

16

Camelion, c'est° une beste fiere,  
Qui vit tansoulement de l'air sanz plus.  
Ensi pour dire, en mesme la maniere,  
De soul espoir qe j'ai d'amour conçuz  
5 Sont mes pensers en vie sustenuz.  
Mais *par* gouster de chose qe jeo sente,  
Combien° qe jeo le serche sus et jus,  
Ne puiss de *grace* trover celle sente.

N'est pas ma sustenance assetz pleniere  
10 De vein espoir qe m'ad ensi repuz.  
Ainz en devient° ma faim tant plus amiere  
D'ardant desir qe m'est d'amour accrüz.  
De mon repast jeo sui ensi deçuz,  
Q'ove voide main espoir ses douns presente,  
15 Qe qant jeo quide meux estre au dessus  
En halt estat, jeo fais plusgrief descente.

Quiqu'est devant, souhaid n'est pas derere  
Au feste quelle espoir avera tenuz,  
U° volenté sanz fait est chamberere.  
20 Tiels officers sont ainçois retenuz.  
*Par* ceuz jeo vive et vuill ceo qe ne puiss.  
Ma fortune est contraire a mon entente.  
Ensi morrai si jeo merci ne truis,  
Q'en vein espoir ascun profit n'avente.

25 A vous, en qui sont toutz biens° contenuz,  
Q'es flour des autres la plusexcellente,  
Ceste balade avoec centmil salut  
Envoie, dame, maisq'il vous talente.

- 1 *Mac* est  
7 *MS* Com bien  
11 *MS* endevient  
19 *Mac* A. See the note to this line in the commentary.  
25 *Mac* bien

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*Balade 16*

16

The chameleon is° a wild beast  
that lives exclusively on air, nothing more.  
In just the same way, so to speak,  
by the hope alone that I have conceived from love  
5 are my thoughts kept alive.  
But by eating of a thing that I feel,°  
however much I seek it, high and low,  
I cannot find the way° to grace.

My sustenance is not adequate  
10 from the vain hope that has fed me thus.  
Instead my hunger becomes so much sharper  
from the burning desire which has increased in me from love.  
Thus I am deceived and disappointed° in my meal,  
for Hope presents its gifts with empty hands,  
15 for when I most expect° to be above,  
in high estate, I make a more painful descent.

Whoever is in front, Wish is not behind  
at the feast that Hope will have held,  
where° Wish without deed° is the servant.  
20 Such are the officers° that are preferred.°  
Through them I live and want what I cannot have.  
My fortune is contrary to my desire.°  
Thus I will die if I do not find mercy,  
For in vain hope no benefit comes to pass.

25 °To you, in whom all good things are contained,  
who among others are° the most excellent flower,  
this ballade with a hundred thousand greetings  
I send, lady, would that it please you.°

Like 12, 13, and 15, this ballade begins with a simile drawn from the natural world, but it evolves a bit unpredictably. The chameleon, living on air, is the model for the way in which hope sustains the persona's thoughts of love, but (unlike the chameleon's?—the comparison gets a little fuzzy here), that food does not lead him to grace. The two stanzas that follow are about the inadequacy of the sustenance offered by this food, which is both hope itself and also served at a banquet at which Hope is the host and Wish and Desire are the servers, and in the final lines of each stanza, as in the first, Gower abandons the metaphor for a different, more familiar

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*Balade 16*

way of accounting for the persona's disappointment. This is perhaps the one poem among the four in this section without a refrain in which the lack of the order that the refrain imposes is most strongly felt.

While a bit dizzying if one tries to follow closely, the poem nonetheless offers, in its assortment of imagery, a persuasive picture of the deceptiveness of hope and its effect upon the persona. The central metaphor of the feast in the second and third stanzas recalls Gower's treatment of Delicacy in Book 6 of *CA*. Amans first complains of his unwilling "fast" of any of the pleasures of love (6.688-726), and then, in his single longest uninterrupted speech in *CA* (6.743-950), he describes the three "foods" — seeing, hearing, and thinking about his lady — by which he is sustained. Hearing stories about other lovers gives him the temporary comfort of hope (6.888-91), just as hearing his lady speak is his "hertes leche" (866), but all three foods leave him unsatisfied and disappointed (6.927-31), a state he compares to that of the plover, which like the chameleon in this ballade, lives on air alone (943-44). Amans' speech is itself drawn from *RR* 2581-2748 in which Esperance ("Hope") provides the gifts that Amans describes as his three foods in order to comfort the imprisoned lover. Among these three different versions of a feast, only in the ballade is hope itself the empty food rather than a source of relief, and only in this poem among the *50B* does the persona find Hope to be so deceptive, the theme of a different lament by Amans in *CA* 1.1954-68.

