

4¹

D'entier voloir, sanz *jammes* departir,
Ma belle, a vous, en qui j'ai m'esperance,
En droit amour *moun* coer s'ad fait unir
As toutz jours mais, *pour* faire vo plesance.
5 Jeo vous assure *par* fine covenance,
Sur toutes autres neez en ceste vie,
Vostre amant sui, et vous serrez m'amie.

Jeo me doi bien a vous soul consentir
Et doner *qanque* j'ai de bienveillance,
10 Car pleinement en vous l'en poet sentir
Bealté, bounté, valour, et suffiçaunce.
Croietz moi, dame, et tenetz ma fiaunce,
Qe *par* doulgour et bone compaignie,
Vostre amant sui, et vous serretz m'amie.

15 De plus en plus, *pour* le *tresgrant* desir
Qe j'ai de vous, me vient la remembrance
Q'en *moun*° pensant me fait tant rejoïr
Qe si le mond fuist tout en ma puissance,
Jeo ne querroie avoir autre alliance.
20 Tenetz certain qe ceo ne faldra mie:
Vostre amant sui, et vous serretz m'amie.

Au flour des flours, u toute ma creance
D'amour remaint sanz nulle *departie*,
Ceo *lettre* envoie, et croi° me sanz doubtaunce,
25 *Vostre* amant sui, et vous serretz m'amie.

17 *Mac mon*

24 *croi*. See the note in the commentary.

4¹

- With all its will, undividedly and unceasingly,^o
my fair one, to you, in whom I place my hope,
my heart has united itself in true love^o
forevermore, in order to do your pleasure.
- 5 I assure you with a solemn promise,^o
above all other women born in this life,
I am your lover, and you will be my *amie*.^o
- I ought well concur with you alone
and give whatever I have of good will,
10 for in you one may clearly^o perceive
beauty, goodness, worth, and dignity.^o
Believe me, lady, and have here my vow,^o
that out of^o kindness and good companionship,
I am your lover, and you will be my *amie*.
- 15 More and more, because of the great desire
that I have for you, the memory comes to me
that in my thought makes me rejoice so much
that if the world were entirely in my power,
I wouldn't seek to have any other alliance.^o
- 20 Be certain that this will not weaken a bit:
I am your lover, and you will be my *amie*.
- To the flower of flowers,^o in whom all my faith
in love resides, undividedly,
I send this letter; and believe me^o without doubt,
- 25 I am your lover, and you will be my *amie*.

Ballade 4¹, like 1-3, borrows much of its language from earlier lyric declarations of love, particularly the terms it uses with direct reference to the persona and his lady in lines 2, 11, and 22, and in the refrain, “amant” and “amie.” But the key expressions in 4¹—“droit amour” (3), “covenant” (5), “fiaunce” (12), “alliance” (19)—are either unknown or very rare in earlier lyrics, and the last three, while all having a more general application, when found in the context of relations between a man and a woman are either commonly or normally used with reference to betrothal or marriage, a sense that is strengthened by lines 3-4, “unir / As toutz jours mais,” another expression equally unknown among Gower’s lyrics predecessors, who had little occasion for celebrating married love.

Balade 4¹

The context of betrothal turns the refrain from a presumptuous, even arrogant expectation into a tender promise, that the persona will have as affectionate a regard for his wife after their marriage as he does before. Gower is not the only one to use “ami(e)” in the context of marriage: see the citations in *DMF* s.v. “ami,” 5, in which “ami(e)” expresses an affection not contained in the more neutral terms “mari [husband]” or “époux [spouse].” Such affection was central, however, to Gower’s conception of marriage as he describes it in *MO* 17245 ff. In denouncing marriages made for money, for instance, he writes that a husband “Comme sa compaigne et bien amee / Cherir la doit en amisté [as his companion and beloved / ought to cherish (his wife) in friendship or affection]” (*MO* 17515-16), and in *Tr* 3.19, he describes his ideal of marriage, in words closer to those of this poem, as “Loiale amie avoec loials amis [a faithful *amie* with a faithful *ami*].”

Both 4² and 5, which immediately follow, echo imagery that is introduced in 4¹, and though neither makes as explicit a reference to betrothal as 4¹ does, the three poems appear to be intended to be read as a group, and 4² and 5 are both made more meaningful in that context.

