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THE ORDRE OF HER DOM: JUDGMENT AND HOPE IN *CHAUCER'S HOUSE OF FAME*

Abstract: *This essay argues for a revival of utopian thinking through a careful investigation of the philosophy of Ernst Bloch and its application to medieval literature. Although the European middle ages have from time to time been used as a source of cultural fantasy throughout the modern age, we seem to have ignored the potential for hope that medieval texts provide. Bloch's concept of a not-yet-consciousness, a space in the human imagination where the future is imagined and interrogated, is entirely appropriate for understanding how we might reinvigorate utopian thought. When we apply Bloch's theories to the obscure dream vision *House of Fame* by Geoffrey Chaucer, a startling vision emerges: Chaucer's poem becomes a vehicle through which a young poet imagined a world in which poetic fame could be understood, and, more importantly, controlled. This fourteenth-century fantasy of a science of fame gives modern readers a sense of hope that their world, too, might be more easily grasped and ordered.*

Key words: *Chaucer, House of Fame, fame, judgment, hope, utopia, dystopia, dream vision, medieval.*

“Utopia” is a tough word, one that is both hard to pin down and hard to avoid. In popular usage, it connotes starry-eyed idealists, Gernsbackian futures of polished chrome and ray guns, or brutalist nightmares of mad bureaucracy and Glorious Leaders. Some readers might recall the origins of the word in Thomas More's 1516 travelogue, although they would quickly dismiss even that as mere pie in the sky. Few would acknowledge that, to much of the rest of the world, the West itself might be a utopia; fewer still would acknowledge as utopian their own dreams of steady jobs, stable homes, and a heaven beyond death.

This last turn hints at the positive side of “utopia”, a word can and often has pointed toward hope. Utopias are our dreams of the better, our suggestions to ourselves of the ways out of our present troubles toward some better future. The dark or dismissive tone “utopia” receives in modern

Western discourse comes largely from a (perhaps deliberate) confusion between *utopia* (the no-place that is also a good-place) and *dystopia*, the good place gone bad. This says much about consumerism in the late 20th and 21st centuries, wherein, in Fredric Jameson's words, “the complaint about the boredom of Utopias can much more clearly be seen to be so much propaganda for the excitement of market competition” (2005: 339). It also ignores the positive aspects of More's pun, in that *outopos* may be a no-place, but *eutopos* is a good place. At its heart, utopia is a vision of what an author or her society thinks is best. So long as we remember this, utopia can become a critical term that might well help us overcome some of our cultural malaise.

That malaise, however, is a larger problem than it might first appear. Westerners in general and Americans in particular seem to take perverse delight in imag-

ining a world that is no better than the one in which we now live. Indeed, in many cases, we dream of worlds far worse than our own, where atomic fallout or ecological disaster has wiped out a great majority of the population, leaving the survivors to scavenge the ruins. Even those who do not dream of so terrible a future still dream of a reset, of a “return to the past,” where life was simpler and the world more understandable.

It must seem odd, then, to attempt this solution through a discussion of “medieval utopia,” to fix the future by turning to the past. But looking at the medieval utopian imagination is not the same as dreaming of a world that looks like the middle ages. Instead, our engagement with the past can lead us to reconsider our present knowledge and systems of understanding, and shape new futures for ourselves. In order to do that, we may find it useful to re-energize the word “utopia,” to rescue it from its negative associations, and put it forward as the critical tool that allows us to shape those futures. This essay will discuss how such a revitalization might occur. I urge readers to reconsider the theories of Ernst Bloch by demonstrating how his theories allow us to unlock a puzzle at the heart of the 14th-century English poem *House of Fame*, by Geoffrey Chaucer.

House of Fame is a notoriously challenging poem, an incomplete hodgepodge of literary influences mixed with anxiety over posterity and the reliance on authority, all of which lead readers, and at times even the narrator, to throw up their hands in despair. Yet somewhere in the midst of all this turmoil, readers might find the seeds of hope: the fresh voice of a new poet seeking through imitation to discover something uniquely his own, something quite new. In *House of Fame*, Chaucer expresses a hope for a more critical and discerning audience, and, through the allegorical vision of Fame and her judgments, gives his public a means to that end.

