

The House of Fame: Tripartite Structure and Occasion

JOHN M. STEADMAN

Like many other allegories, Chaucer's dream-vision is an extended enigma; but (unlike the majority of such poems) it is a riddle without a key. The poem breaks off abruptly at the climax of the narrative; and the nature of its conclusion (which might have illuminated the meaning of the entire dark conceit) must itself remain conjectural. One must not only guess at the meaning underlying the allegory as it stands; one must also guess at the nature of the final key to the allegory—if indeed the missing conclusion actually provided a key. Under the circumstances it would be superfluous to apologize for indulging in conjectures; for they are, in fact, unavoidable. The facts are so few, the uncertainties so manifold, that one can at best achieve hypotheses. Though some theories may seem more plausible than others, none of them can possess demonstrative certainty. Therefore a healthy skepticism is indicated toward the best of them, not excepting one's own hypothesis.¹

Among the problems which still remain unsolved are the tripartite structure of the poem and the significance of the date of the poet's dream. In the following pages I shall examine the possibility that these problems may be interrelated and that the Dantesque associations of Chaucer's eagle may have a bearing on both problems. In the present state of our knowledge² the solution proposed—a recitation on three successive days in association with the feast of Saint Lucy (December 13)—must necessarily remain hypothetical, and largely speculative; but one hopes that it is not altogether "fantome and illusion."³

I.

Chaucer's dream takes place on the tenth day of December, the tenth month. Though several explanations have been advanced for this detail,

the reasons for his choosing this particular date have never been ascertained and will, in all probability, remain conjectural. Is the date itself symbolic, either astrologically or liturgically? Does it have a personal and autobiographical meaning for the poet, as April 6 did for Petrarch? Does it derive its significance from an historical event that is still unknown to us but that may have been the subject of the mysterious love-tidings? Or is it primarily related to the occasion of the poet's recitation?

Elsewhere Chaucer's dates are usually significant for the theme of the poem—May morning, Saint Valentine's Day, the unlucky day or *dies mala* (May 3) on which Pandarus feels "a teene / In love" and on which Chaunticleer encounters the fox.⁴ We may logically assume that the choice of date in *The House of Fame* was equally significant. Perhaps the simplest explanation would be that December 10 was not in itself symbolic,⁵ but merely denoted the night prior to the first formal recitation of the first book of the poem (or possibly the actual date of its presentation).

The underlying conceit of Chaucer's fable is (apparently) that the announcement by the man of great authority is merely part of his dream. In actuality the "tidings" that the latter presumably delivered may have been the real occasion for the narrative, and perhaps for the festivity in which the poet was himself a principal participant. The theme introduced in the Proem and artfully elaborated by numerous figures of amplification and repetition—the validity of dreams⁶—would be resolved by the final annunciation of tidings that the poet has prepared his audience to expect. This is a "true" dream, accordingly, and its truth is decisively vindicated by the real events for which the dream-narrative is merely a fictive and allegorical framework. The heavy and perhaps over-laboured emphasis in the Proem on the truth of dreams serves as ironic preparation (or *parascève*) for the final disclosure. The dream is indeed "true" because the occasion the poet pretends to be dreaming about is the actual festivity at which he and his audience are present in person. Nevertheless, it is also, in a sense, a "false" dream, for (as he and his audience are well aware) it is not a dream at all, but a fictional framework for the real situation. This interplay between dream and reality, fiction and fact, is (in the literal sense of the word)

“occasional” humor, centered on the concrete social occasion in which poet and audience are alike participants.

