

*The House of Fame*

## INTRODUCTION TO 'THE HOUSE OF FAME'

The poem was probably composed in about 1379 and, although speculation exists concerning the possible occasion for its writing, none seems to me worth recording. With the fantastic subject matter, exuberance of composition and wild admixture of the heroic and the downright funny of this poem in mind, it seems Gradgrindish to introduce it initially with reference to its sources. Briefly, then: the poem is regarded as transitional between Chaucer's 'French' and 'Italian' periods. Dante provides the source for several important elements in the poem, but the schema follows the general prescription for the French love vision. The ascent to the House of Fame echoes the ascent to Purgatory; the invocation to Apollo in the Proem to Book Three closely follows a Dantean invocation by which Chaucer was doubtless inspired to claim a lofty role for poetry; the Eagle, together with his science, is also drawn from Dante, but comically metamorphosed; and so on. Ovid and Virgil remain constant sources for classical detail. Other sources – and there are many – are traced in Robinson's Notes, but the poem is very much Chaucer's own.

Although 'The House of Fame' is set out in three 'Books', it is best to look upon its amazing semi-autobiographical poetical process as falling naturally into five sections:

1. Invocation: the Temple of Venus and summary of the *Aeneid*, with the appearance of the Eagle (Book One).
2. Space journey in the Eagle's talons, with in-flight natural science lecture, towards the House of Fame (Book Two).
3. Ascent to, and description of, the House of Fame and its inhabitants (ll. 1091–1519).
4. The judgements of Fame (variously called a Lady, a Queen

and a Goddess) on different applicants for fame (ll.1520-1868).

5. To the Hall of Rumour, where truth and lies fight together to escape (ll.1869-2158).

The transitions from each part to the next are managed with the skill of a practised narrative poet. The conclusions of Books One and Two markedly achieve the kind of suspense aimed at by good serial writers: at the end of Book One the Eagle appears in downward flight, but begins his positive engagement in the poem only at the beginning of Book Two, and at the end of Book Two, the Eagle deposits the poet amid the 'huge uproar' of the House of Fame, which is not described until the beginning of Book Three. The transitions at lines 1520 and 1869 are abrupt surprises, sprung on the reader when he or she has somehow been made to feel that the previous subject is just about exhausted.

A distinguishing feature of the poem is the easy but always surprising alternation between the heroic and the comic, and the fruitful fusion of the two at need, with subtle satiric effect. Chaucer views everything from the standpoint of the narrator, who on the one hand seems an earnest, guileless and even obtuse inquirer, and on the other really knows what is going on and interprets it in an original way. At the outset the confusing attempt to define different sorts of dream and, in the following Invocation, the comic curse on those who misinterpret the dream the poet is about to relate, set the ambiguous tone. Then the double joke at the start of the dream itself – the reference to the longest night of the year and the appalling effort imposed on a pilgrim by a two-mile walk to a shrine – is followed by a condensed re-telling of the *Aeneid*, with emphasis upon Dido, who for the Middle Ages was the major heroic figure of that epic.

The Eagle's domination of Book Two must be enjoyed as a comic *tour de force*, in which the key structural matters of the poem are clearly stated. The message the Eagle brings the poet from Jove is that, although Chaucer in his writings has served Love as best he could, he has done it so far by reference only to books; Jove has the power to give him real illumination on the

subject by sending him, with the Eagle's help, to the House of Fame. That real illumination we never receive; Caxton's twelve-line repair to the conclusion when he printed the poem in 1483 (see Notes) ambiguously assumes a positive ending, but modern critics, although many agree in finding the poem loose in construction and uncertain in ending, see Chaucer's point in leaving us with the unresolved juxtaposition of the House of Fame and the Hall of Rumour. I like J. A. W. Bennett's clarifying hallucination (*Chaucer's Book of Fame*, p.122): 'The Palace proper is a royal broadcasting station, the adjacent, but subordinate, house of twigs a kind of office for miscellaneous business.'

If we accept that the final message of the poem concerns the nature of Fame, determined as it is by humankind's not necessarily logical or moral reactions to the vicissitudes of Fortune, and that its application is general and not limited to Love, we may be satisfied. But we shall hardly fail to hurrah either the Eagle's farcical self-admiration and his dread that his lecture on the properties of sound may be under-prized, or the poet's ability, even while dizzy with whizzing through space in those talons, to refuse a further lecture, this time on astronomy. In the next verbal collision in the poem – Lady Fame's successive confrontations in her court with applicants for her blessing – the rhetoric is diluted by the force of colloquial speech, and we have the august lady dispensing eternal justice and injustice in the language of popular *fabliau* which we shall meet again when the common sorts of bird offer their opinions on the wooing eagles in 'The Parliament of Birds'.

## THE HOUSE OF FAME\*

### BOOK ONE

May God turn all our dreams to good!  
For it's a marvel, by the Rood,  
Which gives me musings infinite,  
What causes dreams by day or night;  
And why fulfilment follows some,  
But from others does not come;  
Why one's a vision, a phantasy,  
And one reveals a prophecy,  
One to delude, one to foretell,  
Doing this man ill and that man well.  
Phantasy or oracle, I  
Can never tell the reason why.  
Let him who better knows the cause  
Explain it, for my own mind draws  
No sense from it. It is not fit  
On such affairs to tire my wit;  
On different meanings signified,  
What gaps in time the dreams divide,  
What causes them, why men surmise  
This reason more than that applies;  
As if dreams were the consequence  
Of people's special temperaments.  
Or maybe, as some people guess,  
They come from brainsick feebleness,  
Or self-denial or illness, or  
Prison or brothel, sorrows sore;  
Or else their normal way of life  
Is upset by some inner strife,

### The House of Fame

As when a man's obsessed by books,  
Or melancholy dogs his looks,  
Or doubt and fear so plague his mind  
That no one can a remedy find;  
Or else, in some, that contemplation,  
Or even holy meditation,  
Causes such dreams as often as not;  
Or that the hard and cruel lot  
Of lovers whose passions make them fret,  
With too much doubt or hope beset,  
Brings on through their emotion's course  
Dreams of visionary force;  
Or else the spirits with their might  
Make men and women dream at night;  
Or does the soul, by Nature's way  
Being perfect, as men tend to say,  
And able to see events to come,  
Accordingly warn everyone,  
By vision or by phantasy,  
What their fortune next will be,  
Unlike the flesh that lacks the might  
To understand these things aright  
Because they too obscurely show?  
Why such things be, I do not know.  
May scholars of this and other themes  
Discover all the truth of dreams!  
But I shall not in any way  
Declare my mind except to say  
This prayer: May the Holy Rood  
Turn every dream we have to good!  
For never since my life began,  
Nor in the life of other man,  
Was dream so marvellous and fair  
As that I dreamed, I do declare,  
Upon the tenth day of December;\*  
And everything that I remember  
Of it I shall report to you.\*

## Love Visions

### Invocation\*

Before I start, so trust me true,  
 I'll offer up an invocation  
 With especial veneration  
 Most promptly to the god of sleep,  
 Whose rocky cavern is his keep 70  
 Above the flow of Lethe's stream,\*  
 A hell-flood foul in the extreme,  
 Beside which the Cimmerians\* dwell.  
 There sleeps this gloomy god of hell  
 With all his thousand sleepy sons,  
 By custom ever-sleeping ones.  
 And to this god of whom I tell  
 I pray he'll make me prosper well  
 When I recount my dream aright –  
 If dreams are subject to his might! 80  
 May he who moves and governs all  
 That is and was and ever shall  
 Be, give delight to those who hear,  
 In all the dreams they have this year!  
 And may they also stand in grace  
 With those they love, and have the place  
 They wish to be in! May they be  
 Secure from shame and poverty,  
 And from bad luck and grief and pain!  
 Whatever pleases, let them gain, 90  
 And take it well and scorn it not,  
 Nor wrongly rate it in their thought  
 Through being malicious in intent!  
 But if, presumptuously bent  
 Through hate or scorn or jealousy,  
 Contempt or tricks or villainy,  
 To rate it wrong, I pray to God  
 That, dream he barefoot, dream he shod,  
 Every misfortune any man  
 Has suffered since the world began 100  
 Shall come to him before he dies.

## The House of Fame

May he deserve it in such wise  
 As Croesus,\* famous Lydian king,  
 High on a gibbet hung to swing.  
 That was how he met his end;  
 His vision he did not comprehend.  
 That's the prayer he has from me;  
 I am no better in charity!  
 I bade you listen when I spoke:  
 Hear what I dreamed before I woke. 110

### The Dream

On December's tenth day I  
 At night to slumber went to lie  
 Exactly where I always lay  
 To sleep, and went off straight away,  
 Like one whose walk had worn him out  
 On two miles' pilgrimage devout  
 To Holy Leonard's\* body tomb,  
 Whose power would lighten all his gloom.  
 But as I slept, I dreamt I was  
 Inside a temple built of glass, 120  
 In which more statues made of gold  
 Stood on bases manifold,  
 More splendidly emblazoned shrines  
 With pinnacles in jewelled designs,  
 More portraits fine to a degree,  
 More images carved artfully  
 In antique style, than ever I saw.  
 But where I was, it is most sure  
 I knew not, but I was aware  
 That it belonged to Venus\* there,  
 That temple; for immediately  
 In portraiture I saw where she  
 Was floating naked in the sea.  
 And she was crowned, as I could see,  
 With a rose garland white and red,  
 And with a comb to comb her head. 130

## Love Visions

I saw her doves there, how they flew;  
I saw her blind son Cupid\* too,  
And Vulcan\* with his face all brown.

But as I wandered up and down  
I found that on a wall there was  
Upon a tablet made of brass  
Inscribed the following: 'If I can,  
I now shall sing arms and the man.  
The destined knight of mighty fame  
Who fugitive from Troy first came  
Much suffering to Italian land,  
And trod Lavinium's\* river-strand.'  
And then at once the tale began  
As I shall tell you, every man.

First I saw Troy's ruinous fall.  
Sinon the Greek\* achieved it all  
By putting on a lying face  
And telling falsehoods vile and base,  
Which got the horse let in to Troy,  
And lost the Trojans all their joy.  
And next was shown there how the fort  
Of Ilium\* under attack was brought,  
And taken, and King Priam killed  
With Polites-his son, both stilled  
By Pyrrhus in his savage spleen.  
I saw how Venus, love's own queen,  
Seeing the citadel aflame,  
Down from the heavens swiftly came  
And told her son Aeneas to flee;  
And how he fled, and so got free,  
Taking, in spite of all the throng,  
Anchises\* his old father along,  
Bearing him on his back away,  
Crying 'Alas! and woe the day!'  
And old Anchises in his hand  
Bore the gods of their native land  
Which in the burning were not lost.

And next I saw in all that host

## The House of Fame

Creusa, Lord Aeneas's wife,  
Whom he loved as much as life,  
With their little son Iulus,\*  
And also with Ascanius,  
Fleeing and crying out their dread;  
'Twas sad to hear them as they fled.  
Then running through a forest, they  
Turned off. Creusa missed the way,  
And thus, alas! was lost, but how  
She died I can't pretend to know.  
I saw him search, and how her ghost  
Told him to flee the Greekish host,  
And said he must in Italy  
Without fail find his destiny.  
And when her spirit there appeared,  
I felt great pity when I heard  
Her beg Aeneas in her despair  
To guard their little son with care.  
There carved, I also saw how he,  
His father and his company,  
Took ship, set sail and left the strand  
For Italy, his promised land,  
By the straightest route that they could draw.  
You, cruel Juno, there I saw,  
The Lord of Heaven Jupiter's wife,  
Who have detested all your life  
The blood of Troy, with maddened eye  
Run forth distracted and then cry  
On Aeolus, the god of wind,\*  
To blow a gale of every kind,  
Strongly enough to drown and drench  
Lord and lady, groom and wench;  
Yes, drown the whole Trojan nation,  
And none of them to have salvation.

I saw there such a tempest wake  
That every heart would shudder and shake  
To see it painted on the wall.

And there I saw, amongst it all,

## Love Visions

You Venus, painted, lady dear,  
Weeping with grief and many a tear,  
Praying to Jupiter on high  
To let that fleet in safety lie,  
And save Aeneas, Prince of Troy,  
Since he was her darling boy.