Chaucer does so through the vehicle of a dream vision, a traditional literary device that allowed medieval authors to explore the more tenuous regions of their culture with some measure of deniability. Such dreams also explore the landscape that Ernst Bloch called the “Not-Yet-Conscious.” This is “the preconscious in its other meaning, over on the other side, in which no repressed material, but rather something coming up, is to be clarified”--in other words, an imaginative unconscious, the space both of daydreams and dreams of the future (1986: 116). Bloch posits the “not-yet-conscious” as a more optimistic version of the Freudian unconscious, or, in Bloch’s terms, the “exclusively *No-Longer-Conscious*; as such it populates solely the moonshine landscape of cerebral loss” (1986: 115). Instead, the Not-Yet-Conscious “is the psychological representation of the Not-Yet-Become in an age and its world”, a representation of a possible future (1986: 127). All of us communicate our dreams of a better life through art; all of us recognize that better life in art. Paradoxically, this content is what we identify as both excitingly new and exceedingly timeless in art--those things that speak to us most deeply.

Although Bloch does not make this connection, textual authority is in many ways the unconscious of the medieval scholastic rhetoric. Authority (*auctoritas*) derives from *auctores*, a category of writers whose works possess true wisdom. Although this seems tautological--*auctores* produce *auctoritas*, which is what *auctores* say--A. J. Minnis reminds us that this distinction rests on the work’s “intrinsic worth” (how close is it to divine Truth?) and “authenticity” (does it have a named, verified author?) (1988: 10-11). Once such criteria had been established for a work, that work could then form the basis for a whole host of new conclusions. Like the Freudian unconscious, textual authority is--to borrow Bloch’s description of the

former--"old content that has merely sunk below the threshold and may cross it again by a more or less straightforward process of being remembered" (1988: 115). Yet for Bloch, this memorial process is "*never a Not-Yet-Conscious*, an element of progressions; it consists rather of regressions. Accordingly even the process of making this unconscious conscious only clarifies What Has Been; i.e. *there is nothing new in the Freudian unconscious*" (1986: 56). From this perspective, reliance on *auctoritas* limits and freezes what might be.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this would seem to present us once again with that historical canard of the middle ages as timeless and unchanging. Bloch himself acknowledges this problem, for change in any society happens when artists tap into the cultural Not-Yet-Consciousness: "every great work of art, besides its manifest essence, is also carried toward a *latency of its coming side*, that is: towards the contents of a future which has not yet appeared in its time, in fact ultimately towards the contents of an as yet unknown final state" (1986: 98). In *House of Fame*, Chaucer dreams of a future in which *auctoritas* is no longer the sole repository of truth. While such a vision may seem unstable to his contemporaries, and perhaps even to Chaucer himself, that instability does not stop him from trying to express what might be. Thus, *House of Fame* asks readers to question that traditional textual authority by compiling this evidence themselves, so that anyone may say, "I wot myself best how y stond" (1878).¹ This interplay between evidence and critical thinking unlocks "a content of consciousness which has not yet become wholly manifest, and is still dawning from the future" (1986: 116). For Chaucer, the way to manifest that content is through lived experience. Each book of the poem presents textual authority only to challenge and critique it by direct

experience, a process that can help identify those traces of the possible future.

The Order of the Poem

In order to see how the organization of Fame's judgments might be utopian, we first have to understand the context in which the judgments occur. Chaucer divides *House of Fame* into three "books," each dealing with a version of authoritative knowledge. In the first two books, Chaucer reveals that this authority is untrustworthy by undercutting it. His long praise of Virgil and Ovid in Book I is undone the moment he opens the temple door and discovers

a large feld,
As fer as that I myghte see,
Withouten toun, or hous, or tree,
Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond;
For as the feld nas but of sond
As small as man may se yet lye
In the desert of Lybye. (482-488)

Although "desert" can imply, for medieval writers, any empty space, such as the *haut desert* or wasteland of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, what the narrator sees here is clearly an actual desert, a "feld nas but of sond" (486). Such an empty wasteland can seem like a symbol for lost creativity, but it is also a sign of possibility, a place where, as the Desert Fathers believed, one can start fresh and be purified. As Bloch reminds us, "the man who has lost his way stands between the permanent wish and the impermanent or elusive path. But the danger in which the traveller is placed by losing his way, the danger of death, is also the toll he pays for the New" (1986: 746). To an author first facing the idea of going against poetic tradition, the desert is thus an excellent image. the narrator has literally reached the end of what can be gained by being a mere poetic *commentator*, someone who, in St. Bonaventure's words, "writes both the materials of other men, and of his own, but the materials of others as the principle materials, and

¹ All quotations from Benson 1987; textual references are to the poem's line numbers.

his own annexed for the purpose of clarifying them" (qtd. in Minnis 1988: 94). It is time, Chaucer seems to argue, to become an *auctor*, someone whose work is his own.