Chaucer’s dream occurs three days before the festival of Saint Lucy of Syracuse (December 13), the shortest day and longest night of the year.⁷ In England her day was honored as a festival of the second rank until the Reformation. She is patroness against eye-diseases, just as the eagle is traditionally the most keen-sighted of birds; and in the *Purgatorio* Dante brings both of these figures into close association. While he is dreaming of an ascent to the element of fire in the clutch of a golden eagle, Lucia (as he learns later) actually lifts him up to the threshold of Purgatory. Commentaries on the *Commedia* often identify her with illuminating grace, and her patroness (Rachel) with the *vita contemplativa*. The eagles of Chaucer and Dante function as contemplative symbols in dream-visions; and the scene in the *Purgatorio* has generally been accepted as one of Chaucer’s sources. The proximity of the date of his dream to Lucia’s feast suggests that he may be drawing on the eagle-Lucia association that he had encountered in the *Commedia*.⁸ As a symbol of the intellect or of illuminating grace, Lucia had been associated in medieval exegesis both with the eagle of the Ganymede and the eagle of Dante’s purgatorial dream. Chaucer’s exploitation of these symbolic associations would be seasonally appropriate.⁹ We should not exclude the possibility that his echoes of Dante’s *Purgatorio* and its imagery are related to the date of his dream, and that both allusions are related to the date and occasion of the recitation of his poem. The vision (or at least its climax in Book 3) would conceivably have been read aloud on the eve of St. Lucy or her festal day, only three days after the ostensible date of the dream. If read aloud in successive installments, moreover, the climax of the narrative would coincide with the feast-day of the saint whom Dante and his early commentators had associated with the eagle as a symbol of the intellect.

Let us assume tentatively that on the night of December 11 Chaucer read the first book aloud—possibly to Richard’s court, to the court of John of Gaunt, or (as R. J. Schoeck suggests) at an entertainment at one of the Inns of Court. In this case he pretends to be recounting a dream that he had experienced the previous night. The journey with the eagle would be recited on the eve of Saint Lucy, and the core of the poem—the

vision of Fame's dwelling and the concluding announcement—would be delivered on the saint's festal day. On each of these days the eagle—the only character besides Chaucer himself who plays a role in all three books—is introduced; and the Dantesque associations of this image make it an indirect and symbolic tribute to the saint whose feast-day coincides with the climax of the poem. On the first day he merely makes his appearance, shining like the sun and appropriately suggesting the root-meaning of *Lucia* (light or *lux*). On the eve of Saint Lucy he carries the poet on his aerial journey, meanwhile delivering a scientific lecture, a scholastic demonstration of the nature of sound. In this passage the eagle (a traditional symbol of the intellect itself or of various intellectual virtues) rationalizes the myth of Fame's aerial dwelling in terms of the principles of natural philosophy or physics. Utilizing both deductive and inductive proofs, he employs arguments from definition and from analogy, to establish (on what appear to be logical and scientific grounds) a point that is, of course, a mythological commonplace but a scientific absurdity. The comic impact of this scene derives not only from its parody of scholastic logic (a traditional rival of poetics and rhetoric in the Middle Ages as well as in the Renaissance), but also (and more specifically) from its burlesque treatment of at least one principal mode of classical and medieval allegoresis: the explication of myths and the justification of poetic fables as symbolic statements of the truths of physics and natural philosophy. In both respects Chaucer could conceivably be making sport of the demonstrative and exegetical methods of the friars. The lecture also serves (albeit humorously and ironically) to enhance the credibility and probability of the marvels that the poet is about to relate to a potentially skeptical audience.

On Saint Lucy's day (December 13), the eagle performs his final office as guide, bringing the dreamer into the actual house of tidings, where the latter will hear in person the news that he has journeyed so far (in contemplation) to hear. At this point the dream-milieu of the vision merges into reality, into the actual festivities. The concluding revelation would thus occur on the day sacred to the patron saint of vision and the symbol of Illuminating Grace. Whether the concluding announcements are made by the great man *in propria persona* or in disguise as part of a mumming we cannot know. The significant point, however,

is that the truth of the poet's dream—an issue emphasized in the Proem by extensive repetition—has been vindicated. The "causes" of his dream are now quite clear. His dream on the "double-tenth"—the tenth day of the tenth month—was a prophetic dream, divinely sent by Jove himself through the agency of his messenger. Through a clever poetic invention and an equally skilful manipulation of suspense and irony, Chaucer has made the occasion for reciting his dream the ostensible proof of its validity, and the solution to its allegorical significance.

II.

