free will. Boethius makes clear the consequences of erroneous solutions to this theological problem—a problem that proves to be fertile soil for most of the heresies in Christendom in the centuries to come—for if it is admitted that man has no freedom, if all things are predetermined, then it is vain to offer reward and punishment to good and bad men, for both are equally undeserved if man cannot act of his own accord. The relationship between God and man is therefore obliterated, Boethius points out, for if it were true that Providence were predetermined and inexorable, then both hoping and praying would be ineffective, useless, powerless, and man would have no reason to continue in hope or prayer. But Philosophy explains that God's foreknowledge does not impose necessity on mankind:

> 'God, byholdere and
> forwytere of alle thingis, duelleth above, and the
> present eternite of his sighte renneth alwey with
> the diverse qualite of our dedes, dispensynge

> and ordeynynge medes to gode men and
> tormentz to wikkide men. Ne in ydel ne in veyn
> ne ben ther put in God hope and preyeris
> that ne mowen nat ben unspedful ne
> withouten effect whan they been ryghtful. (Bo5.p6.293–301)

His judgment is then truly just, and the meting out of rewards and punishments is in ordered response to the "diverse qualite" of men's deeds, instead of being a farcical mimicry of justice, holding man accountable for following the script already written by Providence, a script which he had no hope to alter. Prayer is therefore not an idle activity, and hope is not put in God in vain, for righteous prayers will be efficacious. There is then work to be done:

> 'Withstond thanne and eschue thou vices;
> worschipe and love thou vertues; areise thi
> corage to ryghtful hopes; yilde thou humble
> preieres an heyhe. Gret necessite of prowesse
> and vertu is encharged and comaunded to yow,
> yif ye nil nat dissimulen; syn that ye worken and
> don (*that is to seyn, your dedes or your werkes*)
> byforn the eyen of the juge that seeth and
> demeth alle thinges.' (Bo5.p6.302–10)

Love what is good and hate what is evil. Pray humbly and hope bravely. The necessity that is laid upon man is not one of predetermined outcomes, but the necessity to pursue virtue diligently, to *do* and *be* good, for all works are done in the sight of God, who sees and judges all things.

These subtler eschatological undertones in the *Boece*[3] are given license to overtake the whole of Book Three in *House of Fame*, as they take physical form in the vision and play out a pantomime of the Last Judgment from the book of Revelation. *House of Fame* is, in particular among Chaucer's works, a bookish poem, drawing on and specifically naming numerous valued medieval sources and weighty authorities that even Geffrey—though his wit is "ful lyte" in his head (HF 2.621)—is mindful of as he makes connections between the reality he witnesses and the bits of knowledge he has studiously crammed. As we have seen with the figure of the eagle, much of Chaucer's originality in the use of these familiar, foundational works comes about in embodiments of metaphors and concepts; symbols, ideas, and words are given form, and in this reification, the new likeness or semblance becomes inextricably intertwined with the original work: the embodiment asks to be read in light of the form from which it is drawn, and the texts are, consciously or subconsciously, thus read together. The poem's overt references to the biblical apocalyptic visions would not have been lost on medieval readers, and though seeing Book Three in an apocalyptic light does not solve all the problems of interpretation presented in modern scholarship on the poem, ignoring the seriousness of the context in which the poem asks to be read results more in creative misreading than in clarification of its ultimate meaning.

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[3] Michael D. Cherniss's *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* qualifies *Consolation of Philosophy* as an apocalyptic prototype for later dream visions, supporting his controversial use of the term "apocalypse" by identifying the Boethian genre as a revelation based on "reason" instead of on "esoteric teaching" (11). Cherniss looks at eight poems that include the elements integral to the structure of *Consolation* (the dream vision, visionary/narrator, complaint, rational argument, learning process, etc.), including *Parliament of Fowls* and *Book of the Duchess*, but, interestingly, does not address

The popularity in the late Middle Ages of literature that is clearly apocalyptic in genre—including poems such as "Apocalypsis Goliae," the apocryphal "Vision of Saint Paul" (*Visio Sancti Pauli*), and numerous biblical commentaries on the Apocalypse that represent the conflicts in the interpretation and exegesis of the book of Revelation—indicates that the Apocalypse had powerful effect on the medieval imagination; its symbolism, numerology, themes, and ambiguities were enticing to the medieval mind,

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House of Fame, which may hold the greater claim among Chaucer's dream visions to be labeled an apocalyptic vision.

but beyond that, in an age marked by political and religious uncertainty, catastrophic disease and wars, there was a psychological need for the plan of divine Providence to make sense of the structure of history and give significance to current events, ordering all things to one clear purpose.

Bernard McGinn points out that, for the Middle Ages, the *telos* of all history was neither the sum of human accomplishments and progress nor mankind's attempts to bring about the end by human effort, but rather the ultimate End itself, which was "understood as pure divine irruption," the sudden, powerful entrance of God which will bring the human drama to its close ("Introduction" 7). McGinn contends that an over-emphasis on millennialism and on the particular dates purported at various times to be the end of the world has led to a contemporary undervaluing of the pervasiveness of apocalypticism between 1000 and 1500, a time period in which "[m]edieval folk lived in a more or less constant state of apocalyptic expectation" ("Apocalypticism" 273). As literary critics come to see that "the apocalyptic imagination is more widespread, more subtle, and more significant than has previously been understood" (Emmerson and Herzman 34),[4] a wider variety of literary texts are being considered in light of their apocalyptic perspectives, including Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which ends with the sermonic call to repentance from the Parson as the pilgrims—a motley group of individual types portraying the journey of the Church Militant in précis—approach their holy destination under the zodiacal sign of Libra, the golden scales of justice which are a symbol of eschatological closure. It is fitting, then, to consider *House of Fame* in light of this broader cultural milieu and the intellectual debates which feed it.

