

26

Salutz, honour, et toute reverence,  
Com cil d'amour q'est tout vostre soubgit,  
Ma dame, a vous et a vostre excellence  
Envoie, s'il vous plest, d'umble esprit,  
5 Pour fare° a vous plesance, honour, profit.  
De tout moun° coer entier jeo le desire.  
Selonc le corps combien qe j'ai petit,  
Sanz autre down le coer doit bien suffire.

Qui donne soi, c'est une experience  
10 Qe l'autre bien ne serront escondit.  
Si plein com dieus m'ad de sa providence  
Fait et formé, si plein, sanz contredit,  
Soul apres lui, ma dame, en fait et dit  
Vous donne; et si Rois fuisse d'un Empire,  
15 Tout est a vous; mais en amour perfit  
Sanz autre down le coer doit bien suffire.

Primer qant vi l'estat de vo presence,  
En vous mirer me vint si grant delit  
Q'unques depuis d'ascune negligence  
20 Mon coer pensant vostre bealté n'oublit,  
Par quoi toutdis me croist celle appetit  
De vous amer, plusqe ne porrai dire,  
Et pour descrire amour en son droit plit,  
Sanz autre down le coer doit bien suffire.

25 A vous, ma dame, envoie ceste escript.  
Ne sai si vo danger le voet despire,  
Mais si reson soit en ce cas eslit,  
Sanz autre down le coer doit bien suffire.

5 fare. See the note to this line in the commentary.

6 Mac mon

26

- Greetings, honor, and all reverence,  
as one who is totally your subject in love,  
my lady, to you and to your excellence°  
I send, if it pleases you, in humble spirit,  
5 to do you pleasure, honor, benefit.  
With all my whole heart I desire it.  
Although mine is small, in accord with the body,°  
without other gift the heart should well suffice.
- When one gives oneself,° it is a demonstration  
10 that other goods will not be refused.  
As fully as God has of his providence  
made and formed me, so fully, without reservation,°  
alone after him, my lady, in deed and word  
I give° to you; and if I were the king of an empire,°  
15 all is yours. But in perfect° love,  
without other gift the heart should well suffice.
- When I first saw the quality of your person,°  
such great delight came upon me in looking at you  
that never since out of any negligence  
20 does my pensive heart° forget your beauty,  
because of which the desire° to love you  
constantly increases in me, more than I could say,  
and to describe love in its true condition,  
without other gift the heart should well suffice.
- 25 To you, my lady, I send this writing.  
I don't know if your disdain° wishes to disregard it,  
but if reason be chosen in this case,  
without other gift the heart should well suffice.

Like all but a few of the *50B*, **26** is addressed to the lady and it is meant to be delivered to her, but this is the only one in which its letter-like form is announced in the opening stanza. With its "greetings," the poem begins, in fact, much more like a typical envoy; compare **16.27** and **39.27**. Such a beginning is not unknown; one may compare Granson **56**, which begins "Salus assez . . . A tous amans [abundant greetings to all lovers]" (1-2). The address to the lady, however, is uniquely Gower's. The poem's written form is expressly stated in the envoy, but the envoy also reveals that the entire poem assumes a relationship that may exist only in the

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persona's mind. In that regard, the poem as a whole offers an interesting study of both the presumptions and the blind spots in the male-dominated rhetoric on which it draws.

The poem is built around the common motif of the gift of the heart. The persona links "heart" in that sense both to the heart as the seat of desire in line 6 and to his physical heart in line 7 (if I have understood it correctly; see the note). In the second stanza he compares the gift of his heart to the far larger gifts that he is unable to give, either because he cannot do so literally (his whole self) or because he does not in fact possess them (his "empire"). There are certainly contexts in which the assertion that the heart alone should suffice would constitute an appealing image of the purity of his affection. But here it appears to be at least to some degree self-serving, both because it becomes clear that he expects something in return and because it appears that he has in fact nothing else to give. In one of Machaut's ballades, a woman makes a similar claim: "Et bonne Amour, ce m'est vis, / Ne demande que le cuer, si qu', amis, / Le mien avés [and true love, it seems to me, demands only the heart, just as, my *ami*, you have mine]" (*Lou.* 263.21-23). Her plea is made in the context of her lack of material wealth (lines 16-20), but unlike Gower's poem, it also occurs within an already existing relationship in which she is able to address her beloved as "tres dous amis" (line 2) and in which she makes several allusions to his changed behavior towards her, and the entire poem consists of an argument that between lovers rank and wealth should not matter. In Gower's poem, a difference in rank is never expressed openly but it is hinted at throughout, notably in the formality of the opening (see the note to line 3), in the persona's professed humility (4), in his reference to "l'estat de vos presence" (17; see the note), and finally in the fact that he must address her in writing; and in lines 11-12, the way in which he defines his total being can also serve as a not very subtle reminder that everyone is equal, if not in society, at least before God. Unlike Machaut's ballade, however, as that little hint suggests, there is less of an attempt to persuade and more of a demand, for the repetition of the refrain—"doit bien suffire"—implies that the persona deserves some compensation for his supposed "gift" (a claim that is expressed more openly in 12.9-13, 17.9-13 and 28.5-7). In the envoy, any reason that the woman might have not to return his affection is simply attributed to "danger" (26), and only in that word is there any hint—unrecognized by the persona—not only that the woman remains indifferent to him but that she might have a will or desires of her own; and in making a final appeal based on "reason" (27), he seems to abandon any claim upon an affection like that which he claims to offer to her. At very least, the poem ends upon the contrast between the generosity of the persona's rhetoric and the rather low level of his actual prospects, but it is also possible to feel that his insistence upon the merit of his claim makes each repetition of the refrain a little weaker, and in the final instance, exposes its emptiness. In focusing so exclusively on the man's expectations, this poem has its roots deep in the self-absorbed rhetoric of earlier song, and whether deliberately or not, Gower manages to draw attention here to some of its most common pretensions.