In suggesting a possible connection between the fictional date of the poet's dream, its tripartite structure, the feast of Saint Lucy, and the Dantesque associations of Chaucer's eagle, one should not overlook other associations which may elucidate several of the major images and motifs within this work. Recent scholarship has called attention to the eagle's conventional role as a symbol of Saint John the Evangelist, to the possible significance of the Advent season, and to a potential link between *The House of Fame* and the Christmas revels at one of the Inns of Court.¹⁰ The pretended date of the dream-vision is exactly a fortnight before Christmas Eve, and the feast of the Evangelist (December 27) follows that of Saint Lucy by precisely the same interval. Chaucer's audience was, in all probability, already making preparations for Christmas festivities; and it is possible that certain motifs in his poem—such as the emphasis on tidings—may have involved seriocomic allusions to the imminent celebrations in honor of the Nativity and the first proclamation of the gospel "tidings of great joy." There would appear to be a certain seasonal decorum, albeit parodic, in the dreamer's quest for tidings. The contrast between the kind of love-tidings the poet expects to hear in his dream and those that he and his audience will be listening to in earnest some two weeks hence might enhance the underlying ironies of his vision. In less than two weeks after celebrating the feast of St. Lucy—the saint whom Dante had allegorized as intellect or prudence or "Illuminating Grace," in the opinion of the earliest commentators—Chaucer's audience would be rejoicing in the advent

of the *Lux Mundi*, hailed as the "true Light" (John 1:9) by the evangelist whose conventional symbol was an eagle.

The analogy with the eagle of St. John the Evangelist (and of the gospel-lectern) acquires greater relevance for Chaucer's poem, moreover, through its specific associations with tidings (*evangelium*).¹¹ Lessons from the gospel (i.e. "tidings") were, of course, normally read from the eagle-lectern. The symbolic eagle of St. John the Evangelist was accordingly literally a "bearer of tidings"; and in the gospel lesson for Christmas Day the tidings (not inappropriate for a keen-sighted eagle) are the tidings of the true light and the testimony of another John (the Baptist) who bears witness to the Light.¹² Like the eagle, however, St. John the Evangelist was a visionary, commonly regarded as the author of Revelation—a book which seemed, in the eyes of readers like Boccaccio, to approximate the allegorical methods of poetry and which poets themselves frequently utilized as a partial model for their own dream-visions and as a source for their own allegorical symbols.¹³ Figuratively, as "bearer of tidings" the Evangelist is himself a speaking eagle, like the eagle of *The House of Fame*.

Chaucer's eagle thus possesses a variety of associations, secular and Biblical, literary and iconographical, which the poet might conveniently utilize in accomodating his allegory to time and place, occasion and season. The eagle's role in bearing the poet to the heavens at the behest of Jove derives partly from the Ganymede myth and partly from Dante's *Purgatorio*. Through the *Purgatorio* he is also linked with St. Lucy of Syracuse. Both St. Lucy and the eagle of the bestiaries are associated with keenness of sight, and (allegorically) with intellectual illumination. His association with tidings connects him with the eagle of the gospel-lectern and St. John the Evangelist. Finally, the motif of tidings¹⁴—so intimately connected with the festivities that are the occasion of the poem—suggests a possible link between the eagle who promises to take the dreamer to a place where he will hear love-tidings and the man of great authority who (if we may judge from the context) relates them.

The conscious mystifications in the earlier books—the speculations on whether dreams are true or not, the poet's ignorance as to the meaning of his dream, his doubts as to whether Venus' temple may not be a phantom or illusion—are partly designed to arouse and maintain

suspense, puzzling the audience and increasing their eagerness to hear the continuation of the story at the next recitation. If the poem was indeed designed for recitation on three successive days, Chaucer must somehow manage to make each episode a more or less self-contained narrative, yet at the same time arouse interest in the next installment by breaking off at a crucial point in the story. This was how Scheherazade saved her neck, how Ariosto entertained a ducal court, and how nineteenth-century serial-writers supported their families. Each of the three books of *The House of Fame* is virtually a unified whole—the vision of Venus' temple with the summary of the Aeneid; the flight-scene with the digression on air and sound; the visit to the palace of Fame and the house of tidings—and could accordingly provide a substantial and satisfying evening-fare in itself. The concluding lines of the first two books, however, are proleptic; they provide the preparation for the next episode and are intended to stimulate the audience's expectations. The golden eagle appears at the end of the first book, but we are not told who he is, what he signifies, or why he has come. At the end of the second book the traveller arrives at his destination and receives the preparatory instructions for his visit, but the account of Fame's dwelling and its marvels is postponed until the little last book. Chaucer's narrative art would seem to be admirably adapted to the demands of the occasion we have suggested—a series of recitations on three successive days culminating in festivities held either on St. Lucy's day or on the preceding evening. This is occasional poetry of a very high order indeed.