I saw Jove kiss her; then he swore  
To Venus he would still the uproar.  
I watched the tempest come to rest  
And saw Aeneas, much distressed,  
Sail on until he left the sea  
And came to Carthage secretly.

I saw Aeneas next day set  
Forth with Achates,\* and they met  
The goddess Venus on the way,  
Superbly garbed in the array  
In which a noble huntress dresses,  
With breezes blowing in her tresses.  
When he'd seen through her disguise,  
Aeneas expressed his grief with sighs,  
Lamenting that his ships so fair  
Were sunk or lost, he knew not where.  
Then Venus solaced him with pity,  
And sent him into Carthage city,\*  
Where she said that he would find  
The company he'd left behind.

To give this matter little space,  
She caused Aeneas to win such grace  
With Dido, who was there the Queen,  
That quickly she with ardour keen  
Became his love and let him do  
All that is to marriage due.  
Why should I strain my speaking skill?  
Or paint in words by force of will  
Such talk of love? That cannot be:  
I lack that special faculty.  
Besides, to say exactly how  
They came to close acquaintance now

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## The House of Fame

Would take too long for me to tell,  
Too long for you to listen as well.

I saw Aeneas painted there,  
Telling Dido all the care  
And woes he suffered while at sea.

And then was painted there how she  
Created him with just one word  
Her life, her love, her joy, her lord,  
And did him every reverence,  
Lavishing on him all expense  
That any woman might perform,  
Considering all was in due form,  
As he declared; she thereby deemed  
That he was virtuous, as he seemed.  
Alas! What harm face values do  
When in essence they're untrue!  
For he to her a traitor was,  
And hence she killed herself, alas!

How woman is in error, lo!  
To love a man she does not know!  
By Christ, it's often thus: Behold!  
All that glitters is not gold.

For may I keep my head intact,  
But under godly looks in fact  
May be concealed a wicked vice.

So let no one of taste precise  
Take on a lover for looks alone,  
Or speech, or manner, or friendly tone.

For every woman may discover  
The essential nature of her lover,  
Which makes him seem what all admire  
Until he gets his whole desire;  
And then some reason he will find  
To swear that she has been unkind,  
Furtive, untrue or underhand.  
I say all this of Aeneas and  
Queen Dido with her foolish lust,  
Who too soon loved a guest on trust.

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## Love Visions

Therefore I quote this true proverb:

'He who really knows a herb

May safely apply it to his eye.'

That saying for certain is no lie.

But let us of Aeneas tell

How to treachery he fell,

Deserting Dido brutally.

So when she knew decisively

That he would leave her faithlessly

And go from her to Italy,

She wrung her hands and cried, 'Alas!

What woe for me is come to pass!

Alas! Is every man so true?

Each year to have a lover new?

Or if his love so long endure,

Why not three at once, for sure?

Like this: from one he'd get the fame

Of having magnified his name.

The next for friendship he'd agree,

And then of course the third would be

For his delight and sensual bliss;

Lo! All the profit would be his.'

With words like this, in her great pain,

Dido loudly did complain,

As I truly dreamed that night:

No other author do I cite.

'Alas, my darling heart!' said she,

'Take pity on my misery!

Don't kill me now! Don't go away!

O wretched Dido, woe the day!

So cried she to herself anew.

'O Aeneas, what will you do?

O that your love, and not the troth

You plighted me with hand and oath,

Nor yet my cruel death,' said she,

'Might hold you still to stay with me!

O look upon my death with rue!

For certainly, my dear heart, you

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## The House of Fame

Know very well that never yet

Did I by any use of wit

Do wrong to you in deed or thought.

O is the speech of men so wrought

With seeming virtue but no truth?

Alas, that woman should show ruth

At any time to any man!

I know it now, and well I can

See wretched women lack all art.

For certainly the greater part

Shall similarly be served each one.

However much you men may moan,

As soon as you have won our heart,

You show us your deceiving art.

For though your love may seem to last

A season, wait till that is past,

And then see what occurs to you,

What in the end you mean to do.

'Ah woe the day that I was born!

Through you my name is lost and gone,

And all my acts are read and sung

Throughout the land by every tongue.

O wicked Fame! There cannot be

A thing that moves as swift as she!

Yes, all is known and nothing missed,

Though it be covered with a mist.

Indeed, though I might live for ever,

Undo what I have done I never

Shall be able to. My name

Through Aeneas is brought to shame.

This judgement shall be made of me:

"Having done it once, now she

Will do it again most certainly."

So say the people furtively.'

But what is done can't be undone:

Her cries and moans so woebegone

For sure availed her not a straw.

And when she knew and really saw

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## Love Visions

That he'd embarked with all his fleet,  
 Into her room she made retreat,  
 And called upon her sister Anne, Anne  
 And her lament to her began,  
 Saying the blame was due to her  
 Because she counselled her to err  
 By taking Aeneas as her lover.  
 But what! Those words and actions over,  
 She stabbed herself right through the heart;  
 The pain tore life and her apart.  
 But of the way in which she died,  
 And of the words she dying sighed,  
 If you further wish to read,

See Virgil in the *Aeneid*,\*

Or the *Epistle* of Ovid,\*

For what she wrote and how she died;

And were it not too long to write,

By God! I'd pen it here all right.

The harm, the pity, alas the day,  
 That come when men in love betray!  
 Such things in books you often read,  
 And see them daily too in deed.

To think of them brings sadness on.

The Duke of Athens, Demophon,\*

Forswore himself most treacherously,

Betraying Phyllis wickedly.

The daughter of the King of Thrace,

By dodging wedding date and place;

And when she found he was untrue,

She hanged herself – what else to do? –

Because he had been false and bad.

Does not such anguish make you sad?

Think how treacherous and remiss

Achilles was to Briseis,\*

And Paris was to Oenone,

And Jason to Hypsipyle,

And Jason again to Medea;

And Hercules to Deianira,

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## The House of Fame

For he left her for Iole,  
 Which brought about his death, you see.

How treacherous was Theseus too, Theseus

Who, as appears in story true,

Left Ariadne to console

Her sister, devil rot his soul!

For laugh he, frown he, he'd been dead,

The Minotaur had on him fed

Had Ariadne not been there.

Because she gave him loving care,

From death contriving his escape,

He played her a disloyal jape.

Being saved, within a little while

He left her sleeping on an isle,

A desolate sea-girt place unknown,

And stealing off, left her alone:

And with her sister Phaedra he

Boarded his ship and went to sea.

And yet he'd sworn an oath to her

By all by which a man might swear

That he would have her as his wife

Provided she would save his life;

For she desired nothing else.

It's true: that's what the story tells.

To mitigate Aeneas's case

A little in his great disgrace,

The book\* recounts that Mercury

Told him to go to Italy,

Deserting Africa as well

As Dido with her citadel.

There I saw painted how Aeneas

On course for Italy, met a fierce

Tempest in which his steersman

Was lost soon after it began

Through carelessness; the tiller swept

Him overboard even while he slept.

Besides all that, I saw as well

Near an isle, going down to hell,

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## Love Visions

Aeneas and the Sybil,\* to find  
 Anchises of the lordly mind.  
 Palinurus\* he found thus,  
 And Dido, and Deiphobus;\* *Virgil Aeneid 6. 511*  
 He saw all torments known to hell,  
 And they would take too long to tell.  
 Whoever wants to know should read *Virgil Aeneid 6. 511*  
 The many lines about the deed  
 In Virgil, Dante, Claudian,\* *Virgil Aeneid 6. 511*  
 Who cover well the story's span. *450*  
 I saw Aeneas come to land  
 Safe on the Italian strand,  
 His treaty with Latinus, King  
 Of Latium, and his soldiering  
 In battle, fighting with his knights,  
 Before establishing his rights.  
 I saw him take King Turnus\* life  
 And win Lavinia for his wife,  
 And all the marvellous signs there were  
 From heavenly gods in this affair, *460*  
 And how in spite of what was done  
 By Juno's tricks, Aeneas won,  
 Achieving all he wished to do  
 Because high Jove had seen him through  
 At Venus's request and boon.  
 May all of us be saved as soon,  
 And may she make our sorrows light!  
 When I'd seen all this splendid sight  
 In that noble temple thus,  
 I thought, 'Ah Lord that madest us, *470*  
 I never saw such excellence  
 In images, such opulence,  
 As in that church I saw on show.  
 But still who made them I don't know,  
 Nor do I know where I could be.  
 But now I shall go out and see  
 At the wicket-gate, if I can  
 Find anywhere a stirring man

## The House of Fame

Who can tell me where I am.'  
 When I out of the wicket came, *480*  
 I looked around and all my eyes  
 Saw was a field of massive size,  
 Stretching as far as eye could see,  
 Without a town, or house, or tree,  
 Or bush, or grass, or ploughing land;  
 In all that field was only sand  
 Composed of many tiny grains,  
 As on Libya's desert plains;  
 Nor could I see a single creature  
 Of a kind produced by Nature *490*  
 To give me help of any sort.  
 'O Christ who art in bliss!' I thought,  
 'From false dream and from phantasy  
 Preserve me!' And in piety  
 Up to the heavens my eyes I cast.  
 Then I became aware at last  
 That right beside the sun, as high  
 As I could pierce with my eye,  
 I seemed to see an eagle soar *eagle*  
 Larger by far than heretofore *500*  
 I'd seen in birds of eagle breed.  
 But true as death, in very deed,  
 This bird was shining golden bright:  
 You'd never see so fine a sight,  
 Unless the heavens should gain and hold  
 Another glorious sun of gold.  
 So shone the eagle's feathers bright  
 As downward then it dipped its flight.

## BOOK TWO

### Proem

Now men of all sorts, old and young,  
 Who understand the English tongue, *510*  
 Hear this my dream for the first time,  
 And learn from it a lesson sublime.  
 Such dream it was, as visions go,

## Love Visions

That not Isaiah nor Scipio,  
Not Nebuchadnezzar, king of yore,  
Not Pharaoh, Turnus, Helcanor,\*  
Ever dreamed a dream like this.  
Now, blissful, beautiful Cypris,\* *Verne*  
Grant me your favour at this time!  
And help me to compose in rhyme,  
You gods that on Parnassus dwell,  
By Helicon, the crystal well!\*  
O Thought, that shaped my phantasy  
And shut it in the treasury  
That is my brain, now men shall see  
If you possess the quality  
And force to tell my dream aright:  
So now make known your skill and might!

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## The Dream

That eagle, whose approach I told,  
Shining with feathers as of gold,  
And apt at such a height to soar,  
I came to gaze on more and more,  
To see its beauty and its wonder;  
But never did a crash of thunder  
Or lightning bolt which with its power  
Smashed to dust a mighty tower,  
Descending swiftly all aflame,  
Come down so fast as this bird came,  
When he perceived me roaming free  
In that waste locality.  
And in his claws so grim and strong  
Tipped with talons sharp and long  
He seized me, swooping as I fled,  
Then soared again with wings outspread,  
Carrying me in those talons stark  
With ease, as if I were a lark,  
So high, I cannot tell how high  
Or by what means; I knew not, I.

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## The House of Fame

For every faculty I possessed  
Was stunned, bewildered and oppressed: 550  
What with his soarings and my dread  
My senses went all blank and dead  
Because my terror was so strong.

So in his claws I lay for long,  
Till at the last to me he spake  
In human voice and said, 'Awake!  
Don't be so terrified, for shame!' 560  
And then he called me by my name;  
Indeed I thought he said, 'Awake!'  
The better my deep trance to break 560  
Exactly in the voice and tone  
Of one whose name to me was known.  
And when I heard that voice so plain,  
My mind came back to me again,  
For it was kindlier said to me  
Than ever it was wont to be.

