

Petrarch and Chaucer on Fame*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to make productive connections between Petrarch and Chaucer by exploring their conceptions of fame, particularly literary fame. The first part is a broad overview of the idea of literary fame before Chaucer's time, focusing in particular on such writers as Homer, Hesiod, Virgil, Statius, and Dante to sketch out their different perspectives on literary immortality. The next part examines various works by Petrarch that are reflective of his attitude toward fame. As the Church held sway in his time, Petrarch was acutely aware of the emptiness of worldly fame and carried out a profound dissection of its vanity, yet he could not entirely suppress his longing for literary fame and avowed this yearning throughout his works. Chaucer's case is trickier, mainly owing to his characteristic noncommittal attitude. Through an analysis of the *House of Fame*, the

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third part of the paper advances the argument that though Chaucer, like Petrarch, was intimately familiar with the fickleness and absurdity of worldly fame, he betrays a longing for a posthumous literary fame.

Key Words: Chaucer, fame, Petrarch