The apparent lack of coherence in Chaucer's plot, its tripartite structure, and the seeming lack of continuity between one episode and the next have frequently been deplored as artistic flaws. In actuality, however, these would appear to have been deliberate, the poet's conscious response to the conditions of his "performance". The poem falls into three virtually discrete parts because it was apparently intended to be read in three separate installments. The apparent discontinuity between the episodes of the temple, the flight, and the palace would surely puzzle the audience, just as it has puzzled modern readers; and, as so often in allegorical narratives, the mystery would itself enhance suspense. Their interconnection would ultimately become intelligible on the allegorical plane, if not on the literal level; and the concluding announcements

would probably resolve much of the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in the symbols. The fourteenth-century audience could enjoy this type of allegorical mystification in the same way that sixteenth and seventeenth-century courtiers delighted in enigmas and emblems and in the "court hieroglyphics" of the masque.

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NOTES

¹I am indebted to Professor J. A. W. Bennett for helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this essay.

²Among full-length studies of *The House of Fame*, see W. O. Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame* (London: Chaucer Society, 1907); J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame: An Exposition of The House of Fame* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968); G. B. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966); Sheila Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972). Among other studies, see R. J. Schoeck, "A Legal Reading of Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *UTQ* 23 (1953): 185-92; Reginald Berry, "Chaucer's Eagle and the Element Air," *UTQ* 43 (1974): 285-97; Kay Stevenson, "The Endings of Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *ES* 59 (1978): 10-26; and Lisa Kiser, "Eschatological Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *MLQ* 49 (1988): 99-109, which compares Chaucer's poem with Dante's *Commedia*.

³Though there is evidence of folk customs associated with St. Lucy's day, it remains uncertain whether there were court festivities associated with this day. Accordingly, this study must of necessity remain largely conjectural rather than factual.

⁴See F. N. Robinson's notes on the *Nun's Priest's Tale* 3190; *Troilus* II.55; and the *Knight's Tale* I.1462. Robinson observes that "according to the usual understanding," Palamon escaped from prison on the night of May 3, but that Manly interprets Chaucer's allusion as a reference to the night preceding May 3; *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). R. K. Root cites an additional reference to May 3 in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and observes that the third of May was one of "Egyptian days" or "dismal days" on which "it was unlucky to begin a new undertaking"; *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1945) 437. See also George R. Adams and Bernard S. Levy, "Good and Bad Fridays and May 3 in Chaucer," *ELN* 3 (1966): 245-48; John P. McCall, "Chaucer's May 3," *MLN* 76 (1961): 201-05; *OED*, s.v. *dismal*, Ducange, s.v. *dies*; John Matthew Manly (ed.), *Canterbury Tales* (New York: H. Holt, 1928) 550-51. The English or Anglo-French term *dismal* apparently derived from Old French *dis mal* (or *mals jours*).

According to *OED* and Manly the Egyptian or "dismal" days in each month were as follows: January 1 and 25, May 3 and 25, June 10 and 16, July 13 and 22, August

