

30

Si com la Nief *qant* le fort vent tempeste
Par halte mier se torne ci et la,
Ma dame, ensi moun coer maint en tempeste
Qant le danger de vo parole orra.
5 Le vent° *qe vostre* bouche soufflera
Me fait sigler sur le *peril* de vie.
Q'est en danger, falt qu'il merci supplie.

Rois Uluxes, sicom nous dist la geste,
Vers son paiis de Troie qui sigla,
10 N'ot tiel paour du *peril* et moleste
Qant les Sereines en la Mier passa
Et le danger de circes eschapa,
Qe le paour n'est plus de ma *partie*.
Q'est en danger, falt qu'il merci supplie.

15 Danger, qui tolt d'amour toute la feste,
Unques un mot de confort ne sona.
Ainz plus cruel *qe n'est* la fiere beste,
Au point *qant* danger me respondera
La chiere porte, et *qant* le nai dirra,
20 *Plusque* la mort m'estorne° celle oïe.
Q'est en danger, falt qu'il merci supplie.

Vers vous, ma bone dame, horspris cella,
Qe danger maint en *vostre* compainie,
Ceste balade en mon message irra.
25 *Q'est* en danger, falt qu'il merci supplie.

5 vent: MS, Mac Nief. See the note on this line in the commentary.

20 Mac m'estone

30

°Just as the ship when a strong wind blows°
on the high sea turns here and there,
my lady, so does my heart remain in turmoil°
whenever it hears the *danger*° in your speech.
5 The wind° that your mouth blows about
makes me sail in peril of my life.
Whoever is in danger° is forced to beg for mercy.°

°King Ulysses, as the story tells us,
who sailed towards his country from Troy,
10 did not have so much fear of peril and harm
when he passed by the sirens in the sea
and escaped the power° of Circe
that the fear isn't greater on my part.
Whoever is in danger is forced to beg for mercy.

15 Danger, which takes all the joy out of love,
never pronounced a word of comfort.
Instead, crueller than a wild beast,
at the point when Danger answers me
it removes welcome,° and when it says "nay,"
20 that which I hear° stuns me more than death.
Whoever is in danger is forced to beg for mercy.

To you, my good lady—except for this,°
that Danger remains in your company—
this ballade will go as my messenger.°
25 Whoever is in danger is forced to beg for mercy.

30 has to represent Gower at his most playful, not just for the double (or triple) meaning of "danger" but also for the gentle exaggeration of the conventional rhetoric of unrequited love and for the tone of address in the envoy. This is the only ballade in which Gower uses "danger" to mean either "peril" (in the refrain) or "power" (if that is indeed the sense in line 12; see the note). It is also one of only three ballades in which the persona fears for his death, a particularly common *topos* in Machaut that was passed on to most of his successors, and the only one in which it is so prominent. (The others are 14 and 16.) Even in 12, which uses some very similar imagery, death is referred to directly only with reference to the calandra. Here the persona invokes the danger of his death in dramatic terms in each of the three stanzas. His fear is greater than Ulysses' (suggesting that the lady might bear comparison to the sirens or to Circe); Danger

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itself is “crueler than a wild beast,” though it does no more than to say “no”; and in stanza one, which is perhaps the key to Gower’s intention here, the image of the storm-tossed sea as a metaphor for the persona’s troubled mind yields to the highly unflattering image of the lady as some kind of human Zephyrus, blowing the persona about (however one understands the beginning of that line; see the note to line 5). The elevation of the danger posed by Danger also changes the “merci” of the refrain into something different from that which a lover normally requires. In all, the poem reads as a mild but straight-faced parody of poems more like 12, in which these terms are all used more conventionally. The envoy is more like a parody of the address to the lady that Gower has cultivated in the rest of his own ballades. Only here does the persona refer to the lady as “bone dame [good lady]”; elsewhere she is “doulce dame [sweet lady]” or “noble dame [noble lady]” or simply “dame.” But then, if I have understood it correctly (see the note to line 22), he immediately takes it back: she is good except for her choice of companion. His qualification suggests a lingering resentment, and it undercuts the effect of all his other pleas.

How do we know that the effect of the poem is due to Gower’s playfulness rather than to a series of misjudgments on his part? That question is not easy to answer, but while Gower is capable of writing a dull poem or a disjointed poem, he is characteristically tactful and restrained in his choice of imagery. Elsewhere he reveals his consciousness of the limitations of poetic language by his shifts in register or by allowing another point of view to intrude on the persona’s. He exposes those limitations in this case by carrying the familiar conventions to their logical extremes.