- 3 *excellence*. There is no support in either *AND* or *DMF* for taking "excellence" as an honorific ("your excellency"), especially at so early a date (the citation in *DMF* s.v. "excellence," C.2, that might support it dates from 1492). But there is in English. See *MED* s.v. "excellence," 3, citing Gower's "In Praise of Peace," 375, "This lettre unto thin excellence I sende," and Chaucer's "Complaint unto Pity," 59, "unto youre rial excellence." Arguing in favor of such a use would be the "subgit" of the

previous line; perhaps arguing against it is the compound phrase with the plain "a vous." Cf. the note to 6.9.

- 5 This is the only occurrence of the spelling "fare" in Gower's works. It is listed as an alternative spelling in *AND* s.v. "faire," but it does not appear in any of the included citations, nor does it appear in any of the citations in *DMF* s.v. "faire." One is tempted to emend by adding the missing *i.*
- 7 *in accord with the body.* This is a tricky line, and I believe that it is meant to compare the small physical size of his heart with the immensity of his gift in the refrain. Machaut uses "selon le corps" in a very similar way in *Behaingne* 370-71, with reference to a woman's breast: "et si estoit petiz, / Selon le corps," which Wimsatt and Kibler translate as "small, in perfect accord with her body." See *DMF* s.v. "selon," II.A.1; for the position of the conjunction "combien qe," see the note to 6.6-7. Somewhat more loosely, one might take "selon" as "with regard to" (*DMF*, loc.cit, II.B.1), and translate the line, "with regard to my body, though mine is small," implying the small physical size of the heart as well.
- 9 *When one gives oneself.* Macaulay calls the introduction of an "if" or "when" clause with "qui" or "cil qui" "a favourite one with our author" (1:466), and in his note to *MO* 1244 (1:398) he also cites *MO* 9055, 16541, and *CA* Prol. 460. See also 47.4, 49.5, 13.
- 12 *without reservation.* *DMF* s.v. "contredit," A.1 ("sans réserve").
- 14 *give.* "Donne" lacks an expressed object. Presumably it is to be supplied from the preceding clause: "I give myself to you."  
*if I were the king.* As noted in the introduction, the hypothetical expressed here is formulaic; cf. 4.18-19, 38.11, 44.5-6. It takes on a bit more resonance in this poem, however, because of the other hints at a difference in rank between the persona and his addressee. Amans makes a similar assertion in *CA* 5.4729-37.
- 15 *perfect.* "Perfit" still bore its etymological sense of "finished, complete" in Middle French (from Latin "perficere"), as well as the more recent sense of "flawless." See *DMF* s.v. "parfait." "Amour perfit" might of course be both. Cf. 9.4.
- 17 *quality of your person.* "Estat" is about as general as a word can be, and it is used in a wide variety of contexts, though most often in a positive sense. One might simply translate it as "nature," but it is also commonly used in contexts suggesting "status" or "rank." See *AND* and *DMF* s.v. "estat." "Presence" is trickier. There is no support for taking it to mean "bearing, carriage" at so early a date, much less "dignified or impressive appearance" ("he has a real presence"). Here and possibly in 7.24 as well, it appears merely to designate the person herself, a sense not recorded until somewhat later in both French (*DMD* s.v. "presence," A.2.c, "P. méton. 'Personne présente' [By metonymy, 'person present']," with the earliest citation from 1448) and English (*MED* s.v. "presence," 1(c), "with possessive pron., as a polite substitute for the simple personal pron.," with the earliest citation from 1415). Such a translation works in 6.7 and 15.7 as well, though there also seems to be the additional implication of the woman's actual physical presence, as suggested by the definition cited from *DMF*. Gower also uses "presence" to mean "the condition of being present" (in phrases such as "in her presence") in 9.13, 25.17, 39.21 and in the many uses of the noun in *MO*.
- 20 *pensive heart.* Cf. 3.9.
- 21 *desire.* "Appetit" is used much more broadly than merely with reference to literal hunger in Middle French. See *DMF* s.v. "appetit."
- 26 *disdain.* "Danger" floats between personification and abstraction here. See the note to 12.8.  
*disregard.* The verb "despire" might simply mean "despise," but *AND* s.v. "despire," 2 offers "scorn, disregard," with three citations in which the object is "commandment" or "prayer."