1 and 30, September 3 and 21, October 3 and 22, November 5 and 28, December 7 and 22—i.e. two days in each month. Other lists, however, sometimes designate more than two unlucky days in the month, and the composition of these calendars often varies considerably. On the whole, the variations would appear to be more pronounced in the English calendars *before* 1100 than in the manuscripts after that date; see Francis Wormald (ed.), *English Kalendars before A.D. 1100* (London: Harrison, 1934) 13, 27, 97, 111, 153, 195, and *passim*; Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars after A.D. 1100*, vol. 1 (1939; London: Henry Bradshaw, 1946) 111, 179, and *passim*. In one of the earlier calendars the days identified as *Dies Egyptiacus* or *Dies mala* are January 2 and 25, February 6, April 4, May 4 and 25, June 20 (identified as the summer solstice), July 6 and 13, October 4, November 24, and December 12. (In this instance May 3 is not an unlucky day, but the day preceding Saint Lucy's day is an Egyptian day.) In another calendar the unlucky days are virtually the same as in the *OED-Manly* list; in the case of December, however, the evil days are identified as the 12th and 15th. In another early calendar Saint Lucy's day itself (the 13th) is a *Dies mala*, while a fourth applies this designation to December 11 and December 27 (the day of Saint John the Apostle). Most of the calendars in Wormald's second volume, however, conform to the same pattern as the *OED-Manly* scheme.

⁵An alternative explanation—that the date is primarily symbolic—would derive support from the analogy with Chaucer's use of symbolic dates (notably May 3) in other poems. Chaucer's reward for his services to the god and goddess of love would thus appear to be associated with a lucky day, just as Pandarus' fruitless pains and Chaunticleer's perilous and all but fatal reward for his service to Venus would be linked with a "dismal" day, a *dies mala*. In Koonce's opinion, astrological evidence establishes December 10 as an auspicious date. The fact that this is the double tenth night also reinforces this interpretation. Inasmuch as ten was regarded as a perfect or complete number, the tenth day of the tenth month might seem a fitting occasion for the poet to receive a reward for his hitherto unremunerative labors on behalf of lovers; see Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1938). Nevertheless, since we do not know precisely what year Chaucer is referring to, we cannot be certain that December 10 was an auspicious day. The dismal days not only varied in different calendars, but were sometimes associated with the ten plagues of Egypt. If (as we have suggested) the poem may have been read aloud on three successive days, concluding on Saint Lucy's day or its eve, it is probable that one of the installments occurred on a *dies mala*. Several of Wormald's calendars apply this term to either the 11th, the 12th, or the 13th of December. Chaucer's journey may not be a fortunate voyage. It may terminate in disillusion and (as the eagle's discourse concerning the aerial substance of tidings might suggest) in a reward of empty air. On the significance of the date of Chaucer's "dream on 'the tenth day of the tenth month'" and its "Scriptural context," see Koonce 182, 184.

⁶The time of Chaucer's dream may also suggest an ambiguity as to its validity. In *The Book of the Duchess*, Alcione's dream occurs "Ryght even a quarter before day"; but in *The House of Fame* the dreamer falls asleep "Whan hit was nyght. . . ." Whereas the timing of the former suggests that it may be a true dream (and such it subsequently proves to be), the omission of any reference to a morning dream in the latter poem (although the narrator dreams that he is waking at dawn) may suggest that it is in actuality a false illusion. See Sapegno's notes on *Inferno* 26.7 and on *Purgatorio* 9.16. Dante's vision of the golden eagle occurs in an early morning

dream: "Nell' ora che comincia i tristi lai / La rondinella presso alla mattina . . ." Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, vol. 1, *Inferno* (Firenze: "La Nuova Italia" Editrice, 1955) and vol. 2, *Purgatorio* (Firenze: "La Nuova Italia" Editrice, 1956). I am indebted to Professor Bennett for his suggestion concerning the time of the narrator's dream in Chaucer's poem.