So coming to at that, I stirred,  
Held in the claws of that great bird,  
Who then knew I had living heat,  
And also that my heart did beat. 570  
He started having fun with me,  
And spoke to me consolingly,  
Twice exclaiming, 'Holy Mary!  
What a trial you are to carry!  
As if there could be any need!  
For sure as God helps me in deed,  
No harm shall come to you from this.  
The reason for your airing is  
That you shall learn and gain from it.  
What! Dare you look about you yet? 580  
Be brave and know assuredly  
I am your friend.' And therewith I  
Began to wonder. 'God,' I thought,  
'Who made all beings of every sort!  
Is there no other way to die?  
Is Jove about to stellify

## Love Visions

My soul? What else is in his mind?  
 I'm not Elijah or Enoch's kind,  
 Or Romulus or Ganymede,\*  
 Who was caught up, as you may read,  
 To heaven by Lord Jupiter  
 And made the high gods' cup-bearer.'  
 Behold, this was my phantasy,  
 But he who carried me could see  
 What I was thinking, and said thus:  
 'Your judgement is erroneous,  
 For Jove is not the least inclined –  
 So put it firmly out of mind –  
 To turn you yet into a star.  
 I shall not bear you very far  
 Before I tell you what I am,  
 Where you are going, and why I came  
 To do this job, so kindly take  
 Good heart, and don't in terror quake.'  
 'Gladly,' said I. And he said, 'Know  
 First, I whose talons hold you so,  
 Which makes you shake with fear and wonder,  
 Am dwelling with the God of Thunder,  
 Whom men on earth call Jupiter,  
 Who often sends me flying far  
 To carry out his high intent.  
 And that is why I have been sent  
 To you; so listen, on your oath!  
 Sure, pity and compassion both  
 He has for you because so long  
 You've keenly served with ardour strong  
 Blind Cupid, his adored nephew,  
 And Cupid's mother, Venus, too,  
 Without reward at all as yet,  
 In spite of which you've set your wit –  
 Not much of that your head contains –  
 To writing books and songs, refrains  
 In rhyme, with rhythmic rise and fall,  
 As best you could, a faithful thrall

## The House of Fame

Of Love and of his servants too,  
 Who sought, and seek, his service true.  
 You strove to praise his subtle art,  
 Though you possessed of it no part;  
 For all which reasons, God bless me,  
 Jove counts it great humility  
 And virtue too, that you will make  
 Often at night your head to ache,  
 Writing in your study of Love,  
 Composing evermore of Love,  
 Singing out his honour and praise,  
 And chronicling his followers' ways,  
 Their every move and stratagem,  
 And scorning neither him nor them,  
 Although you're caught up in the dance  
 Of those whom Love will not advance.  
 'And truly that is why I find  
 That Jupiter has you in mind.  
 Another cause, sir, yet ensues:  
 It is that you have brought no news  
 Of Love's adepts in search of bliss,  
 Or other things God made as his,  
 Not only can you nothing learn  
 From distant lands; the near concerns  
 Of neighbours at your very door  
 Are things you simply don't explore.  
 This news and that you always shun,  
 For when your daily work is done  
 And you've made all your reckonings,  
 You do not rest or seek new things,  
 But off you go back home alone  
 And sit as dumb as any stone,  
 Poring over another book  
 Until your eyes have a glazed look.  
 You live as hermits do, I say,  
 Though not abstemiously as they.  
 'And therefore Jupiter, through his grace,  
 Wills me to take you to a place

## Love Visions

Most fitly styled the House of Fame,  
 To amuse you there, as in a game,  
 In recompense for your devotion, *Recompensed*  
 Your travails, and the deep emotion  
 And pain that you have been put through  
 By Cupid, who cares not for you!  
 Thus Jove will through his virtue's sense  
 Provide you with due recompense,  
 And give your spirit much good cheer.  
 Believe it, man! For you shall hear  
 When you and I have landed there,  
 Most wondrous things, I do declare:  
 More doings of Love's devotees,  
 Some true and some false histories;  
 How many loves are new begun;  
 How long devoted loves are won;  
 How some loves accidentally  
 Crop up, and no one can tell why,  
 Just as a blind man starts a hare;  
 Much mirth and fuss shall you see there,  
 As lovers find their love steel-true,  
 Or so they think, good through and through;  
 More discords and more jealousies,  
 More mutterings, more novelties,  
 More tricks and more dissimulations  
 And hollow reconciliations;  
 More scissorless and razorless  
 Beard trimmings in two hours or less  
 Performed than there are grains of sand;  
 More false hopes fondly held in hand,  
 And many desperate patching acts  
 On long-abandoned loving pacts,  
 More dispute-settlings, love-accords  
 Than on instruments are chords;  
 And more interchange of love  
 Than grains of corn that barns know of –  
 Now could you credit it?' said he.  
 'No, God's wisdom succour me!'

670

680

690

700

## The House of Fame

I answered. 'Why?' he asked. 'For it  
 Could scarcely be, so says my wit,  
 That Fame, although she may command  
 All chattering magpies in the land,  
 All spies as well, could hear all this,  
 Or those spies see it,' I said. 'Oh yes!'  
 Said he, 'That I can well attest  
 With reasons you cannot contest,  
 Provided you with keen intent  
 Hear and follow my argument.'

710

'Learn first where Fame the goddess dwells:  
 It's as your favourite author\* tells. *Boo! I know it!*  
 Her palace is positioned, I say, *12.34.56*  
 Exactly at a point midway  
 Between the heavens and earth and sea,  
 So whatever in all those three  
 Is said in secret or openly,  
 The way to it is wholly free  
 Because it's placed with such great care  
 That every sound must go straight there;  
 Whatever comes from any tongue,  
 Be it whispered, read or sung, *12.34.56*  
 Or said in confidence or fear,  
 Is bound to go there sounding clear.

720

'Now listen closely, for I will  
 With first-class logic posed with skill  
 Give you a splendid demonstration  
 Of my profound ratiocination.

'Geoffrey, I'm sure that you know this:  
 Every natural thing that is\* *3.2.1*  
 Has a habitat where it  
 Can best preserve its essence fit,  
 To which location every thing,  
 Its own true nature favouring,  
 When it's far away from thence, *3.2.1*  
 Strives to go with every sense. *Boe then? The place?*  
 Lo! Any day you'd chance to see *the sound is explained*  
 Some heavy object as, e.g. *for the given sound*

730

# Love Visions

Big stone, or lead, some thing of weight,  
Which when you lift it to a height 740  
And let it go, it falls right down.  
Just so I say of fire or sound  
Or smoke, or other substance light;  
Each one strives upward to a height.  
While all are free, the light will tend  
To rise, the heavy to descend.  
And that's the reason why you see  
All rivers flowing to the sea;  
Their nature tells them so to flow.  
Likewise I find that fishes know 750  
Their habitat is flood and sea;  
And trees in earth are glad to be.  
Thus everything, you see by that,  
Has its appointed habitat,  
To which it always will repair  
Because it suffers no harm there.  
Behold! Such thinking's always found  
In what philosophers expound!  
Aristotle, Plato too,  
And other writers hold this view: 760  
And to confirm what I propound,  
You know this well, that speech is sound:  
Otherwise it could not be heard.\*  
So now I'll teach you, mark my word.  
'Sound is only air that's broken.  
And every single word that's spoken,  
Aloud or secret, foul or fair,  
Is in its essence only air;  
For just as flame is smoke that's lit,  
So sound is air which has been split. 770  
But this takes place in many ways,  
Two of which I'll put in phrase:  
The music of the pipe, and harp.  
For when the puff in pipe is sharp,  
The air is rent with violence  
And split. Behold! I speak pure sense!

# The House of Fame

And when a harp-string's given a touch,  
Whether with little force or much,  
Behold! The air breaks with the noise 780  
Just as it does with human voice.  
And that's the truth concerning speech!  
'And now the next thing I shall teach  
Is that every speech, noise, sound,  
With amplified effect is found  
— Even the squeaking of a mouse —  
To come perforce to Fame's own house.  
I prove it thus — take good heed now! —  
By experiment. For if you throw  
A stone into a pool, you know  
Quite well the splash it makes will grow 790  
Into a ring, a little round  
As big as on a pot-lid's found.  
And then you see what that will bring;  
The ring will cause another ring,  
And that a third, and so forth, brother,  
Each circle caused making another  
Wider than itself; so thence  
From small to huge circumference  
Each circle makes another ring  
And causes that one's broadening, 800  
And all expand until at last  
The process goes so far and fast  
The banks are overflowed all over.  
Your eye above might not discover  
That because it happens under —  
Which you may think a mighty wonder.  
And anyone who says I lie,  
Then let him prove the contrary!  
And truly, just as every word  
That's shouted out or hardly heard 810  
To start with moves the air about,  
And by this moving, without doubt,  
At once another air is moved,  
As I have by the water proved,

## Love Visions

With each circle causing another;  
 Just so of air, beloved brother.  
 Each air stirs up another one  
 Increasingly; and once begun  
 Then voice or noise or word or sound  
 With amplified effect is bound 820  
 To travel to the House of Fame.  
 Take that in earnest or in game!  
     'I've told you, if you call to mind,  
 How speech and sound and all their kind  
 Upwards by nature strive to move:  
 This, you perceive, I clearly prove.  
 And that same place, I dare be sworn,  
 To which a thing is always drawn,  
 Has its natural position:  
 That shows with absolute precision 830  
 That the natural living ground  
 Of every speech and every sound,  
 Whether it be foul or fair,  
 Is found by nature in the air.  
 And since each living thing must go  
 From its location, as all know,  
 To that position which I say  
 Is natural, if it's far away,  
 As I proved to you before,  
 It follows that each sound, for sure, 840  
 Proceeds by nature from its base  
 Towards its natural homing place.  
 And this same place of which I tell  
 Where Lady Fame is pleased to dwell  
 Is equidistant from these three:  
 The heavens, the earth, and last, the sea,  
 Because that best preserves the sound.  
 This conclusion then is found:  
 That every speech of every man,  
 From when the very first began, 850  
 Has risen and gone with perfect aim  
 By nature to the House of Fame.

## The House of Fame

'Now have I not, just tell me true,  
 Proved that simple fact to you  
 Without recourse to subtlety  
 Of speech or great prolixity  
 Of terms drawn from philosophy,  
 Or ornaments from poetry,  
 Or rhetorical figures cited?  
 By God, you ought to be delighted! 860  
 For complex language and involved  
 Argument cannot be resolved  
 Both together: you must confess  
 That's true!' he ended. I said, 'Yes.'  
     'Aha!' he went on, 'Lo! I can  
 Talk in lay terms to a lay man,  
 And of such lofty knowledge speak  
 That he may shake it by the beak  
 And find it palpable and true!  
 But tell me now, I beg of you, 870  
 What did you think of my conclusion?'  
 'An irrefutable effusion,'  
 Said I. 'And things are like to be  
 Exactly as you've proved to me.'  
 'By God and by my halidom!'  
 He said, 'You'll have before night come  
 The proof by clear experiment  
 Of each word in my argument,  
 And top and tail and every bit  
 Your ears shall hear the truth of it: 880  
 That every single spoken word  
 Comes to Fame's House and is heard  
 As I have said. What would you more?'  
 Upon which words, he rose to soar,  
 Saying the while, 'By Saint James,  
 Now we'll have some fun and games.'  
     'How do you feel?' he asked of me.  
 'All right,' I said. 'Now look,' said he,  
 'Tell me truly, looking down,  
 Whether you recognize a town 890

## Love Visions

Or house or other habitation:  
If you can make such affirmation,  
Be sure to warn me so that I  
Can tell you then immediately  
How far from it you are up here.'

I looked down then and saw all clear  
Meadow and plain in full detail  
And hill and mountain, down and dale,  
Valley and wood, conspicuous features,  
And just descried some mighty creatures.  
Now rivers, now great cities and more,  
Now towns and mighty trees I saw,  
And big ships sailing on the sea.

But quickly in a flash did he  
Fly up above the ground so high.  
That all the world seemed to my eye  
No bigger than a tiny dot.  
Or else the air was, like as not,  
Too thick for sight to penetrate.  
And then he spoke with ardour great:  
'D'you see a sign of any town  
Or place you know of there far down?'  
'No.' 'No wonder that!' said he,  
'For never half so high as we  
Was Alexander of Macedon,\*

Or Scipio named African,  
Who saw most clearly in a dream  
Both hell and earth, and heaven supreme;  
Nor even wretched Daedalus,  
Nor yet his child, weak Icarus,\*  
Who flew so high the heat of the sun  
Melted his wings, and down he spun  
To soak in the sea and there be drowned:  
Laments for him were quite profound.

