

34

Saint Valentin l'amour et la nature
Des° toutz oiseals ad en gouvernement,
Dont chascun d'eaux semblable a sa mesure
Une compaigne honeste a son talent
5 Elist tout d'un acord et d'un assent.
Pour celle soule laist a covenir
Toutes les autres, car nature aprent,
U li coers est, le corps falt obeïr.

Ma douce dame, ensi jeo vous assure
10 Qe jeo vous ai eslieu semblablement.
Sur toutes autres estes a dessure
De mon amour, si tresentierement
Qe riens y falt *par* quoi joiousement
De coer et corps jeo vous voldrai servir,
15 Car de reson c'est une experiment:
U li coers est, le corps falt obeïr.

Pour remembrer jadis celle aventure
De Alceone et Ceïx ensemment,
Com dieus muoit en oisel lour figure,
20 Ma volenté serroit tout tielement,
Qe sanz envie et danger de la gent
Nous porroions ensemble *par* loisir
Voler tout francs en *nostre* esbatement.
U li coers est, le corps falt obeïr.

25 Ma belle oisel, vers qui mon pensement
S'en vole ades sanz null contretenir,
Pren cest escript, car jeo sai voirement,
U li coers est, le corps falt obeïr.

2 Mac De

Balade 34

34

Saint Valentine has under his governance
the love° and the nature of all birds,
°whereby° each of them chooses a worthy° partner
similar to its size,° according to its desire,
5 entirely of one accord and one assent.°
For that one alone it leaves alone°
all others, for Nature° teaches,
where the heart is, the body must obey.°

10 My sweet lady, thus do I assure you
that I have chosen you similarly.
Above all other women, you are uppermost°
in my love, so totally
that nothing lacks° with which joyfully
I would wish to serve you with heart and body,
15 for by reason it is shown by experience:°
where the heart is, the body must obey.

Likewise, calling to mind° the destiny
of Alceone and Ceix,° long ago,
how God transformed their bodies into birds,
20 my wish would be entirely the same,
that without envy or hindrance° from people,
together, at our leisure, we could
fly completely free in our joy.°
Where the heart is, the body must obey.

25 My beautiful bird,° °to whom my thought
constantly takes flight without restraint,
take° this writing, for I know truly,
where the heart is, the body must obey.

34 is the first of two ballades that begin by invoking Saint Valentine in his role in presiding over the mating of the birds. The origins of the association between the saint and love and between the saint and the birds are lost in time. (For different accounts, see Oruch, "St. Valentine," and Kelly, *Saint Valentine*.) Two different traditions seem to have been current in Gower's time, one, best represented by Chaucer's *PF*, in which the birds choose their mates on the saint's feast day, and the other, appearing exclusively among French poets (notably Granson and Christine de Pizan), in which humans rather than birds choose his day on which to

Balade 34

celebrate and express their love. (See Wimsatt, *French Contemporaries*, p. 234). Granson actually shows knowledge of both traditions, but the two poems in which he refers to the mating of the birds (77, "Le Songe Saint Valentin," and 78.1246-47) we have other reason to believe may both be derived from Chaucer (see Wimsatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-37, and Granson, *Poems*, pp. 32-34). Gower is firmly in the English camp (along with Chaucer and Clanvowe), and since, whatever their date, his ballades must have been written after *PF*, he does not provide any useful evidence on either the origin or the development of the tradition. Nor does he provide any convincing evidence on when the date of the saint's feast was finally fixed on February 14, another point of uncertainty. Kelly argues (pp. 72-74), based on the proximity to the two May poems (36 and 37) and on two passages in *CA*, 1.100-03 and 2088-90, which clearly refer to the birds choosing their mates in May, that Gower thought of the feast taking place late in spring, but the two passages that Kelly cites from *CA* don't actually make any reference to Saint Valentine's Day, and one might argue that in placing these two ballades between the New Year's and the May poems, Gower thought of the feast as also falling between the two (though 34 in fact makes no mention of the saint's day either).

Of all of the relevant surviving texts, Gower's are the first to incorporate the St Valentine's day motif into a ballade. They are much less concerned with the saint himself, however, than they are (like *CA* 1.100-03) with the happiness and the lack of restraint in love that is enjoyed by the birds under the supervision of Nature, for two very different purposes in ballades 34 and 35. The more playful and more artful is 34. It begins soberly enough, using birds as an example of faithful monogamy. The refrain, on the body obeying the heart, invokes the fantasy of a natural, and thus unproblematic, passage from desire to fulfillment, but little more. The monogamy of the birds becomes the model for the persona's own fidelity to his lady in the second stanza, but already the sense of the refrain shifts a bit, as it now describes the willingness of his service to her. A bigger shift occurs in the third stanza, which invokes a very different image of birdlife and a very different fantasy of a love not hindered by social constraint, as the "obeying body" now refers to their flying off together in joy, with everything this implies about their union.

As in other of Gower's most successful ballades, the envoy defines the relationship within which this message occurs. It begins with the affectionate address to "ma belle oisel," which extends the imagery around which the poem is built but which is presumptuous at best unless the woman is already comfortable with the implied intimacy, and it follows, in the verb form "pren" in line 27, with an almost unnoticed shift from "vous" to "tu" which is equally impermissible unless it is already expected by the addressee. At the same time, the persona weaves in the play on words in "s'en vole" (26) and possibly "esbatement" (23) as well (see the note below). This time, we can be sure that the lady shares not just the joke but also the wish that the poem expresses and that she is receptive to the implicit instruction in the final instance of the refrain.