This lesson is driven home in Book II. The narrator is rescued from his desert by the Eagle, who is both a source of textual authority and also a vehicle for the narrator to gain new experiences. The Eagle explains that because Fame lives "in myddes of the weye / Betwixen hevene and erthe and see" (714-715), any sound made will come directly to her: the narrator expresses skepticism that this account is true, despite its grounding in authorities as diverse as Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, Dante, Vincent of Beauvais, and Macrobius (see Benson 1987: 983n734 and 765-781). Sheila Delany remarks that the structure and content of the lecture both need work; the Eagle relies on "tautology, analogy, non sequitur, reductive simplicity, abuse of the syllogism, circular argument, and 'proofs' that prove nothing" (1972: 75). Chaucer has reworked several authoritative positions to demonstrate not that their conclusions are wrong, but that we build new theories based on the old--and, perhaps unexpectedly for a contemporary audience, Chaucer suggests that those theories have to be tried and proven.

It is for this reason that the Eagle takes the narrator high into the air where he sees "eyryssh bestes" such as "Cloudes, mystes, and tempestes / Snowes, hayles, reynes, wyndes" (933, 965-966). The narrator experiences these beasts' behavior "first-hand" and quickly realizes that his textual authorities were, *as far as he could see*, right: "sooth was her description / Of alle the hevenes region, / *As fer as that y sey the preve*" (987-989, my emphasis). Chaucer implies that using experience to prove the truth of one's authorities misses the point of experience. As the narrator's experience with those "airish beasts" demonstrates, direct experience exposes the *limits* of textual authority. Only some of what

the experts claimed turns out to be true, so some re-evaluation is called for. What Chaucer suggests here is that careful attention to the poem and its use of authoritative sources will be rewarded. Indeed, Chaucer rewards readers whose experience of Lady Fame is informed by a close critical analysis of the text; they discover a utopian Fame whose judgments are so organized as to give good rhetoricians a hope for the future. Here is what Bloch would call the "forward dawning" in which Chaucer "extend[s], in an anticipatory way, existing material into the future possibilities of being different and better" (Bloch 1986: 144).

The Ordre of Her Dom

Although the critique of textual authority resonates throughout the entire poem, the clearest example of that theme is the image of Lady Fame herself. Here, the authoritative position comes in Chaucer's portrait of Lady Fame as a second Lady Fortune, serving everyone "dyversly" (1545). The critique of that portrait, however, is not as clear as the authority itself. While critics have long seen her judgments as arbitrary and capricious, I maintain that there is in fact an intelligible pattern to her decisions. This pattern demonstrates that a shrewd writer or performer could play the system, manipulating his way into literary posterity by contributing something new to his culture. In so doing, Chaucer shows us a Lady Fame who listens to the way that petitioners make their cases and responds to every case in a consistent pattern determined by their use of words. As a result, Chaucer gives his art a utopian turn, providing both hope and a possible way forward for his society as well.

Chaucer's authoritative portrait of Fame begins in his descriptions of the palace grounds, the palace proper, and Lady Fame herself. Each one builds upon the other and prepares us for a particularly traditional vision of Fame which Chaucer will quickly undercut. The palace is built on a

dazzling field of ice (1130) into which are engraved “famous folkes names fele” (1137). Those on the south face, where the narrator stands, have begun to melt away and are growing more illegible. The older names on the north face of the ice have been protected, however, by the shade of the castle. On the one hand, this seems like a confirmation of the medieval grammarians’ view of the world, in which “works of unknown or uncertain authorship were regarded as apocryphal, and believed to possess an *auctoritas* far inferior to that of works which circulated under the names of *auctores*” (1988: 11). However, because those shadows occlude texts the culture finds insubstantial, Cawsey argues that the icy foundation of Fame’s house is more like a manuscript, because “it is the most popular manuscripts that are liable to destruction, because they are handled, torn, spilt upon, written in, exposed to the elements, recopied poorly, and textually corrupted” (2004: 975). Thus, Fame may not protect the famous, but subject them to the hot sun of public approval. It is possible, then, that Chaucer is suggesting that we question the tradition by which new works are attributed to ancient authors in order to be acceptable.

