Questions for the *House of Fame*

1. Consider what happens in Book 1 of the *House of Fame*. What is the significance of the dreamer’s rehearsal of the story of Aeneas and Dido? What does the dreamer learn about language and the representation of truth from Dido?

2. What do you make of the eagle’s high-flown speech in the second book, and what is its significance within the context of the whole poem? What does the dreamer learn about language from the eagle? Do you think the eagle is reliable?

3. The eagle has a very literal view of how sounds break air and utterances take on the physical form of those who utter them. This view is matched later in the poem by the vision of the lie and the truth who become “compounded” before escaping the House of Rumour. What are we to make of these anthropomorphic images?

4. The eagle says language has no “substance,” and yet everywhere words effect change in the poem. Thus Geffrey prays and curses his audience, Sinon lies and destroys an ancient civilization, Aeneas promises and betrays Dido, and a whole host of utterances achieve fame or infamy for themselves in the House of Fame. What is Chaucer’s emerging analysis of language? How might words *do not* mean?

5. Consider Geffrey’s idea of Thought as a kind of archive (523ff). If he is uncertain about the unreliability of his memory here, what is Geffrey suggesting?

6. Consider what happens in Book 3 of the *House of Fame*. Geffrey comes to the House of Fame and the House of Rumour, and he has a shocking vision of the origins and ends of all human communication. Such seems to be the “tidings” Geffrey was promised, but he is not satisfied. What does this suggest about his poetic enterprise, or Chaucer’s vision of poetic composition and publication?

7. Why do you think Geffrey protects his name (1871ff)? Has he learned something from Dido, the eagle, and the House of Fame? Has the poet Chaucer?

8. The *House of Fame* has been called “a literary statement about the unreliability of literary statements” (S. Delany), and it generally exhibits what may be called linguistic skepticism. The poem is suspicious of its own sources. Do you agree?

9. Do you think the poem is incomplete?