

27

Ma dame, qant jeo vi vostre oill vair et riant,<sup>o</sup>  
Cupide m'ad ferru de tiele plaie  
Parmi le coer d'un dart d'amour ardant  
Qe nulle medicine m'est verraie  
5 Si vous n'aidetz; mais<sup>o</sup> certes jeo me paie,  
Car soubtz la cure de si bone mein,  
Meulx vuil languir qe sanz vous estre sein.

Amour de sa constreignte est un tirant,  
Mais sa banere qant merci desplaie,  
10 Lors est il suef, courtois, et confortant.  
Ceo poet savoir qui la fortune essaie.  
Mais combien qu'il sa *grace* me deslaie,  
Ma dame, jeo me tiens a vous certain.  
Mieulx vuill languir qe sanz vous estre sein.

15 Ensi ne tout guaris ne languissant,  
Ma dame, soubtz l'espoir de vo manaie  
Je vive, et sui vos *graces* attendant  
Tanque merci ses oignementz attraie  
Et le destroit de ma dolour allaie.  
20 Mais si guaris ne soie enquore au plein,  
Mieulx vuill languir qe sanz vous estre sein.

Pour vous, q'avetz la bealté plus qe faie,  
Ceo *lettre* ai fait sanz null penser vilein.  
Parentre deus combien qe jeo m'esmaie,  
25 Mieulx vuill languir qe sanz vous estre sein.

1 See the note to this line in the commentary.

5 Mais in later hand over erasure. Cross drawn in margin.

27

My lady, when I saw your eyes, bright and laughing,<sup>o</sup>  
Cupid struck me with such a wound  
amidst the heart with a dart of burning love<sup>o</sup>  
that no medicine is real<sup>o</sup> for me  
5 unless you help. But truly I am satisfied,<sup>o</sup>  
for under the care of so good a hand,  
I would rather languish than be well without you.<sup>o</sup>

<sup>o</sup>Love in its binding<sup>o</sup> is a tyrant,  
but when Mercy unfurls its banner,<sup>o</sup>  
10 then it is gentle, courteous, and comforting.  
Anyone who tries his fortune<sup>o</sup> can know this.  
But though it delays its grace for me,  
my lady, I remain attached<sup>o</sup> to you.  
I would rather languish than be well without you.

15 Thus neither completely healed nor languishing,  
my lady, in hope of your pity<sup>o</sup>  
I live, and I await your grace  
until Mercy brings forth its ointments  
and alleviates<sup>o</sup> the distress<sup>o</sup> of my suffering.  
20 But if I am not yet completely healed,  
I would rather languish than be well without you.

For you, who have more than unearthly<sup>o</sup> beauty,  
I have composed this letter without any base intent.<sup>o</sup>  
However much I am troubled<sup>o</sup> between the two,  
25 I would rather languish than be well without you.

The imagery in 27 is so conventional and so familiar that it one might not notice how exceptional it is for Gower: this is the only of his ballades in which the onset of love is attributed to Cupid's arrow and in which Love and Mercy are so fully personified. Gower combines rather successfully here the mixed pleasure and pain of the hopeful lover, the allegorical "wounds" that require the lady's "healing," and the formulaic refrain in which the persona expresses his willing but paradoxical choice. It is a pretty poem, like so many earlier lyrics, but its very conventionality precludes anything that might be unique to the persona's situation, and in contrast to Gower's more typical dramatic mode—in which the persona interacts (or not) with the lady rather than with familiar abstractions—we learn virtually nothing about the lady herself, about how the poem might be received, or even his objective in sending it to her.