The weight of textual authority continues to build once we reach the palace. The palace is covered in windows, in which are “alle maner of mynstralles / And gestoures that tellen tales / . . . Of al that longeth unto Fame” (1197–1198, 1200), all of whom are presumably on the outside of the palace so that they can help spread the fame of Fame. Chaucer lists the more noteworthy ones, like Orpheus, by name and surrounds them with crowds of their fellow-pipers who “Gunne on hem upward to gape / And countrefete hem as an ape / Or as crafte countrefeteth kynde” (1211–1213). This image suggests the diminishing returns for art: the further we get from the creative source, the more we imitate and the less we innovate. Here already is the

suggestion that “hanging on” and blindly serving tradition will lead to ruin.

Chaucer completes his summary of textual authority with the portrait of Lady Fame. She is “a femynyne creature, / That never formed by Nature / Nas such another thing yseye” (1365–1367). Her grotesque body filled with feathers (1382), ears (1389) and tongues (1390) derives from Virgil, and is meant to evoke both Virgil’s chaotic Rumor and the Apocalypse (1385). Her uncouth body is usually read as prefiguring her judgment, and although few authors address directly her gendered state, it, too, is typical of patristic and anti-feminist understandings of the female body—and thus the female mind—as chaotic, unstable, and capricious.² Yet there is a level of ambiguity here—is it a woman? A divinity? A monster? All three? In Lady Fame, Chaucer creates a symbol that is open enough to suggest that Fame, for all its vagaries and weirdness, can be understood if we look close enough.

Both Fame and her Palace are by this point in the poem a large enough collection of signs that, if Chaucer follows his usual pattern, he should begin to critique them. That critique occurs in the description Chaucer gives of Lady Fame’s judgments. Scholars are accustomed to reading Lady Fame as a stand-in for Lady Fortune, in part because how people get fame is traditionally obscure, and in part because Chaucer tells us so:

But thus I seye yow, trewely,
What her cause was, y nyste.
For of this folk ful wel y wiste
They hadde good fame ech deserved,
Although they were dyversly served;
Ryght as her suster, dam Fortune,
Ys wont to serven in comune. (1542–1548)

Here Fame, like Fortune, is said to be capricious, handing out reputation as she wishes. Although the narrator admits that

² For authors who read Fame this way, see Boitani 1984: 172, Delany 1972: 92; and Desmond 1994: 135–136.

he cannot understand Fame's "cause," or the reason behind her judgments, in-depth analysis is not this narrator's primary task, nor is it one he is willing to undertake. Instead, he is more concerned with accurately repeating the dream (66-79), a fact he reminds his audience of here when he remarks "And yet, lo, al this companye / Seyden sooth, and noght a lye" (1551-1552).

Critics have long sided with the narrator's confusion about Fame's judgment. John M. Fyler calls her an "arbitrary goddess" (Benson 1987: 988n1526-48), while Delany writes that the "allotment of reputation is random, and to the narrator, incomprehensible" (1972: 87). Boitani even describes her as "contradictory and voluble, her motives are inscrutable (1541-2), she knows no justice (1820), and bestows her favors with no regard for good or evil" (1984: 16). Fame, however, may be easier to understand than critics have typically thought. For instance, the "company" mentioned here seems to refer to those "that gone her [Fame] of her grace praye" (1550), but Chaucer is careful to stress, through the phrase "And yet, lo," that *all* this company is truthful, as if we should be surprised at the existence of truth. Since both Lady Fame and the petitioners appear as subjects in the beginning of this sentence, it does not seem out of the question that both groups form one great circle of truth-tellers, honest about their desires and judgments.

