

The House of Fame¹

Geoffrey Chaucer



Book I

Proem

May God turn every dream to good for us! For to my mind it is a wonder, by the Cross, what causes dreams by night or by morning; and why some are fulfilled and some not; why this one is a vision, and this a revelation; why this is one kind of dream, and that one is another, and not the same to everyone; why this one is an illusion and that one is an oracle. 11

I know not, but whosoever knows the causes of these miracles better than I, let him explain them; for I certainly know nothing about that, and never think to work my wit too busily to understand the kinds of their significance, or the length of time to their fulfillment, or why this is cause of dreams rather than that: whether peoples' temperaments make them dream of what they have been thinking about; or whether, as others say, over-enfeeblement of brain, from sickness or abstinence, imprisonment, or great distress, or of disorder of the natural routine, as when a person is too zealous in study, or melancholy, or so full of inward fear that nobody may offer him relief; or whether the devoutness and meditation of some people often causes such dreams; or whether it may be that the cruel, hard life that these lovers lead, who hope or fear too much, so that their mere fancies cause visions; or whether spirits have the power to make people dream at night; or whether the soul from its proper nature be so perfect, as men judge, that it foreknows what is to be, and warns one and all of each of their risks to come, by means of visions or prefigurings, but our flesh cannot understand these correctly, because the warnings are too dark--I know not what the cause is. 53

¹ Fame. In the context of this poem, fame is not only fame, but reputation, renown, and gossip as well.

² Tenth day of December. Early readings of the poem tried to link this date with some important historical event such as a royal marriage, but none have been convincing. The most valid approaches have noted the fact that December 10 is one of the shortest days of the year and the least suggestive of spring and love. In a sense, the opening of the poem is the opposite of the opening of the *General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*.

³ The god of sleep. Probably Morpheus, as mentioned in *Book of the Duchess*, 163ff., though the attribution there is questionable.

Good luck in this to great scholars, who comment on this matter and others! For I will now make note of no opinion, but only pray that the holy cross will turn every dream to good for us. For never have I since I was born, nor anyone else before me, I firmly believe, dreamed so wonderful a dream as I did the tenth day of December²; which, as I can now recall it, I will tell you in full. 65

The Invocation

But trust well, at my beginning I will make an invocation without delay, with special devoutness, to the god of sleep³, who dwells in a cave of rock by a stream which comes from Lethe⁴, which is a bitter river of hell; near a people called the Cimmerians always sleeps this mirthless god with his thousand sleepy sons, whose custom is always to sleep; and I pray to this god I speak of to grant me success to tell my dream properly, if every dream be within his power. And may He who is the Mover of all that is and was and ever shall be give them that listen to it joy from all they dream this year; and to stand all in the favor of their loves or in whatever place they would be glad to stand in, and shield them from poverty and shame and mishap and every trouble, and send all their desire to them that receive it well and scorn it not or misjudge it in their minds through malicious intent. 93

And whosoever through presumption or hate or scorn or envy, through spite or mockery or wickedness, may misjudge it--whether he dreams with stockings on or stockings off--I pray to Jesus Christ that every ill that anyone has had since the beginning of the world may happen to him therefore before he die, and that he may fully deserve it all, yes, with such a fulfillment as Croesus⁵ King of Lydia had of his vision, who died upon the high gallows! This prayer shall he have from me; I have no more charity than this! Now, as I have told you, listen to what I dreamed before I awoke. 110

The tenth day of December, when it was night, I lay down to sleep just where I was accustomed, and fell asleep very soon, like one who was weary from walking a pilgrimage of two miles to the shrine of Saint Leonard⁶, to make soft what had been hard. 118

⁴ Lethe. The river in the underworld that causes one to forget.

⁵ Croesus. Wealthy king of Lydia (in the west of present day Turkey) in the Sixth Century BC. He dreamed that he was on a tree, where Jupiter washed him and Phoebus dried him, a dream which his daughter correctly interpreted as: he would hang on the gallows, after which the rain would soak him and the sun would dry him. See also *The Monk's Tale*, 2727-60.

⁶ St. Leonard. Sixth-Century French saint, patron both against robbers and for prisoners. *The Golden Legend* notes that his name is a combination of "leos" (people) and "nardus" (sweet-smelling herb), "for by the odour of good fame he drew the people to him."

But as I slept I dreamed I was within a temple of glass, in which were more golden images standing on various stands, and more rich decorative niches, and more pinnacles of gemmed work, and more skilful portraits and curious types of figures in old work than ever I had seen. For truly I did not know where I was, but well I knew, truly, that this temple was of Venus⁷; for immediately I saw her figure pictured, floating naked in a sea; and her white and red rose-garland, by God, about her brows; and her comb to comb her hair; her doves, and Sir Cupid, her blind son, and Vulcan, with his brown face. 139

But as I roamed about, I found a tablet of brass on a wall, where was written: "I will now sing, if I am able, of the arms and the man also, who, fugitive from Troy, first came by his fate into Italy to the Lavinian shore with great suffering⁸." And then after this the story began, as I shall tell you all. 150

First I saw the destruction of Troy, because of the Greek Sinon, who with his false oaths and his feigned expression and his lies arranged for the horse to be brought into the city, through which the Trojans lost all their happiness. And after this, alas, there was depicted how Ilium⁹ was assaulted and won, and King Priam pitilessly slain and his son Polites as well, by Sir Pyrrhus. 161

And next to that I beheld how Venus, when she saw the castle burning, descended from heaven and bade her son Aeneas to flee; and how he fled and escaped from the entire crowd, and took Anchises his father and bore him away on his back, crying, "Alas and Alack!" Anchises carried in his hands those gods¹⁰ of the country that were not burned in the fire. 173

And next in all this company I saw how Creusa, the wife of Sir Aeneas, whom he loved as his soul, and her young son Iulius, and Ascanius also, fled with such heavy looks that it was pitiful to see. And I saw how at a turning of a path as they went through the forest Creusa was lost and died, alas, but I know not in what fashion. And I saw how he sought her, and how her spirit told him to flee the army of the Greeks, and said he must go to Italy without fail, as was his destiny; so that it was piteous to listen to her words when her spirit appeared to him, and how she prayed him to guard her son. There I saw also depicted how he and his father and his household sailed forth with his ships towards the land of Italy, as directly as they could go. 198

There, cruel Juno, who are Lord Jupiter's wife, and have hated always all the Trojan blood, I saw you run like a mad woman, and call on Aeolus, the god of winds, to blow out

⁷ Venus, Cupid, and Vulcan. Venus is the goddess of love, born of the foam of the sea; Cupid, the god of love, her son; Vulcan, the smith of the gods, her husband.

⁸ I will now sing...suffering. These are the first lines of Vergil's *Aeneid*. What follows is a summary of the entire Roman epic poem.

from all directions so wildly that he should drown lord and lady, serving-man and serving-woman, of the whole Trojan nation without any rescue. 208

There I saw arise such a tempest that every heart might shudder just to see it painted on the wall. 211

There, Venus, I saw also depicted how you, my lady dear, weeping with woeful countenance, prayed to Jupiter¹¹ on high, because the Trojan Aeneas was your son, to save and guard his fleet. 218

There I saw Jove kiss Venus and grant abatement of the tempest. There I saw how it ceased, and how Aeneas proceeded with great toil and secretly arrived in the country of Carthage; and in the morning, how he and a knight called Achates met with Venus walking in an unusual disguise, as if she had been a huntress, with the wind blowing through her hair. And I saw how Aeneas, when he recognized her, began to bewail his sufferings, and the fact that his ships were sunk, or else lost, he knew not where; and how she began to comfort him and told him go to Carthage¹²? There he would find his people who had been left behind on the sea. 238

And, to pass over this thing shortly, she put Aeneas in such grace with Dido, queen of that land, that, to tell it briefly, she became his love in heart and body. Why should I speak more artfully or strive to paint my words in speaking of love? It will not be; I know nothing of that craft. And to tell the manner also in which they became acquainted, it would be a long story to tell, and would delay you too long. 253

There I saw depicted how Aeneas told Dido every adventure that had happened to him on the sea. 255

And after that was depicted how she made of him, in brief and in a word, her life, her love, her joy, her master, and showed him every reverence, and lavished on him all the wealth that any woman could, believing all had been as he had sworn to her, and by this judging that he was good, for so he seemed. 264

Alas! What evil is forged by appearance when it is false to the truth of the case! For he was a traitor to her, therefore, alas she slew herself. Lo! How a woman makes a mistake to love him who is unknown. For indeed, by heaven, all that glitters is not gold! 272

For, on my life, many cursed faults may be covered under righteousness; therefore, let there be no creature so foolish as to take a lover only because of their looks, speech, or

⁹ Ilium. The city or fortress of Troy.