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[4] As critics of Cherniss's book on Boethian apocalypse have pointed out, the parameters of "apocalyptic literature" as a genre may be too broad, for the terms "apocalyptic" and "eschatological" are often used imprecisely and conflated into one concept. But it is clear nonetheless that apocalyptic elements are used in Middle English literature outside of the religious genre. In his introduction to *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Bernard McGinn identifies the radical differences between the apocalyptic mentality of the Middle Ages and traditional Jewish and Hellenistic religious thinking about eschatology (5–6): as opposed to pagan mythology and philosophy or Jewish history and prophecy, there is the risen Christ to make sense of all things in the New Testament Apocalypse. Christian apocalypticism is set apart by "its conviction of God's absolute and predetermined control over the whole of history, a mystery hidden from all ages but now revealed to the apocalyptic seer" (McGinn "Introduction" 8). Apocalypticism views history as a key to understanding the future—as opposed to prophecy, which deals with the present and the events that lead up to it—and has less to do with the nation of Israel and its struggles; instead, the whole of human history has a cosmic scope, evidence of the cosmic conflict between good and evil which will see resolution only in future divine intervention, not in present human action which attempts to institute peace and justice on earth. Richard K. Emmerson describes this attitude as a pessimistic passivity: "typical medieval apocalyptic outlook remained pessimistic concerning renewal within history and looked to a supernatural solution to the increasing wickedness of the age" (49). The emphasis then turned inward to individual faithfulness instead of communal or national social reform.

Morton Bloomfield attributes the rise in apocalyptic thinking in the fourteenth century in particular to the renewed emphasis on God's absolute omnipotence:

> This notion of God's absolute freedom and power too may account for the re-emphasis on apocalyptic thinking which is characteristic of the period. The Renaissance may be partially due to the disillusioned apocalypticism of the Middle Ages. If heaven will not come to earth, we must try to build a heaven on earth. The end of time when God decisively intervenes in history is the culminating example of His power and His arbitrariness. ("Fourteenth-Century England" 64)

The ideas encouraging this "disillusioned apocalypticism" can be traced back through their confusions and exploitations in the fourteenth century to William of Ockham's stress on God's free will and unlimited power in its two aspects, *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*, the absolute and the ordained power, which balance each other and were originally understood as an inseparable pair, two halves of the essential concept.[5] The ordained plan is the law of the created universe and salvation, established by God, constraining nature and man to its course. This plan was not formed by necessity: God could have chosen a different arrangement, but having chosen this plan, God will uphold it, voluntarily limiting himself to act within the ordained system, though his absolute power is not constrained. In other words, God *could*, hypothetically, choose to do anything[6]; he *does not* act out his limitless capability because he operates faithfully and reliably within the laws he has established.

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[5] The distinction is not original with Ockham—it is used earlier by Aquinas, Bonaventure, Scotus, and others—but his is the clearest delineation of its logic, and as it is largely Ockham's ideas that are appropriated and exploited by the later nominalists, it is fitting to use his definitions.

This understanding of God's omnipotence was a commonplace; the formulation of this two-part understanding therefore did not create theological or philosophical problems until the terminology began to erode, conflating the distinctions and giving rise to an overemphasis on God's *potentia absoluta* untempered by his ordained power. This misuse of the concepts of *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* did not occur until the latter half of the fourteenth century, after the Black Death, Laurence Eldredge says, pointing out in the works of later philosophers where the precise distinction between the terms begins to blur; the late fourteenth-century errors make possible the impression that "God might actually use his absolute power on some unknown and unforewarned day," introducing "a note of uncertainty about God, a possibility of a whimsical and arbitrary deity, upon whose will the integrity of the past is wholly dependent," calling into question the trustworthiness of man's intellection about God and the efficacy of man's own actions towards his salvation (Eldredge, "Concept" 216, 219). The reliability of God's own nature was thus undermined, along with his ultimate plan for salvation, as God could, operating outside his ordained plan, tyrannically overrule the free will of man or arbitrarily choose not to reward human effort (or, conversely, choose to bestow salvation upon undeserving or unrepentant souls). This line of logic, perpetuated by the later nominalists, made God more remote to man by accentuating his limitless power, admitting the possibility that he could revoke all secondary causes and change natural law, making reason an unreliable path to an inaccessible God. The logic results in either skepticism or fideism, both of which were theologically untenable and philosophically unsustainable, calling into question the very nature of the faculties and evidences by which man can know God.[7]

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[6] The sole limitation on God's power in this formulation is the principle of noncontradiction: God is unable to make logically contradictory things true at the same time.

The apocalypticism of *House of Fame* is informed by these debates, and as such is not as disjointed in its makeup as it may first appear: the apocalyptic inversion in book 3 flows naturally out of the philosophical problems inherent in the first two books, and Geffrey here witnesses the metaphysical consequences. In Eldredge's discussion of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, he postulates that in the *House of Fame* Geffrey is being shown "what it means to live in a world that actually conforms to skeptical ideas" ("Chaucer's *Hous*" 119). Chaucer seems then to be following the major nominalist theories to their logical conclusion, to the extreme end of seeing God's intervention in human time as arbitrary and unpredictable. Book 3 is thus much more than an amalgamation of various sacred and profane sources that paint the splendid figure of Fame and her temple: it is an inversion of the biblical Apocalypse; the proper order turned upside down. Instead of a holy judge, there is a pagan one; instead of even-handed justice, undiscerning whimsy; instead of a measured standard, arbitrary criteria; instead of eschaton, the perpetuation of earthly injustice; instead of the stability of the Unmoved Mover, the instability of a worldly tyrant.

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[7] Skepticism and fideism were both conceptually implicated in Rome's repeated condemnations of the theological errors that grew out of philosophical nominalism. Various teachings of doctrinally influential Church Fathers militated against these philosophies, as in Augustine's 4th- and 5th- century attacks against the Academic Skeptics and Wyclif's rejection of the skepticism of the logicians, and foundational orthodox medieval theologians such as Anselm and Thomas Aquinas affirmed that God's existence can be demonstrated rationally, by unaided reason.

