

Cinkante Balades

Si apres sont escrites en françois Cinkante bala-
des quelles° -d fait, dont les
. -ment desporter.°

Here afterwards are written in French fifty ballades
which made, of which the
. *-ment* to entertain.

The heading and the first two stanzas of the first ballade are fragmentary because of the large D-shaped tear on f. 12 of the manuscript (one of two tears on this leaf).

- 2 Only the upper portion of “des quelles” remains. Following “quelles” is the upper part of a letter that could be a *J*, followed after a space by the upper part of another letter with a horizontal abbreviation stroke through the looped ascender, very much like the *h* with abbreviation stroke in “*Johannis Gower*” in the explicit to *50B* on f. 33.
- 3 Macaulay writes: “The fragments of the latter part [of the heading] seem to indicate that the whole series of balades was expressly written by the author for the entertainment of the court of Henry IV,” citing lines 27-28 of the ballade that immediately precedes *50B*, “Por desporter vo noble Court roia[l] / Jeo frai balade [In order to entertain your noble royal court, I will compose a ballade].” “The end of it perhaps ran thus, ‘ad fait, dont les nobles de la Court se puissent duement desporter [composed, by which the nobles of the court might be duly entertained],’ or something to that effect” (1:461).

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1

. esperance°
 -attens°
 -ance°

 5

 [Moun coer remaint toutditz en vostre grace.]°

10°

 -gementz°
 -assetz° moun° purpens,
 Car qoi qu'om dist d'amer en autre place,
 15 Sanz un soul point muer de toutz mes sens,
 Moun coer remaint toutditz en vostre grace.

Si dieus voldroit fin mettre a ma plesance
 Et terminer mes acomplissementz,
 Solonc la foi et la continuance
 20 Qe j'ai gardé sanz faire eschangementz,
 Lors en averai° toutz mez esbatementz.
 Mais por le temps, quoiqe fortune enbrace,
 Entre les° biens du siecle et lez tormentz,
 Mon coer remaint toutdits en vostre grace.

25 Par cest escrit, ma dame, a vous me rens.
 Si remirer ne puiss vo bele face,
 Tenetz ma foi, tenetz mes serementz:
 Mon coer remaint toutditz en vostre grace.

- 1-13 *Text is missing because of the large D-shaped tear on this page.*
 2 *A portion of the letter that immediately precedes attens, perhaps n or m, remains.*
 3 *Cross drawn in margin.*
 8 *Supplied from line 16.*
 10 *Cross drawn in margin.*
 12 *Only the lower portion of the g in gementz remains.*
 13 *Only the lower portion of ass and the bottom stroke of the immediately preceding letter remain.*
 Mac mon
 21 *MS enaverai. On the meter, see the note to this line in the commentary.*
 23 *lez: Mac les*

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1

. hope
. *-attens*
. *-ance*
5
.
.
[my heart remains always° in your grace.°]

10
.
. *gementz°*
. *-assetz°* my intention,
15 for whatever one says about loving somewhere else,°
without changing my mind a single bit,°
my heart remains always in your grace.

°If God wished to put an end to my happiness
and to conclude my achievements,°
20 in accordance with° the faith and constancy
°which I have maintained without any change,°
then I would have all my pleasure.°
But in the meantime, whatever fortune embraces,
between the blessings° of the world and the torments,
my heart remains always in your grace.

25 °By this writing, my lady, I surrender° to you.
If I cannot look upon your beautiful face,
°have here my pledge,° have here my oath:
my heart remains always in your grace.

It is unfortunate that the ballade with which Gower begins his collection is so fragmentary, especially if we think that he might have chosen one of his better efforts as an opening. From the first stanza we have only a single complete word, “esperance,” and from the second little over three complete lines, expressing the persona’s single-minded devotion to his lady. In what we have of stanza two, he draws a contrast between the depth of his commitment and inconstancy in love, and at the end of stanza three he draws a contrast to the vicissitudes of fortune. The refrain is a reminder to the lady of her power to grant or withhold her favor (see the note to line 8) that in this context can also be seen as an oblique request. How we

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understand both his attitude and his approach to his lady, however, depends most upon the enigmatic sentence with which stanza three begins. The persona may be saying that whatever happens, he will have taken sufficient pleasure in having always been faithful. (This is evidently how Macaulay understood it; see his note to lines 17-21.) But he might also be saying that if nothing else, he expects to receive the reward for his constancy in heaven, juxtaposing the sureness of God's rewards with the uncertainty of the lady's in the following lines. Whichever the case, he uses a word for pleasure, "esbatementz" (line 20), found in earlier lyrics with reference to the joys of love and that derives from a verb that occurs as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (see the note to that line). If he is alluding to heavenly rewards, he chooses a bold way of contrasting God's grace to the "grace" of the lady that he invokes in the refrain. And in his allusion to the pleasures that he presently misses, do we have a sly complaint? Wry resignation? Or regret for the joys that he realizes lie beyond his reach?