¹⁰ Gods. I.e., images of gods.

¹¹ Jupiter. Supreme god in Roman mythology, also called Jove. In Greek, known as Zeus.

¹² Carthage. In northern Africa, in what is now Libya.

friendly manner. For every woman shall find this, namely, that sometimes a man by his nature will appear outwardly the fairest, until he has gained what he desires, and then he will invent excuses, and swear that she is unkind or false or sly or two-faced. All this I say on account of Aeneas and Dido, and her foolish desire, who loved her guest all too soon. Therefore I will say a proverb, "He who knows the herb perfectly may safely lay it on his eye." Without a doubt, this is true. 292

But let us speak of Aeneas, how he betrayed her and left her unkindly, alas! So when she utterly perceived that he would fail in his pledge to her, and would turn from her to Italy, she began to wring her two hands. "Alas!" she said, "alas, woe is me! Is this the pledge of every person, that he will have a new lover every year (if it will last that long), or else three, perhaps? He would have them thus: from one he would have fame in magnifying his reputation; another, he says, for friendship; and there shall be yet the third, that shall be taken, indeed, for delight or personal pleasure." 310

In such words Dido bemoaned her great pain, as I dreamed; I cite no other author. "Alas!" she said, "my sweet heart, have pity on my bitter sorrows, and slay me not! Don't go away! Ah, woeful Dido, alas!" Then she said to herself, "O Aeneas, what will you do? Ah, that neither your love, nor your pledge that you have sworn with your right hand, nor my cruel death, may keep you here with me still! Ah, have pity of my death! Surely, my dear heart, you know full well that never yet, as far as my wit could stretch, have I wronged you in thought or deed. Ah, do you men have such excellence in speech, and never a bit of truth? 331

"Alas, that ever any woman had pity on any man! Now I see well and can tell others that we wretched women have no deception; for certainly we are treated so, every one, for the most part. However sorely you men can groan, as soon as we have accepted you, in truth we are deceived! For though your love may last for a while, watch for the conclusion, how for the most part you will end. 344

"Alack that I was born! For through you my good name is lost, and all my deeds are read and sung over all this land, in every mouth. O Wicked Fame! For indeed there is nothing as swift as she is. Ah, it is true, everything is known, even if it is wrapped deep in mist. And, even if I should live forever, I can never so retrieve what I have done, so that, alas, I shall not be said to have been shamed through Aeneas, and that it shall not be judged of me thus: 'Lo, just as she has done, she will surely do again.' Thus the people say secretly." But what is done is not yet to do; truly, all her lament and moan helped her not one straw. 363

And when in truth she knew that he had gone forth to his ships, she went without delay into her chamber and called her sister Anne and lamented to her, and said that she was the reason that she first loved Aeneas, and had counseled her to that. But what! When this was said and done, she stabbed herself to the heart and died of the bitter wound. But whoever would like to know all the details of her death and the words she said, let them read Virgil in the book of the *Aeneid*, or in her epistle in Ovid¹³, which she wrote before she died. And if it would not be too long to compose, by heaven I would put it here. 382

But, alack, for the harm and pity that have come about from such faithlessness, as men may often read in books, and see it still in deed every day, so that it is an affliction to think about! 387

Witness Demophon, duke of Athens, how he perjured himself falsely, and wickedly betrayed Phyllis, who was the king's daughter of Thrace, and falsely delayed past his appointed time; and when she knew he was false, she hanged herself by the neck because he had been so faithless to her. Lo! Was not this a woe and a pity? 396

And see how false and heedless was Achilles to Breseyda, and Paris to Aenone, and Jason to Hypsipyle, and again Jason to Medea, and Hercules to Dyanira (for he left her for Iole, who brought him his death, by God!). 404

Also, how false was Theseus, who betrayed Ariadne, as the story tells us--may the Devil be his soul's destruction! For he would have been entirely devoured, whether he liked it or not, if it had not been for Ariadne. And because she pitied him, she helped him to escape from his death. And he played her a very false trick; for some time after this he left her sleeping alone on a desert island in the sea, and stole away and left her alone; and took her sister Phaedra with him and went to his ship. And yet he had sworn to her by all that ever he could swear upon that, if she saved his life, he would wed her; for, as the book says, in truth she desired nothing else. 426

But to excuse Aeneas fully for his great trespass, the book says that in truth Mercury¹⁴ told him to go into Italy and leave the region of Africa and Dido and her fair town. 432

Then I saw depicted how Sir Aeneas set sail for Italy; and how there arose a great tempest, and how he lost his steersman, whom the rudder, before he noticed, struck overboard, indeed, as he slept. 438

And also I saw how the Sibyl and Aeneas, near an island, went down into hell to see his father, the noble Anchises,

¹³ Ovid. *The Heroides* is a collection of letters, among them Dido's, written from women who have been left by men. Several of the other women in the collection are named in the following paragraphs, including Phyllis, Hypsipyle, Medea, and Ariadne.

Chaucer also used the *Heroides* to compose his *Legend of Good Women*.

¹⁴ Mercury. The messenger god. In Greek, known as Hermes.

and how he found there Palinurus¹⁵, and Dido, and Deiphobus¹⁶; and how he saw every torment of hell, which would take too long to relate. Whoever wishes to know this must read many lines in Virgil¹⁷ or Claudian¹⁸ or Dante¹⁹, who know how to tell it. 450

Then I saw depicted entirely the arrival of Aeneas in Italy, and his treaty with king Latinus, and all the battles that he and his knights were in, before he gained what he wished to have; and how he took Turnus' life and won Lavinia in marriage. And I saw all the marvelous signs of the celestial gods; how, despite Juno and all her arts and snares, Aeneas succeeded in his entire enterprise, for Jupiter took care of him at the petition of Venus--to whom I pray always to save us and forever ease us of our sorrows. 467

When I had seen all these sights thus in this noble temple, I thought, "Ah, Lord who made us! Never have I seen such magnificence of figures and such wealth as I have seen depicted in this church. But I know not who had them created, nor where I am, nor in what land. But now I will go out just to the gate, and see if I can detect anyone stirring anywhere who can tell me where I am." 479

When I came out at the doors I gazed around me carefully. Then I saw only a large field as far as I could see, without town or house or tree or bush or grass or plowed ground; for all the field was sand, as fine as men may see yet lying in the desert of Libya. Nor did I see any type of being that is formed by Nature, to instruct or direct me. "O Christ, Who reigns in blessedness," I thought, "save me from hallucination and illusion!" 494

And devoutly I cast my eyes to the heaven. There at last I noticed then how near the sun, as far up as I could discern with my eye, it seemed to me I beheld an eagle soaring, only it seemed much greater than any eagle that I had ever seen²⁰. But for certain, this is as true as death, it was golden, and

shone so brilliantly that never had anyone seen such a sight, unless the heaven had gained another sun all new and of gold; so brightly shone the eagle's feathers. And then it began to descend. 508

Here ends the first book.

Book II

Here begins the second book.

Proem

Now listen, every type of person who can understand English and wishes to learn about my dream; for now or never you shall hear of so wondrous a vision that Isaiah²¹, Scipio²², King Nebuchadnezzar²³, Pharaoh²⁴, Turnus²⁵, or Elcanor²⁶ never dreamed such a dream as this. Now, fair blessed Cyprian woman²⁷, be my helper in this task! And you who dwell on Parnassus, by the pure fount of Helicon, help me to compose and rhyme! O Thought, that recorded all that I dreamed and locked it in the treasury of my brain, now shall men see if there is any power in you to tell my entire dream properly. Now make known your power and craft! 528

The Dream

This eagle that I have spoken of, that soared so far on high and shone as with feathers of gold, I began to behold more and more, and to see its beauty and the marvel of it all. But never was a lightning stroke, or that thing that is called the thunderbolt (which sometimes has smitten a tower to powder and burned it by its swift onslaught) so swift in its descent as this bird, when it beheld me in the open in the field. And with his grim and mighty feet, within his long sharp claws, he caught me at a swoop as I fled, and soared up again, carrying me in his strong claws as easily as if I

¹⁵ Palinurus. The helmsman of Aeneas.

¹⁶ Deiphobus. Prince of Troy, son to Priam and Hecuba.

¹⁷ Vergil. Roman poet, author of the *Aeneid*, source of much of Book I.

¹⁸ Claudian. The reputed last classical Roman poet, author of *The Rape of Proserpine*.

