

24

Jeo quide qe ma dame de sa mein  
M'ad deinz le coer escript son *propre noun*,  
Car qant jeo puiss oïr le chapelain  
Sa letanie dire et sa leçon,  
5 Jeo ne sai nomer autre si le *noun*,  
Car j'ai le coer de fin amour si plein  
Q'en lui gist toute ma devocioun.  
Dieus doingt qe jeo ne prie pas en vein!

Pour penser les amours de temps longtein,  
10 Com la priere de pigmalion  
Faisoit miracle, et l'image au darrein  
De pierre en char mua de s'oreisoun,  
J'ai *graunt* espoir de la *comparisoun*  
Qe *par* sovent prier serrai certain  
15 De *grace*; et pour si noble reguerdoun,  
Dieus doingt qe jeo ne prie pas en vein!

Com cil qui songe et est en *nouncertain*,  
Ainz semble a lui qu'il vait tout environ  
Et fait et dit, ensi qant sui soulein,  
20 A moi *parlant*, jeo fais maint question,  
Despute et puis responde a ma *resoun*.  
Ne sai si jeo sui faie ou chose humein,  
Tiel est d'amour ma contemplacion.  
Dieus doingt qe jeo ne *prie* pas en vein!

25 A vous, qe m'avetz en subjeccion,  
Soul apres dieu si m'estes *soverein*,  
Envoie ceste° supplicacion.  
Dieus doingt qe jeo ne *prie* pas en vein!

27 *Mac* cette

---

*Balade 24*

24

I think that my lady with her hand  
has inscribed her own name within my heart,<sup>o</sup>  
<sup>o</sup>for when I can hear the chaplain  
reciting his litany and his lesson,  
5 I can't say any other name but that one,<sup>o</sup>  
for I have a heart so full of pure love<sup>o</sup>  
that in her<sup>o</sup> lies all of my devotion.  
God grant that I do not pray<sup>o</sup> in vain!

In thinking<sup>o</sup> about the loves of long ago,  
10 how<sup>o</sup> the prayer of Pygmalion<sup>o</sup>  
caused a miracle, and how he finally transformed  
the image<sup>o</sup> from stone to flesh with his prayer,  
I have great hope from the comparison  
that by praying often I will be assured  
15 of grace;<sup>o</sup> and for so noble a reward,<sup>o</sup>  
God grant that I do not pray in vain!

Like one who dreams and is in uncertainty,<sup>o</sup>  
but it seems to him that he goes about  
and acts and speaks, just so, when I am alone,  
20 talking to myself, I pose many a question,  
I argue and then I reply to my argument.<sup>o</sup>  
I don't know if I am *fee*<sup>o</sup> or a human being,  
such is my contemplation of love.  
God grant that I do not pray in vain!

25 To you, who have me in subjection—  
alone after God you are thus my sovereign—  
I send this supplication.  
God grant that I do not pray in vain!

This is a distinctively Gowerian poem (none of his contemporaries would have thought of using the same setting) and an unusually successful one, with its multiples senses of “prayer” and “grace” and with its subtle and affecting portrait of mixed hopefulness and futility. The first of its several paradoxes is embodied in the refrain: “Dieus doingt qe jeo ne prie pas en vein!” There are two prayers here—or better, perhaps, a prayer about a prayer—the one to the lady who is the object of the persona’s devotion and the one to God, whom he has just admitted that he otherwise neglects and who might not therefore be very receptive to his plea, especially

---

*Balade 24*

given its nature. In the second stanza he hopefully invokes another prayer, that of Pygmalion, as a model for his own. The comparison doesn't necessarily work in his favor if it suggests that his lady too might be made of stone (an image that also occurs in 18.12), and his hope, as a fourteenth-century Christian, for Venus' aid might seem to be somewhat misplaced. The poem is simultaneously a prayer to God, a prayer to Venus, and a prayer to his lady (the "supplicacion" that he sends to her in the envoy), each of which, despite the fervency of his wish, is undercut in some way by the others. The third stanza, as in several other of Gower's ballades, does not sustain the dominant image, but it does transform the refrain into an expression of uncertainty about the effect of the persona's prayer. It is only appropriate that in the final line he prays not for his lady's good will but only that he doesn't pray in vain.

2 For a similar image cf. 6.5-6.

3-7 The church also provides the setting for Genius' lesson on Sacrilege in CA 5.7032-95, but both his warning and Amans' response (5.7096-7182) are concerned with flirting rather than with the lover's fervent but silent prayers, as here. In MO 20677-88, it is a priest who is distracted from his duty by a female parishioner.

5 *but that one*. "Si . . . noun" became Modern French "sinon [except]" (cf. 33.18), the same sense that it has here. Cf. MO 10197, "si dieus noun [except for God]" and the citations in AND s.v. "sinun." As Macaulay notes (1:466), the "le" refers to "noun [name]" in line 2.

