

31

- Ma belle dame, bone et *graciouse*,
Si pour bealté l'en doit amour doner,
La bealté, dame, avetz si pleintevouse°
Qe vo bealté porra nulls coers passer
5 Qe ne l'estoet *par* fine force amer
Et obeir d'amour la discipline
Par soulement vo bealté regarder,
Car bon amour a les vertus encline.
- Et si bounté, q'est assetz vertuouse
10 De sa nature, amour porra causer,
Vous estes, dame, assetz plus bountevouse
Q'ascun amant le *purra* deviser,°
Et ceo me fait *vostre* amour desirer
Secondement *apres* l'amour divine,
15 Pour chier tenir, server, et honorer,
Car bon amour a les vertus encline.
- Et si la sort de *grace* est amoureuse,°
Lors porrai bien, ma dame, tesmoigner,
Vo grace entre la gent est si fameuse,
20 Q'a quelle *part* qe jeo me vuil torner,
Jeo puiss oïr vo *grace* proclamer.
Toutz en parlont° et dient lour covine.
L'om est benoit qui vous purroit happer,
Car bon amour a les vertus encline.
- 25 Ma dame, en qui sont *trestout* bien plener,
Tresfressche flour, honeste et femeline,
Ceste balade a vous fais envoier
Car bon amour a les vertus encline.

- 3 *Mac* plentevouse
12 *Cross drawn in margin. Purra may be in a later hand.*
17 *Mac* amoureuse
22 *MS* enparlont

Balade 31

31

My beautiful lady, good and gracious,
if for beauty one ought to give love,
beauty, lady, you have in such abundance
that no heart could encounter° your beauty
5 such that it is not compelled° by sheer necessity to love
and to obey the discipline of love
simply by looking upon your beauty,
for good love° inclines° toward the virtues.

°And if goodness, which is powerful° enough
10 by its nature, can cause love,
you, my lady, are much more virtuous°
than any lover could describe,
and this makes me desire your love,
secondly after divine love,°
15 to hold dear, to serve, and to honor,
for good love inclines toward the virtues.

And if the nature° of grace is with regard to love,
then I could well bear witness, my lady,
your grace is so famous among the people
20 that wherever I wish to turn
I can hear your grace proclaimed.
All speak about it and express their agreement.°
Blessed is the man° who could capture° you,
for good love inclines toward the virtues.

25 My lady, in whom all good qualities are complete,
fresh flower, virtuous and womanly,
I cause this ballade to be sent to you
for good love inclines toward the virtues.

This is the second of five ballades on the lady's virtue and on her effect upon others that also anticipates the advocacy of virtuous love with which *50B* concludes. For the lexical as well as thematic links between **31** and the other four poems, see the note to **21** above. As in the other four, the context excludes any consideration of the persona and lady's actual relationship or of how the poem might be received.

In three cases the need for a rhyme seems to have forced Gower into an unusual choice of word (see the notes to lines 4, 22, and 23). At the same time, this is one of the more neatly

Balade 31

structured of Gower's ballades: the first line announces the three qualities—"belle," "bone," and "graciose"—that will be taken up one by one in the three main stanzas. The same triad occurs again in 39.3-5 and in more attenuated a form in 38.18-23 and 45.6, 8-9, and 23, the other poems on the same theme. It also occurs in the next following ballades, 32.15-19, where, however, the context is a complaint about the qualities that the lady lacks.

