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Om dist, *promesses* ne sont pas estables.  
Ceo piert en vous, ma dame, au tiele enseigne:  
Qe les *paroles* avetz amiables,  
Mais en vos faitz vous n'estes pas certeine.  
5 Vous m'avetz fait com jadis fist Heleine  
Qant prist Paris et laissa Menelai.  
Ne puiss hoster maisque de vous me pleigne.  
Loials amours se provont a l'essai.

Si vos *promesses* fuissent veritables,  
10 Sur vo *parole* q'estoit primereine  
Vous ne serretz, ma dame, si changables,  
Pour lesser qe vous avetz en demeine  
Et *prendre* ailours la chose q'est foreine.  
Vous savetz bien, ma dame, et jeo le sai,  
15 Selonc qe le *proverbe* nous enseine:  
Loials amours se *provont* a l'essai.

Qant verité d'amour se torne en fables  
Et qe vergoigne pas ne le restreigne  
*Parmi* les voies qe sont honourables,  
20 N'est un vertu qe la fortune meine.  
*Vostre* ameisté vers un n'est pas souleine,  
Ainz est a deux; c'est un chaunçon verrai  
Dont chanterai sovent a basse aleine:  
Loials amours se *provont* a l'essai.

25 Adieu, ma joie; a dieu, ma triste peine.  
Ore est yvern qe soloit estre Maii.  
Ne sai pour quoi Cupide me desdeigne.  
Loials amours se *provont* a l'essai.

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They say that promises are not reliable.  
°That is evident in you, my lady, from such a sign:  
that you have words (that are) loving,  
but in your deeds you are not trustworthy.  
5 °You have done to me as Helen did long ago  
when she took Paris and left Menelaus.  
I can't refrain from complaining about you.  
Loyal loves are proven at the test.

If your promises were truthful,  
10 in your initial word  
you would not be so changeable, my lady,  
to leave what you have in your possession<sup>°</sup>  
and take elsewhere something that is not.<sup>°</sup>  
You know well, my lady, and I know it,  
15 according to what the proverb teaches us:  
loyal loves are proven at the test.<sup>°</sup>

When truth in love is turned into fables  
and shame does not confine it  
along paths that are honorable,  
20 there is no force or virtue that guides Fortune.<sup>°</sup>  
Your affection is not exclusively for one,<sup>°</sup>  
rather it's for two. It is a true song  
which I will sing often in a low voice:  
loyal loves are proven at the test.

25 Adieu, my joy; adieu, my sorrowful pain.  
Now it is winter that formerly was May.<sup>°</sup>  
I don't know why Cupid<sup>°</sup> disdains me.  
Loyal loves are proven at the test.

This is the first of four ballades on a partner's infidelity, and the only one spoken by a man. The situation that underlies it—a woman's change of heart—is not, of course, unknown among Gower's predecessors. It is at the center of Machaut's *Behaingne*, which weighs the grief of a partner's death against the sorrow caused by a woman's infidelity. Among the lyrics, one may compare the very different treatments in (among others) Machaut, *Lou.* 52, 53, 55, 193, 206, 207, 213, and 248; Deschamps 1342; and Granson 49. (For poems on a man's infidelity, see the note to 41 below.) Of these, Machaut's 193 is perhaps closest to Gower's in its blame of the lady's

