

18

Les goutes d'eaue qe cheont menu  
L'en voit sovent *percer* la dure pierre,  
Mais cest essample n'est pas avenu  
Semblablement, qe jeo de ma priere  
5 La tendre oraille de ma dame chiere  
*Percer* porrai; ainz il m'est defendu,  
Com plus la prie et meinz m'ad entendu.

Tiel *esperver* crieis unqes ne fu  
Qe jeo ne crie plus en ma maniere  
10 As toutz les foitz qe jeo voi temps et lu,  
Et toutdis maint ma dame d'une chiere  
Assetz plusdure qe n'est la rochiere.  
Ne sai dont jeo ma dame ai offendu,  
Com plus la prie et meinz m'ad entendu.

15 Le ciel amont de la justice dieu  
*Trespercerai* si jeo les seintz requiere,  
Mais a ce point c'est ma dame abstenu,  
Qe toutdis clot s'oraille a ma matiere.  
Om *perce* ainçois du marbre la quarere  
20 Q'ell[e]° ait a ma requeste un mot rendu,  
Com plus la prie et meinz m'ad entendu.

La dieurté de ma dame est ensi fiere  
Com Diamant, qe n'est de riens fendu.  
Ceo *lettre* en ceo me serra messagiere  
25 Com plus la prie et meinz m'ad entendu.

20 MS Qell

18

°Drops of water that fall bit by bit  
one often sees pierce the hard stone,  
but this example hasn't come to pass  
similarly, that I with my prayer  
5 °the tender ear of my dear lady  
might pierce. Instead, it is denied me,  
as the more I entreat her and the less she has heeded me.°

There was never a sparrow hawk so clamorous°  
that I do not cry more, in my own way,  
10 whenever I see the time and place,  
and my lady always remains with the same expression,  
quite a bit harder than a rock.°  
I don't know how I have offended my lady,  
as the more I entreat her and the less she has heeded me.

15 °The heaven above of God's justice°  
I would pierce° if I entreat the saints,  
but to this point my lady has abstained,°  
for she always closes her ear to what I say.°  
One cuts sooner through a block° of marble  
20 than she has returned a word to my request,  
as the more I entreat her and the less she has heeded me.

°The hardheartedness of my lady is as hard°  
as a diamond, which is not split by anything.  
This letter on this will be my messenger  
25 as the more I entreat her and the less she has heeded me.

Ballade 18, like 14 and 17, plays with the paradox of the persona's revealing the ineffectiveness of his speech in yet another attempt to address his lady, and to an even greater extent than in those two poems, since he has no real prospect of any better outcome, it appears that he simply re-enacts the very rejection of which he complains. Unlike those two poems, 18 makes the persona's persistence the entire theme. The only suggestion of his actual affection for the woman is the reference to "ma dame chiere" in the fifth line. There is nothing about why he finds her attractive, about the pains he suffers, about his dedication to her service, about the dilemma he faces, or even about his hope for her pity, as in 14 and 17. Instead, he believes that he deserves a reward simply for the duration and the doggedness of his entreaties—that repeating his complaint will simply wear her down—and as he expresses his frustration and his

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*Balade 18*

bewilderment at his lady's resistance, he places all blame directly upon her character, comparing his efforts to reach her to the erosion of a stone, to prayer, and to cutting a block of marble, and comparing his lady's hardheartedness both to a rock and to a diamond. But it is the cries of a sparrowhawk in the second stanza, clamorous, loud, and insistent, that best seem to describe his efforts, including this poem. At the conclusion of that same stanza, he wonders how he could possibly have offended her. The juxtaposition is telling, but it reveals more to us than it does to him. Even as he expresses his puzzlement, he unwittingly introduces another whole perspective both on his language and on his expectations, and he implicitly acknowledges a sensitivity that is not a mere defect of character, one that suffices to explain his plight.