- 4 *encounter*. The translation is compelled by context, but this is a very unusual use of the verb "passer."
- 5 *such that it is not compelled*. One is tempted to take the "Qe" as a relative and to translate, "that is not compelled to love," but "estoei" (from "estover" [AND], "estouvoir" [DMF]) is normally used impersonally, like "il faut" in Modern French, and when it takes a third-person object, Gower normally elides it to "I," as in MO 1871, 2099 and as he apparently does here. The "Qe" appears therefore to be a conjunction, but the sense, of course, is the same.
sheer necessity. This is the translation offered by AND for "fine force" in the entries both for "fin" and for "force¹," in the list of phrases at the end of each entry. For a similar use see MO 4119, 6251. Gower uses the same phrase in a more literal sense in 38.4 and MO 17966.
- 8 *good love*. In the two earlier uses, in 6.20 and 25.25, "bon amour" seems to mean little more than "true love," but here "good love" takes on more moral weight, preparing the way for 49, where it is used to mean genuine, that is to say virtuous, love.
inclines. There is likely a double meaning here. The primary sense, since the verb is apparently used intransitively, is "tends," that is, "has an inclination for" or "has a preference for" (as in *Tr* 13.19) AND s.v. "encliner¹," v.n. 3; DMF s.v. "encliner," III.A.1.c. But the verb can also be used transitively (though evidently less commonly) to mean "to incline" in the sense of "to dispose, to cause to have a preference" (AND, loc.cit., v.a., 3; DMF, loc.cit., III.B.1.a); or to put it differently, "to cause to be *enclin*" in the sense of "porté, disposé à qqc. [directed, disposed towards something]"; DMF s.v. "enclin," B.1.a. Thus "love disposes towards the virtues," with the object (the lover) understood. The Middle English verb is also used in both senses. See MED s.v. "enclīnen," 8b, "to be favorably disposed (toward something), citing CA 8.2081-83, "I wolde . . . / To vertu more than to vice / Encline"; and 8a, "to dispose or incline (a person, . . . etc.) favorably toward some course of action," with four citations from Chaucer.
- 9-16 The lady's "bonté [goodness]" is frequently cited as a stimulus to love, often along with her other qualities, such as her beauty and her comportment. See for instance Machaut, *Lou*. 88.15-20, 173.1-7, 179.1-7, 196.9-16.
- 9 *powerful*. "Vertuous," like the underlying "vertu," might refer either to strength or to moral goodness, in both Middle French and Middle English (DMF s.v. "vertu," "vertueux"; MED s.v. "vertū," "vertuōus"). The former sense seems to be required by the context here, though the latter is certainly also relevant to "bounté." (AND has entries for "vertu" and "vertueusement" but not for "vertueux.")
- 11 *virtuous*. "Bountevouse" is the adjective formed from "bonté [goodness]." According to DMF s.v. "bontiveux," the word is Anglo-Norman rather than continental, meaning "Qui manifeste de la bonté [that manifests goodness]." (AND s.v. "bontivous" defines only as "bounteous.") It also appears in Middle English. Chaucer uses it twice (*T&C* 1.883, *PhyT CT* VI.110). See MED s.v. "böuntevōus," 1.(a), "Good, virtuous, worthy."
- 14 For the comparison cf. 9.7, 24.26, and 26.13.
- 17 *nature*. AND s.v. "sort," 3; DMF s.v. "sort," A.3.d. Though this is not a common use of "sort," in providing the transition from the preceding stanza, with its reference to divine love, this line seems to imply "If we are to speak of grace in love as opposed to divine grace." In doing so, it hints very

briefly at the normal sense of amorous grace, which is the favor that the lady bestows upon her lover, before switching quickly to the different sense of grace, that aspect of the lady's character with which this poem and the others with which it is linked is most concerned, the sense that is invoked in the reference to her as "graciously" in line 1. On the range of meanings of "grace," see the note to 1.8.

- 22 *agreement*. The translation is compelled by context, but it is difficult to find any other examples in which *co(n)vine* has so neutral a sense. The word has a wide range of meanings. Elsewhere, Gower uses it to mean "company, companions," as in 21.19, or "nature, character, behavior," as in 45.16 (see the notes to these lines). It can also be used with reference to the contents of one's thought: see *DMF* s.v. "convine," II.B, "Disposition d'esprit, intention, dessein, projet [disposition of mind, intention, design, plan]," but as the citations in this entry demonstrate, the context is almost exclusively negative, referring to the designs of enemies or to malicious plans. The same is true in *MO*: see for example 136, "Ly deable conta sa covine [the devil explained his plan]." Cf. *Tr* 13.4, with reference to the Pharaoh, and *AND* s.v. "covine," 7, "connivance, collusion"; 8, "trick, deceit." The same range occurs in Middle English, with the same implications in context. See *MED* s.v. "cōvīne," 1.(a), "a group of confederates" (with two citations from *CA*); 2.(b), "collusion, conspiracy" (two citations from *CA*); 3. "A secret plan or intention" (three citations from *CA*); 4. "fraud, deceit, guile" (one citation from *CA*). Definition 2.(a) is "Agreement, assent," the sense that is required in this line, but there is only a single citation, from 1425. The neutral sense may derive from the neutral or positive contexts in which "covine" as "company" sometimes occurs, but the choice of word may simply be compelled in this case by the need for a rhyme.
- 23 *blessed is the man*. Cf. 21.15 (and the note) and the refrain to 39.
- capture*. The citations in both *AND* (s.v. "haper") and *DMF* (s.v. "happer") suggest that this is a rather violent term in this context, though *AND* also notes that it can be used with reference to chess. Neither provides any other examples of the use of this verb in the context of love. Gower uses the verb twice in *MO*, in 13679, with figurative reference to the evils that will seize and imprison the one who reveals what he should not, and in 25317, describing how the dishonest draper steals a customer's money.