¹⁹ Dante. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Italian poet and philosopher, whose works, especially his *Divine Comedy* (*Comedia*), influenced Chaucer greatly. In fact, *The House of Fame* is sometimes referred to as "Chaucer's Dante."

²⁰ Eagle. Dante in *Purgatorio* 9.19-20 dreams that he is taken up by an eagle.

²¹ Isaiah. Old Testament prophet. In Isaiah 6.1-8, the prophet sees a vision of heaven and the angels worshipping God. One of the angels takes a burning coal and, burning Isaiah's mouth with it, tells him that he is thus purified.

²² Scipio. The conclusion of Cicero's *Republic* contains a memorable passage that is known as *The Dream of Scipio*, which was preserved with a long commentary by Macrobius, the version Chaucer most likely knew. In the dream, the Roman general Scipio the Younger (Scipioun) meets his grandfather, Scipio the Elder

(Affrycan) in a dream in which the younger is shown the entire universe. For a short summary of the dream, see the beginning of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*.

²³ King Nebuchadnezzar. Old Testament king of Babylon (c.605-562 B.C.). His vision in Daniel 2:1-45 of a large statue composed of various materials from head to toe was interpreted by Daniel as the declining generations that would succeed the king.

²⁴ Pharaoh. In Genesis 41:1-36, the Pharaoh's dream of seven fatted cows followed by seven emaciated cows is interpreted by Joseph to be seven years of good harvest followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh was much pleased with Joseph for his help.

²⁵ Turnus. The enemy of Aeneas who in *The Aeneid* (VII. 413-59) has a dream in which the Fury Alecto appears to him. He is visited by Iris in another dream in IX 1-13.

²⁶ Elcanor. The identity of this person is uncertain, but it may be an indirect reference to Elkanah, father of the prophet Samuel, who receives a vision or revelation from God (1 Samuel 3:11-14) that the family of the tribal leader or priest Eli will no longer be honored because of their crimes.

²⁷ Cyprian woman. I.e., Venus.

were a lark--how high I cannot tell you, for I did not know not how I came up. For every faculty in my head was so stunned and dazed, for with his swift ascent and my own dread, all my sense of feeling died away, so great was my fear. 553

Thus I lay long in his claws, until at last he spoke to me in human voice and said, "Awake, and don't be so afraid. Fie upon you!" And then he called me by name, and, to arouse me better, so I dreamed, he said "Awake!" to me, just in the same voice and tone that one whom I could mention uses. And at that voice, to tell the truth, my mind returned to me, for it was spoken to me kindly, as it never was. 566

And at this I began to stir, and he bore me further in his talons until he felt my heart beating and that I grew warm as well. 570

Then he began to be mirthful with me and to comfort me with words, and said twice, "By blessed Mary, you are troublesome to carry, and more than you need be, by God! For, so God help me, you shall have no harm from this. 577

"This thing that has happened to you is for your instruction and your profit. Let's see! Do you dare to look yet? Be fully assured, I tell you plainly, I am your friend." And with that I began to marvel within my mind. 583

"O God Who made nature," I thought, "am I to die in no other way? Will Jove transform me into a star? Or what may this thing all mean? I am neither Enoch²⁸ nor Elijah²⁹ nor Romulus³⁰--and not Ganymede³¹, who, as books tell, was borne up to heaven by Lord Jupiter and made the gods' butler³²." 592

Indeed, this was my delusion then! But he who carried me noticed that I thought thus, and said, "You think incorrectly in your own mind; for Jove is not intending--I dare well put you fully out of doubt--to make a star of you as yet. But before I bear you much farther I will tell you what I am, and where you shall go, and why I came to do this, so that you will take good heart and tremble not for fear." 604

"Gladly," I said. 605

"Now that is well," he said. "First, I who have you in my feet, and whom you fear and marvel, dwell with the god of thunder whom men call Jupiter, who sends me often flying

far to do all his commands³³. And for this cause he has sent me to you. Now listen, by your word! He has pity for you, truly, because you have served his blind grand son Cupid, and the fair Venus as well, so long and attentively, always without reward. And nevertheless you have set your mind--as small as it may be to making books, songs, and ditties, in rhyme or in cadence, as you best know how, in worship of Love, and of his servants also, that seek and have sought his service; and strive to praise his art, although you had never a portion of it. 628

"For these reasons, so God bless me, Jove deems it great humility and great virtue, that often you will set your head to aching by night, so diligently composing, and always about Love, in honor and praise of him and to the benefit of his followers; and you have set forth all of their concerns, and despise neither him nor his followers, though you must go into the dance with those he cares little to promote. 640

"For these reasons, as I said, in truth, Jupiter considers this and other things also, fair sir; that is, that you gain no tidings of Love's followers, whether or not they are glad tidings, nor of anything else that God made. It is not only so that no tidings come to you from far lands, but you hear neither this nor that from your very neighbors who dwell almost at your door. For when your labor is ended and you have made all your calculations, instead of rest and recreation you go home without delay to your house, and as dumb as any stone you sit at another book until your eyes are entirely dazed. Thus, though your abstinence is rather little, you live like a hermit³⁴! 660

"And therefore Jove by his kind favor wills that I should bear you to a place that is called the House of Fame, to give you some amusement and diversion, as some compensation for your labor and devotion to Cupid the careless--lo, who is ever without reward! And thus this god will by his grace requite you with some type of thing, if you will be of good heart. For trust well, when we have arrived where I have noted, you shall hear of more wondrous things, I dare wager, more tidings of Love's followers, both truthful words and lies; and more loves newly started, and more love's long labors won; and more loves that happen by chance, nobody knows why, except that such things happen, just as when a blind man startles a hare; and more jolliness and goings-on, while they find love true as steel, as they think, and see joy and well-being everywhere; more discords, more jealousies, more murmurs, more changes,

²⁸ Enoch. Old Testament Patriarch who was believed to have ascended directly to heaven. See Genesis 5:24.

²⁹ Elijah. Like Enoch, Elijah was also believed to have ascended directly to heaven.

³⁰ Romulus. The founder of Rome who was carried to heaven by Mars, the god of war. See Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 14. 816-28.

³¹ Ganymede. The servant or butler to Jupiter who was abducted by the god's eagle. Many have noted that Chaucer's father was butler to the king. See Vergil's *Aeneid* V.252-57 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10:155-61.

³² I am neither Enoch...butler. Dante, when he is taken up by the eagle, remarks the same thing in *Inferno* 2.32: "I am not Aeneas, neither am I Paul; neither I nor others think that I deserve it."

³³ Jupiter...commands. Here the eagle is implicitly compared to Mercury, the messenger god.

³⁴ Hermit, abstinence. A hermit would be expected to abstain from all worldly pleasures, but presumably the narrator, though he lives in solitude, does not abstain from such pleasures.

more deceptions and feigned makings-up, and more beards³⁵--not the kind with razor or scissors--in two hours, than there are grains of sand; and more lovers falsely led on, and more renewals of old abandoned acquaintances, more love days and reconciliations, than there are strings played on instruments of music; and more exchanges of loves also than ever were grains of corn in barns. Can you scarcely believe all this?" he said. 699

No, so surely may God help me!" I said. 700

"No? Why?" he said. 701

"Because to my thinking it seems impossible--even if Fame had all the magpies and all the spies in a whole kingdom--that she should yet hear all this, or they discover it." 706

"Ah, yes, yes!" he said to me. "I can prove that by reason worthy of believing, so you may pay attention to understand my words. First you shall hear where she dwells, as your own book relates it. As I shall tell you, her palace stands in the very midst of the way between heaven, earth and sea; so that, whatever is spoken secretly or openly in all three of these domains, every sound must pass to it, or whatever comes from any mouth, be it read or sung or whispered, or spoken in security or fear, certainly it must go there, since that palace stands in so exact a spot, and the road to it is so open. 724

"Now listen well, for I will show you a very proper argument and a noble demonstration from my own imagining. 728

"Geoffrey, you know well that everything that is in nature has a natural place where it is best conserved; toward this place everything is naturally inclined and moves to come to that place when it is far away from it. As such you may indeed see at all times with respect to any heavy thing, such as stone or lead, or something of weight, if you carry it to any height and let it drop from your hand, it will fall down. Likewise, I say the same for fire or sound or smoke or other light things; they always seek to go upward on high. While each is free, light things go up and heavy things down. And for this reason you perceive that every river, by its nature, tends to go to the sea, fish have their dwelling in the river and sea, as I read, and trees are also in the earth. And hence each thing has its proper dwelling place, to which it seeks to go, and where it is ever at its best. Doubtless, this opinion is well known from the mouth of every philosopher, including Aristotle, Lord Plato³⁶, and many other scholars. And, to confirm my interpretation, you know this well: that speech is sound, or nobody could hear it. Now listen to what I shall teach you. 764