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*Balade 27*

- 1 *bright and laughing*. As Macaulay notes (1:466), the line as it appears in the manuscript is two syllables too long, but it is easily corrected by deleting “vair et” (“riant” being required for the rhyme). He suggests that the mistake is authorial, but it is just as easy to attribute it to a scribe familiar with the common formula for describing the lady’s eyes; see the note to 12.22. Alternatively, one could keep the formula and either omit “Ma dame” at the beginning of the line or treat it as extra-metric.
- 3 *dart of burning love*. This could just as easily be the “burning dart of love,” as in Yeager. In love poetry (unlike in *MO*, where it refers almost exclusively to literal flame), “ardant” is typically used metaphorically to describe the intensity of the emotion, as in 3.1 and 16.12, but with reference to Cupid’s dart, the distinction between literal and metaphorical is perhaps obscured.
- 4 *real*. For other examples of the use of “verraie” after “être” see *DMF* s.v. “vrai,” II.B. For a citation with reference to healing (“...vraye terminacion de la maladie”), *DMF* offers “effectif.”
- 5 *satisfied*. *AND* s.v. “paier,” v.refl. 1. The second definition, which might work equally well here, is “to be pleased.”
- 7 For the formula (“I prefer X with my lady to Y without her”), see the note to 23.13-15.
- 8-9 Love is gently personified elsewhere in *50B*, e.g. in 3.6, 10.15, and 13.13, but only here is “Amour” evidently used as another name for Cupid. “Merci” is also personified in 9.35 and 15.21 and perhaps in 37.19 as well, in the first instance offering her “healing” (as in line 18-19 below), but in none of these is she as active as in this poem.
- 8 *binding*. I borrow the translation from Chaucer, *T&C* 1.255-56: “Refuseth nat to Love for to ben bonde, / Syn, as hymselfen liste, he may yow binde.” The entire passage describing Troilus’ falling in love draws upon the same conventions as Gower’s first two stanzas, but the resemblance exhausts itself very quickly.
- 9 *unfurls its banner*. See *DMF* s.v. “déployer,” A.1.a: “(À) banniere(s) desployee(s).” “Bannière(s) au vent; en position de combat [*With banners unfurled*: Banners to the wind; in combat position].” An interesting choice, to say the least, for Mercy.
- 11 *tries his fortune*. *DMF* s.v. “essayer,” B.1.a, for “Essayer sa fortune” gives “Tenter sa chance [try his luck],” with an unambiguous citation from Christine de Pizan. Except that one wouldn’t expect “qui” in this context, “la fortune” could conceivably be the subject of “essaie,” “anyone whom Fortune tests,” as in Yeager. *DMF*, loc.cit., “*Essayer qqc.* ‘Mettre à l’épreuve (la force de qqn) en l’affrontant’ [*essayer* something: put to the test (someone’s strength) by confronting him].”
- 13 *I remain attached*. See the note to 25.15.
- 16 *pity*. “Manaie” is not a common word, and this is the only time that Gower uses it. *AND* s.v. “manaie” defines it as “pity, mercy,” but all of the included citations, including those for the various phrases in which the noun appears, are from the 12th and 13th centuries. *DMF* s.v. “manaie” offers “puissance, pouvoir qu’on a sur qqn ou sur qqc. [power that one has over someone or something]” with citations from the 14th and 15th centuries. Only the *AND* definition is appropriate here, and it appears that Gower may be reviving an archaic term.
- 19 *alleviates*. French “allaier” normally had an entirely different meaning. See *DMF* s.v. “allier” and “alloyer,” both from Latin “ligare” and both with senses linked to Modern English “ally” and “alloy,” and *AND* s.v. “alaier,” with a single citation in the sense of “alloy.” The Middle French verb that meant “to allay, alleviate, relieve” is “aleger” (*AND*), “alleger” (*DMF*), so commonly used by Machaut along with the related noun “aligement [relief],” e.g. in *Lou.* 3.25, 86.11. Both “allaier/allier/alloyer” and “aleger/alleger” entered Middle English, and their history became entwined with that of a different Middle English verb, “aleien, aleggen,” from Old English “alecgan.” See the etymological notes in *OED* s.v. “allay” and “allege.” Only in English, however,

are the forms without a *g* recorded in the sense of "allay"; see *MED* s.v. "aleien," 3(c). It appears that Gower may have let an English word slip into his French here. This is the only time he uses this verb in French, but cf. *CA* 6.310, 7.5406.

*distress*. Both "destroit" and "destresce" (Modern English "distress") derive from Latin "destrictus." Machaut uses "destret" in this sense in *Lai* 4.14.

- 22 *unearthly*. One thinks immediately of the famous couplet in *CA* 4.1321-22, "The beaute faye upon her face / Non erthly thing it may desface." Both Machaut and Christine de Pizan also use "fée" as a measure of beauty: Machaut, *Font.Am.* 200, *Lou.* 254.8; Christine, *Le Liore de la mutacion de fortune*, line 10171 (ed. Suzanne Solente, 4. vols. Société des Anciens Textes Français. Paris: Picard, 1959-66, 2:222). In French, however, "faie/fée" appears to be used only as a noun. See *AND* s.v. "fee<sup>1</sup>," *DMF* s.v. "fee<sup>1</sup>." Here Gower uses it an adjective, which happens also to be his most common use in English. In addition to the lines just cited, see *CA* 1.2317, 2.1019, 5.3769; also 5.4105 and 24.22, where it might be adjective or noun; and *MED* s.v. "faie," adj. and n.
- 23 *without any base intent*. For the formula, see the note to 21.8.
- 24 *troubled*. *DMF* s.v. "esmayer" would have one believe that this verb belongs to formal poetic diction: all but a few of the many citations are from Machaut or other poets. Gower uses it here, in 36.13, and 46.20, and the related noun in 10.9 and *Tr* 10.11, and the verb and noun also occur eight times in *MO*.