

15

- Com l'esperver qe vole *par* creance
Et de son las ne poet partir envoie,
De mes amours ensi *par* resemblance
Jeo sui liez, *sique par* nulle voie
5 Ne puiss aler s'amour ne me convoie.
Vous m'avetz, dame, estrait de tiele Mue.
Combien qe vo *presence* ades ne voie,
Mon coer remaint, qe° point ne se remue.
- Soubtz vo constreignte et soubtz vo *governance*
10 Amour m'ad dit qe jeo me supple et ploie
Sicome foial doit faire a sa liegance,°
Et plus d'assetz, si faire le porroie.
Pour ce, ma douce dame, a vous m'otroie,
Car a ce point j'ai fait ma retenue,
15 Qe si le corps de moi fuist ore a Troie,
Moun° coer remaint, qe point ne se remue.
- Sicome le Mois de maii les préés° avance,
Q'est tout flori qant l'erbe se verdoie,
Ensi *par* vous revient ma contenance
20 De vo bealté, si penser jeo le doie.
Et si merci me volt vestir de joie
Pour la bounté qe vous avetz vestue,
En tiel espoir, ma dame, *uque* jeo soie,
Mon coer remaint, qe point ne se remue.
- 25 A *vostre* ymage est tout ceo qe jeo proie
Qant° ceste lettre a vous serra venue,
Q'a vous servir, come cil q'est *vostre* proie,
Moun° coer remaint, qe point ne se remue.

- 8 *Mac que*
11 *See the note to this line in the commentary.*
16 *Mac Mon*
17 *MS lesprees*
26 *Mac Quant*
28 *Mac Mon*

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Like the sparrowhawk that flies on a leash°
and cannot get away° from its bond,°
so in similar fashion am I bound°
by my love,° so that by no path°
5 can I go if love° does not accompany° me.
Lady, you have drawn me from such a cage.°
Although I do not always see you in person,°
my heart remains, for° it does not move at all.°

°Under your constraint° and under your governance
10 Love has told me to bow and to submit°
just as a vassal should do homage,°
and rather more, if I could do so.
Therefore, my sweet lady, I submit° to you,
for I have made my commitment° in this way,°
15 that if my body were now in Troy,
my heart remains, for it does not move at all.

°Just as the month of May quickens the meadows,
which° is all in flower when the grass becomes green,
just so, through you, does my appearance revive°
20 because of your beauty, if I must think about it.°
And if Mercy wishes to dress° me in joy
because of the goodness that you have donned,
in such a hope, my lady, wherever I am,
my heart remains, for it does not move at all.

25 To your image° is everything that I pray
when this letter will have come to you,
for to serve you, as he who is your prey,°
my heart remains, for it does not move at all.

The poem is a bit unusual for Gower. It is linked to the others with which it is grouped by its use of simile and by the repetition of “douce dame” from 14.21 in line 13. But with 20, it is one of only two poems between 13 and 24 that is addressed to the lady in both the stanzas and the envoy. Yet despite its direct address, we can tell nothing about the relationship between the lady and the persona or about how the poem will be received, except perhaps as an artful compliment. The interest lies not in the dramatic situation but almost exclusively in the very profusion of its figurative imagery and in the mixing of literal and metaphorical, for example in the refrain (see the note to line 8). Each stanza begins with a different simile: the bird of prey

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that cannot escape its restraint in the first, the obedient vassal in the second, and the return of springtime in the third, which evolves into the metaphor of “dressing” with joy. Two more metaphors, each using a different sense of “proie,” occur in the envoy (echoing the *rime riche* of “voie” in stanza one). Of the multitude of images, the most original may be the first, but it is also the most difficult to grasp in all its details, and line 6 suggests that it may not have been fully understood by a scribe. Other puzzles, also possibly due to errors in transmission, occur in lines 11 and 20.