"Sound is nothing but broken air; and every speech that is uttered, aloud or silently, good or bad, is in substance nothing but air. For as flame is but lighted smoke, sound is broken air. But this may be so in many ways, of which I will tell you two: with sound that comes from a pipe, or from a harp. When a pipe is blown strongly, the air is twisted and rent with violence; indeed, this is my interpretation. And when men strike harp-strings, heavily or lightly, witness, the air breaks apart with the stroke. Likewise, it breaks when men speak; thus you have learned what speech is. 781

"Next now I will teach you how every word or noise or sound, even if it were piped by a mouse, must through its multiplication come to the House of Fame. I prove it thus, by experiment. Pay attention, now. For if now you throw a stone into water, you know well that immediately it will make a little round spot, like a circle, perhaps as broad as a pot-lid; and right away you shall see how that wheel will cause another wheel, and that, the third, and so forth, friend, every circle causing another wider than itself was. And thus from small circle to great, each circumscribing the other, each caused by the other's motion, but ever increasing until they go so far that they both are at their brinks. Although you cannot see it from above, these circles spread beneath the water as well, though you may think it a great marvel. And whoever says that I vary from the truth, make him prove the reverse. And even so, certainly, every word that is spoken, loud or quietly, first moves a circle of air around it, and from this motion directly another circle is stirred. As I have proven about the water, that every circle causes a second, even so is it with air, my dear brother; each circle passes into another greater and greater, and bears up speech or voice or noise, word or sound, through constant increase, until it comes to the House of Fame--take this in earnest or game. 822

"Now I have told, if you can bear it in mind, how speech or sound by its very nature is inclined to draw upward; this I have well proven, as you can perceive; and that the abode to which each thing is inclined has in truth its particular location. Then it is plainly clear that the natural abode of every speech and sound, fair or foul, has its natural position in the firmament. And since everything that is out of its natural place of a certainty tends to go there, as I have before proven to you, it follows, by God, that every sound naturally tends to go right up to its natural place. 842

"And this place I tell of, where Fame is pleased to live, is set in the midst of these three, the sea, the sky, and the earth, as the place where sound is most readily received. Then this is the conclusion: every speech of every creature, as I began first to tell you, moves up on high to pass to Fame's place, by its very nature. 852

³⁵ Beards. There is a pun here that can not be translated. A beard in Middle English can be either a type of deception or something that grows on a man's face.

³⁶ Aristotle, Plato. The two primary Greek philosophers known, at least for some of their works, in the Middle Ages.

“Tell me this faithfully, have I not thus simply made a proof without any deception in speech or great prolixity of philosophical terms or poetical figurative language or rhetorical colors³⁷? By God, it ought to please you, for difficult language and difficult matter together are annoying to hear: do you not know this well? 864

And I answered and said, “Yes!” 865

“Aha!” he said. “Lo! Thus I can speak simply to a simple man, and show him such arguments that he can shake them by the beaks, they shall be so palpable. But tell me this, I pray you, what do you think of my conclusion?” 871

I said, “It is a good argument, and likely to be just as you have proven to me. 874

“By God,” he said, “and as I believe, you shall yet, before it is evening, have proof of every word of this argument by experience. And with your ears you will hear well that every word that is spoken, top and tail and every bit, certainly comes into Fame’s house, as I have said. What more would you want?” And with this word he began to soar higher, and said, “By Saint James, now we will speak entirely of amusement. 886

“How are you doing?” 887

“Well,” I said. 888

“Now by your faith,” he said, “see down yonder whether you know any town or house or any other thing. And when you recognize anything, be sure to tell me and I shall tell you directly how far you now are from it.” 895

And then I looked down and beheld fields and plains, and now hills, now mountains, now valleys, now forests, and now (but I scarcely saw them) great beasts; now rivers, now cities, now towns, now great trees, now ships sailing on the sea. But soon, after a while, he had flown so high from the ground that the entire world seemed no more than a point to my eyes; or else the air was so thick that I could discern nothing. With that he spoke to me then and said, “Do you see you any town or anything that you know down yonder?” 912

I said, “No.” 913

“No wonder is it,” he said, “for Alexander of Macedon³⁸ was not half as high as this, nor the king Sir Scipio³⁹, who in a dream saw every point of hell and earth and paradise; nor luckless Daedalus, nor foolish Icarus⁴⁰ his child, who flew so high that the heat melted his wings and he fell wet amid the sea and there drowned; for him there was made great lamentation. 924

“Now,” he said, “turn your face upward. And behold this large region, this air. But see that you are not afraid of those that you shall see; for in this region, in truth, dwell many citizens, of whom Sir Plato speaks. Surely, these are the aerial beasts.” 932

And so I saw that entire multitude both walk and fly abroad. 934

“Now,” he said then, “lift up your eyes; look and see yonder the Galaxy, which men call the Milky Way, because it is white; and some, in faith, call it Watling Street⁴¹. It was once burned with fire, when the red sun’s son⁴², called Phaethon, wished at all odds to drive and guide his father’s chariot. The chariot horses knew well that he did not know how to govern them, and began to leap and plunge and to bear him now up now down until he saw the Scorpion, which is still a sign in heaven. And for fear of that he lost his wits, and let go of the reins of his horses; and immediately they mounted and descended until both air and earth burned; until in fact Jupiter at last slew him and hurled him from the chariot. Is it indeed not great harm to let a fool have the management of a thing that he cannot control?” 959

And with this word, to tell the truth, he began to soar steadily upward; and gladdened me more and more, as he spoke to me with such friendly wisdom. Then I looked below me and beheld the aerial beasts, clouds, winds, mists, tempests, snows, hails, rains and their generation according to their natures, and all the way over which I had come. “O God that made Adam,” I said, “great is your power and your splendor!” 971

And then I thought of Boethius⁴³, who writes, “A thought may fly so high on the wings of Philosophy as to mount above every element; and when it has gone so far, then the clouds may be seen behind its back,” and all of which I have spoken. 978

³⁷ Rhetorical colors. Figurative language.

³⁸ Alexander of Macedon. Alexander the Great

³⁹ Sir Scipio. See note above at line 514.

⁴⁰ Daedalus, Icarus. Daedalus, archetypal engineer, who constructed wings for his son Daedalus and adhered them to his body with wax, only to see his son fall to earth after the wax melted when he flew too close to the sun. See Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 8. 183-235.

⁴¹ Watling Street. The “old native name for the Roman road running from near London through St. Albans . . . to Wroxeter and

Chester, and from the twelfth century on also applied to the road running SE from London to Canterbury and on to Dover.” (Magoun, cited in RC)

⁴² Red sun’s son. Phoebus Apollo’s son, Phaeton.

⁴³ Boethius. Boethius. Ancius Manlius Severinus (c. 475-525), Roman philosopher, consul and minister to Theodoric, accused of treason. While awaiting execution he wrote *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (*The Consolation of Philosophy*), one of the most important books for the Middle Ages, which Chaucer translated into English (*Boece*).

Then I began to grow confused and said, "I know well that I am here, but whether in body or in spirit truly I know not; but You, God, know!" For not as yet had He sent me clear understanding. Then I thought of Martian⁴⁴, and on the *Anticlaudianus*⁴⁵ as well, and that their description of the entire heavenly region was true, so far as I had experience of it. Therefore I can now believe them. 990

And at this the eagle cried out and said, "Set aside your fancies. Do you wish to learn anything about stars?" 993

"No, in truth," I said, "nothing. And why? Because I am too old now." 995

"Otherwise," he said, "I would have told you the names of the stars, and all the signs of the heavens, too, and what they are." 999

"No matter," I said. 999

"Yes truly, it does matter," he said; "and do you know why? For you read in the poets how the gods have made stars of bird, fish, beast, or man or woman, such as the Raven⁴⁶ or either Bear⁴⁷, or Arionis' fine harp⁴⁸, Castor and Pollux⁴⁹, the Dolphin⁵⁰, or the seven daughters of Atlas⁵¹, and how all these are set in the sky. For though you often hear of them, yet you know not where they are." 1010

"No matter," I said. "There's no need; so God help me, I believe those who write of this matter just as much as if I knew their places here; and they shine so radiantly here, it would ruin all my sight to look on them." 1017

"That may well be," he said. And so he carried me on a while, and then cried out so that I had never heard a thing so loud. "Now up with your head, for all is now well over. Saint Julian⁵²! A good lodging! Behold, here is the House of Fame! Can you not hear what I hear?" 1024

"What?" I asked. 1025

"The great sound," he said, "that rumbles up and down in Fame's House, full of rumors, both of kind words and chidings and composed of both lies and truth. Listen well, it is not whispered, in faith! Do you not hear the great murmur?" 1031

"Yes," I said, "well enough, by God." 1032

⁴⁴ Martian. Martianus Capella, whose work, *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, is an extended discussion on astronomy in relationship to philosophy.