Moreover, Fame and her petitioners have similar origins. As Piero Boitani reminds us, "everyone in the Middle Ages knew that 'fama a fando, i.e. a loquendo'" (1984: 6). Fame comes from speech, is constituted by spoken things, and exists to continue that speech. So too her subjects, who are not people, but speech:

Whan any speche ycomen ys
Up to the paleys, anon-ryght
Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight
Which that the word in erthe spak
Be hyt clothed red or blak (1074-1078)

Spoken words take on the body of the one who spoke them, clothed in red and black like the pages of a rubricated manuscript (Quinn 2008: 183). Both Fame and her petitioners are the same category of thing: embodied speech.³

Reading the judgment scene this way implies that both Fame and her petitioners could now be able to communicate on a level plane, where each side knows that what the other will say is true. In turn, each side negotiates its posterity through its use of language. This is the new content, the bursting forth of the "not-yet-consciousness" into Chaucer's poem. Certainly some of Chaucer's readings have their roots in the unconscious or preconscious of textual authority, the forgotten and repressed knowledge of what great men said was true. However, if Bloch is right that some artistic inspiration arises from a "preconscious of what is to come, the psychological birthplace of the new," then we should not look for Fame's criteria and judgments to arise solely from the works of *auctores* whose theories Chaucer was encouraged to trust. When the petitioners receive their judgments from Lady Fame, we should not then be surprised if those judgments run counter to received wisdom, whether that wisdom comes from medieval *auctores* or more modern canons of critical authority.

Every set of petitioners addresses Lady Fame and asks her to grant them a certain kind of fame: the first three sets, who have done good works, ask for "good fame;" the fourth and fifth groups have done good works but want "no fame;" groups six and seven have been idle but demand "good fame" anyway; and the eighth and ninth groups are both malefactors, but the former wish to be known by "good

3 This detail explains the narrator's confusion: while he is unsure whether he is alive or dead (981), he is certainly not "embodied speech," because he did not arrive at Fame's palace by vibrating through the air to the House of Rumor. He is thus out of his element, resulting in his inability to fully see Fame's process.

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fame” while the ninth group is happy with their “bad fame.” These exchanges demonstrate that, far from being capricious, Fame is actively ensuring a certain kind of future, one in which good fame goes to those who speak boldly, work for God, or tell good stories; bad fame is given to timid speakers, the truly lazy, and the most wicked. As an arbiter of both posterity and the *auctoritas* that is derived from it, Lady Fame is creating an authority that rests on good speech acts; this in turn creates a poets’ utopia, in which only those who speak well are remembered.

Fame’s first petitioners are
Folk that here besechen the
That thou graunte us now good fame
And let our werkes han that name.
In ful recompensacioun
Of good werkes, yive us good renoun. (1554–1558)

These petitioners frame their request as a transaction: our good works are payment enough (“ful recompensacioun”) for good renown. They also couch their request as a kind of begging, *beseeching* that she grant them fame. Such petitioning fails, however: fame is not a direct compensation for services rendered (or, alternatively, reparation or atonement), nor does it seem to be given to those who rely on older models of deference in making their request. Lady Fame’s response to these petitioners is very curt; she warns them (1559) that they will receive no fame at all, and, when they ask her why, she states that explaining would not please her (“for me lyst hyt nought,” 1564). Fame does not scold these petitioners because they have asked for renown, nor because they have done good works; in fact, she is willing to give it to the third group, whose members are still good-working seekers of good fame. Something about the *tone* of the request has set her off, and that would seem to be the language of deference and compensation. The timidity of this company ensures its oblivion. In approaching

Lady Fame, whose domain is echoing with speech and who herself is a thing spoken, one has to be certain, indeed boastful, of one’s right to posterity. It is not a matter of boasting or pride - a sin in Chaucer’s time—but a mark of the utopian novum: Fame must be sought on its own terms.