⁷Alexandre Masseron, "Quelques énigmes hagiographiques de la *Divine Comédie*," *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950): 369-82, observes that in Dante's heaven Saint Lucy plays a role analogous to that of Iris (or, one might add, Mercury) in the pagan Olympus. In accordance with Dante's belief (*Vita nuova* 13) that "*nomina sunt consequentia rerum*," Masseron observes that Lucy's name signifies light and that its proper effect is light. An early commentator on the *Commedia*, Graziolo de' Bambaglioni, stressed Dante's "*maximam devotionem*" to this saint. Saint Lucy was one of the four principal patronesses of the Western Church and the protectress of "the labouring poor, or tillers of the ground, of sight and the eyes, against dysentery and hemorrhage of all sorts." According to popular legend, her eyesight had been miraculously restored after she had plucked out her eyes in literal obedience to the Scriptural injunction ("if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out") and presented them to her lover in a dish. See Agnes B. C. Dunbar, *A Dictionary of Saintly Women*, vol. 2 (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1904); *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. *Saint Lucy*; Osborn Bokenham, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, ed. Mary S. Serjeantson (London: H. Milford, 1938) 243-44, derives the saint's name etymologically from light, for it is the nature of light that "in syht þer-of ys gracyous consolacyoun. . . ." Invoking her aid, Bokenham declares that the saint has been called "lyht / Or lyhtys weye" by the singular property of "specyal grace," for the Holy Ghost had given her so great a might that a thousand men and many yokes of oxen "in no degree / To the bordelous myht not drawyn þe . . ." Against this background of legend, the poet might appropriately be delivered from the illusion of Venus' temple by a contemplative symbol that had already served Dante as a figure of Lucia.

William B. Hunter, Jr. has discussed affinities between John Donne's "Nocturnal" and the "Evening Prayer lectionary for the evening before" St. Lucy's Day. See Hunter, "Donne's 'Nocturnal' and Isaiah 38," *AN&Q Supplement*, vol. 1, *Studies in English and American Literature*, ed. John L. Cutler and Lawrence S. Thompson (Troy, NY: Whitson, 1978). In *Chaucer and the Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1967), Beverly Boyd has reexamined allusions to religious ceremonies and the ecclesiastical calendar in Chaucer's work.

⁸Cf. Cino Chiarini, *Di una imitazione inglese della Divina Commedia: La Casa della Fama di Chaucer* (Bari: G. Laterza e figli, 1902) 95-97; Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1957) 110; Robinson 781-82. Lucia is mentioned in Dante's *Inferno* 1, *Purgatorio* 9, and *Paradiso* 32. Sapegno observes that, for early commentators on the *Purgatorio*, the eagle who bears him to the sphere of fire while Lucia carries him to the threshold of Purgatory symbolizes Illuminating Grace. According to Buti, "la grazia di Dio illuminante. . . fa l'omo cognoscere quelle che li è bisogno alla sua salute, e dimandare lo dono dell'amore dello Spirito Santo, lo quale rape l'anima e portala in alto e falla ardere dell'amore"; Sapegno 2:98-100. Elsewhere in the *Commedia*, however, Dante attributes other symbolic functions to the eagle; it may figure divine justice (*Paradiso* 19 and 20) or more specifically the *Imperium Romanum*. In the penultimate Canto of the *Purgatorio*, its descents (the first, symbolizing the persecution of the Church by imperial authority; the second, figuring the Donation of Constantine, which Dante

regarded as largely responsible for the corruption of the Church) occur in a decidedly pejorative context, in sharp contrast to the beneficial role of the eagle in Canto 9.

In the *Commedia* the "donna . . . gentil nel ciel" describes Dante to Lucia as "il tuo fedele," and Beatrice refers to Lucia as "nimica di ciascun crudele." C. H. Grandgent regards her as a symbol of Illuminating Grace; *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, rev. ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1933) 21-22. Natalino Sapegno endorses the same interpretation, but notes that other commentators on this passage have interpreted the three heavenly ladies as charity, hope, and faith. The symbol of Lucia as "Gracia illuminante" involves etymological word-play ("Lucia lucens"), while the references to Dante as her "fedele" refers to the eye-trouble he mentions in *Convivio* (3.9) and *Vita nuova*; *La Divina Commedia* 1:25; cf. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950) 20-21. In commenting on the *Purgatorio*, Jacopo della Lana interprets both Lucia and the golden eagle as figures representing the intellect. For Pietro Alighieri, both represent the science of mathematics, which comprises music and astronomy as well as arithmetic and geometry; see my "Chaucer's Eagle: A Contemplative Symbol," *PMLA* 65 (1960): 153-59. On the symbolism of the eagle and Lucia in Dante's *Purgatorio*, see Koonce 134.