- 2 *the love*. This might simply be "love" generally rather than just that of the birds.
- 3-7 The male does the choosing in these lines. "Une compaigne [a partner]" in line 4, "celle [that one]" in line 6, and "toutes les autres [all others]" in line 7 are all feminine in form. The roles are evidently reversed in 35.4-5.
- 3 *whereby*. The antecedent of "dont" isn't fully clear: most likely "gouvernement," which immediately precedes, but possibly "nature" in line 1, and possibly the entire proposition in lines 1-2 (see *DMF*

Balade 34

- s.v. "dont," II.C), typical of the rather loose way in which "dont" can be employed as relative, as conjunction, or as adverb.
- worthy*. The range of meaning of "honeste" is quite broad. In this context it might also mean "chaste, virtuous" (AND s.v. "honest," 1; DMF s.v. "honneste," A.2) or "suitable, appropriate" (AND, loc.cit., 2; DMF, loc.cit., B.1). See the note to 21.23.
- 4 *size*. The primary sense of "mesure" has to do with physical measurement (AND s.v. "mesure¹," 1; DMF s.v. "mesure," A.2.), but one wonders (perhaps under the influence of *PF*) if Gower might also had something like "rank" in mind. Yeager translates "in its degree."
- 5 *entirely of one accord and one assent*. That is, by mutual agreement. Deschamps uses "tous d'un acort [both of one accord]" with reference to marriage in 1342.3.
- 6 *leaves alone*. AND s.v. "convenir," with several good citations for the phrase "lesser convenir, lesser a, al convenir," "to leave alone, leave the decision to."
- 7 *Nature*. 34, 35, and 36 (the first of the two May poems) introduce a new sense to the personified Natura, not the creative divinity of 13.11, 38.16 and 45.18 but more specifically the goddess of regeneration, preparing the way, if the last section of 50B can be said to have an "argument," for the reconciliation of Nature and Reason that is offered in ballade 50. In 50B, Gower does not have as much scope to explore the different senses of Nature as he has in both *MO* and *CA*. Here, while Nature is associated with the innocent coupling of the birds, she is also cited in favor of their monogamous union.
- 8 *where the heart is, the body must obey*. This refrain is obviously proverbial in character, but I can find no precise analogue elsewhere. The closest that I know of is in the Middle English *Romaunt*, 1794-95, "For evere the body must be lad / After the herte," for which there is no equivalent in any of the available texts of *RR* (at line 1757 in the Lecoy edition used for citation here). Whiting lists this passage under H303, "Who has the Heart is lady (lord) of the body," citing also *BD* 1152-54, "She was lady / Of the body; she had the herte, / And who hath that may not asterte," and *Romaunt* 2084-85, "For of the body he is full lord / That hath the herte in his tresor," for which the underlying source is *RR* 1994-95, "Il est assez sire dou cors /qui a le cuer en sa comande [he is lord enough of the body / who has the heart under his command]." Whiting's H302, "Where the Heart is, the body must be abandoned," is also close, with only one citation, from Berners' *Arthur* (c. 1533), "Where as the hert is, there is the body habandoned, for the body enclyneth to the herte." Among the lyricists, see Machaut, *Lou*. 171.18-20, "S'ara le cuer et le corps sans partie, / Car quant mes cuers le vuet, je ne doi mie / Desobeïr a faire son voloir [thus she will have heart and body undivided, for when my heart desires it, I must not disobey in carrying out her wish], and Granson 45.27, "Bien tient le corps qui a le cuer en gage [he or she who has the heart as gage possesses the body]." There does not appear to be any relevant listing in Hassell.
- 11 *uppermost*. Gower uses a similar expression in 39.4.
- 13 *nothing lacks*. This is a variation of the formula used to praise the lady in 14.3-4 and 39.6-7 and to gently criticize her in 11.12 and 17.26.
- 15 *shown by experience*. "Experiment" can mean "an experiment" in the modern sense, but it was also used for the knowledge gained by experiment or experience. See AND s.v. "esperiment," 3,4,6; and DMF s.v. "experiment," B.
- 17 *calling to mind*. For the construction with "pour" see the note to 11.5.
- 18 *Alceone and Ceix*. Genius tells the story in *CA* 4.2927-3123 as an example of the truthfulness of dreams. His source is the much longer version in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.410-748. See also Chaucer's *BD* 62-217, which omits, however, the happy reunion of husband and wife after their transformation into birds that Gower celebrates both here and at the end of his version in *CA*.

- 21 *hindrance*. With reference to a third party rather than to the lady herself, "danger" must take on a somewhat different meaning from its most common use in the lyrics. See *AND* s.v. "dangier," 2; *DMF* s.v. "danger," C.1. On the range of sense of "danger" see the notes to 12.8 and to 30.
- 23 *joy*. "Esbatement" commonly means "joy" or "pleasure" (*AND* s.v. "esbatement," 2, also offers "frolicking, amusement, fun") as in 1.21, sometimes in a specifically sexual context (see the note to that line), but *AND*, loc.cit., 1, provides one citation to indicate that it could also be used, like Modern French "battement," to refer to the beating of wings, appropriate enough (like "s'en vole [takes flight]" in line 26) in a poem in which the lovers are likened to birds. (There seems to be no justification in Middle French for invoking the Modern French expression "les battements de mon coeur [the beating of my heart].")
- 25 *bird*. "Oisel" is grammatically masculine, but natural gender (in the feminine forms of "ma" and "belle") takes priority as the persona addresses the term to his lady. Cf. 35.22.
- 25-26 *my thought takes flight*. Gower uses a similar image in 8.1-4, comparing the flight of his wishes to the flight of a falcon.
- 27 *take*. This is one of three instances (with 4¹.24 and 16.26) in which the persona slips from the formal form of the verb to the familiar ("pren"). Here the choice is consistent with the change of tone in the envoy, with the address to "ma belle oisel" and the gentle play on words in "s'en vole."