The second company’s request is more streamlined, although it does repeat word-for-word two lines of the earlier petition:

Lady graunte us now good fame,
And lat oure werkes han that name
Now in honour of gentillesse
And also God your soule blesse!
For we han wel deserved hyt,
Therefore is ryght that we ben quyit. (1609–1614)

Gone is some of the deference of the previous appeal. These petitioners begin with the more direct request, “graunte,” rather than humbling themselves as the first set do “beseech.” They press on Lady Fame’s “gentillesse,” meaning both nobility and kindness, which they reinforce with a quick prayer for Fame’s soul. This mindful turn is quickly ended with a clear statement that they *do* deserve fame. The Lady’s response to this set of petitioners is actually longer, and in it she reveals that their request merits “a shrewed fame, / And wikkyd loos [fame], and wors name / Though ye good loos have wel deserved” (1619–1621). This judgment of worse fame could well stem from several things, including presumption, but the biggest crime (for Fame at least) is repetition. This set of petitioners, alone among the nine, repeats verbatim two lines from the previous set’s request: “graunte us now good fame, / and lat our werkes han that name” (1555–6; 1609–10). Repetition by itself is not problematic; indeed, it is a well-known and welcome mnemonic device. But that is not the function that repetition plays here. Instead, it is more akin to stock phrasing, a kind of mindless repetition--something that the phrase “God your soule blesse”

(1612), which seems to have little function other than as a forced rhyme for “gentillesse,” drives home. Fame’s own repetition of their terms, “though ye good loos have wel deserved” (1621), is delivered in a mocking tone, since she opens her decision with the sarcastic taunt “But wite ye what?” (1618). This kind of repetition is likely to lead to what C. S. Lewis later called “a stereotyped monotony, unnoticed by contemporaries but cruelly apparent to posterity” (1957: 232).

Fame’s decision here leads to a rare comment from the narrator on the plight of the judged. He declares that “they amon ges al the pres, / Shul thus be shamed gilteles. / But what, hyt moste nedes be” (1633–1635). If indeed Fame is insulted by their repetition, then the narrator’s statement can be understood as another example of Chaucer’s tendency toward self-parody. At the time when *House of Fame* was likely written (1379–1380), Chaucer’s career was largely one of homage and translation. If Lady Fame rejects those who ape convention without contributing to the conversation, then our poet might feel a little stung. Yet he appears to come to terms with that rejection by the end of his digression. Although he says that these petitioners should be “guiltless,” he still acknowledges that this decision is the way things have to go (“hyt moste nedes be”). Here, then, is a tiny moment of utopian change, for even the confused narrator is beginning to understand that, to paraphrase Bloch, there can be nothing new in the textual unconscious (cf. Bloch 1986: 56).

The third company of petitioners is the last of those who ask for good fame because they have done “good works.” Although the nature of these works is undisclosed, it is noteworthy that this company is the only one to actually receive good fame, perhaps because their request is so straightforward:

We ben everychon
Folk that han ful trewely

Deserved fame ryghtfully,
And praye yow, hit mot be knowe,
Ryght as hit is, and forth yblowe. (1660–1664)

This third petition is hardly one at all. Gone is the beseeching, gone the sense that we have to appease Fame to get notoriety. Instead, the company states that their fame should be known “right as his is” (1664), without emendation or baggage. Fame’s response is equally straightforward:

“I graunte,” quod she, “for me list
That now your goode werekes be wist,
And yet ye shul han better loos,
Right in dispit of alle your foos,
Than worthy is, and that anoon.” (1665–1669)

Fame’s “for me list” can go two ways: on the one hand, it is pleasing for her to give the fame (it pleases me that your good works be known); on the other, it is the reason for her granting good fame (I grant [it] because I am pleased). Some glosses (e.g. Lynch 2007: 82), following the traditional view of Fame as random, translate “me liste” as “I feel like it.” However, the phrase has both an impersonal and a personal meaning (Davis et al. 1989: 89). Since Fame’s usage does not include a pronoun, either meaning could work here. Moreover, if we read this as “I grant it because I am pleased,” then it becomes one of the few times that Fame offers any outright justification for her decisions. It is also the first time in this procession of companies that we learn what *does* please her: if your good works are good, just say so, and don’t add honorifics or attempt to flatter her. She continues her reasoning, however, by stating that the fame she provides will be “exactly to spite all your enemies” (1668). In so doing, Fame underscores that her decision to give good fame to the most direct company of do-gooders will seem odd: tradition has long been in favor of deference, but the game, as both Fame and the narrator have noted, is changing. Chaucer’s argument here is that to receive fame, language must be used well, “well” in this case

being a straightforward, boasting demand to be remembered.