⁴⁵ *Anticlaudianus*. This work, by Alain of Lille (Alanus de Insulis), contains an extended discussion on the configuration of the heavens.

⁴⁶ Raven, The constellation of Corvus.

⁴⁷ Either Bear. Ursa Major or Ursa Minor.

⁴⁸ Arionis' fine harp. The constellation of Lyra.

"And what sound is it like?" 1033

"By Peter⁵³!" I said, "Like the beating of the sea against hollow rocks, when a tempest engulfs the ships, to a person who stands a mile from there and hears the roar. Or else it is like the last mutter after a thunder-clap, when Jove has struck the air. But it makes me sweat for fear." 1042

"No," he said, "don't fear about that: it is nothing that will bite you! Truly you shall have no harm." 1045

And at this word we had come as close to the place as someone might hurl a spear. I knew not how, but he set me squarely on my feet on a street, and said, "Walk on at your ease and take your chance or lot, whatever you shall find in Fame's place." 1053

"Now," I said, "while we have time to speak, before I depart from you, for the love of God, tell me--in truth, I wish to learn it from you--whether this noise that I hear is, as I have heard you tell, from people who live down upon the earth, and comes here in the manner that I heard you describe just now; and whether there is not in all that house yonder a living creature that makes all this loud clamor." 1065

"No," he said, "by Saint Claire⁵⁴, and so surely may God help me! But I will warn you of one thing at which you will marvel. Indeed, you know how every speech comes to the House of Fame yonder; there is no need to tell you again. But now understand this very well: when any speech has come up to the palace, soon it becomes like the same person who spoke those words on earth, whether it is clothed in red or black. And it has so much the very likeness of him who spoke the words that you would believe it is the same body, man or woman, he or she. And is this not marvelous?" 1083

"Yes! by the heavenly King," I said. 1084

And at this word he said, "Farewell, and here I will await you. And may the God of heaven send you grace to learn some good here." 1088

And then I took leave of him and walked on to the palace. 1090

Here ends the second book.

⁴⁹ Castor and Pollux. The constellation of Gemini.

⁵⁰ Dolphin. The constellation of Delphinus.

⁵¹ Daughters of Atlas. The Peiades.

⁵² St. Julian. Julian the Hospitaller, patron saint of travelers and hospitality.

⁵³ Peter. St. Peter, one of Christ's apostles and the first head of the Christian Church.

⁵⁴ St. Clair. A disciple of St. Francis; the order of the Poor Claires is named after her.



Book III

Here begins the third book.

Invocation

Apollo, god of knowledge and light, through your great power please guide this last little book! Not that I desire that poetical art be shown here as a sign of skill; but, because the rhyme is light and unlearned, yet make it somewhat pleasing, even though some verses may be lacking in a syllable, and though I seek to display no art, but only my meaning. And if, divine power, you will help me to show now what is noted in my mind, that is, to describe the House of Fame, you shall see me go swiftly to the nearest laurel that I can find and kiss it, because it is your tree. Now enter directly into my breast! 1109

The Dream

When I had departed from this eagle, I began to look about. And truly, before I proceed further, I will describe to you the overall aspect of house and site; and the manner in which I approached the place, which stood upon so lofty a rock that in Spain there stands none higher. But I climbed up with great labor, yet I was still attentive to see and to observe below at my feet, to find out if I could in any way what type of stone this rock was; for it was like crystallized alum, except that it shone much more brightly. But of what congealed matter it was, I could not readily tell, in truth. But at last I detected that it was every bit a rock of ice, and not of steel. I thought, "By Saint Thomas of Kent⁵⁵, this would be a feeble foundation on which to build so lofty a place! Whoever builds on it should not boast much, so God save me!" 1135

Then I saw the whole side depicted with many names of famous people, who had lived in much happiness and had their renown blown afar. But scarcely could I make out any letters to read their names; for in truth they were so nearly thawed away that one or two letters of every name were melted away, so unfamous had their fame grown. But men say, "what may endure forever?" 1148

Then I pondered in my heart how they were melted away by heat, and not worn away by storms. For on the opposite side of this hill, which lay to the north, I saw how it was written full of names of people that had great renown in ancient times, and still they were as fresh as if men had written them there that very day or the very hour when I

looked upon them. And well I knew the reason; all this writing that I saw was preserved by the shadow of a castle which stood on high; and the writing lay on so cold a spot that heat could not deface it. 1164

Then I went up the hill and found on top an abode such that all the men alive would have no skill to describe the beauty of it, nor could devise a plan to make another such place that would be its match in beauty and so wondrously created. It still astonishes my mind and makes all my brain labor to think on this castle. The great art and beauty, the plan and curious workmanship, I cannot describe to you; my brain does not suffice. 1180

Nevertheless all the substance of it I have yet in my remembrance. For it seemed to me, by Saint Giles, all was made of beryl, without piecing or joints, including castle and tower and hall and every chamber. I saw many clever devices, gargoyles and pinnacles, statues, and finely ornamented recesses for them; and it was as full of windows as flakes fall in great snow-storms. And in each of the pinnacles were also various niches, in which throughout the castle stood all types of minstrels and tellers of tales both tearful and merry, of all those who minister to Fame. 1200

There I heard Orpheus⁵⁶ playing so skillfully upon a harp which sounded clear and beautiful; and by his side sat the harper Arion, Eacides Chiron, and the Welsh bard Glascurion⁵⁷, and many other harpers; and in seats below them sat small harpers with their musical instruments, and stared up at them and counterfeited them like apes, or as art counterfeits nature. 1213

Then I saw standing behind them, far away and all by themselves, many scores of thousands, who made loud music with bagpipes and reed-pipes and many other kinds of pipes, and skillfully played both wind and reed instruments, such as are played at feasts with the roast-meat, and many a flute and liltng-horn and pipes made of green stalks, such as these little shepherd boys have who watch over beasts in the broom bushes. 1226

Then I saw there Atiteris, and Sir Pseustis of Athens, and that Marsyas who lost her skin, on face, neck, and body, because she wished to vie with Apollo, to pipe better than him. 1232

There I saw famous pipers of the German speech, both young and old, learning love-dances, springs, rounds and these foreign capers. In another part I saw standing in a large space certain ones that make bloody sounds with

⁵⁵ St. Thomas of Kent. St. Thomas of Canterbury, whom the pilgrims in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are to visit.

⁵⁶ Orpheus. Quintessential musician whose love for his wife Euridyce was so great that he descended to the underworld to seek her. The Middle English *Sir Orfeo* takes this as its subject.

⁵⁷ Arion, Eacides Chiron...Glascurion. All famed musicians. Chiron the Centaur, was important as the teacher of Asclepius, Achilles, Patroclus, and Jason.

trumpet, clarion, and horn; for those who fight and shed blood are glad to have clarion playing. 1242

There I heard Misenus, of whom Virgil speaks; also I heard Joab trump there, Thiodamas, and others besides. And I saw trumpeting there all those in Aragon and Catalonia that were acquainted with the clarion, who were famous in their time. 1250

On other seats I saw sitting there, playing upon various instruments that I cannot name, more people than there are stars in heaven; of whom I will not now rhyme, considering your pleasure and the time that would be lost. For this you know: time lost can in no way be recovered. There I saw jugglers playing, magicians, wizards and pythonesses, charmeresses, old witches, and sorceresses, who use exorcisms and these mystic fumigations as well; and scholars who well know all this natural magic, and who give their minds and their craft, in certain aspects of the ascendant, to making images, through which magic they may make a person sick or well. 1270

There I saw you, queen Medea, and Circe and Calypso⁵⁸. There I saw Hermes Ballenus, Limote, and Simon Magus⁵⁹ as well. There I saw, and knew by name, those who by such arts gained renown. There I saw the magician Colle⁶⁰ perform upon a table of sycamore a thing strange to describe; I saw him carry a windmill under a walnut-shell. 1281

