

A Model Declaration of Love

Se ele est si grans dame k'il ne li ose dire sa volenté, il doit pourcacier par coi il ait tant d'acés et tant de grace de la dame que la dame l'oce aucune fois parler, si doit contes conter ki toukent a amours, et de choses ki toukent a soulas et a joie; et lors, quant il verra point de toukier, entre ces paroles, de se matiere, si prenge hardement en son cuer, et moustrece belement sa proiere et sa besoigne: 'Ma dame, vous estes la lumiere et la joie de mon cuer; vous estes l'esperance de toute ma vie; vous poés faire vostre volenté de moi et moi metre a mort, se il vous plaist: je suis vostre sers, et apparelliés a faire vos conmandemens. Ma dame, que vous diroie je? je ne le vous puis celer; et, pour Diu, ne vous displeise mie, que vraiment **je vous aim** de tout mon cuer; si vous pri, dame, pour Diu, que vous me retenés pour vostre ami et pour vostre serf, ou autrement la grans valours de vous et haute amours qui s'est en moi herbegie m'ont mis a le mort!'

(Richard de Fournival, fl. 1240-1260, *Consaus d'amours*, edited by Gian Battista Speroni, 1974, *Medioevo Romanzo* 1:217-278, quote p. 265; emphasis added)

If she is such a highborn lady that he dare not confess his desires, he must find means to gain the lady's interest and favour, so much that she will, in time, deign to hear him speak. Once he has found that she is willing to give him ear, then he must fill his speech with tales of love, and the joys and solace love can bring. At length, in the midst of his discourse, he will find the proper moment to speak on his own behalf; and, summing up all his courage, he will proclaim his distress in passionate entreaty: 'Milady, you are the light and joy of my heart, the hope of my life. You may do with me what you will and [even] put me to death, if it pleases you. I am your servant, ready to do your bidding. Milady, what shall I tell you? I cannot hide it any longer from you, and I pray to God that you take no offence, that I love you truly with all my heart. And so I beseech you, my lady, for God's sake, to keep me as your faithful friend and servant; else all the good that is in you and all the noble love that dwells within my heart will have brought me to my death.' (based on Shapiro, Norman R. (trans.), 1997, *The Comedy of Eros: Medieval French Guides to the Art of Love*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, quote page 115).

A lady's point of view on a declaration of love:

Mais dire: 'Amie, je me doeil, ou muir, pour vous, se vous ne me secourés je sui traïs et me morrai', ja, par Dieu, puis qu'il se descouvrera ensi, je n'i arai point de fianche; anchois me sanle que teus paroles sont mengiers a rebours. Ne je nule fianche n'aroie en tel amant [...]. (Richard de Fournival. fl. 1240-1260. *Li bestiaires d'amours e li response du bestiaire*. Edited by Cesare Segre. 1957. Documenti di Filologia 2. Milano and Napoli: Ricciardi, quote page 130)

But to say: 'Beloved, I am grieving, or dying, for you. If you do not rescue me, I am betrayed and shall die.' I will never, by God, have any trust in him after he reveals himself in that way; now then, those words are, in my view, 'eating in the wrong way' [this remark refers to the allegorical interpretation of the crocodile that is said to move its upper jaw when eating]. Never will I have any trust in such a lover.