

14

Pour penser de ma dame souveraine,
En° qui tout bien sont plainement assis
Que riens y falt de ce dont corps humeine
Doit *par* reson avoir loenge et pris,
5 Lors sui d'amour si finement espris
Dont maintenant m'estoet soeffrir la peine
Plus qe Paris ne soeffrist pour Heleine.

Tant plus de moi ma dame se desdeigne
Come plus la prie, et si jeo mot ne dis,
10 Qe valt ce, lors qe jeo ma dolour meine
De ceo dont jeo ma dame n'ai requis?
Ensi de deux jeo sui tant *entrepris*
Qe *parler* n'ose a dame si halteine,
Et si m'en tais, jeo voi la mort procheine.

15 Mais si pités, qui les douls° coers enseine,
Pour moi ne *parle* et die son avis
Et la fierté de son corage asseine
Et plie au fin q'elle ait de moi mercis,
Jeo serrai mortz ou tant enmaladis.
20 Ne puiss faillir del un avoir estreine.
Ensi, ma doulce dame, a vous me pleigne.

Ceste balade a vous, ma dame, escriis,
Q'a vous *parler* me falt du bouche aleine,
Par quoi soubtz *vostre grace* jeo languis,
25 Sanz vous avoir ne puiss ma joie pleine.

2 MS Een

15 MS doules. *The e has no grammatical basis, and the emendation is required for the meter.*

14

In thinking° about my sovereign lady,
in whom all virtues are fully and plainly° set
°so that nothing lacks of that for which a human being
ought by reason to have praise and esteem,
5 then am I so thoroughly° inflamed with love
that° now I am compelled to suffer pain
more than Paris° suffered for Helen.

°My lady disdains° me all the more
the more I beseech her, °and if I don't say a word,
10 what good is that, when I carry on my grief
for that which I haven't requested of my lady?
°Thus I am caught between the two in such a way
that I dare not speak to so proud° a lady,
and if I'm silent, I see an imminent death.°

15 °But if Pity, which teaches gentle hearts,
does not speak for me and give its counsel
and strike° and bend° the haughtiness of her heart
so that she have mercy on me,
I will be dead or become so° ill.
20 I cannot fail to have one of these as my fortune.°
Thus, my gentle lady, I make my complaint to you.

I write this ballade to you, my lady,
for I lack the breath to speak to you aloud,°
because of which I languish beneath your grace.°
25 Without you I cannot have my joy complete.°

In a collection of poems each of which is addressed by a man to a woman or by a woman to a man, those that deal directly with the effectiveness of the lover's message take on special significance. There are five such poems in *50B*, of which **14** is the first (the others are **17**, **18**, **19**, and **22**), each of which, since the persona's suit has so far been unsuccessful, draws attention in a different way to the paradox of revealing the ineffectiveness of his speech to his lady in a poem that constitutes yet another attempt to attract her attention. In the central stanza of **14** (one of Gower's most tightly crafted), the persona weighs the ineffectiveness of his speech against the ineffectiveness of silence, incorporating motifs with roots in earlier lyrics into a single cogent expression of the persona's dilemma: should he speak to her or not? In stanza three, he invokes the traditional figure of Pity as his spokesperson. In both, it is his fear of death

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that justifies his continued complaint, and with the final line before the envoy, he thus turns to address his lady directly. And as in most of the *50B*, he does so in writing: with the envoy, as the ballade itself becomes the vehicle for that which he has otherwise been unable to express, writing replaces speech, solving the dilemma of how to communicate his wish, at least, if not the bigger question posed by her earlier rejection.