The analogues between the scene in Fame’s temple and the book of Revelation are suggested by the poem itself, first as Geffrey surveys the multitude in the outer court, and declines to list (since the listing would take too long) all the people he saw there “Fro hennes into domes day” (HF 3.1284), but more explicitly upon Geffrey’s first sight of Fame:

> Y saugh, perpetually ystalled,
> A femynyne creature,
> That never formed by Nature
> Nas such another thing yseye.
> . . . .
> And therto eke, as to my wit,
> I saugh a gretter wonder yit,
> Upon her eyen to beholde;
> But certeyn y hem never tolde,
> For as feele eyen hadde she
> As fetheres upon foules be,
> Or weren on the bestes foure
> That Goddis trone gunne honoure,
> As John writ in th’ Apocalips. (HF 3.1364–67, 1377–85)

The reference to the four beasts of John’s “Apocalips” is a gratuitous addition to the description of Fame’s multitudinous eyes: it serves more significantly to make the apocalyptic substrate of the scene evident for the reader. Geffrey first surveys the castle from the outside, noting its beauty and the intricacy of its craftsmanship, and the components of this house are modeled after those of the magnificent medieval gothic cathedrals, every element of which was designed as material representation and reminder of the celestial reality that illuminated Church Militant:

> the grete craft, beaute,
> The cast, the curiosite
> Ne kan I not to yow devyse;
> My wit ne may me not suffise.
> But natheles al the substance
> I have yit in my remembrance;
> For whi me thoughte, be Seynt Gyle,

> Al was of ston of beryle,
> Bothe the castel and the tour,
> And eke the halle and every bour,
> Wythouten peces or joynynges.
> But many subtil compassinges,
> [Babewynnes] and pynacles,
> Ymageries and tabernacles
> I say; and ful eke of wyndowes
> As flakes falle in grete snowes. (HF 3.1178–92)

Geffrey's professed inability to describe the craft and beauty of the palace gives important insight into the nature of the poetic arts, as we shall see, but first the physical details themselves bring to mind the medieval prototype for this structure. As Otto von Simson explains in his comprehensive study of the gothic cathedral, the "order and aesthetic cohesion" of the cathedrals' design "is all the more remarkable if we recall the idea to which the Christian sanctuary is to give expression. The church is, mystically and liturgically, an image of heaven" (8). Its construction is a means by which the mind is led beyond the physical beauty of the intricate crafting, rich materials, and decorative gemstones themselves and into higher contemplation of God, who is the source of the light and translucence that illuminates the objects. The multitude of windows Geffrey takes note of, then, are a staple feature of the gothic cathedral, for they exist to admit the mystical light into the interior.

Geffrey recounts also the pinnacles and niches that adorn the towers, recesses filled with minstrels who, rather than singing harmonious praises in worship of Fame, tell the tales of those who have sought her, tales of cheer and sorrow, and take the place of the lesser saints who would be found in the niches of the gothic cathedral. This castle is made of beryl, and as Geffrey muses on the properties of this stone that composes the walls, he points out that it makes things appear greater than they are, magnifying, deceiving, and distorting, imitating the natural working of Fame. Beryl is present in the visions of both John (20:21) and Ezekiel (1:16, 10:9, 28:13, 28:20), and it is described by Bede in his commentary on the Apocalypse (typical of medieval commentaries in its allegoresis) as a stone less perfect than the others that adorn the celestial holy city of Jerusalem which comes down from heaven as John watches from a high mountaintop. Beryl, Bede allegorizes, represents man's natural wit and requires much polishing and shaping to ensure clarity, to allow the "light of diving grace" to be reflected in it and to join this wisdom with works, being "recreated by the fire of good behavior"; the ideal form from the beryl is a six-sided one, the angles of which accentuate its brightness, and the number six, Bede reminds, is often the number of completed work, the "finished word of the world" (qtd. in Weinrich 377).[8] It is a doubly fitting stone to be used in this context, then, for it figures both Fame's misleading powers (and the irony of her worldly work, which still awaits completion) and Geffrey's own intellect, which is darkened and unreliable, as Geffrey has neglected to polish and care for it correctly.

Within the temple, Fame sits on a dais, elevated on a throne of ruby in honor and splendor, adorned with gems and riches, amidst the harmonious praises of the muses and the people who sing their adoration. Her height is uncertain, for at one moment she seems to Geffrey to be short and in the next she stretches till her head touches heaven, where the seven stars shine. She has as many eyes as feathers on a bird and as many ears and tongues as the hairs of the four apocalyptic beasts that honor God on his throne in John's revelation, Geffrey notes, and the description he gives here brings immediately to mind the throne John describes, set in heaven and shining with the radiance of gemstones, as a sea of glass, amidst creatures and elders who worship perpetually before the throne.[9] The one who sits on *that* throne, however, is dramatically different from Fame.

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[8] Robert Boenig comments on this usage, theorizing, aptly, that "Chaucer's care in removing the more perfect jewels from his building and leaving the suspect beryl is evident, for it is the appropriate material for the House of Fame, a palace dedicated to a human virtue which may be good on occasion but is usually clouded by human imperfections" (266–67).

The one who appears before John, who identifies himself as the first and the last, having the keys of death and hell, is "like to the Son of man," with eyes "as a flame of fire," and voice "as the sound of many waters" (Rev 1:14–15). He holds in his right hand the seven stars, and out of his mouth comes, instead of a tongue, "a sharp two-edged sword"; his face shines as the sun in his power, the clear light of day as opposed to the deceptive, idolatrous light of Fame's temple, the light of beryl which blinds or distorts (1:16). John is commanded to record the words of he "that hath the sharp two edged sword" (2:12), he who will "fight against" the church that does not reform its ways "with the sword of [his] mouth" (2:16). As in the Old Testament vision of Ezekiel, the one who comes in authority to the apocalyptic seer is immediately concerned with the acts of judging and measuring.

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[9] "And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne one sitting. And he that sat, was to the sight like the jasper and the sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats, four and twenty ancients sitting, clothed in white garments, and on their heads were crowns of gold. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there were seven lamps burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. And in the sight of the throne was, as it were, a sea of glass like to crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures, full of eyes before and behind. And the first living creature was like a lion: and the second living creature like a calf: and the third living creature, having the face, as it were, of a man: and the fourth living creature was like an eagle flying. And the four living creatures had each of them six wings; and round about and within they are full of eyes. And they rested not day and night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come. And when those living creatures gave glory, and honour, and benediction to him that sitteth on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever; The four and twenty ancients fell down before him that sitteth on the throne, and adored him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory, and honour, and power: because thou hast created all things; and for thy will they were, and have been created." (Rev 4:2-11)

In the beginning of *House of Fame*, Geffrey twice identifies the date of his vision as December 10, the day of Ezekiel's biblical vision (the tenth day of the tenth month),[10] in which Ezekiel in his desert captivity is set upon a high mountaintop and shown, by a holy authority with a voice "like a noise of many waters" (Ez 43:2), the building of a city. The destruction of Jerusalem, which had been judged and found wanting as a result of its idolatry and its profanation of the temple, has been accomplished and the Lord's indignation poured out: Israel cut down with his sharp sword, the temple destroyed when God's glory departed from it. After this message of doom, a vision of restoration and deliverance. Ezekiel sees the new temple filled with the glory of God (43:5), the temple whose dimensions are measured in exacting detail by the man with "a measuring reed in his hand" (40:3). Ezekiel is commanded to show Israel the temple and to "let them measure the building" themselves, that they might be ashamed of their iniquities in the sight of the laws, ordinances, and the very form of the holy house on the mountaintop (43:10-12).