'And now,' said he, 'Turn up your face,  
And look upon this mighty space,  
This air; and take care not to be  
Afraid of what you there shall see;

900

910

920

## The House of Fame

For in this lofty region dwell  
Many beings reported well  
In Plato's works. So now behold  
The Skye Beasts\* so many-fold!  
And so I saw that company,  
Both those that walk and those that fly.  
He then said, 'Look up still more high,  
And there behold the Galaxy,  
Which men have named the Milky Way  
Because it's white (and faith, I say,  
Some even call it Watling Street\*),  
And which was scorched and burnt with heat

930

940

When, be advised, the Sun's own son,  
Phaeton,\* tried to drive alone  
And guide his father's chariot.  
The horses were not slow to spot  
The lad's mishandling at a glance,  
And they began to buck and prance,  
Throwing him now up, now down,  
Until he saw the Scorpion,  
A sign that stays in heaven yet.  
And he in terror lost his wit  
At that and dropped the reins and freed  
The horses, which with sudden speed  
First galloped up, then downwards turned  
Until both air and earth were burned;  
Then Jupiter killed him on the spot  
And threw him from the chariot.

950

Lo, is it not an error large  
To let an idiot have charge  
Of something that he can't control?  
And with those words, upon my soul  
Still higher he began to soar,  
And cheered me ever more and more,  
He spoke to me so truthfully.

I looked around and under me  
And saw the Skye Beasts below,  
The clouds and mists and storms and snow

960

# Love Visions

And hailstorms, rain and driving winds,  
 And all creation of right kinds,  
 Through which I'd travelled. 'God!' said I,  
 'Creator of Adam nobly high. 970  
 Great is your power of every kind!  
 Then Boethius came into my mind  
 Who wrote, 'A thought may fly so high  
 With feathers of philosophy  
 It passes the celestial sphere,  
 Transcending earth in its career;  
 And at its back it sees the clouds -'  
 Such thoughts I spoke: they came in crowds.  
 Then I was seized with doubt and fear  
 And said, 'I know that I am here, 980  
 But whether I am flesh or ghost  
 I know not: God, thou surely know'st!  
 For never yet was sent to me  
 Perception of such clarity.  
 And then I thought of Marcian,\*  
 And next of Anticlaudian,\*  
 Who both once gave descriptions fair  
 Of all the heavenly regions there,  
 At least, as far as then I saw.  
 I can believe them now therefore. 990  
 With that the eagle gave a cry:  
 'Leave off your dreaming phantasy!  
 Concerning stars, why not learn that?'  
 'No fear! Not me!' I answered flat.  
 'Why not?' 'Because I am too old.'  
 'If you'd said, "Yes", I would have told.'  
 He said, 'the names of stars to you,  
 And all the heavenly signs thereto,  
 And which they are.' 'No matter,' said I.  
 'Yes, by God!' said he, 'And why? 1000  
 Because when you read poetry,  
 How gods proceed to stellify  
 Bird, fish or beast, or him or her,  
 As Raven, Great Bear, Little Bear.\*

# The House of Fame

Arion with his harp so fine,  
 Castor and Pollux, the Dolphin sign,  
 Or Atlas's fair daughters seven,  
 Each one of which is set in heaven,  
 You often think about them, though  
 Where they are placed, you just don't know.' 1010  
 'No matter!' I said, 'There is no need.  
 I take their word - may I have God-speed! -  
 Who wrote of things in this high sphere  
 As if I knew their places here.  
 Besides, up here they shine so bright  
 I might be blinded by the light  
 If I gazed on them.' 'Maybe,'  
 He said, and went on carrying me  
 A while, then gave the loudest shout  
 I'd ever heard, and thus cried out: 1020  
 'Saint Julian's\* helped us to arrive,  
 So raise your head and look alive!  
 Behold, the House of Fame is here!  
 Can you not hear what I can hear?'  
 'What?' I asked. 'The mighty sound,'  
 He said, 'that rumbles up and down  
 The House of Fame conveying tidings  
 Both of compliments and chidings,  
 Of lies and truth all mixed, I swear.  
 So listen! There's no whispering there. 1030  
 Can't you hear the roaring sough?'  
 Said I, 'By God, yes, well enough.'  
 'And what sound is it like?' asked he.  
 'By Peter, like the crash of sea,'  
 I said, 'against great hollowing rocks\*  
 When ships are swallowed in tempest shocks;  
 Or like the din a man would hear  
 A mile away drum in his ear.  
 Or like the rumble after the last  
 Mighty clap of a thunder-blast, 1040  
 When Jove has struck apart the air.  
 It makes me sweat with fear, I swear!'

## Love Visions

Said he, 'Don't let such things affright you;  
There's nothing there that wants to bite you.  
You'll come to no harm, honestly.'

And as he spoke, both he and I  
Had neared the place, which there below  
Was well within a spear's throw.  
I don't know how, but in a street  
He set me fairly on my feet,  
And said, 'Walk forth a bit: advance  
And seek adventure; take what chance  
May offer in the House of Fame.'

I answered, 'If it's all the same,  
And while we've time, before I go,  
For the love of God please let me know –  
In truth I'll give a willing ear –  
If this loud din that I can hear  
Is made, as I have heard you tell,  
By people who on earth do dwell,  
And comes here in the very way  
You outlined earlier today;  
And that there's nobody at all  
Before us in this mighty hall,  
Making all this huge uproar.'  
'No, by Saint Clare!\*' the eagle swore,  
'And guide me, wisest God above!  
But one thing I must warn you of,  
A thing that's bound to make you wonder.  
Lo! to the House of Fame up yonder  
Comes all men's speech, I've made it plain.  
No need to teach you that again.  
But grasp this further: when a speech  
Arrives within that house's reach,  
Then straight away it starts to take  
The form its speaker used to make\*  
On earth below when it was said,  
Whether clothed in black or red;  
And has a likeness so exact  
To the speaker that you'd swear in fact

1050

1060

1070

1080

## The House of Fame

It must the self-same body be,  
Man or woman, he or she.  
Now, isn't that a marvellous thing?'  
'Yes,' said I then, 'by heaven's King!  
These words exchanged, he said, 'Adieu!  
I'll stay here and I'll wait for you.  
May God in heaven send you grace  
To learn some good thing in this place!  
I took my leave without delay  
And towards the palace made my way.

1090

## BOOK THREE

### Invocation

O God of wisdom and of light,  
Apollo, through thy glorious might  
Favour this little book, the last!  
Not that I'd have it highly classed  
As poetry, to give delight;  
But since the rhymes are crude and light,  
Yet make it, please, at least agreeable,  
Though verses often lack a syllable;  
Because my effort is not seen  
In graces, but in what I mean.  
And if, Divinest Virtue, thou  
Wilt help me to exhibit now  
What's clearly printed in my head –  
Behold! It should be boldly said:  
It's to describe the House of Fame –  
Thou'lt see me go with certain aim  
To the nearest laurel that I see  
And kiss it, for it is thy tree.  
Now quickly come into my breast!

1100

### The Dream

Leaving the eagle, I addressed  
Myself to studying the place.

1110

## Love Visions

Before my verses further pace,  
I shall describe the house and site  
In detail and in form, then write  
Of how I scaled the rocky height  
On which that castle stood in might:  
There's not a higher one in Spain.  
But up I climbed in utter pain,  
And though to climb was hard for me,  
Yet keenly I desired to see  
By gazing as I bent down low,  
If somehow I could come to know  
What sort of stone this high rock was.  
Crystalline alum in form of glass  
It seemed, but that it shone more bright,  
Yet what compacted substance might  
Compose it was not clear to me.  
But I perceived eventually  
It was wholly, in essence real,  
A rock of ice, and not of steel.  
'By Saint Thomas à Becket!' I thought,  
'Foundation of a feeble sort  
On which to build a house so high!  
The builder of it I deny  
The right to boast, God save my soul!'

1120

1130

Then saw I carved along the whole  
Of one side famous names galore  
Of folk who'd prospered long before,  
Whose fame had blown the wide world over.  
But scarcely could my eyes recover  
The shapes of any letters for me  
To read their names; for certainly  
They'd thawed and were so lost to view  
That of the letters one or two  
Had melted out of every name –  
And thus unfamous was their fame!  
Men well say: 'What can ever last?'

1140

I pondered then how they had passed  
Away. Did they not melt in heat?

## The House of Fame

Or founder in the tempest-beat? 1150  
For on the other side, I say,  
Of that great height which northward lay,  
The hill was carved with many a name  
Whose owner had enjoyed great fame *Great fame*  
In olden times, and yet they were  
As fresh as if the writing there  
Were done that day, that hour indeed  
When I'd arrived to gaze and read.  
Of course I knew exactly why  
All those words before my eye  
Had been preserved: because they stayed 1160  
Within a lofty castle's shade. *shade*  
Besides it was so high a place  
That heat was powerless to deface.  
Then up the hill I made my way  
And found upon its crest, I say,  
A building of such loveliness  
That no man living could express  
Its beauty by his verbal art,  
Nor yet design its counterpart, 1170  
Then build a perfect copy of it  
Which might in beauty rival it,  
Being most marvellously wrought.  
Yes, every time I give it thought,  
That castle astounds me; and my wit,  
Striving to tell the truth of it, *truth*  
The beauty and superb design,  
And craft in every detail fine,  
Cannot meet such a high demand.  
I can't describe it, understand? *describe* 1180  
But all the same I hold in mind *memory*  
The essential things of every kind.  
Thus, by Saint Giles,\* to me it seemed  
That everything in beryl gleamed,  
Both the castle and the tower,  
The hall and every room and bower –  
A jointless whole without a flaw.

## Love Visions

But yet much delicate work I saw:  
Pinnacles, turrets, ornament,  
Niches, gargoyles excellent,  
While many windows made a show  
Like heavy flakes in a storm of snow.  
Carved deep in every turret's face  
Were niches, various in their grace,  
In which there stood all round about  
That castle, always facing out,  
Statues of minstrels most diverse  
And story-tellers who rehearse  
Romances of both joy and grief,  
A sphere in which Fame rules as chief.

Orpheus\* I heard harping there  
With truest tune and tone most fair -  
Musicianship supremely high!  
And playing at his side close by  
There sat Arion with his lyre,\*  
Chiron, the centaurs' wisest sire,  
The Breton bard Glasgerion,  
And other harpists many a one.  
And little harpists sat below,  
Each with his harp most apropos,  
And looking up at them agape  
In imitation like an ape:

Art miming Nature, you might say.

I saw behind, not far away  
From these performing by themselves,  
At least a thousand men times twelve  
Playing music of various forms  
On bagpipes, oboes, strident shawms  
And many more wind instruments.  
Their playing was all excellence  
On dulcet and reed-pipe, which grace  
The ox-roast at the feasting-place,  
And trumpet, flute and lilting horn,  
And rough pipes fashioned from green corn,  
Music of shepherd-boy or groom

1190

1200

1210

1220

## The House of Fame

Who guards his livestock in the broom.  
I saw Athenian Pseustis there,\*

Atiteris and, I declare,

The satyr Marsyas, whose skin  
Was flayed from body, face and chin  
Because he claimed to pipe as well  
As God Apollo, sages tell.

I saw famed pipers old and young,  
Speakers of Teutonic tongue,  
Teaching love- and leaping-dances,  
Rounds and other steps and fancies.  
Then saw I in another place  
Standing in an open space

Those who blow the clarion sounds  
Of bugle and trump on battle-grounds,  
For stirring clarion calls are right  
Where blood is shed in deadly fight.

I heard Misenus, trumpeter famed,\*  
Whom Virgil in the *Aeneid* named.

I listened there while Joab blew,

Thiodamas and others too;  
And all who blew the clarion

In Catalonia and Aragon  
And were illustrious in their day  
For trumpeting, I there heard play.

Sitting nearby, a host immense  
Were playing different instruments  
Whose names I know not, numberless  
As stars are in the sky, I guess;

And these I shall not put in rhyme  
To spoil your ease or waste your time.