The envoy introduces the inability or the desire to see the lady because of their separation that unites ballades 1-3 and 6-9. It also establishes the formal model for the rest of the collection and the dramatic pattern for most of the ballades that follow, the consistency of which makes 50B so unique. The persona addresses his lady directly; he reaches out to her in the envoy rather than to someone else; he sends his ballade in writing; and in implying the expectation either of acceptance or of a response, the poem gives a greater tangibility to their relationship than we find in most lyrics of Gower's predecessors, and it allows us to speculate on how the persona's words might be received.

This ballade is constructed around three closely related rhymes, *-ens/entz*, *-ance*, and *-ace*, preserving the distinction between *-en* and *-an* (here, in *Tr 2*, and in other of the 50B that consistently use either one or the other syllable for a rhyme) that is characteristic of Anglo-Norman and that is lost by this time in standard continental French (Short, §§ 1.4, 3.6).

- 8 *always*. "Toudtitz," like "always," embraces both "constantly" and "forever."
in your grace. I.e., "at your mercy," "under your power to grant or withhold your favor." This is not a common meaning of "grace," and it must be distinguished from benevolence ("by the grace of God," a formula that also occurs in French), from the favorable regard that is granted by such benevolence (e.g. the Squire's "hope to stonden in his lady grace" [CT I.88]; see also *T&C* 3.472, Machaut, *Lou*. 186.8, "s'en vo grace n'estoie [if I were not in your grace]"), and from the particular benefits that one might receive from such regard, including specific acts of mercy and both divine grace and amatory grace, the most common meaning of "grace" in the lyrics, including 50B (cf. 16.R, 19.25, 24.15, et al.). ("Grace" may also refer to the lady's graciousness or beauty, as in 10.3, 31.19, and 38.23.) The persona is certainly not claiming here (or in 14.24) that either he or his heart already receives or (even more presumptuously) expects such favor or such rewards. However, it is difficult to find any precedent in French for the usage that is reflected in this line. Neither *AND* nor *DMF* provides any good examples, but cf. *MED* s.v. "grace," 4.e, the passages cited in support of the definition "putten in (to) ~, yeven in ~, cast (oneself) on (someone's) mercy," including *CA* 1.730-32: "if I have in my yowthe / Don otherwise in other place, / I put me therof in your grace." See also *CA* 891-92, "[sche] thoghte tho was time and space / To put hire in hir fader grace"; and *T&C* 3.1176, "Doth what yow list, I am al in youre grace." In his note to 1.17, Macaulay offers, somewhat implausibly, "I remain true to thee always."
- 12 *-gementz*. The complete word might be "changementz." See the note to line 20.

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- 13 -*assetz*. While “*assetz* [enough]” is certainly one possibility here, there is no space between the *a* and the surviving bit of the immediately preceding letter, and this could also be either the second person plural, present or imperative, or the past participle of a verb; cf. “*quassetz*,” 42.14, and in *MO*, “*passez*,” 23344 and “*amassez*,” 23345, both rhyming with “*asses*,” 23341.
- 14 *loving somewhere else*. The use of “*amer*” (the infinitive) rather than “*amour*” (the noun) would seem to allow both “whatever one might say elsewhere about love” and “whatever one might say about loving someone else.” In *CA*, Gower uses “in other place” both to mean simply “elsewhere” (e.g. 3.818, 7.2889) and in contexts involving love, to mean “to love another person” (e.g. 1.1314, 2.2249, 5.4652, *et al.*; cf. also 5.7775, “set thi love in sondri place”). In either case (or both), this line might be a conscious or semi-conscious allusion to *100B*, the second half of which is very much concerned with encouraging inconstancy.
- 15 This is a difficult line. “*Sens*” covers a wide range, including the five senses (as in 11.1), the capacity to reason (19.27), and intelligence and good sense (as in 6.2), in addition to “meaning” and “direction”; see *AND* s.v. “*sen*,” *DMF* s.v. “*sens*.” (There is no basis for taking it to mean “feelings” in the sense of “emotions.”) The translation I offer places “*de toutz mes sens*” after “*un soul point*,” but I have found no similar expression elsewhere. The closest may be in 42.19, where “*tes sens*” appears to refer to thoughts or mind very broadly. The alternative is to place a comma after “*muer*” and to attach “*de toutz mes sens*” to the following clause: “with all my thoughts or faculties . . .” “*Muer*” can be used intransitively, often paired with “*changier*” in contexts referring to fidelity in love, e.g. in Machaut, *Lou.* 3.21, 7.17, 158.12 (see *DMF* s.v. “*muer*,” II.C.1); and “*un seul point*” can be adverbial. With the inserted comma, the first half of the line might thus be simply “without changing a bit.”
- 17-21 Macaulay translates instead, “If God should put an end to my happiness and to my life at once, my faith being unbroken, I should be content” (1:461), omitting “*solonc*” and choosing a weak translation for “*esbatementz*.” See the notes to lines 19 and 21 below.
- 18 *conclude my achievements*. This is a very unusual use of “*accomplissements*.” In all but one of the dozens of citations in *DMF* s.v. “*accomplissement*,” the word is followed by a prepositional phrase, most often with “*de*.”
- 19 *in accordance with*. See *DMF* s.v. “*selon*,” II.A.2, 3; *AND* s.v. “*sulum*,” prep., 2. For a similar use, cf. the refrain to *100B* 36, “*serez . . . / Mery selon vostre desserte* [you will be rewarded in accordance with what you have deserved]”.
- 20-21 As pointed out in the Introduction and as Macaulay notes (1:xvi-xvii), Gower commonly uses forms ending in *-s* or *-z*, a survival of the singular *cas sujet* of an earlier stage of French, when required by the rhyme, even for nouns that are not in subject position. As suggested by the context, we are therefore justified in translating both “*eschagementz*” and “*esbatementz*,” and also “*serementz*” in line 27, in the singular. See further the note to 2.5 below.
- 20 “*Change*” (noun) and “*changer*” (intransitive verb) are often used in fourteenth-century French poetry with reference to inconstancy or infidelity in love; see *AND* s.v. “*change*,” 4; *DMF* s.v. “*change*,” B.1, “*changer*,” I.A.2.c, II.A.1. For the same use in English, cf. *PF* 582, “*Nay, God forbede a lover shulde change*,” and *T&C* 4.231, where Chaucer inserts a little noticed pun hinting at Criseyde’s future inconstancy. See also *Tr* 7.8, *100B* 27.11; Granson 78.1471, and 77.140-41, where the poet plays this sense off another meaning of “*change*” drawn from hunting. “*Changement*” is a much less common word, but in Machaut’s one use it has a similar meaning (*Motets* 5.24), as it does in Granson 78.267, and in two poems by Charles d’Orléans (see *DMF* s.v. “*changement*” A.1.a). “*Eschange*” and “*eschagement*” are not used in this context in earlier poetry, as best I can tell. Gower uses “*eschange*” eleven times in *MO* in its common sense of “*exchange*” (cf. *AND* s.v. “*eschange*”; *DMF* s.v. “*eschange*”), but in *Tr* 17.18, he uses it uniquely with reference to infidelity.