The first group, those who did good works and want good fame, have received their judgment, and the next set, those who have done their works for the sake of good and God, take their place. The fourth company, who are “wonder fewe” (1691), argue that

We han don wel with al our myght,
But we ne kepen have no fame.
Hyde our werkes and our name,
For goddys love; for certes we
Han certeyn doon hyt for bounte
And for no maner other thing. (1694–1699).

While the word *bounte* could imply they did these works for reward, the more common meaning of the word is goodness, virtue, or benevolence (“Bounte” 2001). Each of these is a virtue that is practiced here on earth: one is benevolent toward other humans. Thus, this group seems to be made of people who do good works that are directed to the community at large; for them, fame means nothing, because they are unaccustomed to it (we have done well, but we have never kept fame). This is another straightforward request, and Fame’s response to them is equally simple: “I graunte yow alle your asking / . . . let your werkes be ded” (1700–1701). In the cases of both the third and fourth companies, the direct, well-reasoned approach to Fame pays off.

The fifth company’s position seems at first somewhat similar to the fourth’s:

And to hir thoo besoughten alle
To hide her gode werkes ek,
And seyden they yeven nought a lek
For fame ne for such renoun;
For they for contemplacioun
And Goddes love hadde yrought,
Ne of fame wold they nought. (1706–1712)

However, they are explicitly people who have withdrawn from the world into contemplative acts (1710–1711). Unlike the previous company, their good works do not

have immediate social gains and, as we will see, Fame is more concerned with temporal renown than spiritual immortality, which perhaps explains some of her reasons for rejecting their petition. More importantly, their argument relies on reference and repetition--the company asks her to *also* (ek) hide their good works--and again, it relies on insulting Fame, although the insult is more direct than the earlier deferential treatment: this group cares for fame “not a leek” (1708). Their contempt for Fame leads directly to their ironic reward. Fame’s angry judgment (“What? quod she, ‘and be ye wood?’” 1713) is a direct response to this insult: “Have ye dispit to have my name?” (1716). These get good fame precisely because they do not want it, and do not know how to ask for obscurity correctly. Fame’s judgment process becomes clearer: not only must one speak well for Fame to work, but that speech must not cross the line between boast and insult. While there is something unsettlingly dystopian about the notion that we must toe the line in order to secure the future we desire, all is not lost. We are still beginning to see what the rules are, where the order lies—and when we understand how the game is played, then we finally have a chance at winning it on our terms.

Chaucer’s point that good speech is necessary for fame is carried out in the extreme in the next group. The sixth and seventh companies are made up of those who, as the sixth company puts it, “han don neither that ne this / But ydel al oure lyf ybe” (1732–1733). Even so, they ask, in the longest speech (32 lines) given by any company of fame-seekers, for a particular kind of fame:

That we mowe han as good a fame,
And gret renoun and knowen name,
As they that han doon noble gestes,
And acheved alle her lestes,
As wel of love as other thing. (1735–1739)

Their request continues in this vein for some time. They point out that while they have never been the object of a woman's affection (1741–1743), they would like to be known as “Worthy, wise, and goode also, / And riche, and happy unto love” (1766–1767). Although they have not done these deeds, the sixth company clearly demonstrates their facility with words. Their case is for what they want and why they ought to have it is clearly stated and, to Fame at least, convincingly argued. She accedes to their demand, saying that “every man wene thinks hem at ese, / Though they goon in ful bade lese” (1767–1768). Though they are doing quite poorly, they appear to be doing quite well indeed. Although this seems like a direct response to their request that she let them “coun-trepese ese and travaylle” (1750), it also points to the ultimate hollowness of this victory: they have fame, they use words well, but being *famous* for “women loven us for wod” does not help the fact that women did not actually love them madly.

Mortal happiness, however, is not Fame's concern; words are, as the seventh company learns when they ask “Lady, graunte us sone / The same thing, the same bone, / That [ye] this nexte folk han doon” (1773–1775). The contrast between the long, involved explanation of the last group and this short, unimaginative, “give us what they got” request couldn't be more clear. Fame's scolding underscores that their crime is not general idleness but a lack of trying: they are “lyke the sweynte cat / That wold have fissh; but wostow what? / He wolde nothing wete his clowes” (1783–1785). Her curse, that in addition to “a sory grace” (1790) an “yvel thrift come to your jowes, / And eke to myn, if I hyt graunte” (1786–1787), is an appropriate punishment for those who are unwilling even to use their jaws in the first place.