Why should I make a longer story, from now to doomsday, of all the people that I saw? When I had beheld this entire company and found myself free and not a bit restrained, and had again mused a long while upon these walls of beryl, which shone more brightly than glass, and made all things, in truth, to seem greater than they were, as is natural to Fame, I roamed on until I found on my right the castle-gate, which was so well carved that there was never another such as it; and yet the workmanship was done by chance as often as by pains. There is no need to make you tarry too long, to tell you of the flourishes on this gate, nor of the images, nor of the sculptures, nor how they are termed in the art of masonry, such as corbels full of sculptures. But Lord, how fair it was to the eye, all pointed with beaten gold! 1306

But I went in, and did so without delay. And there I met many people crying, "A gift! Give us a gift! Hold your hands out! God save our own noble lady Fame, the lady of this castle; and all those who desire to have renown through us!" Thus I heard them cry, and they came quickly out of the hall and threw down sterling coins, nobles and others. And some were crowned like kings in arms, with crowns sculpted full of diamond-shaped figures, and on their

garments many ribbons and fringes. Then at last I discovered that they were all heralds and their assistants, who announce the praises of rich people; and every one of them, I can tell you, had thrown upon him a vestment that is called a surcoat, richly embroidered, although they were not alike. But, on my life, I will not go about to describe all the coats-of-arms that they thus wore on their surcoats, for it could not be done; men might make a book about it twenty feet thick, I believe. For truly whoever knew them might have seen there all the coats-of-arms of famous people that have lived in Africa, Europe, and Asia since knighthood first began. 1340

How should I tell all this now? And, likewise, what need is there to tell you of the great room of the castle, that every wall of it and floor and ceiling and everything else was plated half a foot thick with gold? And this gold was not at all alloyed, but to every test as fine as a ducat of Venice (of which all too few are in my pouch)! And all was set with jeweled clasps of the finest fair stones, of which men read in the Lapidary, as thick as grasses grow in a meadow. But it would be entirely too tedious to recite the names; therefore I pass on. 1355

But in this rich, lusty place, which was called Fame's hall, there was not a very large gathering of people, nor any crowding of too great a throng. But on high, on a dais, sitting on an imperial throne made entirely of one ruby, which is called a carbuncle, I saw eternally enthroned a being in woman's form; and never was seen such another formed by Nature. For, to tell the truth, at the first it seemed to me she was so little that the length of a cubit was longer; but before long she stretched out so wondrously that she reached to earth with her feet and with her head touched the sky, where the seven planets shine. And, to my mind, I saw a still greater wonder, looking upon her eyes; but truly I never counted them; for she had as many eyes as there are feathers upon birds, or as were on the four beasts that did honor God's throne, as John writes in the Apocalypse⁶¹. Her hair, which lay in waves and curls, shone before my eyes like burnished gold. And, to tell the truth, she also had as many projecting ears and tongues as there be hairs on beasts. And on her feet truly I saw partridge's wings growing. 1392

But Lord, the gems and riches that I saw adorning this goddess! And Lord, the heavenly melody of songs full of concord that I heard sung about her throne, so that all the palace walls rang! So sang the mighty Muse, she who is called Calliope⁶², and her eight sisters as well, so gracious in their visages. And evermore and eternally the people sang of Fame, as I heard then,

⁵⁸ Medea, and Circe and Calypso. All three are women with magical powers and seductresses.

⁵⁹ Hermes Ballenus, Limote, and Simon Magus. Like the women named before them, they are also deceivers of various sorts.

⁶⁰ Colle. An English magician who practiced his arts in France.

⁶¹ Apocalypse. The last book of the Bible, also named Revelation.

⁶² Calliope. The Muse of epic poetry.

“Blessed are you and your name,
Goddess of renown and Fame! 1406

Then at last I noticed, as I turned my eyes upward, that this noble queen bore on her shoulders both the coat-of-arms and the name of those who had wide glory, Alexander, and Hercules, who lost his life because of a shirt! Thus I found this goddess sitting in dignity, honor, and splendor, all of which I will leave a while, to tell you of other things. 1418

Then I saw standing on either side, straight down from the dais to the broad doors, many metal pillars, which shone not very brightly. But though they were of no great splendor, nevertheless they were made for noble use and great significance; and I saw honorable and reverend people standing upon the columns, of whom I will try to tell you. 1428

First of all I saw standing on high, upon a column of lead and fine iron, him of the school of Saturn, the Hebrew, the ancient Josephus⁶³, who told of Jewish history; and upon his lofty shoulders he bore up the fame of the Jewish people. And by him stood seven others, wise and worthy to be named, helping him to bear the burden so great and so heavy. And because they wrote of battles as well as other ancient wonders therefore this column of which I tell you was made of both lead and iron. For iron is the metal of Mars, god of battle; and the lead, in truth, is the metal of Saturn, that turns in so large an orbit. 1450

Then in every row stood forth some whom I could recognize, though I tell them not in order, lest I make you wait too long. These of whom I shall speak I truly saw standing there. Upon a strong iron pillar, stained all over with tiger’s blood, was one from Toulouse who is named Statius⁶⁴, who bore the renown of Thebes upon his shoulders, and the name of cruel Achilles⁶⁵ also. 1463

And in truth there stood beside him, so high on an iron pillar, the great Homer⁶⁶; and Dares and Dictys⁶⁷ in front of him, and Lollius⁶⁸ and Guido delle Colonne⁶⁹ and the

⁶³ Josephus. Flavius Josephus (37-95A.D.), Romanized Jew, author of *History of the Jews*, an important source for the relations between the Romans and Jews in the time of Christ.

⁶⁴ Statius. Roman poet and author of the *Thebiad*, indirectly one of Chaucer’s primary sources for *Troilus and Criseyde*. Lucan. Roman poet and author of *Bellum Civile*, also known as *Pharsalia*, on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.

⁶⁵ Achilles. Greek champion, invulnerable except his heel, who defeated the otherwise invincible Hector after the latter had killed Achilles’ beloved Patroclus in battle.

⁶⁶ Homer. Author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which tell the stories of the Trojan War and of Odysseus’ long journey home to Ithaca after the war.

⁶⁷ Dares and Dictys. Authors of histories of the Trojan war, supposedly sources for Homer, available to Chaucer in Latin translations, both of which are now believed to be forgeries: Dares Phrygius, *Daretis Phrygii de excidio Trojae historia*; Dictys Cretensis, *Ephemeris de Historia Belli Trojani*.

English Geoffrey⁷⁰ also. And each of these was busy to bear up the fame of Troy, and so heavy was it that to bear it was no sport. But still I fully discerned that there was a little ill-will among them. One held that Homer’s story was just a fable, and that he spoke lies, and composed lies in his poems, and that he favored the Greeks. 1480

Then I saw standing on a pillar of bright tinned iron that Latin poet Virgil, who for many years has borne up the fame of pious Aeneas. And next to him on a pillar of copper was the clerk of Venus, Ovid⁷¹, who sowed so broadly the name of the great god of Love. And there he well bore his renown upon this pillar, as high as I could see; for this hall of which I speak had grown in height, length and breadth, far greater, a thousand times, than it had first been; that I saw well. 1496

Then I saw close by on a column made of stern iron the great poet Sir Lucan⁷²; and he bore upon his shoulders, as high as I could see, the fame of Julius and Pompey. And by him stood all these scholars who wrote of the mighty deeds of Rome; if I should tell their names, I would need to delay too long. 1506

And on a pillar of sulphur next to him stood Sir Claudian⁷³, as if he were in a gloomy frenzy, to tell the truth; he bore up all the renown of hell of Pluto, and of Proserpine, queen of the dark torments.

Why should I tell more? The hall was as full of those who wrote old histories as trees are of rooks’ nests. But it would be confusing to hear all the exploits that they wrote of, and what their books were named. 1519

But while I beheld this sight, I heard a noise swiftly approaching, as if it were of bees in a hive toward the time of their swarming; for the entire world, it seemed to me such a murmuring. Then I looked about and saw that there came entering the hall a great company, and from various lands, of all sorts and conditions, poor and rich, that dwell on earth under the moon. And as soon as they had come into the hall,

⁶⁸ Lollius. Also named as one of the sources of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Lollius seems to be a fictitious invention by Chaucer, a designation for Boccaccio and/or Petrarch (both relevant sources for Chaucer’s works), or some other lesser-known author.

⁶⁹ Guido de Colonne. Author of *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, which sets out to correct Homer’s account of the Trojan War.

⁷⁰ English Geoffrey. Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1100-1154), author of *Historiae regum Britanniae*, a major source of Arthurian legend.

⁷¹ Ovid. Most famous for his *Metamorphoses*, he also wrote *The Art of Love (Ars Amatoria)* and the *Heroides*, one of the primary sources for Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*.

⁷² Lucan. Roman poet and author of *Bellum Civile*, also known as *Pharsalia*, on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.