In the Revelation of John, John is instructed to write the words of Christ to the angels of the seven churches, to admonish, remind, and exhort, for judgment is coming, and he of the two-edged sword knows all their deeds, searches all hearts, and will reward according their works (2:23). Destruction and judgment will come in the figures of the four horsemen: the first of white, come to conquer, the last pale, bringing Death and hell, the other two on red and black steeds, one given a sword to end peace on earth and the other a pair of scales for divine justice (6:2-8). John is given "a reed like unto a rod" and told to use it to "measure the temple of God, and the altar and them that adore therein," excluding the outer court (11:1). After the destructions trumpeted by the seven angels, John sees the heavens open, and Christ, the Word of God, appears seated on a white horse, leading the armies of heaven and judging and fighting with justice (19:11-14). Again, "out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp two-edged sword; that with it he may strike the nations" (19:15). The Last Judgment is at hand:

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[10] David L. Jeffrey and B. G. Koonce discuss the significance of the dating of *House of Fame* (Tebeth [Dec-Jan] is the tenth month in the Assyrian and Jewish calendar at the time of Ezekiel) and explore in more depth Chaucer's use of the book of Ezekiel; Jeffrey's "Authority and Interpretation in the *House of Fame*" compares the structure of the poem with the structure of Ezekiel's vision and the eschatological hope offered by it.

> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell gave up their dead that were in them; and they were judged every one according to their works. And hell and death were cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the pool of fire. (Rev. 20:12–15)[11]

The final chapter of Revelation winds to a close with the words of the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (22:13) who reminds again of the immediacy of the coming judgment: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to his works" (22:12).

The Apocalypse is accompanied by judgment, and each of these biblical visions contains a tangible standard, represented in an object by which the judging must be accomplished. The two-edged sword issuing from Christ's mouth is, unlike the wagging tongues of Fame's many mouths, an instrument of judgment, as are the measuring reeds and the book of life. Fame's proclamations are not final or true judgments: the emphasis is on the multitude of her tongues and their ability to spread abroad reports. She may act in the capacity of judge, mimicking the judgment of Christ, but she will not use any immutable standard to do so. Part of Geffrey's own epistemological difficulties seem also to arise from his lack of just such a standard, for none has been provided him by his eagle guide, who acts in the capacity of the angelic messenger, catching up the ostensible seer and taking him to the place of visionary revelation. Having no standard by which to measure, Geffrey's questionable discernment and apparent inability to judge between competing theories is the evident result, as when he professes in the prologue that the causes and kinds of dreams are too complex for him to comprehend. But despite the various professions of ignorance or insufficiency, Geffrey is not left altogether bereft of interpretive capability or the possibility of sound judgment, and the poem as a whole does not despair of the possibility of finding Truth amidst the competing confusions of earthly events, authorities, and knowledge.

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[11] Other references to the Book of Life in Revelation also include a description of those who are excluded or included in it, the earth-dwellers and inhabitants "whose names are not written the book of life of the Lamb, which was slain from the beginning of the world" (13:8), "whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world" (17:8), and the undefiled who alone may enter, for they "are written in the book of life of the Lamb" (21:27).

Words, Words, Words . . .

Truth is not completely obscured in the vision, despite the misprisions of Fame and her temple and the conflicting and confusing reports of the house of Rumor: Geffrey can and does identify truth and falsity, and contrary to the eagle's description, the words that are drawn to Fame's house are not mere sound or beaten air—they still *mean*, still have signifying power. The "people" that crowd the temple, the eagle has forewarned Geffrey—evading Geffrey's questioning whether the "grete swogh" he hears rumbling ahead like the beating of the sea against the rocks is produced by any living creature—are actually the embodiment of speeches uttered on earth:

> 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.
> And ys not this a wonder thyng? (HF 3.1070–83)

These figures that Geffrey will see in the house of Fame in the likeness of men and women are spoken words, utterances which appear before Fame in the shape of the one who spoke them, resembling the speaker so exactly, the eagle says, that no difference can be discerned between the original and his or her verbal counterpart. All speech is but sound, the eagle tells Geffrey, and yet we see in the court of Fame that this is not an accurate assessment, for even here, amidst the cacophony, the sounds are distinguishable and the words become individual likenesses of the one who spoke them, mimesis of the real self, the person whom they speak: the words are not detached from the reality of being. It is not the form taken by the signifying words that is being judged, but the acts and deeds of the one being represented.

Adopting now the voice of an authoritative omniscient narrator, Geffrey relays the self-assessments of the nine groups of petitioners who request Fame's favors while Geffrey is in the temple, assessments which are accepted without question by Fame as truthful representations of the deeds they represent. The words state their case plainly, represent themselves truly: the tacit assumption is that at their conception, at the originary moment, the words are true representations of reality, of deeds done on earth, a valid portrayal of the worthiness of a man. Even those who seek to deceive—who desire to be known to posterity as something other than what they are and request that the historical record misrepresent them accordingly—are themselves here compelled to speak truth, to lay themselves bare. Fame's judgment will not alter the reality of their being or the true motivation of their deeds. Just as Fame's own declaration that there is no justice in her seems to indicate that a true, objective standard of justice does exist elsewhere (hence the righteous anger felt by the victims of injustice), the recognition of untruths admits the existence of Truth, for, as Wyclif goes to great lengths to explain, ". . . it is clear that it is not possible for an audible or visible proposition made by us to be true or necessary, in contrast to a false proposition, except on the basis of a truth or necessity in the real world" (7.258, p.53). It is not possible to make judgments about truth or falsity unless universal Truth exists outside of the mind of the knower, Wyclif insists: there must be a stable, unchanging standard by which things are known and evaluated.