The judgment wraps up with two companies of great malefactors, who had done “the grettest wikkednesse / That any

herte kouthe gesse” (1813–1814). The eighth company's request is simple:

to han good fame,
And that she nolde doon hem no shame,
But yeve hem loos and good renown,
And do hyt blow in a clarioun. (1815–1819)

Fame rejects this bid with an emphatic series of negatives: “Al be ther in me no justice, / My lyste not to doo hyt now, / Ne this nyl I not graunte yow” (1820–1822). Delany remarks that Fame's judgment here “is perhaps a vestige of his [Chaucer's] will to believe in some form of absolute justice,” but, when compared with the ninth company's boasting of evil, the process remains clear (1972: 88). This is not justice, as Fame suggests (1820), but a just poorly-worded case, for, while it is as straightforward a declaration as the other successfully famous companies, it also implies that Fame has “shamed” them with their present bad reputation. Fame, as we have seen, does not judge their deeds, only their words. By contrast, the ninth company is proud of its wickedness. They announce their arrival by “leyping in a route, / and gunne choppen al aboute / Every man upon the crowne” (1823–1825). They are self-described “shrewes” (1830) who “han delyt in wikkendesse, / As goode folk han in godnesse,” (1831–1832) and they ask, simply, “that oure fame such be knowe / In alle thing ryght as hit ys” (1836–1837). This Fame grants, and is impressed not only by the boldness of this desire, but also by the prestige of the chief speaker, who burned the temple of Isis at Athens “for to gette of Fames hire” (1857)—a sacrifice worthy of fame, if one isn't too picky about what kind of fame it is.

All Fame's judgments, then, rely on the ability to speak well. We should not be surprised that speech is so highly prized; after all, for Dante, speech was God's way of allowing humanity a sensible and rational way to communicate despite being saddled “with the heaviness and density of the

mortal body" (1996: 7). Boccaccio, too, reminds us that "if it is a sin to compose stories, it is a sin to converse, which only the veriest fool would admit. For nature has not granted us the power of speech unless for purposes of conversation, and the exchange of ideas" (1956: 47). Chaucer's addition to the theories of his Italian, vernacular-loving heroes is to praise the power of that language to shape one's destiny through one's speech. This is the Not-Yet-Conscious of the text: the realization that anyone who deserves fame has to use their words as effectively as possible, not just for a contemporary audience, but for everyone, every when--a daunting task to be sure, but also a utopian one. Bloch reminds us that "sound change, especially that into the *realm of freedom*, comes about solely through sound knowledge, with ever more precisely mastered necessity" (1986: 281). Such knowledge can only come through a synthesis of experience and textual authority; as Bloch remarks elsewhere, "Because merely contemplative knowledge necessarily refers to what is closed and thus to what is past, it is helpless to what is present and blind to the future" (1986: 198). That future can only be imagined through language. Chaucer indicates that whatever your desired future, it will be achieved through your use of words, a faculty open to everyone "of sondry regiounes, / Of alleskynnes condiciouns / That dwelle in erthe under the mone" (1529-1531).

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THE ORDRE OF HER DOM: СУД И НАДА У
ЧОСЕРОВОЈ КУЋИ СЛАВЕ

Резиме

Есеј се бави оживљавањем утопијског промишљања кроз пажљиво проучавање филозофије Ернста Блоха и њену примјену на средњовјековну студију. Иако средњовјековни период у Европи помиње времена на вријеме у савременом добу као извор културне фантазије, чини се да смо заборавили колико наде средњовјековни текстови нуде. Блохов концепт не-свјесности, простор људске уобразиље у којем се будућност замишља и пропитује, потпуно је погодан за разумијевање начина на који бисмо могли оживјети утопијску мисао. Када применимо Блохове теорије на опскурна сновиђења из Чосерове *Куће славе*, појављује се запањујући приказ. Чосерова поема постаје средство помоћу којег је млади пјесник замислио свијет у којем је могуће разумјети и, што је још важније, контролисати поетску славу. Ова фантазија из четрнаестог вијека пружа савременом читаоцу наду да се и његов свијет може лакше схватити и уредити.

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