This introduction of the woman's perspective in this way, through the persona's own words—our sudden understanding of that which the persona himself seems so unaware, that his every attempt is self-defeating—has no real precedent in the lyrics as far as I can tell, and it undermines not just the persona's own claims upon her regard but the entire rhetorical tradition on which he draws, not least the assumption, commonplace in poems of this sort, that the lover somehow deserves a "reward" merely for the intensity of his efforts—to reverse the refrain, that she *should* heed him the more that he entreats her. In the envoy, the persona tells us that the poem will be his "messenger," immediately after his strongest statement of her impenetrable "durté." The final statement of the refrain guarantees that yet another entreaty will have no happier effect. By the end, in fact, "durté" seems an entirely reasonable response, and the balanced phrases of the refrain express not an unfathomable mystery but a completely understandable cause and effect.

Gower finds a different way of crediting the lady's will in 19.

- 1-2 Proverbial. Hassell G44, "La goutte creuse la pierre [the droplet hollows the rock]" (citing this passage, Deschamps 939.7, and one other); Whiting D412, "Little Drops thirl (*pierce*) the flint on which they fall."
- 5-6 Gower uses the image of "piercing the ear" in 6.5 (possibly an English expression; see the note) and 44.10, but here he juxtaposes the figurative use of the verb with the more literal sense in line 2. See further the note to line 16 below.
- 7 Amans makes a similar lament in CA 4.285-86: "For ay the more I crie faste, / The lasse hire liketh forto hierre." On the "plus . . . moins . . ." formula, see the notes to 14.8-9 and 17.8.
- 8 *clamorous*. AND s.v. "crieis." Macaulay (glossary, 1:494), "loud in crying." Cf. MO 25287, "Ainz est crieis plus q'esperver [rather is he more clamorous than a sparrowhawk]," with reference to a fraudulent shop-keeper calling in customers from the street.
- 12 A proverbial comparison. Hassell P174, "Dur comme une pierre (roche) [hard as a stone (rock)]," citing among many others MO 2053-54, "Desobeissance . . . ad le cuer dur plus que perrine [Disobedience has a heart harder than stone]"; Whiting S763, "As hard as (the, any, a) Stone(s)." See also Machaut, *Lou*. 258.19, "A son dur cuer, plus dur que marbre bis [to her hard heart, harder than grey marble]"; Mudge 60.11, "cuer de pierre [heart of stone]."
- 15-18 Amans too compares the effectiveness of prayer with the ineffectiveness of his appeals to his lady in CA 4.3489-95.
- 15 *God's justice*. See Short §31.3; "The expression of possession by juxtaposition of substantives, the so-called "fiz le roi" construction, is widely used in AN . . . , particularly with *Deu* as possessor, and survives throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century and beyond." On the use of the construction in Old French;

see Lucien Foulet, *Petite syntaxe de l'ancien Français*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Paris: Champion, 1968), §§ 19-32. Gower refers to "la justice dieu" or "la dieu justice" four times in *MO*, in 2600, 7612, 16091, and 20185. He also uses expressions such as "autry pecché [another's sin]," *MO* 12817.

- 16 Like "piercing the ear" (see the note to 6.5 above), "piercing heaven" may be an English expression. There are no similar citations in *AND* or *DMF* (s.v. "percer"), but see *MED* s.v. "pērcen," 5(a), "To get through to (heaven), achieve communication with, have an effect in"; and *CA* 5.5674, "That my vois schal the hevene perce."
- 17 *has abstained*. Macaulay notes the use of "c'est" for "s'est" (1:xxxix and the note to this line, 1:465).
- 18 *to what I have to say*. More precisely, "to my subject matter."
- 19 *block of marble*. *AND* s.v. "quarrere," 2.
- 22-23 Proverbial. Hassell D67, "Plus dur que diamant," with seven citations, four from Machaut and one from Deschamps; Whiting D227, "As hard as (the, a) Diamond"; *MO* 2052-53, 7538. It is usually the heart that is compared to the diamond, but for this line cf. Machaut, *Chans.Bal.* 31.1-3: "Plus dur qu'un dyament / . . . Est vo durté [harder than a diamond . . . is your hardheartedness]." See further the note to 38.1.
- 22 *hard*. "Fier(e)" can be a synonym for "dur(e)," as is needed here for the comparison to the diamond, but with reference to one's disposition it can also mean "cruel, harsh." See *AND* s.v. "fer<sup>2</sup>," a.1.