For time that's gone you can't retrieve  
By any means, you must believe.

Minstrels, magicians, conjurors

I saw performing, sorcerers,  
Charm-spellers too and sorceresses,  
Ancient witches, Pythonesses  
Who work in smoky emanations

1230

1240

1250

1260

## Love Visions

At exorcisms and incantations;  
 And scholars too who know the arts  
 Of natural magic in their hearts,  
 At some ascendants with their skill  
 Making images which will  
 Through magic of the Zodiac  
 Cure the sick or set them back.  
 Queen Medea I there did view,\*  
 And Circe and Calypso too;  
 There saw I Hermes Belinous,  
 Simon Magus and Elymas.  
 I saw them there, knew them by name:  
 By such art great men have their fame.  
 Colle the magician there I saw  
 Upon a table of sycamore  
 Perform a trick most strange to tell:  
 I saw him put a whole windmill  
 Under a tiny walnut-shell.  
 Why should I draw it out and tell  
 From now until the Day of Doom  
 Exactly what I saw and whom?  
 When I had marked those people well  
 And found myself still free, I fell  
 To musing and considered long  
 Those beryl walls so fine and strong,  
 Which shone more luminous than glass  
 And made each thing seem to surpass  
 Itself in worth and in acclaim –  
 That is the natural way with Fame!  
 I wandered forth till I came straight  
 On my right hand to the castle gate,  
 Whose carving was so fine that none  
 So beautiful was ever done;  
 And yet what made that building fair  
 Derived from chance as much as care.  
 No need to make you longer dwell  
 Upon this portal while I tell  
 Its images, embellishments,

1270

1280

1290

1300

## The House of Fame

Ingenious carvings, ornaments  
 And hacked out masonry such as  
 The corbel and its figured mass.  
 But Lord! How lovely to behold!  
 For all was leaved in carven gold.  
 So in I went, no pause for doubt,  
 And met a crowd there crying out:  
 'Largess! A bounty! Do us grace!  
 God save the lady of this place,  
 Our own true noble Lady Fame,  
 And those who wish to win their name  
 From us!' I heard that cry from all.  
 Quickly they came then from the hall,  
 Jingling coins both silver and gold;  
 And some were kings-at-arms with bold  
 Shapes of diamond on their crowns.  
 And ribbons on their splendid gowns,  
 And many fringes on them too.

1310

I saw that those who came in view  
 Were heralds and pursuivants all,  
 Who praised rich people with their call.  
 And every single officer there,  
 As I most truly can declare,  
 Had on a garment which men call  
 A coat of arms. Yes, one and all  
 Wore rich-embroidered surcoats\* there;  
 Though all were different, all were fair.  
 But now I shall not, as I live

1320

All the lively detail give  
 Of all the escutcheons that I saw  
 Upon those surcoats that they wore.  
 The task would be impossible,  
 For all the detail told in full  
 Would make a twenty-foot-thick book!  
 If one who knew them undertook  
 To scan the arms, he'd see all those  
 Of famous men that Europe knows,  
 And Africa and Asia too,

1330

## Love Visions

From when the knightly code first grew. 1340  
 Lo! How can I convey all this?  
 About the great hall, what need is  
 To say to you that every wall  
 Of it, and floor and roof and all,  
 Was half a foot thick golden plate,  
 And none was in a shabby state,  
 But proved as fine in every way  
 As ducat from Venice any day,  
 Of which my purse contains too few?  
 Each surface was set thickly through 1350  
 With foils containing jewels as fair  
 As those the Lapidary\* calls rare,  
 Profuse as grass in any dell.  
 But it would take too long to tell  
 Their names, so I'll proceed apace.  
 Within this fine luxurious place  
 So pleasant called the House of Fame,  
 No mighty press of people came,  
 Nor was there overcrowding there.  
 But on a dais high and fair, 1360  
 Seated on an imperial throne  
 Entirely made of ruby stone –  
 A carbuncle that jewel is called –  
 I saw in permanence installed  
 In state a splendid female creature,  
 So beautifully formed by Nature  
 There could not be a lovelier.  
 And first of all, as I aver,  
 She was, I thought, so small and slight  
 That no more than a cubit's height 1370  
 In very truth she seemed to be;  
 Yet being thus, she suddenly,  
 Miraculously, grew and so,  
 With feet upon the earth below,  
 Yet with her head reached up to heaven,  
 Where there shine the planets seven.  
 And in my judgement a still more

## The House of Fame

Extraordinary thing I saw  
 When I looked upon her eyes;  
 I could not count them anyway. 1380  
 She had as many, take my word,  
 As there are feathers on a bird,  
 Or on the feathered creatures four\*  
 Who to God's throne such honour bore  
 In the Apocalypse, John's book.  
 Curling and wavy, her hair shook  
 Like burnished gold reflecting light,  
 And she besides – I truly write –  
 Had as many upstanding ears  
 And tongues as on a beast are hairs; 1390  
 And swiftly growing on her feet  
 I saw wings of the partridge fleet.  
 But Lord! The jewels, wealth limitless  
 I saw adorning this goddess!  
 And Lord! The heavenly melody  
 Of songs most full of harmony  
 As round her throne I heard the singing  
 That set the palace walls all ringing!  
 There sang the Muse of Epic, she  
 Whom all men call Calliope;\* Calliope 1400  
 And her eight sisters too were there  
 Whose faces seemed most meekly fair,  
 And evermore continually  
 They sang of Fame, as there heard I:  
 'All praise to thee and to thy name,  
 Thou goddess of Renown and Fame!'  
 Then I perceived there finally,  
 When I chanced to look up high,  
 That this noble queen upon  
 Her shoulders wore inscribed and drawn 1410  
 The coat of arms and the true name  
 Of every soul that won great fame: *coat of arms*  
 Alexander, Hercules – *name*  
 A shirt concluded his life's lease!\*  
 Thus seated saw I this goddess

## Love Visions

In honour, wealth and worthiness,  
Concerning whom I'll cease to prate  
While other matters I relate.  
I saw there standing on each side,  
And leading to the portals wide  
Down from the dais, columns made  
Of metal which no gleams displayed.  
But though their value was not great,  
Yet they were made for high estate,  
And people worthy of reverence  
And noble and lofty sentiments  
Were on the columns standing high.  
To tell you of them now I'll try.

First of all then I saw there  
Upon a column tall and fair  
All made of lead and iron fine  
Him of the sect called saturnine,\*  
Josephus,\* that great jew of old,  
Who all the Hebrew history told,  
And on his shoulders high he bore  
The Jewish people's fame. I saw  
Another seven standing by  
In honour and in wisdom high  
Who helped him with his weighty charge.  
It was so heavy and so large.  
The writing being of battles fell  
And other marvels old as well,  
On this account the column there,  
Whose use I now to you declare,  
Was made of iron and of lead,  
For iron is the metal dread  
Of Mars, the god of strife and war,  
While lead, I tell you now for sure,  
Is Saturn's metal, Saturn who  
A mighty orbit must go through.

Then stood forth in row on row  
Of those whose histories I know,  
Which I shall not in order tell –

1420

1430

1440

1450

## The House of Fame

Too long on such a host to dwell! – *Narrator*

Those whose fame I shall recall.

I saw there standing first of all

Upon an iron column strong

Painted end to end along

With tigers' blood, the Toulouse poet

Whose name was Statius,\* all men know it,

1460

Who on his shoulders bore the fame

Of ancient Thebes, besides the name

Of cruel Achilles, that proud Greek.

And by him stood – no lie I speak –

High on a column of iron true,

Great Homer, with him Dares too, *Homer, Dares*

The Phrygian, Dictys\* of Crete *Dictys*

In front, and Lollius, complete *Lollius*

With Guido delle Colonne\* and *Guido delle Colonne*

Geoffrey of Monmouth,\* understand?

1470

For each of these, God grant me joy,

Busily penned the fame of Troy.

So mighty was that city's fame,

To write of it was not a game.

In fact, among the six I saw

No little envy spread therefore.

One said that Homer wrote all lies,

His verses being but false surmise

Favouring Greeks to a degree:

It was all fairy tales, said he.

1480

Iron tin-plated and hence bright

Was the column on whose height

The Latin poet Virgil stood, *Virgil*

Who long maintained with hardihood

The pious Aeneas' mighty fame.

Next on a copper pillar came

Venus's poet Ovid, who *Ovid*

Publicized the whole world through

The mighty God of Love's great name.

And there he spread abroad his fame

1490

From on the column's top, as high

## Love Visions

As I could pierce with my eye;  
For all the time this mighty hall  
Was growing more wide and long and tall,  
And was a thousand times, I saw,  
As huge as it had been before.

Upon a column strongly made  
Of iron, next my eye surveyed  
The famous poet Lucan,\* who  
Upon his shoulders gave to view,  
So high that I could well behold,  
The fame of Caesar and Pompey bold.  
And next them all those scholars came  
Who wrote of Rome's great deeds and fame,  
So many that I haven't time  
To state their titles in my rhyme.

And next there, on a sulphur column,  
As if distracted, madly solemn,  
Stood Claudian,\* I truly tell,  
Who wrote of all the fame of hell,  
Of Pluto and of Proserpine,\*  
The queen of torment's dark confine.  
Yet why should I inform you more?  
That palace was as full, for sure,  
Of tellers of tales and histories,  
As with rooks' nests lofty trees.  
And it would be bewildering  
If I recounted everything  
They wrote of, and their names as well.

But while I saw these things I tell  
I heard a sudden buzzing sound  
Like that in any beehive found  
When bees are ready to fly out.  
Just such a buzz without a doubt  
For all the world it seemed to be.  
Looking about, I came to see  
A mighty thronging company  
Entering the hall tumultuously  
From every corner of the earth,

## The House of Fame

Of every kind and sort of worth  
Of folk who live beneath the moon,  
Both poor and rich. And just as soon  
As they arrived within the hall,  
Down on their knees fell one and all  
Before this Queen of noble name,  
Saying, 'Lovely Lady Fame,  
Grant each of us by grace a boon!'  
And some of these she granted soon,  
And some denied most gracefully,  
And others yet, the contrary  
Of what they asked she brought about.

But truly I cannot work out  
The reason she decided so,  
For all those people, as I know,  
Although they were diversely served,  
A very decent fame deserved;  
Fame's like her sister Fortune,\* who  
Similar things is wont to do.

Now listen how she satisfied  
Those who for her favours cried;  
And yet, I say, this company  
All told the truth, with never a lie.  
'Great Madam,' said they, 'here are we  
In supplication come to thee  
To beg that thou wilt give us fame  
And let our exploits have that name;  
In recompense for what we've done,  
Make us the gift of high renown!'

'That I deny,' at once said she,  
'You get no high renown from me,  
By God! And therefore go your way!'  
'Alas!' they wailed, 'And woe the day!  
Explain what might your reason be.'  
'Because it's not my wish,' said she.  
'No one shall speak at all of you,  
Not good nor bad, whatever you do.'  
Upon which word she then did call

## Love Visions

Her messenger, who was in hall,  
And told him he at once must find,  
On pain of being stricken blind,  
1570 Aeolus the God of Wind.  
'In Thrace you'll find him; and remind  
The god to bring his trumpet here,  
Whose various sounds are cloud and clear.  
Its name, we know, is Great Renown:  
With that he makes the fame well known  
Of those whose praise rejoices me.  
And tell that god besides that he  
Should bring his other clarion  
1580 Called Evil Fame in every town,  
With which his wont is to defame  
Whomever I wish, and do them shame.'

This messenger was quickly gone,  
And found deep in a cave of stone  
Within the country known as Thrace  
This Aeolus, with relentless face  
Confining with power pitiless  
The winds in such extreme distress  
That, like wild bears, with growling sound  
They roared their agony profound.

The envoy cried immediately,  
'Rise up, and quick as quick can be,  
Come to my Lady! And take care  
To take your trumpets with you there.  
Now hurry up.' So Aeolus told  
The sea-god Triton then to hold  
His trumpets, and he next let out  
A certain wind which blew about  
So violently, so loud and high,  
That soon in all the wide long sky  
1600 There was not left a single cloud.  
This Aeolus no pause allowed  
Until he'd come to the feet of Fame  
With that sea-god, Triton by name:  
And there he stood, as still as stone.