- 1 *leash*. A “creance” is a “longue corde attachée à la laisse d'un oiseau de proie pendant qu'on l'exerce à prendre le leurre [long cord attached to the leash of a bird of prey while it is being trained to seize a lure]” (*DMF* s.v. “creance¹,” B.4.b), as also noted by Macaulay, I.465. This sense does not appear in *AND*, as noted by Merrilees and Pagan, p. 129.
- 2 *get away*. Yeager: “break loose.”
bond. A “las” might be a string or cord (*DMF* s.v. “lacs,” A.1, 2), like the “creance” in the preceding line, but more generally it refers to any type of bond, including metaphorical ones, e.g. “les pièges d'Amour [the snares of Love]” (*DMF*, loc.cit., B.1.d); “lien affectif qui attache une personne à une autre [an emotional bond that attaches one person to another]” or “ce qui retient, séduit la personne qui aime [that which retains, seduces the person who loves]” (*DMF*, loc.cit., B.2.c, the latter with four citations from Machaut).
- 3 *bound*. Despite the alliteration, there is no etymological link between “las [bond]” in line 2 and “liez [bound].” Like “las,” however, “liez” can refer to both physical and emotional binding. On the latter, see *DMF* s.v. “lier,” I.B.1.e, citing, among others, Machaut, Lai 3.83, “Vostre amours me lie [your love binds me].” See also Whiting L497, citing *T&C* 1.237, “Love is he that alle thing may bynde.” Gower uses “lier” again in this sense in 37.R and also in *MO* 25406, describing the effect of wool upon covetous merchants, “L'amour de toy tant point et lie [love of you bites and binds so greatly] . . .” Cf. also the use of “liens [bonds]” in 4².11.
- 3 *mes amours*. On the *cas sujet* form, see the note to 2.5.
- 4 *by no path*. Like Modern English “way,” “voie” might be a literal road, path, or route (as in 9.11), a direction (as in 12.R), or metaphorically, a means or manner (as in *Tr* 18.26), and the latter sense might also be present here, “by no means.” See *DMF* s.v. “voie,” esp. D.2, 3.
- 5 *love*. A personification or not? There are clearer instances (e.g. 3.6, 9.35). Gower did not use capitalization to indicate the distinction, with the consequence that we can keep both possibilities in mind.
accompany. “Convoie” is perhaps compelled by the rhyme, but it alters the metaphor somewhat, and it is not the best choice of verb if Gower means “if love does not restrain me or keep me attached to you.” On the choices offered by the verb see 8.20 and 9.14.
- 6 This line is problematic. “Mue [mew]” sustains the bird simile from lines 1-2, but it also has a figurative use, and this line is cited in *AND* s.v. “mue,” 2, to illustrate the sense “cage, prison.” “Estrait” appears to be the past participle of “extraire,” most generally “to extract or remove,” (*AND* s.v. “extraire,” 1; *DMF* s.v. “extraire,” II), but if this is what Gower wrote, it alters the metaphor again. The verb appears several times in *MO*, usually in the sense of “to form, to give birth to” (*AND* loc.cit., 3; *DMF* loc.cit., I), as in lines 93, 5322, 17211, 28244. In lines 25285-86, however, we find the same expression as in this line, “Cil q'est estrait de ceste mue / N'ad mye la parole mue [he who is *estrait de ceste mue* is not at all silent],” with reference to a garrulous shopkeeper. Here too the sense is at best puzzling, and one suspects an idiom meaning something like “drawn from that box,” meaning “of this sort” or “in this circumstance.” Macaulay offers no assistance, either in his glossary

or his notes. Yeager takes "estrait" as a form of the adjective "estreit" (*AND*), "estroit" (*DMF*), and offers "You have me, lady, close in such a Cage." The image works a little better, emphasizing the binding rather than the release, but it would seem to require the emendation of "de" to "en."

Without any satisfactory solution, I have simply translated both words in their most common sense.