As precedent for the persona's addressing his lady after claiming that he dare not do so, there are a small number of earlier poems in which the persona similarly "tells" his lady about that which he cannot tell her directly. In Granson 75, for instance, the persona declares (in a *lai*) that "Pour riens ne vous ose dire / le mien desir [I don't dare for anything to tell you about my desire]" (3-4), but the communication is clearly imaginary: the poem begins with the silent plea that his lady turn her eyes towards him in order to behold his suffering (1-2), more typically of the lyric mode in which we seem to be overhearing the persona's most private thoughts, even when in the form of an address to another person. Machaut has two similar ballades, *Lou.* 65.17-18 and *Bal.Not.* 26.19-20, in which the persona states, in poems addressed to the lady, that he doesn't dare reveal his suffering to her, though in saying so he does; but without an envoy we can again only imagine how or if this message is actually delivered. Deschamps has a ballade in which the persona states that he must hide his love "Qu'a vous n'a nul dire ne l'oseroye [for I wouldn't dare tell it to you or anyone]" (768.7-8), and that he therefore depends upon Love to send its grace, though the poem is ostensibly addressed to the lady both in the stanzas and in an envoy. Bringing us even closer to Gower's, Machaut has several other poems (that are not ballades) that express, in one way or another, the assumption that the lady will be the recipient. In *Lai* 6.135-40, for instance, the persona declares that he can reveal his sorrow only in his song; in *Chans.Bal.* 1.16-24, a *virelai*, the persona tells his lady that since he becomes speechless in her presence, he cannot tell her of his wishes "autrement [otherwise]" than in this poem; and in *Lou.* 117, a *chanson royale*, the persona describes his lack of success in love, and then in the envoy (lines 46-54), he asks the lady to listen to his song because he cannot reveal his suffering in any other way. In another poem by Deschamps, finally, the persona, addressing the lady, identifies himself as "celui qui n'ose a vous parler [he who dares not speak to you]" (1275.1), and therefore "vous fait ce rondel presenter [has this rondeau presented to you]" (1275.4).

As in most of the *50B*, Gower makes fully explicit the manner of transmission in the envoy, and the resort to writing is also wholly typical, in fact uniquely so, of his collection. And again, it does solve in at least one respect the dilemma that the persona faces: if he doesn't dare speak to her, at least he can write. The bigger issue of the effectiveness of his plea is set aside, however. In none of the other poems just cited has the persona, though sorrowful (as in line 10), already faced rejection. In those, the persona might hope that his "song" might have some effect, but here, given the lady's previous disdain, there is no real reason to think that a written plea will bring him any closer to what we have to imagine is his real objective. The dilemma posed in the second stanza is not so easily resolved. One might also think that the mere distinction between writing and speech actually diminishes the mystery somewhat, compared to the poems by other poets in which the actual communication is much less explicit than the lover's wish. Gower also left a number of loose ends in this ballade. Even more fully than in 13, the routine praise of the lady in the first stanza seems to belong to an entirely different poem, giving no hint at all (especially in the choice of Paris as an example) either of the nature of the

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man's efforts or of his rejection. There are a couple of little contradictions. The appeal to Pity as his spokesperson is immediately followed by the persona's decision to speak for himself; the choice between speaking and death in the second stanza turns into the much less compelling choice between death and illness in the third; and the haughty lady of the third stanza becomes the "doulce dame" of line 21. And given what is evidently at stake in the preceding stanzas, the final line can only be an anticlimax. This ballade is pulling in several directions at once. Gower returns to the theme and handles it a bit more neatly in the similar poems that follow.