- 1 *undividedly and unceasingly*. On “sans departir” and “sans nulle departie” (line 23), see the note to 4².1.
- 3 *true love*. Gower uses the phrase “droit amour” four times in *50B*, in 4¹.3, 4².13, 11.16, and 35.5. (See also “droit amant” in 50.17.) He also uses it once in *Tr* (18.9) and three times in *MO* (10582, 11525, and 13548). The contexts are highly varied: 11.16 refers to an unreciprocated love; in 35.5 the subject is love among the birds; *Tr* 18.9 treats love in marriage; and *MO* is concerned with love of God in the first two instances and with Augustine’s “three loves” (of God, of one’s neighbor, and of oneself) in the third. In all cases “droit” appears to be used to validate the authenticity, the force, and also the propriety of the emotion. It is not an expression that is commonly found in the lyrics, and it does not occur at all in Machaut, in Granson, in *100B*, or as far as I know in Froissart.
- 5 *solemn promise*. “Covenant” may refer to any sort of promise or commitment, but it is also commonly used with particular reference to a promise of marriage. See *DMF* s.v. “convenance,” 2. The word occurs only very rarely in the lyrics. Granson uses it once (17.7). It also appears in most copies of Machaut’s Motet 8.11, where the variant “contenance” makes better sense, and where the context is the promises (or appearance) of Fortune. “Fine” is difficult to translate, its precise sense varying according to the noun that it modifies. One might well choose “formal” or “most worthy” here.
- 7 Cf. Deschamps, 911.34, “Vostre ami suis et vous estes m’amée [I am your *ami* and you are my beloved]” in which, however, the male persona urges his addressee *not* to insist upon marriage. Cf. 44.R.
amie. There are few words that are more difficult to translate directly into English than “ami(s)” and “amie.” In their common general use, they are the masculine and feminine forms of the word for “friend,” but in the context of the lyrics, where “amant [lover]” might signify one who still seeks the love of another (see *DMF* s.v. “amant¹,” I.C.1), “ami” and “amie,” like Modern English “boyfriend” and “girlfriend,” normally imply an existing mutual affection. Hence the many poems in which the persona expresses his wish simply that his lady call him her “ami”; e.g. Machaut, *Lou* 59.6, 202.13, 210.14; Deschamps, 493.8, 532.9-10, 664.8-9; Granson, 78.1131; *et al.* No specific degree of intimacy is implied. *DMF* divides its citations between those describing “un attachement essentiellement sentimental [an essentially sentimental attachment]” (*s.v.* “ami,” B.1-2) and those involving “des relations charnelles hors mariage [carnal relations outside of marriage]” (*loc.cit.*, B.3-4). In most instances in which the words are used in the lyrics, we are simply not given enough

information to judge. As noted above, the words may also occur with reference to spouses, as in *Tr* 3. In such cases, as in the present instance, the word evokes a sentimental attachment apart from or in addition to the couple's sacramental bond. Lacking an equivalent that carries the same emotional weight and that also rises to the same level of dignity as the two words in French, I have thought it best to leave them untranslated here.