Punctuation is also an issue. Macaulay places a comma at the end of this line, implicitly joining this clause to those that follow, but if this were so, we would expect "tiele [such]" to be followed by "q(u)e [that]" or some equivalent word at the beginning of line 7. "Tiel" without "q(u)e" normally refers to what precedes, as it does in line 23.

7 *in person*. See the note to 6.7.

8 On the appearance of the refrain after two poems without one, see the explanatory note to 13. *for*. As in 12.27 and elsewhere, the "qe" might be either a conjunction ("for"), like the first "q[e]" in line 27, or a relative ("which"), like the second "q[e]" in the same line, but the effect is the same. *move*. There is another double meaning here which cannot be captured in translation. Intransitive "remuer" can mean "to move or depart" (*AND* s.v. "remuer," v.n., 2, 3; *DMF* s.v. "remuer," II.B.1.a), consistent with the verbs of motion in the rest of this stanza and recalling the image of the separation of the heart from the body in 7.2-4 *et al.*; but also, with reference to sentiments or one's heart, "to change" (*DMF*, loc.cit., I.B.1; *AND*, loc.cit., 1), making the refrain also a profession of fidelity, the dominant sense in stanza 3 and in the envoy. Gower uses the root verb "muer" in the reflexive to mean "to change" in 8.1 with reference to the heart, where he also rhymes it with the noun "mue." See also 1.15.

9-13 The imagery of feudal service (which recurs in 23.5-7 and 25.22) has a long history in earlier poetry, describing both the lover's submission to a personified Love and his submission to his lady. For the former see, among many examples, Machaut, *Lou.* 83.11, 22; for the latter, *Lou.* 40.20. Machaut also freely uses "ligement" ("in the manner of an *homme lige*") to describe the depth of the persona's commitment; see *DMF* s.v. "ligement," A.1, "De manière entièrement dévouée [in a fully devoted way]," with numerous examples from the "Lang. de l'amour [language of love]," most from Machaut.

9 *constraint*. A common term with reference to the force of love (as in 27.8, 42.12), especially in the verb form (as in 45.11). See Machaut *Lou.* 13.17, 191.18; Granson 30.5, *et al.*; *DMF* s.v. "contraindre," II.A.

10 *to bow and to submit*. *DMF* distinguishes between two verbs, both derived from Latin *supplicare*: "soupleoyer" (either intransitive or reflexive), "to bow, submit," and "supplier," "to pray, beseech." Godefroy also lists both "soupleoyer" and "soupleier" (the latter in the Supplement), while *AND* has only a single entry under "supplier." Gower seems to have been a bit casual in the distinction. He uses "supplie" consistently to mean "pray, entreat, beseech," but "supploie" to mean either "beseech" (*50B* 9.35) or (reflexively) "bow" (*MO* 18125). The form "supple" occurs only once elsewhere in Gower, in *MO* 29171-72, "Et ceaux qui furont en erreur / En droite foy les supple et ploie [and those who were in error he bends to the proper faith]." Here, used reflexively, it evidently means "bow, submit," as does the cognate verb "ploie" (from Latin "plicare"). This verb too had two different forms, "ploier" and "plier," but they appear in *DMF* in a combined entry s.v. "plier," and only in senses having to do with bowing and submitting rather than praying. Gower uses both forms (for "plie," see 10.6, 14.18). For a possible different use of "se ploier," however, see 3.16 and the note.

11 *do homage*. The "a" in the manuscript is superfluous grammatically and it has no effect metrically, and one is tempted to delete it. "Faire (sa) ligence" (without the preposition) is a common expression. See *DMF* s.v. "ligence," "remplir ses obligations d'homme lige [fulfill one's obligations as an *homme lige*]," and *AND* s.v. "ligance," "to do homage." See also *MED* s.v. "ligeance," 1.b.: "don (maken) ~ . . . to swear allegiance"; *CA* Prol. *25, "To whom belongeth my ligeance."