Truth, therefore, is something eternally thought by God, not merely at an earlier stage, "[a]nd in this way universality or metaphysical truth does not depend on any created intellect, since it is itself prior, but it does depend upon the uncreated intellect which uses its eternal intellectual knowledge to bring everything into effective existence" (2.300–304, p.16). Truth is rooted in the uncreated intellect, God, who brings all things into existence, and since it is not dependent upon the intellects of individual men, it is a reliable standard. In the same way, in each category of creation, each genus and species of concept and creature, there exists "one principle which is the metre and measure of all other things. And this refers not only to the supreme thing in each category measuring all the others, but also to the exemplar ideas in God, which are the principles of their genera" (10.653–56, p.105). The exemplar ideas, the universal Forms, are the eternal prototype after which all other things are fashioned, and the measuring rod by which they are judged. Wyclif's standard—the same as that of the biblical Apocalypse, and that of the traditional Augustinian realist—is the Word.

Fame may have the capacity to determine the duration and name of each of the tidings that comes before her, but she names each according to its disposition, its nature:

> Thus saugh I fals and soth compouned
> Togeder fle for oo tydynge.
> Thus out at holes gunne wringe
> Every tydynge streght to Fame,
> And she gan yeven ech hys name,
> After hir disposicioun,
> And yaf hem eke duracioun,
> Somme to wexe and wane sone,
> As doth the faire white mone,
> And let hem goon. (HF 3.2108–17)

Truth or falsity is already inherent in the tidings, as Geffrey notes, seeing "fals" and "soth" fighting to exit through cracks in the house of Rumor, finally joining together in order to squeeze out, then flying to Fame to be named. Even amidst the confusion of this battery of conflicting reports, the dreamer is able to make unequivocal value judgments about truth and falsehood. He desires truth, we know from the very beginning of the vision, as he seeks to know the source of the craft he sees on display in the temple of Venus, and through the rest of the poem we see his attempts to process and verbalize an accurate, meaningful account of this vision. Inside the house, Geffrey sees what he professes to already have known, that Fame's pronouncements do not make things other than what they are. She can distort or manipulate or misrepresent, but she cannot make a false thing true or a true thing false. She can only assign the tiding a name according to the quality inherent in it and determine its earthly duration. The falsity exists in Fame herself, for she is a figure of worldly changeability.

The relevance of Fame to the poetic and historical arts, which are representations of the real, exteriors, is then fraught with difficulty. The only seeming solidity in Fame's house exists in the numerous poets and authors who have a place of distinction there, standing on dull but strong metal pillars. All histories are subjective in some sense, as is clear from these pillared authors: one holds of the fame of Troy, another the fame of the Jews, another favors the Greeks. Despite all of Fame's whimsy, place in hierarchy of the hall seems to be reserved for those who had a solid foundation upon which to stand, a unity of purpose that provided them with matter worthy to uphold. These historians who focused their histories on one principle each shoulder the fame, words, and deeds of a particular race or nation: it is a history viewed through a single lens. The rows of poets remind us again of Geffrey's original dilemma in the temple of Venus, as he is unsatisfied with seeing the works alone without knowing who created them. Clearly, if the author or creator is unknown, the motives and principle by which he ordered his work, the principle by which he determined his choice of facts and the sifting of historical events, remain a mystery as well. The poets and historians who are pillared in the hall of Fame have endured and stood firm in their singularity of vision; like those faithful who are made "pillars" in the temple of God (Rev 3:12), these poets have overcome their adversaries of time, translation, and interpretation. The names carved on the mountain of ice are shaded by Fame, just as those who serve God in his temple are shaded, protected from the heat of the sun: "he, that sitteth on the throne, shall dwell over them. . . . neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat" (7:15-16).

Since Fame's judgment is, by her own admission, wholly unreliable, the preservation of the great poets—ensconced upon pillars appropriate to their subject and accomplishment—and the dissemination of their epic works cannot be fully explained by Fame's methods alone. The same sort of protected permanence is granted by Wyclif, who says it is through Providence that the realist philosophy of universals has not died away altogether, for it is necessary for the ascent to Truth: ". . . the knowledge of universals is the principle step on the ladder of wisdom towards the exploration of hidden truths. And this, I believe, is the reason why God has not permitted the doctrine of universals to die out altogether" (8.623–27, p.79). Truth exists both outside and beneath the surface of the stories of the poets, beyond the facts or details of the history they spin, and the mystery of its preservation cannot be fully explained, for it is not actually part of Fame's purview.

"*queyntelych ywrought*"

Exteriors take on particular significance in the *House of Fame*: Geffrey expends a good deal of narrative effort on appearances, decorations, embellishments, and his use of descriptive language again and again admits equivocal meanings in regards to arts and language and their ability to represent faithfully. Geffrey's descriptions of the structures and forms he sees in his visions have multiple applications, putting to use words that comment superficially on the exterior, the skill of the intricate craftsmanship, and the effect that it has on the viewer, but that also refer back to his own craft, to the use of language itself, its limitations and its possibilities. The terms themselves recognize that every art form contains within it the potential for deceit, and Geffrey makes many allusions to his distrust of any craft that makes things seem other than what they are. His most evident commentary on the nature of true and false comes in the middle of his rumination on Dido's cautionary tale: Dido deemed that Aeneas was good, "for he such semed," and she acted on this false perception, loving him without knowing his intent and making him "[h]yr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir lord" (HF 2.258). Geffrey's lament for the dichotomy between truth and appearance is clear—"Allas! what harm doth apparence, / Whan hit is fals in existence! (HF 2.265–66)—and he comes back to this subject repeatedly throughout the rest of the poem, often in veiled references to his own task as a poet. In his opening invocation to Apollo in Book Three, Geffrey comments on both his poetic skill and his intent in the poem:

> O God of science and of lyght,
> Appollo, thurgh thy grete myght,
> This lytel laste bok thou gye!
> Nat that I wilne, for maistrye,
> Here art poetical be shewed,
> But for the rym ys lyght and lewed,
> Yit make hyt sumwhat agreable,
> Though som vers fayle in a sillable;
> And that I do no diligence
> To shewe craft, but o sentence.
> And yif, devyne vertu, thow
> Wilt helpe me to shewe now
> That in myn hed ymarked ys—
> Loo, that is for to menen this,
> The Hous of Fame for to descryve—
> Thou shalt se me go as blyve
> Unto the nexte laure y see,
> And kysse yt, for hyt is thy tree.
> Now entre in my brest anoon! (HF 2.1091–1109)

He means to describe the house of Fame, he says, not to showcase his mastery of his poetical craft, and he asks assistance from the divine virtue to "do no diligence / To shewe craft, but o sentence." The word "craft" itself has multiple meanings, the most applicable here including: skill, dexterity, cleverness, ingenuity; skill in deceiving or trickery; a trick or wile; an art or handicraft; a device, method, technique; a means.[12] Craft, Geffrey protests, either skill or deception, is not what he wants to display here;

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[12] "craft" (n.(1)), *Middle English Dictionary.*

sentence, rather, is his concern. Inherent in the rhetorical and manual arts is the possibility for deceit. The best protection against such deceit is to ground the art as firmly as possible in the truth that exists outside the crafted work, in the real.

Geffrey's accounting of the musicians and artificers outside the temple of Fame involves just such referentiality. The scene is a clear allusion to the coming judgment that will be visited upon the city of confusion, the seat of worldly loves. The great city of Babylon will be overthrown, the angel of John's vision reveals, and on this day, the musicians and craftsmen will have disappeared: "And the voice of harpers, and of musicians, and of them that play on the pipe, and on the trumpet, shall no more be heard at all in thee" (Rev 18:22). Alone for this leg of the journey, after the eagle has unloaded him, leaving him to explore Fame's domain on his own, Geffrey sees outside Fame's palace walls

> alle maner of mynstralles
> And gestiours that tellen tales
> Both of wepinge and of game,
> Of al that longeth unto Fame. (HF 3.1197–1200)

Among the vast multitude of tale-tellers numbering "[m]any thousand tymes twelve / That maden lowde mynstralcies" (HF 3.1216–17), Geffrey identifies several musicians by name, famous harpists and trumpeters and pipers who are playing their instruments "ful craftely" (HF 3.1203). Seated behind or below these great musicians, Geffrey sees various "smale harpers" who gape upwards at the masters and "countrefete hem as an ape," imitating, mimicking, aping their skill "as craft countrefeteth kynde" (HF 3.1212–13). The lesser musicians cannot match Orpheus's or Orion's art, and their attempts are evident counterfeits: they struggle to imitate with their instruments the skill that comes naturally to the more talented players. Others also pipe "craftely" (HF 3.1220) nearby, and Geffrey identifies different instruments, “trumpe, beme, and claryoun,” “cornemuse [bagpipes] and shalemyes,” “many flowte and liltyng horn, / And pipes made of grene corn” (HF 3.1214–52). The relevant apocalyptic pronouncement delivered against Babylon continues after relating the silencing of all these instruments, extending to encompass the other arts: “and no craftsman of any art whatsoever shall be found any more at all in thee . . . for all nations have been deceived by thy enchantments” (18:22-23). Similarly, next in Geffrey’s panoramic view come the shadier practitioners of craft:

> jugelours,[13]
> Magiciens, and tregetours,
> And Phitonesses, charmeresses,
> Olde wicches, sorceresses,
> That use exorsisacions,
> And eke these fumygacions;
> And clerkes eke, which konne wel
> Al this magik naturel,
> That craftely doon her ententes
> To make, in certeyn ascendentes,
> Ymages, lo, thrugh which magik
> To make a man ben hool or syk. (HF 3.1259–70)

These crafters use their technical arts to “craftely” do their *entente*, making images and potions, “magik naturel” (surely an oxymoron) that has power to sicken or cure. The crafters are playing games of illusion, competing with nature in their techniques, copying its power: it is craft which counterfeits kynde. The Revelation refers to this species of crafter as well, naming them among those who will be shut out of the holy city: “[w]ithout are dogs, and sorcerers, and unchaste, and murderers, and servers of idols, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie” (22:15). These “sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars," along with the unbelieving and the abominable, will be subject to the second death, the pool of fire (21:8).

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[13] The *Middle English Dictionary* entry for “jogelour (n.)” includes two primary senses: first, that of an entertainer, jester, clown, tumbler, dancer; second, that of an enchanter, wizard, sleight-of-hand artist, illusionist, deceiver, or rascal. Considering the grouping in which Geffrey’s jugelours are included, the latter sense is the most fitting here.

Geffrey surveys this crew of deceivers and then moves on to the palace itself: "Whan I had al this folk beholde, / And fond me lous and nought yholde / . . . I gan forth romen" (HF 3.1285–86, 1293). He has seen the enchanters and sleight-of-hand hustlers performing their tricks, and as he moves on, he considers it worth nothing that he still has the ability to do so, finding himself "lous" and "noughte yholde," as if the condition is not entirely expected. He is free, unconstrained, unfettered: he has not submitted himself to their spells, to the enchantments that have deceived nations. This has not been the case for the entirety of the poem, for Geffrey has been at various times astonished, confused, dumbstruck, witless in the face of the craftiness that exerts its influence on him. Craft, counterfeits, can be used with the intent to deceive or enslave, as substitution for the real instead a means by which one is lead back to the real. The craft in Venus's house originally exerts this sort of force over him, captivating him and drawing him into a sentimental reverie, as he, like Aeneas before him, feeds on empty images.

Geffrey's description of the figures that convolute, misrepresent, exaggerate, or detract from substance throughout the poem indicate his deep awareness of the dangers inherent in the crafts that "countrefeteth kynde," the dual nature of the arts. And, of course, dreams themselves are "avisions" or "figures" or "fantomes," as Geffrey points out in the proem, so the dream medium adds another layer of complexity to the images that populate his vision.