## The House of Fame

And soon there came towards the throne  
A second mighty company  
Of folk who pleaded loud and high:  
'Lady, grant us now good fame,  
And let our deeds have that great name  
1610 Now in honour of chivalry;  
And may God bless thy soul so free!  
For since we have deserved our fame,  
It's right we should receive the same.'

She answered, 'As I live, you'll fail!  
Your virtuous deeds shall not avail  
Just now to win renown from me.  
But you know what? I here decree  
That you shall have an evil fame,  
A foul report and fouler name,  
1620 Though fair renown you have deserved.  
Now off you go: you have been served.  
And you, god Aeolus, let me see  
You take your trumpet now,' said she,  
'The one called Fickle Slander. Blow  
Their disrepute, that men shall know  
And speak of all their wickedness,  
And not their good and worthiness.

For you must trumpet contrary  
To deeds of worth and bravery.'  
'Alas!' I thought, 'What evil thing  
These luckless folk are suffering!  
To be so shamed amongst the throng  
When surely they have done no wrong!  
But Fate cannot be dodged, it's true.'

So what did Aeolus then do?  
He raised his blackened trump of brass  
Which fouler than the devil was,  
And blew it loudly, as if so  
The universe he'd overthrow.  
Through every region all around  
Went that ghastly trumpet's sound  
As fast as cannon-ball from gun

## Love Visions

When flames amidst the powder run.  
And such a powerful smoke belched out  
From that appalling trumpet mouth,  
Black, blue and greenish, swarthy red,  
As gushes out, when men melt lead,  
From the chimney opening.

And then I saw another thing:  
The further that the smoke-cloud blew,  
The bigger and stronger yet it grew,  
Like a river from spring or well;  
And it stank like the pit of hell.

Alas! though guiltless, thus was rung  
Their shameful name on every tongue!

A third great company then came  
Stepping up to the throne of Fame,  
Where down upon their knees they fell,  
Exclaiming, 'All of us excel

As people who most certainly  
Deserve renown most rightfully.

We pray thee that it may be known  
Just as it is, and forth be blown!

'I grant it, for it pleases me

That your great deeds be known,' said she.

'Indeed, though foes would do you down,

You shall possess a higher renown

At once than you deserve, I say.

So Aeolus,' said she, 'put away

That trumpet which is black and grim.

Your other trumpet, take out him

Called Great Renown, and blow it so

That round the world their fame shall go

Harmoniously and not too fast,

So that it's known until the last.'

'Most gladly, Lady,' he replied.

His golden trumpet from his side

He drew, and put it to his mouth

And blew it east and west and south

And north, as loud as any thunder,

1650

1660

1670

1680

## The House of Fame

And all who heard were struck with wonder,  
So far it sounded: then it ceased,  
And truly, all the breath released  
From that fine trumpet's mouth there swelled  
As if a pot of balm were held  
Inside a basket full of roses,  
Scenting their honour in our noses.

And straight away there caught my eye  
A fourth advancing company, 1690

And very few indeed were they:

A single row made their array.

They stood and pleaded, 'Lady bright,

In truth we strove with all our might,

But we have no regard for fame,

So please efface our deeds and name

For love of God, for truly we

Did everything in charity,

And not for gain of any kind.'

Fame answered, 'All you have in mind

Is granted: let your deeds be dead.'

At that I turned and scratched my head,

And saw then a fifth company

Who to this lady bowed the knee,

Bending low before her throne;

And they begged her every one

Not of their good deeds to speak,

Saying they wouldn't give a leek

For fame or noble reputation

Because it was for contemplation

And love of God that they had acted:

By love of fame they weren't attracted.

'What's that? Are you quite mad?' cried she,

'And would you do such charity

And for its doing not win fame?

And do you scorn to have my name?

No! All of you shall live in glory.

Aeolus! Sound out their story

In concord on your trumpet: blow

# Love Visions

Their fame that all the world may know,  
She ordered, 'and their deeds may hear.'  
And then he blew their fame so clear  
Upon his golden clarion,  
It crossed the world, went on and on,  
Piercing sharp, yet sweetly soft,  
And at the last dissolved aloft.

Then came the sixth fine company,  
And fast to Fame they raised their cry,  
Exclaiming just as I write here,  
'Have mercy on us, Lady dear!  
To tell it truly as it is,

We have done neither that nor this,  
But have been idle all our days,  
But each one notwithstanding prays  
That he may have as good a name,  
As great renown and noble fame,  
As those whose deeds were high-aspiring  
And who fulfilled their whole desiring  
In love or any other thing.

Not one of us had brooch or ring  
Or other gift by woman sent;  
No lady with her heart's intent  
Ever made us friendly cheer  
But what might bring us to our bier.  
Yet let us to the people seem  
Such that the world may of us deem  
That women loved us to distraction.

That will produce as good reaction  
For us, and heart and spirit please  
By counterpoising work and ease,  
As if for it we'd worked and fought.  
For that is honour dearly bought,  
Considering our idleness.

Yet grant thou us still more largess:  
Let us be reputed wise;  
Honoured and virtuous in men's eyes,  
And happy on the field of love.

1720

1730

1740

1750

# The House of Fame

For love of God, who sits above,  
Though we may not have got possession  
Of women's bodies, let the impression  
Of having done it bring us fame.

Enough that we have such a name!  
Fame said, 'I grant it, by my troth.

Now Aeolus, don't yield to sloth.  
Take out your golden trumpet, see,  
And blow as they requested me;  
So all shall think they earned high praise  
Although they practised evil ways.'

So Aeolus made their glory known  
And widely through the whole world blown. 1770

The seventh company then came,  
And kneeling down with loud exclaim  
Cried, 'Quickly do us, Lady free,  
The same favour to the same plea  
That to the last lot thou hast done!'

She said, 'Fie on you every one!  
You sluggish swine, you lazy wretches,  
Full of rotten torpid tetches!

What? Lying thieves, how could you ask  
For fame, and then in glory bask  
Without deserving, and not care?  
You should be hanged for that, I swear!  
For you are like the fagged-out cat  
Who longed for fish; but you know what?

He couldn't bear to wet his claws.  
May bad luck grip you by the jaws,  
And me as well if I agree  
To favour your posterity!

Now Aeolus, you King of Thrace,  
Go blow this lot a rotten grace  
At once!' said she, 'And you know how?  
Do just as I instruct you now.

Say: "These men want an honoured name,  
But haven't done a thing for fame,  
Not one good deed, yet they'd persuade

1760

1780

1790

## Love Visions

The world Isolde\* couldn't evade  
 Inviting them to serve love's turn!"  
 A slattern grinding at a quern  
 Would be too good to ease their heart.'  
 Aeolus leapt up with a start  
 And on his blackened trumpet blew  
 A sounding din, I swear to you,  
 As loud as bellowing gale in hell,  
 With comic blasts which, truth to tell,  
 Were just as many as grimaces  
 Upon a crowd of monkeys' faces.  
 All round the world the discords went,  
 And everyone who heard gave vent,  
 As if quite mad, to laughs and shouts,  
 Such fun they made of those poor louts.

Then came another company  
 Who had performed more treachery  
 And done more harm and wickedness  
 Than any living soul could guess.  
 They prayed to her for virtuous fame,  
 And begged her not to bring them shame,  
 But have them praised and well renowned.  
 In the appropriate trumpet sound.  
 'No, that would be,' said she, 'a vice.  
 I know my justice isn't nice,  
 But all the same, I don't feel pleased,  
 And therefore you shall not be eased.'

Next came leaping in a gang  
 Who laid about with thwack and bang,  
 Hitting men upon the head  
 And making people howl with dread  
 Throughout the palace. 'Lady dear!'  
 They cried, 'We're men, as you can hear.  
 To tell the truth and get it done,  
 We're horrid villains every one,  
 Who take delight in wickedness  
 As good folk do in righteousness.  
 We love to be renowned as knaves

1800

1810

1820

1830

## The House of Fame

Whom brutal roguery depraves;  
 And so we line up to request  
 That you our proper fame attest  
 Exactly as it really is.'

Fame said, 'Of course I grant you this:  
 But who are you, with stripe upon  
 Your stocking and a bell\* upon  
 Your cope, to make me such a plea?'  
 'Madam, to tell the truth,' said he,  
 'I am the man of vile renown  
 Who burned the temple of Isis down  
 In Athens, city by the sea.'  
 'And why did you do that?' asked she.  
 He said, 'I swear, my Lady Fame,  
 I wished to have a famous name

Like other people in the town,  
 Although they all won great renown  
 By noble deeds and moral powers.  
 I thought as great fame should be ours,  
 We evil men, for wickedness,  
 As good men have for righteousness.  
 Since fair renown I cannot know,  
 The other one I won't forego;  
 And so to interest Lady Fame,  
 I set the temple all aflame.

Now if thou truly wouldst rejoice,  
 Have our fame blown with trumpet noise!  
 'Gladly!' said she. 'Aeolus!  
 You hear what they implore of us?'  
 Said he, 'My Lady, yes, I hear.  
 By God, I'll trumpet loud and clear!  
 He took his pitch-black trumpet fast,  
 And puffed and blew with mighty blast  
 Until the world's end heard the sound.

And at that point I swivelled round  
 Because it seemed someone\* behind  
 Me spoke with words both good and kind,  
 Saying, 'Friend, what is your name?

1840

1850

1860

1870

# Love Visions

Personal  
Fame

And have you ventured here for fame?  
'No, truly,' answered I, 'my friend.  
God save my soul, for no such end  
Did I come hither, by my head!  
It will suffice when I am dead  
That no one falsely quotes my name.  
My right worth I myself best claim,  
For what I suffer, what I think,  
Shall wholly be my own to drink,  
As surely, for the greater part,  
As I know my poet's art.'

1880

News

'But why come here then?' questioned he.  
I said, 'I'll tell you openly  
The reason for my being here:  
Of deeds or news I well might hear,  
Or novel thing, I don't know what,  
Some great event, of this or that,  
Of love, or other happy thing.

Love

For truly, he who chanced to bring  
Me hither well instructed me  
That in this place I'd hear and see  
Extraordinary goings-on:  
But it's not the things being done  
I chiefly mean.' Said he, 'Oh no?'  
'By God!' I answered, 'No, not so.  
For ever since my wits matured,  
My mind has truly been assured  
That many people longed for fame  
In different ways to praise their name.  
But certainly I knew not how  
Or where Fame lived until just now,  
Nor did I know her form or feature,  
Her way of life or living nature,  
Or her style of dealing doom,  
Until to this place I had come.'  
'Then what about those new events  
You mentioned with such eloquence  
Of which you've heard?' he said to me.

1890

1900

# The House of Fame

'No matter now, for well I see  
Exactly what you want to hear.  
Come forth, and stay no longer here,  
And I shall faithfully direct  
You where you may indeed inspect  
And listen to such goings-on.'

1910

It wasn't long before we'd gone  
Out of the castle, I declare.  
Then saw I in a valley there  
Close by beneath the castle wall  
The House of Daedalus.\* Men call  
It Labyrinth, for never house  
Was made so wholly marvellous,  
Or with such quaint designing wrought.  
For all the time, as swift as thought  
It whirled around, that mighty hall,  
And never once stayed still at all.  
And from it came so strange a noise  
That had it stood upon the Oise\*

1920

Men could have heard it easily  
As far as Rome, most certainly.  
For all the world the din I heard,  
As all around the place it whirled,  
Was like the roaring of a stone  
When from a catapult it's thrown.  
And all this house of which I tell you  
Was built with twigs, red, brownish yellow  
And green; and some were whittled white  
As when men fashion cages right,  
Or are the manufacturers  
Of baskets or of panniers.  
What with the swishing of the twigs,  
The moans and squeaks and creaking jigs,  
The house was full of clamourings  
Of movement and of other things.  
It had as many entrances  
As there are leaves upon the trees  
In summer when they bloom with green;

1930

1940

## Love Visions

And on its roof were to be seen  
 More than a thousand holes, I know,  
 To let the sound out from below. 1950  
 All day the doors were open wide,  
 At morning, noon and eventide;  
 Wide too, at night, the doorways stood.  
 There was no porter there who could  
 Admit good news or false report.  
 There was no rest of any sort  
 Within, but what was still infused  
 With shouted or with whispered news.  
 The house's corners, all its angles,  
 Were full of chitter-chatter jangles 1960  
 Of wars and peace and marriages,  
 Of rest and work, and voyages,  
 Of suffering, of death and life,  
 Of love and hate, accord and strife,  
 Of praise, of loss and then of gain,  
 Health, sickness, then of cure again;  
 Of tempests and of zephyrs mild,  
 Plague deaths of men and creatures wild;  
 Of various sudden transmutations  
 Of circumstances and locations; 1970  
 Of trust and doubt and jealousy,  
 Of wit and folly, victory,  
 Of plenty and of great starvation,  
 Of trade, of dearth, of ruination,  
 Of good rule and bad governments,  
 Of fire and various accidents.