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"Eschangement" is less common than "eschange." As Merrilees and Pagan note (p. 128), it has no listing in *AND*. It too ordinarily means "exchange," and it appears twice in this sense in *MO*, in 8387 and 29062. *DMF* s.v. "échangement," B provides one later example in which it is used as a synonym for "changement," though not in an amatory context. As in *Tr* 17.18, Gower is clearly employing it here with reference to inconstancy, drawing upon the common use of the root word in the lyrics. Cf. 5.8 and the note.

- 21 "Averai" appears four times in *50B*, here and in 23.18, 23.20, and 29.15, in each case with the *er* represented by an abbreviation stroke, and once as "averay" (17.R), without abbreviation. In all five instances the meter requires that the *e* not be pronounced. On the inorganic vowel see Macaulay, 1.xxx, and Short, §§ 19.11, 34.R.

pleasure. "Esbatre" and its derivatives, like Modern French "ébatre," suggest something rather less passive than "contentment" (see Macaulay's translation in the note to lines 17-21 above). Machaut uses the noun only once (*Lou.* 220.11), but closer to Gower's time, there are four examples in *100B* and 14 in Granson. In several of these, it occurs in conjunction with "joie," "rire [to laugh]," or "jouer [to play]." See also *AND* s.v. "esbatre¹," "esbatement"; *DMF* s.v. "ébatre," "ébattement." "Pleasure" and even perhaps "joy" seem to be appropriate equivalents. The reference in the earlier lyrics is of course to the joys of love. Both *AND* and *DMF* provide examples in which the verb occurs outside the lyrics as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and so also seems to be the case in *100B* 65.5. Gower makes only one other use of "esbatement" (an equally interesting one) in 34.23. Neither noun nor verb occurs in *MO*.

- 23 *blessings*. "Biens" can refer very generally to any "good." One might also choose "comfort" (see *AND* s.v. "bien," s.1) to preserve the opposition to "torments."

- 25-28 As noted in the Introduction, the vast majority of Gower's ballades refer in some way to their written form. "Par cest escrit [by this writing]," a formula Gower uses elsewhere only in 2.27, here, in the company of expressions referring to surrender and oaths, seems to evoke the formal language of documents and charters rather than that of a letter. See the examples cited in *AND* s.v. "escrit."

- 25 *surrender*. "Se rendre" is a common expression for "surrender" that is also commonly used for submission to love, to the God of Love, or to the lady, e.g. in 39.12, *RR* 1882-97, Machaut, *Lou.* 3.8, and Froissart, *Lay* 1.186.

- 27 *have here my pledge, have here my oath*. The verbs might possibly be indicative rather than imperative, "you have."

pledge. *AND* s.v. "fei¹," 3; *DMF* s.v. "foi," B.3; *MED* s.v. "feith," 6; as in *CA* 5.2924, "Whan that a man schal make his feith." Cf. Froissart, *Esp. Am.* 2442-43, "Tenés ma foi, m'amour entiere / Sans departir [have here my pledge, my complete love, undividedly]."