> 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. (HF 1.119–27)

In his dream, Geffrey finds himself in the glass temple of Venus, more richly decorated than any place he had ever seen, with "curiouse" paintings and images and "queynte maner of figures / Of olde werk." The adjectives here and elsewhere contain within them the double meanings of the skill and deception in the art: "curiouse" can mean skillful, ingenious, artistic, exquisite, curious, or sumptuous, but it can also refer to subtlety, obscurity, inaccessibility, or even to magic or the occult; "queynte" is semantically similar, meaning elaborate, clever, elegant, skillful, but also mysterious, supernatural, magical, crafty, deceptive, or dissembling, and it is a word used to describe both things and language. Figures themselves also exist as both visible shapes, embodied forms, and linguistic devices or ornaments. The term includes written characters, representations or likenesses, concrete representations, symbols, signs, apparitions. The eagle protests that in his "simple" proofs addressed to Geffrey he has not used "any subtilite / Of speche, or gret prolixite / Of termes of philosophie, / Of figures of poetrie, / Or colours of rethorike (HF 2.855–59), acknowledging as he gives himself unwarranted praise that the linguistic arts can be used to obscure truth just as readily as they can be used to reveal it.

When Geffrey approaches the temple of Fame alone, he again spends numerous lines describing the craftsmanship of its exterior:

> Thoo gan I up the hil to goon,
> And fond upon the cop a woon,
> That al the men that ben on lyve
> Ne han the kunnynge to descrive
> The beaute of that ylke place,
> Ne coude casten no compace

> Swich another for to make,
> That myght of beaute ben hys make,
> Ne so wonderlych ywrought;
> That hit astonyeth yit my thought,
> And maketh al my wyt to swynke,
> On this castel to bethynke,
> So that the grete craft, beaute,
> The cast, the curiosite
> Ne kan I not to yow devyse;
> My wit ne may me not suffise.
> But natheles al the substance
> I have yit in my remembrance; (HF 3.1165–82)

His wit does not suffice to tell all the craft and beauty of the place, for it is a beauty that no man alive has the "kunnynge" (1168)—the skill, mastery, cleverness, or shrewdness—to describe, but that beauty is also suspect, superficial, as opposed to the substance and meaning of it, which he carries in his memory. The "grete craft" and the "cast"—the skill, art, form, design, intention, trick, plot, or scheme—cannot be disentangled by his intellect. It is "wonderlych ywrought," as is the cage of twigs, the House of Rumor, which is crafted even more marvelously than the labyrinth created by Daedalus, the prototypical cunning artificer:

> An hous, that Domus Dedaly,
> That Laboryntus cleped ys,
> Nas mad so wonderlych, ywis,
> Ne half so queyntelych ywrought.
> And ever mo, as swyft as thought,
> This queynte hous aboute wente,
> That never mo hyt stille stente. (HF 3.1920–26)

"Wonderlych"—marvelously, miraculously, beautifully, superlatively, puzzlingly, or unnaturally—made and "queyntelych ywrought," as were also the figures in the temple of Venus. This "queynte hous," too, is an unreliable one, both deceptive and elaborate in its craft.

In discussing his own craft of poetry, Geffrey speaks deprecatingly about the using of "queynte" words—and self-depreciatingly about his own abilities—for the idea of speaking more elaborately on love, a subject with which he has little personal experience, seems a false and vain endeavor:

> What shulde I speke more queynte,
> Or peyne me my wordes peynte
> To speke of love? Hyt wol not be;
> I kan not of that faculte. (HF 1.245–48)

To "peynte"—paint, represent, portray, embellish, disguise, use words vividly, feign, deceive, give a false appearance to—words seems a deception that Geffrey himself is unwilling to perpetrate, and as is often the case the note of apathy here (he does not want to take the pains to craft that sort of work) is evidence of a particular humility. As opposed to the attempted self-aggrandizement of the eagle, of Fame herself and of many of the companies that come before her, Geffrey makes himself seem less than he is. For all of Geffrey's shortcomings—shortcomings typical to the conventional dream narrator—revealed as he moves on through the stages of the *House of Fame*, he takes care to establish his own fallibility, not as an all-encompassing denial of authorial reliability, but in admission of the limitations inherent in his humanity.

As the narrative progresses, Geffrey seems less impressionable and deluded than his self-assessments suggest; his reaction to the eagle's lectures is non-committal and he withholds judgment on the subjects the eagle introduces. When he is alone in Fame's house, without the eagle, he finds Fame to be unsatisfactory, boring: she does not answer any of his pressing questions, for he has long understood the hold that Fame and Fortune have over the things of the world, and this view of her workings thus reveals nothing new to him. He will not seek her favors, for as he tells the one who questions him in the house of Fame—one who is also intrigued by the “newe tydynges,” tidings “Of love or suche thynges glade” that Geffrey seeks (HF 3.1886–89)—“I wot myself best how y stoned” (HF 3.1878). He knows best his own merit and recognizes that his fame may not be proportional to his merit, seeking after Fame’s favor will bring him no closer to answering his more pressing questions.

The eagle insists that all words are merely sound, but Geffrey withholds judgment about his theory wisely, for the reality that awaits Geffrey in the house of Fame does not support this conclusion. The words that appear before Fame are not merely air or disembodied noise: they have form and meaning, and they seem more authentic, true representations than any of the art forms Geffrey sees. But the eagle completely ignores the metaphysical problems introduced here, making no comment other than to say it is a marvel, for the semblances themselves are beyond the reaches of logic; he is a logician looking at sounds as purely physical phenomena, individual and empty of meaning. Unlike the crafted forms, images, and figures in and outside the edifices of the poem, the petitioners speak the truth of themselves here, revealing their intent; the words have meaning in the context of the lives they represent. They cannot deceive or produce counterfeits on this their day of judgment, and regardless of their intent or desires with regards to their reward, they must represent themselves truly. The pseudo-shades are compelled to make an account of themselves and their individual integrity, establishing the correlation between word and deed, and though Fame’s judgment is truly arbitrary and false, the criteria presented to her is not—each group of petitioners offers up the individual truth of themselves based on how completely they achieved a unity of word and deed in life.