- 1 *in thinking*. Here and in 22.19 and 24.9, Gower uses "pour" plus infinitive rather like "en" plus present participle, to introduce a verbal modifier of the subject of the main verb (in all three cases, "I"). Cf. the note to 11.5.
- 2 *fully and plainly*. On "plainement" see the note to 4¹.10. Both senses of the word seem to apply, but the next line suggests that "fully" is dominant.
- 3-4 Gower repeats the formula in 39.6-7. See also PhyT, CT VI.41-42, "In hire ne lakked no condicioun / That is to preyse." For the use of the same formula but with a qualification see 11.12.
- 5 *thoroughly*. AND s.v. "finement²," 3, "completely."
- 6 *that*. On "dont" where one might expect "que," see the note to 4².11.
- 7 *Paris*. Elsewhere when Gower cites Paris and Helen, he does so disapprovingly: see 40.6, Tr 10.4, MO 16700-04, and CA 7195-7590. It is a bit surprising to see Paris used as an example of depth of suffering in love. Hassell P39, "Comme Pâris aimait Heleinne," cites three passages in which Paris is used as a model of depth or intensity of love (Machaut, *Remede* 167-70; *Lyon* 258-60; and Froissart, Past. 11.45-46; one may add Froissart, Bal. 39.4-5), which isn't quite the same thing.
- 8-9 The persona in earlier ballades is often tongue-tied (as in 22), frequently out of fear of rejection, and his efforts to speak to his lady sometimes merely have no effect (as in 17, 18, and 19). Here he has besought her repeatedly and only made things worse. Gower uses the "plus . . . , plus . . ." formula, as does Froissart in Bal 1.12-16, particularly line 13, "Com plus li pri, et plus m'est desdagneuse [as the more I beseech her, the more scornful she is]"; and Granson in 19.6, "Plus la deprey doulcement, plus m'est fiere [the more sweetly I beseech her, the haughtier she is]." (Granson uses the same formula again for a different purpose in the refrain to the same poem. See the note to 17.15-16 below.) The formula also appears in the form "plus . . . , moins . . ." (e.g. in 17.8 and 18.R). Amans uses both forms, first as he denies his guilt of Sloth: "For ay the more I crie faste, / The lasse hire liketh forto hier" (CA 4.285-86); and then when he defends his lack of Idleness: "The more busnesse I leie, / The more than I knele and preie / With goode wordes and with softe, / The more I am refused ofte" (CA 4. 1747-51). Machaut is familiar with the construction (see *Lou*. 14.3-4, 48.46-47), but he does not use it, as far as I know, in this context, though he expresses similar frustrations, e.g. in *Lou*. 203.R, "Qu'adès la pri et riens ne me respont [for I constantly beseech her and she does not answer me]."
- 8 *disdains*. Gower uses "desdeigner" as a simple transitive verb in 12.3, 40.27 and elsewhere. The reflexive use ("se desdeigner de") is not listed in any of the dictionaries, but it also appears in MO 2269, 2271-72, 2276, 23712.
- 9-11 Granson has a ballade (33) in which he dismisses those who think that they can win the "don de merci [gift of mercy]" without requesting it, and Genius offers similar advice to Amans in CA 4.616-18 and 712-13, comparing the need to make one's wishes known to the necessity for prayer in 4.717-18. (See also 4.312 *vv.* 1-4.) These are all in the form of counsel to another, however. I haven't found any other example of a man realizing the futility of his own grieving for that which he hasn't requested yet.