This house of which I tell you all  
 Was certainly by no means small,  
 For it was sixty miles in length.  
 Although the timber had no strength, 1980  
 Yet it was founded to endure  
 As long as Chance exerts her lure,  
 Who gives all news her mothering,  
 As sea is mother of well and spring;  
 And it was fashioned like a cage.

## The House of Fame

'In all my life, I will engage,  
 Such a house I never saw,'  
 Said I and, pondering it with awe,  
 I suddenly became aware 1990  
 My Eagle friend was close by there  
 Perched upon a stone on high.  
 So quickly to him then went I  
 And spoke the following: 'I pray  
 That with me for a while you'll stay  
 For love of God, and help me see  
 What wonders in this place may be.  
 For I may learn by happy chance  
 Some good, and so my mind enhance  
 With pleasing truth, before I leave.'  
 'By Peter, that I shall achieve!' 2000  
 Said he, 'And that is why I stay.  
 And one thing I am bound to say:  
 Unless I show the way to you,  
 There's nothing you could ever do  
 To gain admission, without doubt,  
 Because it whirls so fast about.  
 But seeing Jove in bounteous measure,  
 As I have said, will grant you pleasure  
 Finally in all these things – 2010  
 Unusual sights and happenings –  
 To help you fight your dolefulness;  
 And seeing he pities your distress,  
 Which you combat so manfully,  
 And so well knows you utterly  
 To have surrendered hope of bliss,  
 Since Lady Fortune did amiss,  
 Making that fruit, your peace of heart,  
 Rotten and ready to burst apart –  
 He through his mighty merit will  
 In small degree your wish fulfil. 2020  
 For he expressly ordered me –  
 And I obey, as you shall see –  
 To help you on with all my might,

## Love Visions

Equipping you with guidance right,  
 To hear all news of consequence:  
 You'll promptly learn of such events.'  
 Upon those words he swiftly rose  
 And, seizing me between his toes,  
 He through a window in the wall  
 Conducted me, as I recall – 2030  
 And then that house's whirling stopped;  
 All movement there to nothing dropped –  
 And set me down upon the floor.  
 Such milling crowds of folk galore  
 As I saw roaming all about,  
 Some in the hall, and some without,  
 Were never, nor yet will be, seen:  
 In all the world have never been  
 So many brought to birth by Nature,  
 Nor yet died so many a creature; 2040  
 So scarcely in the whole wide place  
 Could I secure a foot's breadth space.  
 And every person I saw there  
 Was whispering in another's ear  
 Some novel tidings secretly,  
 Or else was talking openly  
 As thus: 'What's happened? Have you heard?  
 And do you know the latest word?'  
 'No,' said the other, 'tell me what.'  
 The other told him this and that, 2050  
 And swore that all of it was true. *Truth*  
 'He says so' and 'He's going to do';  
 'He's at it now!' 'I heard some chat';  
 'You'll find it's true!' 'I'll bet on that!'  
 Yes, all who on this planet dwell  
 Would not possess the craft to tell  
 The many things that there I heard  
 By open speech or whispered word.  
 But most astonishing of all,  
 When one heard something, I recall, 2060  
 Straight to another man he went

## The House of Fame

And immediately gave vent  
 To all that he had just been told  
 Before the yarn was two ticks old,  
 And by the way he told the tale,  
 He magnified the news's scale  
 And made it bigger than before.  
 And when he left him, what was more,  
 He drew a breath and quickly met  
 A third man, and before he let 2070  
 A moment pass, he told him too,  
 And whether it was false or true,  
 Each time he told it to a man  
 His news was more and stranger than  
 It was before. Thus north and south  
 Went all the news from mouth to mouth,  
 Each time increasing more and more,  
 Like fire that starts to glow and draw  
 From sparks that accidentally flash,  
 Until a city's burnt to ash. 2080  
 And when the tale was fully sprung  
 By growing greater on each tongue  
 That told it, then at once it tried  
 To find a gap and fly outside;  
 But if it failed there it would try  
 To creep out by some crack, then fly  
 Away at once. While watching there,  
 I saw two rising to the air,  
 A falsehood and a serious truth *Falschood vs Truth*  
 By chance at one time coming both 2090  
 And striving for a window space.  
 Colliding in that narrow place,  
 Each one was hindered, as it tried  
 To make its own escape outside,  
 By the other one and, jostling there,  
 They started shouting, I declare.  
 'Let me go first!' 'No, no, let me!  
 I promise you most faithfully,  
 On condition that you do,

## Love Visions

That I shall never go from you, 2100  
 But swear to be your own true brother!  
 We shall so mingle with each other  
 That no man, even in a rage,  
 Shall have just one, but must engage  
 The two of us, like it or not,  
 Come day or night, come cold or hot,  
 Be we loud or softly sounded.'  
 Thus saw I false and true confounded,  
 Flying up in each report.

So out of holes there squeezed and fought 2110  
 Each bit of news, and went to Fame, *Fame*  
 Who gave to each report its name  
 According to its disposition,  
 And fixed its life-span by permission:  
 Some to wax and wane quite soon  
 Like the beautiful white moon,  
 Then disappear. There might you see  
 Winged wonders flying furiously,  
 Twenty thousand rushing out  
 As Aeolus blew them about. 2120

*Sailors  
Pilgrims*  
 Lord! Non-stop in that house I saw  
 Sailors and pilgrims by the score,  
 Their satchels stuffed brimful with lies  
 Mixed up with truth and some surmise,  
 And each, moreover, by himself.  
 O many a thousand times twelve  
 Did I perceive these pardoners,  
 Couriers too and messengers  
 With boxes crammed with falsities  
 As full as bottles are of lees. 2130  
 And as I swiftly moved and went  
 About fulfilling my intent,  
 Obtaining knowledge and diversion  
 By getting news in many a version  
 About some land of which I'd heard –  
 Of that I shall not say a word:  
 Truly, no need, for others sing

## The House of Fame

It better than my minstrelling;  
 For soon or late, without a doubt,  
 Like sheaves from a barn, all must out – 2140  
 There struck my ear a mighty din  
 In a hall-corner far within,  
 Where news of love and all its ways  
 Was being told: thither my gaze  
 I bent and saw men running there  
 As fast as ever they could, I swear.  
 And all exclaimed, 'What thing is that?'  
 And some replied, 'We don't know what.'  
 And as they scrambled in a heap,  
 Those behind them tried to leap 2150  
 And clamber over them on high,  
 Raising prying nose and eye,  
 And treading on each other's heels  
 And stamping, as men do on eels.  
 At last I saw a person there  
 Of whose true name I'm not aware.  
 But certainly he seemed to be  
 A man of great authority ...\*

*Iliad*; but his supposed account of the Trojan War seems to be late Latin, possibly of the twelfth century. Polyxena was one of Priam's daughters, and the story that Achilles went unarmed into Troy to woo her, and was there killed by Paris, is one of several versions of Achilles' death.

- 1072 Minerva (Gr. Athena): goddess of power and wisdom.
- 1081 Penelope: the exemplar of wifely fidelity, who remained true to her husband Odysseus during his twenty years' absence, first at the siege of Troy and afterwards on his wanderings.
- 1084 Titus Livius: the Roman historian Livy (59 BC-17 AD) who is cited in *Le Roman de la Rose* as the author of the story of Lucrece, the historical Lucretia (see the fifth story in 'The Legend of Good Women').
- 1114 A strange development. The Dreamer, as a means of prompting further easing confession, pretends to assume that, since Blanche deserted the sorrowing knight, the latter will not be guilty if he subsequently loves another.
- 1118-23 A short catalogue of evil counsellors. Achitophel mis-advised Absalom in his wars against his father David (Judges 2.17); Antenor first advised his fellow Trojans to return Helen to Greece, and then helped Odysseus to capture Troy's Palladium (statue of Pallas Athena), thus virtually ensuring the fall of Troy; and Ganelon, jealous of Roland's warrior prowess, planned with the Moorish king the ambush at Roncesvalles in which Roland and Oliver were killed in 778.
- 1162 Jubal (erroneously Tubal in Chaucer): in the mythopoeic opening chapters of Genesis (4.21), 'the father of all such as handle the harp and organ'.
- 1169 'Aurora, a Latin metrical version of parts of the Bible, with allegorical interpretation by Petrus de Riga, Canon of Rheims, in the twelfth century' (Robinson, p.886).
- 1247 Cassandra: prophetess and daughter to Priam, who after the fall of Troy was taken by Agamemnon as his slave to Mycenae, where Clytemnestra murdered them both. Her lament for Troy was much expanded by the medieval Troy romancers.
- 1318 It is generally thought that these indications refer to the castle of John of Gaunt at Richmond, Yorkshire. 'Long Castle' may refer to the House of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's family, and possibly the white walls refer obliquely to Blanche.

## THE HOUSE OF FAME

*Title:* In the Retraction at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer refers to this work as 'The Book . . . of Fame', which is a better title as the house of Fame is only one of three buildings in which the main action of the poem takes place.

- 63 The insistence on 10 December has tempted commentators to seek a topical reason; but I like David M. Bevington's observation (in 'The Obtuse Narrator in Chaucer's *House of Fame*', *Speculum*, April 1961) that in the calendar then prevailing, 10 December was the winter solstice. The longest night of the year might yield the longest (and best?) dream. The date falls in Sagittarius, the presiding sign of the House of Dreams.
- 65 The classification of dreams here is hard to make sense of; possibly Chaucer meant it to be so, in harmony with his consistent characterization of the Poet-Dreamer as an earnest novice.
- 66 Each of the three books of 'The House of Fame' has an Invocation; the other two are modelled on Dante, but the origin of the first one is less clear, though Robinson sees it as deriving from Froissart's *Trésor Amoureux*.
- 71 Lethe: the underworld river, of which souls of the dead drank and thus forgot all they had said and done in the upper world.
- 73 Cimmerians: according to Homer, dwellers farthest west in the ocean (i.e. nearest the sunset, which was thought to be the abode of the dead).
- 103 The story of Croesus and his dream is the last of the monk's examples of the fates of famous men in *The Canterbury Tales*.
- 116 Holy Leonard: near to Chaucer's house in Aldgate there were three churches dedicated to St Leonard, the patron saint of prisoners. The present reference seems to contain a private joke. Chaucer's Prioress evidently came from the Benedictine nunnery of St Leonard's at Stratford-atte-Bowe, and Chaucer knew people who had visited it, and almost certainly would have been there himself. The distance of two miles is about right.
- 130 Venus (Gr. Aphrodite): goddess of love, whose functions

# Notes to 'The House of Fame'

physical and spiritual were heavily exploited by medieval courtly poets.