The biggest shift in the poem occurs in the envoy, as the persona turns to address his lady for the first time. Indeed, this is his first direct reference to her, and this is the only poem in *50B* in which the lady (or the man, in the poems in which the persona is a woman) is not named in the stanzas themselves as either the subject or the addressee. The change in address is also marked by a change of tone and, even more than in **13**, by a change in the implicit relationship between the persona and his lady, for as he sends her the ballade, with his compliments and his greetings, he is much less the despairing lover that he describes, and he hopes only "qu'il vous talente," that it please her. These last four lines could easily be dismissed as an afterthought, but in view of the consistent use of the envoy to affirm a dramatic setting in most of the other ballades, the effect must be deliberate even if the poem might once have existed without them. And the effect of the disjunction between stanzas and envoy is to draw attention to the literariness and artificiality of the poetic language of the main part of the poem. In contrast to the gracious address of the final lines, the lyrical mode of the first three stanzas is merely a pose and the persona's distress and suffering merely another way of offering a compliment to the lady, a strategy with important implications for the reading of several of the later poems.

- 1 Macaulay omits the redundant "c(e) [it]," either having overlooked it while transcribing or silently emending it. A similarly redundant "c(e)" appears in 8.20 and 37.1-2. In none of these three cases is it required metrically.
- 6 *a thing that I feel*. A tricky phrase. Macaulay finds in "sente" an implicit distinction between the persona's mere hope and some more substantial food, and he translates lines 6-8, "But by feeding on this food of the mind I cannot, though I seek it up and down, find for myself the path of grace" (1:465). The context certainly suggests a reference to "hope" in line 4, but while the range of "sentir" (as of "chose") is very broad, it is difficult to find any other examples in which it suggests a distinction between purely mental activity, particularly imaginary activity, and real experience, or in which it refers to mere "feelings." See *AND*, *DMF* s.v. "sentir."

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*Balade 16*

- 8 *way*. "Sente," like "voie" (15.4, *Tr* 18.26) can refer to paths both concrete and metaphorical. Both Machaut (e.g. *Comp.* 1.225) and Deschamps (e.g. 477.17, 528.7) refer to the "sente" of love.
- 13 *deceived and disappointed*. "Deçuz" embraces both senses: *AND* s.v. "deceivre," 1, 2; *DMF* s.v. "décevoir," A, B.
- 15 Gower repeatedly uses "meux quide" with reference to illusions or to foolish or misplaced expectation, as in 48.12, *Tr* 8.8, *MO* 10951 ("Qant om meulx quide estre au dessus [when one most thinks to be above]"), and some dozen other passages in *MO*.
- 19 *where*. Macaulay's error of transcription ("A" for "U") completely alters the meaning here. "Volenté" must be the subject, and it provides a second server at the feast. "Volenté" in this context is not very different in meaning from "Souhaid" in line 17. See *AND* s.v. "volenté," 1; *DMF* s.v. "volonté," B.1.a, B.2.a.
- without deed*. The basic meaning of "fait" is "deed, act." Gower uses the phrase "sanz fait" only once elsewhere, in *MO* 17960, where the context is the one who does not sin but who does not perform a positive act of virtue. *AND* s.v. "fait<sup>1</sup>," 1, cites a passage from Nicole Bozon in which "Tiele fei saunz fet" translates "fides sine operibus [faith without deeds]." *DMF* s.v. "fait," II.B, cites Froissart, "Ne pensés . . . que sans fait l'omme martir me claimme [Don't think that I call myself a martyr *sans fait*]," translating "sans fait" as "Hors de toute réalité, sans raison [outside of all reality, without reason]," though again the sense seems to be more simply without a deed to back up the claim. Here, in context, in combination with "Volenté," the sense seems to be "Wish without attainment," and perhaps we should treat the three words together as a compound name for the personification, rather like "Dolour d'autry Joye [sorrow for another's joy]" (*MO* 3027) and "Joye d'autri mal [joy for another's pain]," (*MO* 3163). For the condition that Gower describes, cf. 47.13.
- 20 *officers*. "Officer" normally refers to a somewhat more exalted position, but in *MO* 17982 Gower also uses it, as here, with reference to two figures who are enlisted to serve at table.
- preferred*. Though the primary meaning of "ainçois" is temporal, "before, earlier" (*AND* s.v. "anceis," 1, 2), like Modern English "rather" (also temporal in its original sense) and Modern French "plutôt," it can also be used to indicate preference (*AND*, loc.cit, 3), as seems to be the case here.
- 22 *desire*. "Entente" embraces both "intention" and "desire." See *DMF* s.v. "entente," I.A.1 (with numerous citations from Machaut). The context here is shaped by "souhaid" (line 16) and "vuill" (line 21).
- 25-28 Cf. the similar greeting in the envoy to 39.25-27.
- 26 *are*. One expects "estes," the plural form of the verb (used for formal singular) with "vous" rather than "es," which is singular (and informal). Macaulay (1:465) notes that "The confusion of singular and plural in the second person is common in our author," citing *MO* 442, though there and in the other passages in *MO* that he cites in the note to that line, Gower uses a plural verb with a singular pronoun subject (as in 42.R below). Here he uses a singular verb in a context in which he elsewhere uses formal pronouns, as in 4<sup>1</sup>.24 and 34.27. Cf. also 38.19, where we find an unexpected singular pronoun.
- 28 *would that it please you*. Or "provided that it please you," but as in 10.5 (see the note to that line), "maisq(ue)" here introduces a wish rather than a condition.