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- 13 *submit*. This is another very common image in earlier lyrics. See *DMF* s.v. "octroyer," A.3, with a dozen citations from Machaut.
- 14 *commitment*. On "retenue," see the note to 8.17.
in this way. For "a ce point," see *DMF* s.v. "point¹," II.B.2.a. Possibly also "at this time," *DMF*, loc.cit., II.B.1.b.
- 17-20 May and springtime are commonly invoked in the lyrics (see the note to 36), but I don't know of any model for Gower's conceit in this stanza, comparing the effects of the coming of springtime to the effects of the lady's beauty upon the persona's mood. For another invocation of May for comparison to the lady, see 23.22-23.
- 18 *which*. The singular verb ("est") suggests, but does not prove, given the looseness of agreement elsewhere in *50B*, that the antecedent is "Maii," not the fields. Cf. 10.22-23, 23.22-23.
- 19 *revive*. The verb "revenir" can also be used with reference to plants that grow back after cutting (*DMF* s.v. "revenir," I.B.2), continuing the image from the preceding lines.
- 20 Another problematic line. Macaulay's punctuation, with a comma at the end of line 19, no punctuation after "bealté," and a colon at the end of line 20, places "de vo bealté" in the same clause as the rest of the line, which appears less than likely because of the "le" which serves as the object of "penser." The use of "de" to mean "because of," as I have translated it, with reference to the preceding line, is nonetheless a bit unusual. If the "le [it]" does not refer vaguely to the entire preceding clause (making this half line a nearly meaningless filler, rather like "pour dire voir" [11.3] or one of its variants), then it must refer to "bealté," in which case one would expect the feminine form "la" instead. Unusual gender accords are not that uncommon in Gower (see Merrilees, p. 176, and Macaulay, 1:xvi-xvii), though not normally with pronouns of this sort (though cf. 16.7-8). "Penser" without a following "de" can have various senses, including "consider," "imagine," and "remember." See *AND* s.v. "penser," 1, 2; *DMF* s.v. "penser," I.B.2.c, II.A.1.a, c, II.B.
- 21-22 *dress, donned*. The translation loses the repetition of the verb "vestir," which might have as object either the person who is dressed or the object that is being donned (*AND* s.v. "vestir," 1, 2). The image of dressing emerges from that of the return of spring. Cf. 7.15-17, in which Gower uses "revestir" to describe the return of greenery to the garden with the departure of winter.
- 25 *image*. In addition to the play on two different senses of "proie" in lines 25 and 27, in line 25 Gower blends two different meanings of "ymage." In combination with "proier [to pray]," an "ymage" might be a painting or sculpture that serves as an object of veneration. (See *DMF* s.v. "image," II.A.) In Machaut's *Voir Dit*, the lady sends the narrator an "image" (a painted representation) of herself (1532 ff.), before which he kneels (1566), which he holds in reverence (1582), and which he addresses (1594-99), though he does not actually pray to it as here. But after the praise of the lady's beauty in the preceding stanza, the reference might also be her face (*DMF*, loc. cit., I.B.1, "visage, figure [face]," where four of the six citations are from Machaut) or to the "image" of the woman's appearance that the persona bears in his mind (whence modern "imagination"; *DMF*, loc.cit., II.C; also *MED* s.v. "imāge," 2(a), citing *CA* 7.4876). Gower similarly blends these meanings in Amans' confession of Sacrilege in *CA* 7125-34, where he admits to venerating his lady's "ymage" when he's in church as he expectantly observes her face. Cf. 23.R.
- 27 *prey*. "Proie" might be either the object of a hunt (*DMF* s.v. "proie," A) or the booty or spoils of battle or war (*DMF*, B). The first vaguely recalls the hunting image of the first stanza, though it greatly alters the roles. Macaulay (1:465) gives "'your prey,' i.e., your possession by right of capture." Cf. *Tr* 18.4, where the adulterous husband "Grant peccché fait s'il quiet ailours sa proie [commits a great sin if he seeks his *proie* elsewhere, i.e. outside of marriage]."