- 138 Cupid (Gr. Eros): son and companion of Venus; usually a wanton young god who inflames sensual passion and promotes not only that, but also discords in love. His mythical predecessor, the older god Eros, represented the uniting power of love which brought order and harmony out of chaos.
- 139 Vulcan (Gr. Hephaestus): the lame god of fire, consort of Venus and haunter of volcanic islands.
- 148 Lavinium: Latin city founded by Aeneas and named after his Italian wife, Lavinia.
- 152 Sinon: the Greek who feigned a defection to the Trojans so that he could persuade them to allow the Wooden Horse into Troy. It was full of Greeks, and when Sinon let them out, the fall of Troy was assured.
- 158-61 Ilium: strictly speaking, the citadel of Troy. Pyrrhus (or Neoptolemus) was one of the leaders inside the Wooden Horse, and killed the King of Troy and his son at the altar of Jove.
- 168 Anchises: in youth beautiful enough to attract Venus, on whom he begot Aeneas.
- 175-8 Iulus: the same as Ascanius. In the *Aeneid*, Creusa became separated from Aeneas while escaping from Troy.
- 203 Aeolus: in Homer, Aeolus was not god of the winds but an island ruler to whom Jove gave power over them. A later tradition made him a god who kept the winds enclosed in a mountain.
- 226 Achates: a faithful friend of Aeneas.
- 236 Carthage: centre of Phoenician influence in the western Mediterranean, a sister city of Tyre in the east, and Rome's deadly rival. Tradition places the founding of Carthage about a hundred years earlier than that of Rome, in about 850 BC. Just before it fell to Rome in 146 BC, its population was about 700,000.
- 378 The story of Dido and Aeneas, which figures more fully as the third tale in 'The Legend of Good Women', is in Book IV of the *Aeneid*.
- 379 'The Epistle' is the seventh of the *Epistolae Heroidum* (letters of heroines) of Ovid.
- 388 The story of Phyllis and Demophon is the eighth in 'The Legend of Good Women'.

# Notes to 'The House of Fame'

- 398 The catalogue of unfaithful lovers, drawn mainly from Ovid, continues:  
Achilles gave Briseis away to Agamemnon after being persuaded by Athena.  
Paris rejected his wife Oenone when he carried off Helen.  
For the tale of Jason and his desertion of Hypsipyle and Medea, see the fourth story in 'The Legend of Good Women'.  
When Hercules captured Iole and took her for his lover, Deianira his wife soaked his shirt in the blood of Nessus the centaur, whom Hercules had killed for making advances to Deianira. The dying centaur had told her that his blood would preserve Hercules' love for Deianira, but it burned him to death. Iole married Hercules' son.  
For an account of Theseus and his desertion of Ariadne, see the sixth story in 'The Legend of Good Women'.
- 429 'The book' is Virgil's *Aeneid*, the story of which is now very briefly summarized to line 465.
- 441 Sybils: women with second sight.
- 443 Palinurus: the steersman of Aeneas's ship (l.435 above), who went to sleep at the tiller, fell overboard, and was murdered when he was washed ashore.
- 444 Deiphobus: another of Priam's sons. He was killed and mutilated by the Greeks during the sack of Troy, and in that condition was found by Aeneas in the underworld.
- 449 Claudian: a Latin writer of the late fourth century AD, often cited by Chaucer.
- 457 Turnus: a southern Italian king, killed by Aeneas during the latter's conquests leading to the founding of Rome. Latinus was allied to Aeneas, to whom he wedded his daughter Lavinia, though the latter had been promised to Turnus.
- 514-16 Of these Dreamers, Scipio (see 'The Parliament of Birds', pp.129ff.), Isaiah (whose *visions*, rather than dreams, are mentioned in Chapters 1 and 6), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1-4) and Pharaoh (Genesis 41) are well known, but there is apparently no certainty about Turnus and Helcanor.
- 518 Cypris: one of the names of Venus, who was born in Cyprus.
- 521-2 Parnassus: mountain home of the Muses. Helicon, though called a fountain sacred to the Muses, was in fact a mountain too.
- 588-9 Elijah 'went up by a whirlwind into heaven' (2 Kings 2.11), and Enoch 'walked with God: and he was not; for God took him' (Genesis 5.24). Romulus, the mythical founder of

## Notes to 'The House of Fame'

Rome, after reigning for thirty-seven years, was carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot by Mars during an eclipse of the sun. Ganymede, the beautiful boy whose name gives us the word *catamite*, was taken up to heaven by Jove, who came in the form of an eagle.

- 712 The favourite author was, of course, Ovid, whose description of the House of Fame is in Book XII of the *Metamorphoses*.
- 730 The idea that everything has a natural habitat is a medieval commonplace.
- 763 This theory of sound is again common, and Chaucer (v. Robinson, p. 765, note) probably found it in Boethius' *De Musica*.
- 915 According to medieval legend, Alexander was 'carried in a car in the air by four gigantic griffins' (Robinson, p. 765, note).
- 920 Icarus: son of Daedalus (see note to 'The Book of the Duchess', l. 569). He flew too near the sun and the wax binding of his wings melted, so that he was drowned in what became the Icarian Sea. The legendary event is the subject of a famous painting by Brueghel, and a famous poem by Auden, 'Musée des Beaux Arts'.
- 932 The 'eyrssh bestes' of Chaucer's original were probably the signs of the Zodiac, though Robinson surmises that they were 'the daemons of the air'.
- 939 It seems that the Milky Way was in each country given the name of a prominent long road.
- 942 Phaeton: a favourite classical subject for medieval moralizing. The son of Helios, the sun, he persuaded his father to let him drive the chariot of the sun across the heavens. But the horses proved too strong for him, and when the sun left its usual path, Jove killed Phaeton with a flash of lightning for his presumption.
- 985 Marcian: a fifth-century writer on astronomy.
- 986 Anticlaudian: a philosophical poem by the twelfth-century writer Alanus de Insulis.
- 1004-7 Constellations. Arion (Arion's harp) is Lyra; Castor and Pollux are Gemini; Atlas's seven daughters are the Pleiades.
- 1021 Saint Julian: the patron saint of hospitality.
- 1035 Chaucer *would* make his Dreamer swear by St Peter when thinking of sea crashing against rocks ('petra' being the Latin word for stone or rock).
- 1066 Saint Clare: a thirteenth-century abbess and disciple of St Francis; now patron saint of good weather and of television. Nuns of her order are called 'Poor Clares'.

## Notes to 'The House of Fame'

- 1076 J. A. W. Bennett (*Chaucer's Book of Fame*, p. 98) notes that the Eagle's answer to the poet's question (l. 1060) whether humans are making the noise embodies the 'truth that as a man speaketh, so is he'; and further, that the phenomenon described 'symbolizes an aspect of the imaginative process as operating in the poet whose influence has pervaded this second book; for the shapes embodying human speech correspond to those shades in Dante that embody the mental state of men in life'.
- 1183 Saint Giles: a sixth- or seventh-century saint celebrated in *The Golden Legend* as the patron saint of cripples. Churches dedicated to him were usually on city outskirts, cripples and beggars not being allowed through city gates. Cripplegate disappeared from the map of the City of London in 1981, owing to the Barbican development.
- 1201 Orpheus: see note to 'The Book of the Duchess', l. 568.
- 1205-7 Some interestingly chosen musicians of fame:  
 Arion: a citharist of the seventh century BC. He won a music prize in Sicily, and when returning by ship to Corinth he threw himself overboard to avoid being murdered by the sailors for his wealth. Music-loving dolphins took him safely ashore.  
 Chiron had been taught music by Apollo; he became tutor to Achilles and many other Greek heroes.  
 Glasgerion: a king's son who was a harpist, and hero of the ballad 'Glasgerion'.
- 1227-9 This list is evidently of arrogant and bad musicians. Nothing is known of Atiteris and Pseustis, and the story of Marsyas is told in the verse.
- 1243-6 Now for trumpeters: Misenus for Hector and Aeneas, and Joab for King David (see 2 Samuel 2.18 and 20).  
 Thiodamus was a Theban augur, whose invocations would be followed by trumpet-calls.
- 1271ff. Magicians now, female first:  
 Medea, when forsaken by Jason, murdered her children by him, poisoned his new wife and flew to Athens in a chariot pulled by winged dragons.  
 Circe: Medea's aunt, who turned men into pigs, often after they had been her lovers.  
 Calypso: like Circe, detained Odysseus amorously on his homeward journey after the fall of Troy. She could bestow immortality.

# Notes to 'The House of Fame'

Hermes Belinoux: disciple of Hermes Trismegistus, the Greek god related to the Egyptian god Thoth who was the source of knowledge and thought.

Simon Magus trafficked in black magic during the time of Nero (first century AD). Trafficking in sacred things, including religious offices, is still called simony.

Elymas (in Chaucer, *Limote*): the sorcerer mentioned in Acts 13. is thought by Robinson to be the person referred to here.

Colle: probably an English magician who practised in Orleans (Robinson, p.894). Chaucer calls him a *tregetour*, a word derived from the French and apparently applied particularly to magicians specializing in illusions, like the man described in 'The Franklin's Tale' (ll.1140-51 in Robinson).

1327 Surcoat: an outer garment, usually sleeveless, which was often worn over armour.

1352 The Lapidary: an eleventh-century treatise on precious stones.

1383 For 'the feathered creatures four', see Revelation 4.6-8.

1400 Calliope: the Muse of Epic Poetry. The Nine Muses were sisters.

1414 For Hercules' death, see note to l.398.

1432 Robinson suggests (p.895) that since Saturn was the senior planet, the term was applied to Jewish religion as the source of other religions.

1433 Josephus: a first-century Jew who became Romanized and was the author of two books on Jewish history.

1460-70 The first-century poet Statius was not a native of Toulouse. He wrote the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid*, and in the former tells of an incident in which three Greeks were killed by tigers.

Dictys is supposed to have written a diary of the Trojan War. He and Dares Phrygius (see 'The Book of the Duchess', note to l.1070) provide many of the Troy legends of which medieval poets made use.

Lollius: identity uncertain.

Guido: the author of a medieval Latin history of Troy, based on a French *roman*.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, collected history and myth about early Britain and made Britons descendants of Aeneas, thus qualifying him, for Chaucer's present purpose, as one who 'penned the fame of Troy'.

1499 Lucan: a first-century Latin poet whose chief work was the

# Notes to 'The House of Fame'

*Pharsalia*, an account of the struggle between Caesar and Pompey.

1509 Claudian: see note to l.449.

1511 Pluto: king of the underworld; Proserpine was his queen.

1547 Fame and Fortune make good sisters, but it is not known whether Chaucer had any authority for making them so.

1796 Isolde: daughter of the King of Ireland, whose lifelong love for Tristan (I use the name forms made familiar by Wagner), in spite of her marriage with King Mark, made her an ideal of love-worthiness and beauty for medieval romancers.

1840 'stripe' and 'bell', i.e. dressed like a Fool.

1869 No identity is proposed for the new character, whose sole function seems to be to ask the questions the answers to which define the poet's attitude to his discoveries thus far.

1920 In his creation of the house of rumour, Chaucer goes far beyond his source, the description in Book VIII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of the curious building Daedalus built for Minos to house the Minotaur.

1928 No reason for the choice of the Oise, except its rhyme sound, has been adduced.

2158 A tantalizing non-ending, since the poem cries out for rounding off at this point. Noble patrons' names, as well as neglect by a copying scribe, have been tentatively suggested, as has the God of Love. The ending Caxton supplied is as follows:

And wyth the noyse of them wo  
I sodeynly awoke anon tho [at once then]  
And remembryed what I had seen  
And how hye and ferre I had been  
In my ghoost and had grete wonder  
Of that the god of thonder  
Had lete me knowen and began to wryte  
Lyke as ye have herd me endyte  
Wherfor to studye and rede alway  
I purpos to doo day by day  
Thus in dremyng and in game  
Endeth thys lytyl book of Fame

(Quoted by Robinson, p.1018)

*Verse; The Owl and the Nightingale, Cleanness, St Erkenwald; and King Arthur's Death: Alliterative 'Morte Arthure' and Stanzaic 'Le Morte Arthur'.*

Brian Stone died in London in March 1995. In its obituary the *Independent* described him as 'a brilliant teacher, an enthusiast for good English and an exceptionally brave man. He was unmistakable with his jaunty, determined, one-legged walk and air of buoyant optimism.'

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

# *Love Visions*

THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

THE HOUSE OF FAME

THE PARLIAMENT OF BIRDS

THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

*Translated with an Introduction and Notes by*

BRIAN STONE

PENGUIN BOOKS

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