⁹Traditionally Saint Lucy's day (December 13) coincided with the sun's entrance into Capricorn and hence with the winter solstice. In actuality, however, the date of the winter solstice sometimes varied widely in medieval calendars. According to one calendar of c. 969-978 (Wormald 27), the sun entered Capricorn on December 18, while the winter solstice occurred on December 21. In the Sarum missal the winter solstice (and *a fortiori* the sun's entrance into Capricorn) took place on December 14.

For folk customs associated with Saint Lucy's day, see Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Saints*, ed. Herbert Thurston, vol. 12 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1931-1942) 150-51, and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli et al., eds., *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 5 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1933) col. 1442-46. D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962) 184, calls attention to a thirteenth-century sermon on Saint Lucy which stressed her firmness in prosperity and adversity and her altitude of mind, "soaring above the heavens in contemplation . . ."

In view of the popularity of etymological interpretations of names in late classical and medieval rhetoric (the *argumentum a nomine*), it is hardly surprising that the saint herself (like her Renaissance namesake, the Countess of Bedford) should be praised as light (*lux*), or that astronomical and etymological associations should contribute to her symbolic interpretation in terms of intellectual illumination and the act of contemplation.

Nevertheless, there may have been a further association which could have made the seasonal allusions in Chaucer's vision appropriate. The fact that the solstices were sometimes associated with demonic activities—frequently of a strongly erotic nature—could have possible significance for the character of the poet's dream as well as for his dread of "fantome and illusion." In commenting on John Holywood's discussion of the colure distinguishing the summer and winter solstices, Cecco d'Ascoli declared that the princes of the demons occupy the four signs associated with the solstices and equinoxes. Incubi and succubi inhabit the colures. The former "dominantur in somniis coitus hominum," while the latter assume bodies of air "in forma mulieris" and deceive "quandoque hominem agendo in eum." See Lynn Thorndike, *The Sphere of Sacrobosco and Its Commentators* (Chicago: U of Chicago P,

1949) 387-88. Cf. also Cecco's etymological interpretation of the word *colurus* in terms of the erotic dreams sent by the demonic spirits who dwell in the colures. Though it is doubtful whether Chaucer knew the work of the condemned astrologer who had dared to cast the horoscope of Christ, he may have encountered elsewhere similar superstitions concerning the demonic associations of the solstices. If so, he would have had ample reason to fear demonic illusion. For an interpretation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* against the background of Cecco's commentary on Sacrobosco's *The Sphere*, see Stanley Archer, "Satan and the Colures: *Paradise Lost* IX, 62-66," *ELN* 10 (1972): 115-16.

¹⁰For the association of the eagle with Saint John, see Bennett 49-51; for the eagle symbolism in Dante and the relation of Chaucer's poem to the Advent season, see Koonce 68, 80-81, 133-34. R. J. Schoeck, "A Legal Reading of Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*" suggests that Chaucer wrote *The House of Fame* for "one of the ritualistic functions of the Inner Temple"—possibly "the Christmas Revels, which by the end of the fifteenth century were the most elaborate of the revels at the Inns."

¹¹Koonce observes (149n) that "the concept of good (glad) tidings or news is conveyed in the Vulgate by *evangelium* (*evangelizare*) or, as in Prov. 25:25, *nun[n]tius bonus*."

¹²In the Sarum Missal the Mass at Cock-crow includes a gospel reading from Luke 2:1-14, "ecce enim evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum"; the Third Mass includes John 1:1-14 as the gospel lesson. See *Missale ad usum insignis et præclaræ ecclesiæ Sarum*, ed. F. H. Dickinson, part 1 (Burntisland and London: C. J. Stewart, 1861) 54, 62; *The Sarum Missal in English*, trans. Frederick E. Warren, part 1 (London and Milwaukee: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1913) 99, 105. In *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 265-65, 265n, 274, 274n, B. G. Koonce relates the date of Chaucer's dream to the liturgy for Advent in the Sarum Missal.

¹³On the identification of St. John the Evangelist with John the Divine, author of Revelation, see Koonce, *passim*.

¹⁴On the Scriptural connotations of 'tydynges' see Koonce 149.