- 1-2 Gower uses the storm-tossed ship as an image of emotional tumult in CA 1.1064-70, 2.24-27, and 5.443-44, and in a somewhat different sense in 50.19-21. Cf. Deschamps 543.9-10: “Sinon je sui en la mer sanz nacelle, / Près de perir, se Pitez ne m’appelle [Otherwise I am at sea without a boat, near to death, if Pity doesn’t summon me].”
- 1, 3 *tempeste . . . tempeste*. Like his contemporaries, Gower makes frequent use of *rime riche*. Most involve a whole word rhyming with part of another (e.g. “voir”/“decevoir” in 5.18-20). There are also a dozen examples of rhymes of whole words, always in different parts of speech (e.g. “voie” in 12.7-9). But with the exception of “deçuz”/“dessus” in 11.13-15, these are all either monosyllables or single syllables followed by an unstressed *-e* (like “voie”). “Tempeste” is the only *rime riche* with two strong syllables in 50B. Does its prominence foreshadow in some way the extravagant imagery in the rest of the poem?
- 4 *danger*. Here and in the personifications in the third stanza and the envoy, “danger” is the aspect of the woman’s character that the persona imagines prevents his acceptance as her lover. See the note to 12.8. I leave it untranslated here and where it is personified in order to preserve the play on the different senses of the word, the more modern of which (*DMF* s.v. “danger,” D) appears in line 12 and in the refrain.
- 5 *wind*. Macaulay is surely right in suggesting (in his note to this line) that Gower wrote “vent [wind]” rather than “nief [ship],” which is the reading in the manuscript. The masculine article is a clue (“nief” is normally feminine, as in line 1 and 50.19), but the strongest reason is the sense: as Macaulay puts it, “it is not the ship that imperils his life but the storm.” Gower uses a similar image for a very different purpose in MO 16648, “La bouche souffle a malvois port, / Qant des folditz fait son report [the mouth blows to an evil port when it recounts foolish words].” In both cases, Gower

- seems to be aware that the image is not very flattering. The error is more likely due to scribal inattention than to any similarity in appearance between the two words. (Cf. the note to 21.15.)
- 7 *danger*. The use of “danger” to mean “peril” is quite common in *MO* (2836, 2963, 6246 *et al.*) For another poet’s use in this sense, see Granson 47.6. See also Gower’s use of “dangereuse” in 48.15, also perhaps with a double meaning.
- beg for mercy*. When “supplier” takes a simple object, it is more often the person being beseeched than the thing that the subject asks for, as in 9.35, 10.20 and 51.20, but see *DMF* s.v. “supplier,” I.B, and *AND* s.v. “supplier,” v.a., which provides as one example “vostre amistee suplee et requere [I beseech and request your friendship]” See also *MO* 18881-83, “supplier / Estoet ainçois la bienveillance / Du pape [but first it was necessary to ask for the good will of the pope].” The alternative for this line would be “Whoever is in danger is forced to plead to Mercy.”
- 9-12 Gower cites Ulysses and the Sirens in *MO* 10909-20 to illustrate the dangers of Vainglory and in *CA* 1.481-529 to illustrate the temptations that enter by way of the ears. Ulysses’ outwitting of Circe appears in the tale of Ulysses and Telegonus, *CA* 6.1427 ff. In all of these, the lesson derives from Ulysses’ prudence or cleverness rather than his fear, and in *CA* 1.560, Amans admits that he fails to live up to Ulysses’ example.
- 12 *power*. This is the third common sense of “danger” (see the note to 12.8 above). It is common in Machaut: see *Lou*. 14.18, 153.9, 187.6, 252.7; and *DMF* s.v. “danger,” A; *AND* s.v. “dangier,” 1. It is less common in poetry at the end of the century, but see Froissart, Bal. 32.2, Granson 78.2343. This would be Gower’s only use of the “danger” in this sense. He might simply have meant “peril” instead, or with reference to Circe, he perhaps invokes both senses at once.
- 19 *it removes welcome*. This is my best attempt to make sense of this line as appears in the manuscript, and it is determined in part by the parallelism to “tolt . . . toute la feste” in line 15. For “chiere,” Macaulay lists “welcome” in his glossary, as in *MO* 460, “Et de ma part te ferray chiere [and on my part, I will offer you welcome],” and *DMF* also recognizes this sense s.v. “chere,” C.3, as does *MED* s.v. “chère,” 6 and 7. If this were the sense, however, we might expect “enporte” (Modern French “emporte,” “removes, carries away”) rather than simply “porte [carries]” (a change that would not affect the meter). One has to wonder if Gower might perhaps have written instead “la chiere torne [turns its face]”; *DMF* s.v. “chere,” A.2.b, gives another 14th example of “torner la chere,” which it translates as “Tourner le dos à qqn, détourner le regard de qqn [turn one’s back to someone, look away from someone].” For a different sense of “chiere” see 37.4.
- 20 *that which I hear*. “Oie” is derived from the verb “oïr [to hear].” There is no good single word equivalent in English. Macaulay, in his glossary (1:532) provides “sound.”
- 22 *except for this*. “Horspris” (like the closely related “horsmis”) commonly means “except” or “except for” (see *AND* s.v. “horsmis,” “horspris”; *DMF* s.v. “hormis,” “horspris”), but it is difficult to find other examples in which it introduces an exception to a preceding adjective rather than, say, to a collective or plural noun (e.g., “all of them except for . . .”). The closest I have found is in Froissart, *Buisson*, 2295-96, “Je sui chi seuls et desgarnis / De conseil, hors mis que de vous {I am alone and deprived of counsel, except from you},” in which “hors mis que” could be analyzed as introducing an exception to “desgarnis.” Based on the available citations, reading “irra” as a conditional and “horspris cella” to introduce an unmet condition (i.e., “except for the fact that Danger remains in your company, this ballade would go as my messenger”) appears to be even more of a stretch, but if that is the sense, then this ballade goes with the 37, 40, and 46, the other ballades in which, paradoxically but for different reasons, the poem cannot be sent to the person to whom it is addressed, and the futility of the address might in this case be considered another element of parody.

- 24 *as my messenger*. "Message" can mean either "message" or "messenger"; see *AND, DMF* s.v. "message." For "aler en message," *AND* gives "to take a message, perform an errand."