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- 12-14 The germ for the alternatives that the persona faces can be found in several earlier poems. In Machaut, Motet 2.32-34, the persona asserts, "Miex vient en joie manoir / Par proier qu'adès languir / Par trop taire et puis morir [it is better to dwell in joy for having asked than to languish constantly for having remained silent and then dying]. And in Motet 7.21-32, a woman who initially rejected her lover and now wants him back faces the same choice. Both resolve to find the courage to make their wishes known. The narrator in *Remede*, fearful of refusal (559-68) wonders how his lady will ever know of his love (579-90) and decides to place his confidence in the reassurances of Hope (633-38). The persona in Machaut, *Lou.* 3.22-26, on the other hand, leaves the issue unresolved: "L'aim et desir de tres loyal amour, / Ne ne sara par moy, car j'ai paour, / Se je li di, d'avoir son mautalent; / Ne je ne puis avoir aligement / Sans li, de qui je sui descongneüs [I love and desire her out of a very loyal love, and yet she will not know it from me, for I fear, if I tell her, to incur her ill will, nor can I have relief without her by whom I remain unknown]." So too does the persona in Granson 78.2368-70: "Ouir ne vault rien que je die. / Las! Comment pourra elle savoir / Mon penser et ma muserie [she doesn't want to hear anything I say. Alas, how will she know my thought and my imaginings?]" and Amans weighs the same choices in his lesson on Disobedience, *CA* 1.1280-96. Froissart, finally, has three *rondeaux* in which he weighs speaking against silence (Rond. 83-85). The closest to Gower's is perhaps 84, particularly lines 1-3: "Se je parole et ne ne sui oïs, / Trop me sera parole virgongneuse, / Et sanz parler n'est nulls homs conjois [if I speak and I am not heard, speech would be very shameful for me, but no man was ever warmly welcomed without speaking]." 83 offers no conclusion, 84 ends with a resolution to speak up, and 85 with the fear of rejection. Gower chooses to end this stanza, at least, upon a dilemma, but see further the note to 15-20 below.
- 13 *proud*. "Halteine" might point to the awe-provoking qualities of the lady that the persona praises in lines 1-4, as in 3.15; less likely does it refer to her social rank, as in 39.26 (cf. 13.17), since there is no other allusion to a difference in rank in this poem. But in the context of her disdain (line 8) and her "fierté" (17), the dominant reason for the persona's speechlessness appears to be her haughtiness and pride (*AND* s.v. "haltein," 3; *DMF* s.v. "hautain," D).
- 14 *imminent death*. The persona's claim that he may die of his unrequited love is a staple of earlier lyrics, found in between a quarter and a third of the poems in Machaut's *Louange des dames* (as in the first two passages cited in the note to lines 12-14 above). It is also a common motif in Froissart. Gower invokes the possibility only here, in 16.23, and in 30.6.
- 15-20 Pity is one of the principal aids to the lover in *RR* (3233 ff.), but she has a long history in earlier lyric and romance, and she frequently appears among other allegorical agents that either aid or impede the lover in the lyrics that precede 50B. For one example in which Pity (in the company of "Humblesse [Humility]" serves as the lover's spokesperson, see Granson 78.165-68. For another, closer to Gower's, see Machaut, *Lou.* 2, in which the persona, faced with a choice similar to that in the poems cited in the note to 12-14 above, prefers to remain silent rather than risk the death that will result if he is rejected, and thus the woman will not know of his love "Tant que Pitès or Amour li dira [until Pity or Love tell her]" (*Lou.* 2.R). Machaut uses the same line as the conclusion to *Comp.* 2, in which a woman invokes Pity and Love when both she and her male admirer are prevented from revealing their love to one another. See also Froissart, *Lay* 12.5-11, 29-40; and Deschamps 727.22-25: "Or veil Pitié reclamer / Qu'elle veuille demander / Piteusement / Merci et grace rouver [Now I wish to call upon Pity, that she please ask piteously for mercy and request grace]."
- 17 *strike*. Macaulay, in his note to 39.9, remarks on the variety of senses in which Gower uses "assener." For this line, he offers "strike down the pride of her heart," but there is better support elsewhere for "strike, hit, wound" rather than "strike down, vanquish" (and none at all for "erase," as in "to strike something from something"). See *AND* s.v. "asener," 1; *DMF* s.v. "assener," III.

bend. "Plie [bend]" (line 18) doesn't have an object unless we take it as part of a compound verb with "asseine" in the preceding line, and so have I translated it. For this metaphorical use see *DMF* s.v. "plier," I.B: "Fléchir, faire céder qqn, son coeur, sa volonté . . . [bend, make someone, their heart, their will, yield]." The alternative is to emend it to "prie [pray, plead]": "and plead so that she have mercy on me." "Prier" is not commonly used intransitively, but Gower does so in *MO* 1066 *et al.*

- 19 Macaulay (1:464) notes that the "tant [so]" "is not answered by anything and does not seem to mean much."
- 20 Word by word, from Macaulay (I:464): "I cannot fail to have the fortune of one (or the other)."
- 23 *aloud*. I.e. "from the mouth," as opposed to in writing. See *DMF* s.v. "bouche¹," B.4.b.
- 24 *grace*. See the note to 1.8. The sense here appears to be the same: "beneath your power to grant or withhold mercy."
- 25 Cf. Machaut, *Lou*. 76.6: "Que je ne puis sans vous grant joie avoir [for I cannot have great joy without you]."