6 *pure love*. On "fin amour," see the note to 7.1.

7 *her*. I choose "her" based on sense, though the normally masculine form "lui" might refer instead to the lady's name. Gower elsewhere uses "lui" for a feminine direct object (e.g. in 23.13), however, and the choice of "lui" over "elle" in this line could be meant to satisfy the meter.

8 *pray*. "Prier" is commonly used both for prayers to God and for entreaties to other mortals, such as one's beloved, as in 14.9, 17.18, 18.R, *et al.* See AND, DMF s.v. "prier."

9 *in thinking*. For the construction with "pour" see the note to 11.5. One wants to change "les" to "des," as in 14.1, 21.R. Cf. 15.20 and note.

10 *how*. Gower commonly uses "com(e)" as a preposition or conjunction meaning "like" or "as." The only other instance in 50B where we might expect "comment [how]" instead is in the exclamation in 35.15, but there are numerous such examples in MO, e.g. at 506, 784, 796, *et al.*, and in exclamations, 565, 4087, 4735 *et al.* For this use see AND s.v. "cum," conj., 1, DMF s.v. "comme," 1.A. Here "com" governs both of the following clauses.

*Pygmalion*. Genius tells the story of Pygmalion in his lesson on Pusillanimity in CA 4.371-436, but with reference to an active pursuit of love, not to prayer specifically, as here. In his reply (4.516-23), Amans cites his repeated efforts to address his lady without mentioning prayer. In the ballade, it is not actually clear whom Gower imagines that Pygmalion prays to. In Genius' version, he directs his prayer to the unliving statue (4.407-10). In Ovid's, he prays to "the gods" (*Metamorphoses* 10.274), while in RR (21053-78), he begins by addressing the gods and then prays directly to Venus. The ambiguity might actually suit Gower's purpose. In all three, the prayer is ultimately answered by Venus.

Other poets as well, of course, knew the story. Machaut (*Lou.* 203.1-16) compares a woman's lack of response to that of the statue before its transformation. Both Froissart (Lay 1.145-54) and Granson (65.7-8) believe that not even Pygmalion could have created a woman as beautiful as his lady. (Cf. RR 16147, where the same claim is made in praise of the beauty of Nature.) And in an anonymous ballade in Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, MS J.II.9, f. 113, Pygmalion's

success is cited as model of hope and effort for other lovers, as in *CA* (see <http://jechante.exeter.ac.uk/archive/text.xql?id=CyBa039ca&wit=base&view=ms>).

- 11 *image*. This echo of 23.R may account in part for the juxtaposition of these two poems in Gower's final ordering of 50B.
- 15 *grace*. On the range of meanings of "grace," see the note to 1.8. Here it is the "reguerdon" that will be granted in response to his prayer. That God, Love, and the lady all might be the granters of "grace" in this sense helps create the uncertainty over whom the persona is praying to at any moment and who will grant the reward that he seeks. Gower uses the overlap in a very different way in *CA*, for as part of Genius' general lesson that the ethical demands of Love are consistent with God's commands, he holds out to Amans the prospect of "grace" in both senses, e.g. in 2.3497-3505.
- reward*. There is a very faint echo of 23.21 in the repetition of "reguerdon."
- 17 *uncertainty*. There is no listing for "nouncertein" in *DMF*, and it appears only as an adjective (not as a noun, as in this line) in *AND* s.v. "nun-certein," which lists, however, the nouns "nun-certé" and "nun-certeinté." The three appearances of the word in *MO* are all adjectives. Gower uses "noncertain" as a noun in English, however, in *CA* 8.2179 and 2378, as does Chaucer, in *T&C* 1.337, "Complaint of Venus," 46 (translating "sans nul certain" in Granson 40.22), and *Romaunt* 5426 (no equivalent in *RR* 4830).
- 21 *argument*. A common use of "resoun." *AND* s.v. "raisun," 2, 5; *DMF* s.v. "raison," III.A.1. For a similar use cf. 39.23.
- 22 *fée*. Since Modern English "fay" might suggest "elfin" or "elfish" rather than "supernatural, non-human," there is no single appropriate word to translate Gower's "faie." *AND* s.v. "fee<sup>1</sup>" offers "enchanted being, elf," citing this line. See also *DMF* s.v. "fee<sup>1</sup>," "être fantastique [fantastic being]." Gower uses the same word again in 27.22 with reference to the lady's supernatural beauty (see the note to that line), and five times in *CA*, providing four of the six citations in *MED* s.v. "faie," adj. and n., "possessed of magical powers or properties; enchanted, enchanting; as noun: a person or place possessing such powers or characteristics."