⁷³ Claudian. Classical Roman poet, author of *The Rape of Proserpine*.

they fell on their knees before this noble queen, and said, "Of your grace, bright lady, grant each of us a request!" And to some of them she granted it at once, and some she refused flatly, and to some she granted the very contrary of their request. But truly I tell you I knew not what her reason was, for I knew full well that each one of this company had deserved good fame, although they were treated differently; just as her sister, lady Fortune, is ever accustomed to treat men. 1548

Now listen how she requited those who prayed her grace; and yet all this company spoke truth and nothing false. 1553

"Madame," they said, "we are people that here beseech you to grant us now fair renown and let our achievements have that name; in full recompense for good works, give us good reputation." 1558

"I deny it to you," she said without delay. "You get no good fame from me, by heaven, and therefore go your ways." 1561

Alas and alack!" they cried. "Tell us, what may be your reason?" 1563

"Because I wish not," she said. "No person shall speak good or ill of you, in truth, neither this nor that." And at that she summoned her messenger who was in the hall, and ordered him, on pain of blinding, to go speedily and summon Aeolus, the god of winds: "You shall find him in Thrace, and tell him to bring his clarion that is diverse in its tone, the one that is called Clear Laud, with which he is accustomed to herald those whom I please to have praised; and bid him also to bring his other clarion, which everywhere is called Slander, with which he is accustomed to dishonor and to shame those whom I wish." 1582

The messenger went speedily and found where, in a rocky cave in a country called Thrace, this Aeolus held the winds in harsh constraint and oppressed them under him until they roared like bears, so sorely did he bind and press them. 1590

This messenger cried on high, "Rise up," he said, "and rush quickly until you come to my lady; and take your clarions with you, and hurry forth." And at once he delivered his clarions to a man called Triton to carry, and let go a certain wind, that blew so high and hideously that it left not a cloud in the entire high and wide sky. This Aeolus delayed nowhere until he had come to Fame's feet, and with him the man named Triton; and there he stood, still as a stone. 1605

And there came directly another huge company of good people, and cried, "Lady, grant us good fame, and let our deeds be known so, in the honor of nobility, and so may God bless your soul! For since we have well deserved it, it is right that we be requited accordingly. 1614

"On my life," she said, "it shall not be; good works shall not help you, to get good fame from me. But do you know what? I grant you that you shall have a cursed fame, a bad reputation, and a worse name, even if you have deserved fair praise. Now go your ways, you are finished. And you, Lord Aeolus," she said, let us see now. Take now your trump that is called Quick Slander, and blow their renown so that every creature shall speak evil and cursedness of them, instead of what is good and worthy. For you shall trump the contrary of what they have done fairly or well." 1630

"Alas," I thought, "what bad fortune these sorry creatures have! For among the entire crowd shall they thus be shamed, though they are guiltless. But what! It must be." 1635

What did this Aeolus do but take out his black trumpet of brass, fouler than the Devil; and he blew this trumpet as if he would overthrow all the world, so that this foul trumpet's noise went throughout every land as swift as cannonball from a cannon when fire is touched to the powder. And such a smoke came out of the end of his foul trumpet: black, blue, dark red, greenish, as comes on high from a chimney where lead is melted. 1649

And one thing more I saw well, that the farther it went the greater it grew, as a river from its source; and it stunk like the pit of hell. Alas, thus guiltless was their shame sounded on every tongue! 1656

Then came the third company and hastened to the dais, and immediately fell on their knees and said, "We are all people that have rightfully deserved fame, and we pray you that it may be proclaimed just as it is, and blown forth." 1664

She said, "I grant it, because it pleases me now that your good works should be known; and, in spite of all your foes, you shall have yet better praise than you merit, and soon. Aeolus," she cried, "set aside your trumpet that is so black, and take out your other trumpet that is called Laud, and blow it so that their fame may spread nimbly throughout the world, but not too speedily, only so that it may finally be known." 1676

"Gladly, my lady," he said, and immediately drew out his trumpet of gold and set it to his lips, and blew it east, west, north, south, as loud as any thunder, so that every person marveled at it, so widely ran the sound before it ceased. And for certain all the breath that issued from his trumpet's mouth smelled as if a potful of balm were placed amid a basket full of roses. This favor he did for their renown. 1683

And upon that I detected that the fourth band was coming, but certainly they were amazingly few, and they stood in a row and said, "In truth, bright lady, we have done well with all our power, but we care not for glory. For God's love,

hide our works and our name; for surely we have done them out of goodness and for no other type of thing." 1699

"I grant your request," said she; "let your works die!" 1701

"With that I turned my head and soon saw the fifth band, who bowed down to this lady and fell on their knees immediately, and then all implored her to hide their good works also, and said they gave not a leek for fame or such renown; for they had labored out of piety and love of God, and wished nothing of fame. 1712

"What!" she said. "Are you mad? And do you think of doing good and having no glory for it? Do you have scorn to have my name? No! Then you shall live, every one of you! Aeolus," she said, "blow your trumpet, I command, and do so immediately, and ring out in music the deeds of this company so that all the world may hear of them." And he blew their praise so clearly in his golden clarion that the sound went throughout the world sharply and softly; but at last it mounted to the sky. 1726

Then came the sixth band and began to cry earnestly to Fame in this manner: "Mercy, dear lady! To tell the very truth, we have done neither this nor that, but have been idle all our life. But nevertheless we pray to have as fair a fame and great renown and glory as they that have done noble deeds and achieved all their will, in love as in other matters; albeit never was brooch or ring or anything else sent to us from women, nor once did they think in their hearts to make us even friendly company, but would have liked to see us in our graves. Yet let us seem so to the people that all may judge of us that women loved us madly. 1747

"It shall do us as much good, and help our hearts to balance ease and travail, as if we had won it with labor. For that had been dearly bought honor at the cost of all our ease. And you must do for us yet more; let us be held also as worthy, wise and good, and rich, and lucky in love, for the love of God who sits above. Though we may not have the bodies of women, yet, may God save you, let men fasten on us the credit! That shall suffice us to have the fame! 1762

She said, "By my word, I grant it! Now Aeolus, let us see, delay not. Take out your trumpet of gold, and blow as they have asked, so that everybody may think them at ease, though they may find themselves in a bad situation." This Aeolus blew it so loud that it was known throughout the world. 1770

Then soon came the seventh crowd, and all fell on their knees and said, "Lady, grant us without delay the same thing, the same favor that you have granted for this last company." 1775

"Fie on every one of you!" she said. "You gluttonous swine, idle wretches full of the rotten vice of sloth! What, false thieves, do you wish to be famed as good, and deserve none of it and never cared about it? Men ought rather to hang you! You are like the tired cat that would gladly have fish; but what do you think? 1784

"He would not wet his paws! Bad luck on your pates and on mine as well, if I grant it, or give you favor, to extol you! Aeolus, king of Thrace," she said, "go and blow this company directly a sorry bit of grace. And do you know what? Just as I shall tell you without delay. Say, 'These are those who wish to have honor and do nothing to work for it; and do no good, and yet have praise. And they desire that men should think that the beautiful Isolt⁷⁴ herself could not refuse them love, and yet she that grinds at a hand-mill is entirely too good to ease their hearts.'" 1799

This Aeolus started up immediately, and with his black clarion blew out a sound as loud as winds bellowing in hell, and in truth the sound was as full of mocks as ever apes were of grimaces. 1806

And that went around the entire world, so that every person began to shout at them and to laugh as if they were mad, as they found them so ridiculous! 1810

Then came another band, that had done treachery, harm, the greatest wickedness any heart could imagine; and prayed her to grant them fair fame, and not to disgrace them, but blow them glory and good name by the clarion. "No, certainly," she said; "that would be a mistake. Though there may be no justice in me, I care not to do it now; I will not grant you this." 1822

Then a crowd came leaping in, rapping every person about on the pate until the entire hall resounded; and they said, "Sweet and dear lady, we are such people as we shall tell you. In good truth we are rogues, every one of us, and delight in wickedness, just as good people delight in goodness. And we rejoice to be known as rogues and full of vice and sins. Therefore here in a row we pray that our fame be known in all things just as it really is." 1837

"Truly, I grant it you," she said. "But who are you who say this, and wear a stripe on your hose and such a bell on your tippet?" 1841

Madame," he said, "to tell the truth, I am that very rogue that burned the temple of Isis in the city of Athens!" 1845

"Why," she said, "did you do that?" 1846

"By my thrift, Madame," he said, "I would gladly have had glory just as other people in the town had, though they were

⁷⁴ Isolt. Lover of Tristram, though she was married to King Mark of Cornwall, in the Arthurian tradition.