This mimicry of judgment is not enough to satisfy Geffrey, however, for he is seeking conclusion. He wants to hear “som good,” a tiding that is true, universal, substantial, the opposite of the crafty, vain, empty words he encounters at every step, and it is, counterintuitively, in the cage of Rumor where he finds it at last. In the cage of Rumor, after having observed again the mingling of deceptions and truths and their attraction to Fame, Geffrey is at liberty, “to pleyen and for to lere” (HF 3.2133), and here accomplishes his search for tidings (“dide al myn entente” [HF 3.2132]). Here Geffrey learns the tydynge

> That I had herd of som contre
> That shal not now be told for me—
> For hit no nede is, redely;
> Folk kan synge hit bet than I;
> For al mot out, other late or rathe,
> Alle the sheves in the lathe— (HF 3.2135–40)

He has heard the tiding, been satisfied in his quest for truth, but he will not reveal it, for others can “synge” of it better than he can; the revelation of the tiding is deferred, for in the end, at the End, all truth will be laid bare, with undeniable clarity. This tiding of a far country is a tiding of truth and reality, and in Geffrey’s silence, it will remain unmediated by craft: it is a tiding that will not be left to the mercies of Fame. False words and deceptions are found throughout the whole of the dream, and Geffrey prays to Christ to be delivered from them at the end of Book One. Here at the end of Book Three, we see deliverance. Amidst the “many a thousand tymes twelve” (HF 3.2126) of shipmen and pilgrims, pardoners and couriers and messengers,

> I herde a gret noyse withalle
> In a corner of the halle,
> Ther men of love-tydynges tolde,
> And I gan thiderward beholde;
> For I saugh rennynge every wight 2145

> As faste as that they hadden myght,
> And everych cried, “What thing is that?”
> And somme sayde, “I not never what.”
> And whan they were alle on an hepe,
> Tho behynde begunne up lepe,
> And clamben up on other faste,
> And up the nose and yen kaste,
> And troden fast on others heles,
> And stampen, as men doon aftir eles.
> Atte laste y saugh a man,
> Which that y [nevene] nat ne kan;
> But he semed for to be
> A man of gret auctorite. . . . (HF 3.2131–58)

One and all, they are drawn irresistibly to the corner of the hall, running, stampeding, trampling their way to the place where the mysterious love tidings are to be revealed. And Geffrey here ends poem deliberately with expectations for something more. With silence, and with the “man of gret auctorite” who cannot be named, whose name “no man knoweth but himself” (Rev. 19:12). The disorder of the vision is placed in a larger eschatological context, and the Word which will measure all others is the instrument by which the mind of the dreamer will be reordered and the desire for truth will be fulfilled.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This is How the World Ends

"... [F]ame whether won or lost is a thing which lies in the award of a random, reckless, incompetent, and unjust judge, the public, the multitude. The only just judge, the only just literary critic, is Christ, who prizes, is proud of, and admires, more than any man, more than the receiver himself can, the gifts of his own making."
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, letter to Richard Watson Dixon, June 1878

Chaucer's longing to maintain the correspondence between thing and word is a desire to name accurately, to communicate truthfully, to correctly identify what *is*, and by doing so, to use the faculty of reason in such a way that a true picture of the world and man's place in it is apprehended and rendered. The existence of mind-independent Truth is necessary, then, to recognize the substance of mass of particulars in the world. Without this external measuring rod, there is no reason to trust that the information gathered by the mind of man is a reliable measure of reality, a true rendering of dependable things, of matter, of natural law, or of God's character.

As Etienne Gilson explains, "If our concepts are but words, without any other contents than more or less vague images, all universal knowledge becomes a mere set of arbitrary opinions. What we usually call science ceases to be a system of general and necessary relations and finds itself reduced to a loose string of empirically connected facts" (*Unity* 29). The realist says in his response to nominalism that certitude can be found only in the existence of ontological universals: if universals have existence only in the words used to represent them, only in figures or signs, then universal knowledge is illusory and subjective. Signs are invulnerable to the decay of the world only if the concepts they signify have universal status. They are not themselves subject to entropy when they have no material existence: it is when they are given form, spoken or textual, that they are subject to change, misunderstanding, manipulation, exploitation. They can have a beginning and an ending, a duration determined by Fame. But as Augustine points out in his explanation of universals, the signs are not themselves to be the focus of our interest: "But enough of the name! Let us see the thing which above all we must contemplate and come to know, while leaving it in the power of each to call that thing which he knows by whatever name pleases him" (79). It is not the names alone, but the things signified that we are to contemplate and come to know, the truth "deep down things."

Chaucer's is not a naive or tidily ordered conception of language, authority, or Truth. Instead, the *House of Fame* presents a challenge for the reader: it is a puzzle to be figured out. There is disparity between actual truth and what gets written, as Geffrey notes in his revision of Virgil and his comments on the pillared poets and their works; the reminders of this disparity recommend to the reader a cautionary approach to human reckoning. Dependence on human accounting, particularly that of an unknown author, is dangerous, for language cannot always communicate wholly, and craft does not always intend to communicate truly. The *House of Fame* is clearly a poem concerned with epistemology, a poem that asserts in its layers of distorted intellection that Truth must necessarily exist outside of the human knower. Geffrey's opening insistence about the seriousness of the dream and its marvels and his repeated vocalization of his core desire to find the author, creator, source, and, by extension, the intent, of creations—combined with the very conventions of the dream vision genre—suggests that his search is not in vain. His final encounter in the cage of Rumor indicates that this desire is fulfilled, though the answer to his ineffable longings will not be revealed to the reader: his authorial skill cannot do justice to describing the love tiding granted him, nor can he replicate the breathlessly anticipated revelation of the mystery from the man of great authority.

The finality of the End of Days reminds readers of the ultimate seriousness of earthly existence, which wends inexorably to its close. Even amidst the comic elements of the poem, its situation in the apocalyptic genre lends the vision an air of earnestness. The apocalyptic overtones of book 3 serve to remind us of that end to which theories and philosophy are merely a handmaiden. There is no happy ending or true closure within time: closure in the Christian cosmos (of which Chaucer fully recognizes himself to be a part) comes only at the end of time, when Christ comes suddenly with irresistible authority to judge with justice in the final, decisive event for humanity; this is the grand-narrative that serves as the framework for the Christian ordering of history. Accordingly, Fame does not have the last "word"; it is not her image that dominates the conclusion of the narrative. Instead, we are left in silence before the man of great authority.

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