- 10 *clearly*. "Pleinement" can be either "fully, completely" (from Latin *plenus*; *AND* s.v. "pleinement"; *DMF* s.v. "pleinement," A) or "openly, clearly, plainly" (from Latin *planus*; *AND* s.v. "plainement"; *DMF* s.v. "plainement," and s.v. "pleinement," C). Gower uses both spellings in each sense in *MO*, as Macaulay indicates in his glossary. Both senses might apply, both in this line and in 14.2, but here the verb "sentir" suggests that "clearly" is dominant.
- 11 *beauty, goodness, worth*. The enumeration of the lady's good qualities in noun form is also formulaic (cf. the note to 3.12). The alliterative collocation of "beauté" and "bonté" is so obvious that it is surprising only that it does not occur even more often than it does. For examples: Machaut, *Lou*. 15.10, "Bonté, valeur, biauté souverainne [goodness, worth, sovereign beauty]"; Froissart, *Lay* 1.92-94, "Sa très parfait biauté / Et bonté / Qui tant ont los [her very perfect beauty and goodness which receive such praise]"; and Granson, 12.9, "Beauté, bonté, sens, honneur et advis [beauty, goodness, sense, honor, and wisdom]." See also *CA* 5.2595, "Beaute with bounte so besein"; and cf. the common phrase "belle et bonne," e.g. in Machaut, *Lou* 58.9, 173.16, 174.10; Froissart, *Lay* 4.65, 7.36; Granson 30.22, 39.1, *et al.*; and in *MO* 29874 (with reference to Mary). Gower uses the collocation of "beauté," "bonté," and "grace" in four ballades that may once have been grouped together; see the note to 21.
- dignity*. "Sufficaunce" is a potentially loaded term. In its meaning of "sufficiency" (*DMF* s.v. "suffisance," A), Machaut uses it in *Remede* 2488, 2777 to translate Boethius' "sufficientas" (*De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 3 pr.9). Granson, on the other hand, uses it to mean mere "satisfaction" (e.g. 68.11, 77.67), while for Froissart it implies something stronger, more like "happiness" (e.g. in *Lay* 2.154, 9.149). Here, however, in conjunction with the other nouns in this line, it derives from a different sense of "suffisant" and signifies "competence, dignity, honor"; see *DMF* s.v. "suffisance," B.
- 12 *vow*. "Fiaunce" has a fairly broad range of meaning. Machaut and Granson use it to mean "faith, confidence in a particular person": e.g. *Lou*. 117.46 ("Dame, en qui j'ai mist toute ma fiance [Lady in whom I have placed all my faith]"; *Chans.Bal.* 1.13; Granson 24.2, 68.32, 78.1947. See *DMF* s.v. "fiance," A.1, A.2.b; *AND* s.v. "fiance," 1. This is the sense in which Gower uses it in its only other appearance in *50B*, in 13.3. It can also be used with reference to any pledge or commitment generally (*DMF, loc.cit.*, B.2; *AND, loc.cit.*, 3). There is one passage in Machaut in which it might mean something more like "fidelity" (*Lou*. 186.1-2: "Se par amour ou par fiance / Vous me moustriés estrangeté [if out of love or out of fidelity you show me coldness]"; cf. *DMF, loc.cit.*, B.3). In the context of a promise made by a man to a woman, however, like the verb "fiancer," it more commonly refers specifically to betrothal (*DMF, loc.cit.*, B.2; *AND, loc.cit.*, 4). "Affiance," evidently rare in continental French (see *DMF* s.v. "affiance"), was also used in contexts of betrothal, e.g. in *MO* 8683 and in the passages cited in *AND* s.v. "affiance," 3.
- 13 *out of*. In this context, "par" might also be translated as "in," "through," "by means of," or "because of."
- 19 *alliance*. Like "covenant" (line 5), "alliance" can have a very general meaning. Applied to the relations between men and women, *DMF* provides citations suggesting a shared love (s.v. "alliance¹," A.2.b), and that appears also to be the sense in one of the rare appearances of the word in earlier lyrics, in *100B* 69.28-30: "Qui loial acoustumance / D'aliance / Prent en Amours [who takes undertakes a loyal habit of alliance in love]." The word is also used by both Deschamps and Froissart to refer specifically to marriage but in contexts that suggest a political alliance as well

- (DMF, *loc.cit.*, A.2.d), but see also *AND* s.v. "alliance," 3, which provides citations in which it refers to marriage in which a political context is not evident, as also in *MO* 822.
- 22 *flower of flowers*. "Flour" is used to designate the lady in far too many of the lyrics to count. (And also in narratives: cf. *T&C* 5.1317.) Gower uses it in 16.26 and 31.26 and in the expression "flour des flours," here and in 6.22 and 9.41. Machaut uses the same phrase in *Lou.* 3.5 and 234.6. Deschamps uses it in 532.15, 546.7 (or in the form "flour de toutes flours," 453.20, 724.12), and with reference not to a lady but to Machaut, in one of the ballades that he wrote upon Machaut's death (124.1). *in whom*. For (o)u with a personal antecedent cf. 5.27, 8.6, and *AND* s.v. "u²," pr.rel. 2. Butterfield includes "flour des flours" among the "clichés" of medieval French courtly poetry ("Forms of Death," pp. 174-75).
- 24 *Believe me*. Does the unusual switch to the *tu* form of the verb (Gower uses "vostre" in the very next line) suggest that "croi me" ought to be "croietz" instead, as in line 12 or as in 2.7? Does it anticipate the regular use of "tu" in the next ballade? Or is this another instance of Gower taking liberty with the grammar for the sake of the meter? Cf. 16.26 and 34.27, each of which poses a different issue.