famous for their excellence and their moral virtue. I thought, rogues have as great a fame, though it may be only for roguery, as good people for goodness. And since I cannot have the one, I will not forgo the other. And to get the payment from Fame I set the temple afire. 1858

“Now let our renown be blown quickly, as ever you hope for joy!” 1860

“Gladly,” she said. “Aeolus, do you not hear their prayer?” 1862

“Yes, Madame,” he said, “I hear well. And I will trumpet it, by God!” And he quickly took his black trumpet and puffed and blew until the sound was at the world’s end. 1867

With that I turned around; for one who stood right at my back spoke to me kindly, it seemed to me, and said, “Friend, what is your name? Have you come here to ask for renown?” 1872

“No, in truth, friend!” I said. “Mercy! I did not come here for any such cause, by my life! It suffices me that no person may have my name on his lips, even as if I were dead. I myself best know how I stand; for whatsoever I think or suffer I myself will swallow it all--or certainly the greater part, so far as I am able.” 1882

“But what are you doing here then?” he said. 1883

I said, “That I will tell, the reason why I stand here: to learn some new tidings, some new things, I know not what; tidings of this or that, of love, or such glad things. For certainly he who caused me to come here told me that I should both see and hear wondrous things in this place. But these are no such tidings as I speak of. 1895

“No?” he said. 1895

And I answered, “No, in truth! For since I first had understanding, I always knew that people have desired fame and glory and renown diversely. But truly until now I knew not how or where Fame dwelt; nor yet what kind of creature she is, in appearance or quality, nor the manner of her judgments, until the time I came here.” 1906

“Lo, what is this that you have heard, which you just now spoke of?” he asked me. “But now it does not matter; for I see well what you wish to hear. Come forth, stand here no longer, and without doubt I will lead you into another place where you shall hear many things.” 1915

Then I went forth with him out of the castle, and saw in a valley below the castle close by such a house that the House of Daedalus, which is called the Labyrinth, was not half so wondrously and curiously fashioned. And always swift as thought this wondrous house whirled around, so that it never stood still. And there came out from it such a roar that if the

house had stood upon the Oise, I believe truly that it might easily have been heard it as far as Rome. And the noise that I heard there went on for the entire world like the roar of the stone which is shot from the catapult. This whole house was made of twigs, yellow, green, red, and some white, such as men whittle for these cages, or make into these wicker baskets for carrying bread or to be carried on the back or by a horse; so that with the gusts and the whirring of the twigs, this house was full of squeaks and creakings and much commotion. And this house also had as many entries as there are leaves on trees in the summer when they are green; and still in the roof one could see a thousand holes, and more yet, to let out the sound easily. 1950

And the doors were open wide the entire day and night. There is no porter there to hinder any kind of tidings from passing in; and there is never quiet in that place, never without tidings, either aloud or whispered. And all the corners of the house are full of whisperings and prattling of war, of peace, marriages, rest, labor, journeys, abidings, of death, life, love, hate, accord, enmity, of praise, learning, of gains, of health, sickness, of buildings, of fair winds, tempests, pestilence of human and beast; of various changes of estate for men and nations; of trust, fear, jealousy, wit, profit, folly, of plenty, and of great famine, of ruin, of cheap times and dear; of good or ill government, of fire, of various events. 1976

And rest assured it was not small, this house of which I write; for it was sixty miles in length. Though the timber was not strong, the house was still founded to last while it should please Chance, which is the mother of tidings, just as the sea is the mother of springs and founts. And it was shaped like a cage. 1985

“Surely,” I said, “in all the years of my life I never saw such a house.” And as I marveled at it, I noticed that my eagle was perched high upon a rock nearby; and I went straight to him and said, “I pray you, for God’s love, wait for me a while, and let me see what wonders are in this place. For perhaps I may yet learn some good from it, or hear something that would be pleasant to me, before I go.” 1999

“By Peter, that is my intention!” he said to me. “Therefore I am waiting. But certainly I tell you one thing: unless I bring you in there, without doubt you shall never know the trick to enter it, so rapidly it whirls around. But since Jove through his grace, as I have said, wishes to give you solace with such matters, strange sights and tidings, to drive away your heaviness, such pity he has on your troubles, which you endure meekly. And know yourself quite hopeless of all joy, since Fortune has unjustly made the fruition of all your heart’s ease to languish and be on the point of bursting, since he of his great kindness will do you pleasure, though it may be but little, and gave express command, to which I am obedient, to assist you all I can, and guide and direct you

properly to where you may hear most tidings, therefore you shall directly learn many here.” 2025

With this word without delay he caught me up between his toes and brought me in through a window of this house, it seemed to me; and at that the house seemed to stop, and revolved not at all; and he set me down on the floor. But never was seen, and never again shall be, such a congregation of people as I saw roaming around, some within, some without; surely there are not left in the world so many formed by Nature, nor so many creatures dead, so that scarcely had I one foot's breadth of room in that place. And every person whom I saw was whispering secretly in another's ear a fresh piece of news, or else openly spoke thus and said, “Do you not know what has happened lately or now?” 2048

“No,” said the other, “tell me.” And then he told him this and that, and swore it was true, “Thus has he said,” “Thus he does,” “Thus it shall be,” “Thus I heard tell,” “That shall be found,” “That I dare wager”; so that all the people alive have not the skill to relate the things I heard, some aloud, some in the ear. But the most wondrous was this; when one had heard a thing, he came forth to another and immediately told him the same thing that he had heard before it was a moment older, but in the telling he made the tidings somewhat greater than ever they had been. 2067

And as soon as he had departed from him, the second met a third; and before he was done, he told him everything; whether the tidings were true or false, he would tell them nevertheless, and with more additions still than at first. Thus every word went from mouth to mouth in all directions, always increasing, just as a fire will kindle and spread from a spark thrown amiss, until a whole city is burned up. 2080

And when that story was fully spread, and had grown greater on every tongue than it ever had been, soon it went up to a window to go out; but before it could pass out there, it crept out at some crevice and flew forth directly and quickly. And sometimes then I saw a lie and a sober truth at the same time by chance draw near to pass out of a window. And when they met there, they were both checked and neither could go out, each so crowded the other, until each cried shrilly, “Let me go first!” 2097

“No, but let me! And so you will do so, I here assure you that I shall never part from you, but be your own sworn brother. We will both so mingle together that no person, no matter how angry, can get only one of us, but both at once, all without his permission, whether we come by morning or night, or summoned loudly or quietly whispered.” Thus I saw falsehood and truth compounded fly abroad as one piece of news. 2109

Thus all the tidings squeezed out of holes straight to the goddess, and she named each according to its nature, and allotted to each its duration, some to grow and diminish quickly, as does the fair white moon, and let them go. There I could see winged wonders fly fast, twenty thousand in a company, as Aeolus blew them about. 2120

And, Lord, at all times this house was full of shipmen and pilgrims, with bags brimful of lies, mingled with true tidings or alone by themselves. And I saw, ah, many thousand scores of these pardoners, couriers and messengers, with boxes crammed as full of lies as any vessel ever was with dregs. And I went about as fast as I could go, and gave all my mind to entertain myself and to learn, as well as to hear news which I had heard of some country (which for my part shall not now be told, for truly there is no need; other people can sing it better than I can, for all must come out, sooner or later, all the sheaves in the barn). 2140

Then I heard a great noise in a corner of the hall where men were telling tidings of love, and I began to look there; for I saw every creature running as fast as he could, and each cried, “What is it?” And some said I know not what. And when they were all in a mass, those behind began to leap up, and crowded and climbed up on the others, and lifted up their noses and eyes, and trod hard on others' feet, and stamped, as men do after eels. 2154

At last I saw a man whose name I know not, but he seemed to be a man of great authority. 2158

[Unfinished.]⁷⁵

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⁷⁵ Unfinished. Though some have speculated that this ending might actually complete the poem (that the man of great authority is actually in the audience and is to speak for some occasion), it is

still generally accepted that the poem is incomplete and might have been leading to a collection of tales, such as in *Legend of Good Women* or *The Canterbury Tales*.

The first book opens with a kind of prologue (actually so marked and called in earlier editions) in which the author speculates on the causes of dreams; avers that never any man had such a dream as he had on the tenth of December; and prays the God of Sleep to help him to interpret the dream, and the Mover of all things.Â It finds the poet close to the House of Fame, built on a rock of ice engraved with names, many of which are half-melted away. Entering the gorgeous palace, he finds all manner of minstrels and historians; harpers, pipers, and trumpeters of fame; magicians, jugglers, sorcerers, and many others.