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deceptiveness rather than merely proclaiming the persona's grief. Most such poems are addressed to an impersonal audience; of those listed, only Granson 49 and Machaut 206, 207 (both rondeaux rather than ballades), and 248 are addressed to the lady herself. (Granson's is paired with the lady's apt response in 50.) Gower's begins that way, addressing the lady directly in line 2, and holding up a mirror to her conduct in the first two stanzas. But if she is listening, she of course makes no reply, and more in the manner of the ballades that have no specific addressee, it really seems that we overhear the man talking to himself, trying to make sense of his betrayal. As he does, the refrain, "Loials amours se provont a l'essai," serves variously as a complaint, as a justification of his own commitment, and as a silent but ineffective plea. The paradox of addressing a complaint to one who has already proved her indifference recalls the earlier ballades (17, 18, and 19) on the ineffectiveness of the lover's language. Machaut seems to be aware of the same paradox in *Lou*. 254, a *chanson royal* spoken by a woman complaining to her lover not just about his infidelity but also that "ne me vues oïr ne regarder [you don't want to hear or see me]" (14). Despite her own wishes, though, she does not renounce him (47-48), and the envoy addresses her poem to the "Princes" (51). Gower's ballade takes a different turn. In the conclusion to the final stanza, the persona contrasts his lady's false words to his "chaunçon verrai" which he sings "a basse aleine" (22-23), only to himself and not to her: he turns away from the lady completely, abandoning his complaint, not expecting to be heard, and recognizing the futility of any attempt to change her. Despite the address to the lady in the opening lines, the poem is finally less about reproach than about sorrow and loss. The envoy begins "A dieu, ma joie, a dieu, ma triste peine" (25), but in the lines that follow, the man says nothing at all about sending the poem to his lady. This is one of only three poems in 50B (with 37 and 46) that are not sent to the person to whom they are ostensibly addressed, and each one enacts in a different way the lack of communication that the poem itself describes. Here, the envoy expresses both the man's disappointment and his helplessness, and it helps make the poem as a whole less a farewell to the woman than a farewell to love.

- 2-3 *That is evident . . . that.* Five times in *MO* the verb "piert" (from "pareir" [AND]/"paroir" [DMF], "to appear") occurs with the subject "ce [this/that]," referring to the immediately preceding statement. In four of these (21099, 21477, 21513, 22194), the verb is followed by a clause beginning with "car [for]; in the other (1816) the clause that follows begins with "q[ue]," which might be either "for" or "that." By that model, this would be "That is evident in you, . . . for . . ." which makes good sense. But the "Qe" clause here also apparently functions in apposition to "enseigne [sign]," requiring "that." What appears to be excluded by sense is the normal use of "tel . . . que": "from such a sign that you have words that are loving." The appearance of "tiele" here is in any case a bit unusual. *AND* s.v. "tel," 6, provides two citations in which the appropriate translation would be "this, the following," but from Gower we might expect "celle" instead. One would also expect "a" rather than "au" before a feminine noun, even from Gower. The sense is clear, but we might not have solved all of the grammatical puzzles yet.
- 3 *loving.* The range of meaning of "amiable" is quite broad, depending on context. *AND* s.v. "amiable" offers "friendly," "kind," and "lovable" in addition to "loving."
- 5-6 Gower treats Helen rather severely. Here she is an example of unfaithfulness, and in *Tr* 10.3 she is both the most beautiful woman who ever was and a "fole peccheresse [foolish sinner]." Paris does a little better: in *MO* 16700-02 it is his foolishness that is cited, but in 14.7 he appears as an example of suffering in love. In *CA* 5.7195-7590 their story provides an exemplum on Sacrilege, but Paris

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appears with Helen, his "joie souveraine," in the company of famous lovers in Amans' vision in 8.2528-30. Gower's lyric predecessors cite Helen for her beauty rather than for her betrayal. Hassell H23 "Belle comme Hélène" cites Machaut, Lai 1.307, *Voir Dit* 3482; 100B 19.7; Christine de Pizan, *Duc des vrais amans*, 1579; to which add Granson 26.17.

- 7 For the use of "maisque" in this context see the note to 17.27.
- 12 *in your possession*. The same noun ("demeine") appears in 33.4 and 39.14. In both cases, as here, the lover is the lady's "demeine" rather than *vice versa*.
- 13 *that is not*. "Forein(e)" applies widely to anything that is on the outside. Here it is placed in contrast to "en demeine." There is no one good word in English that means "outside of your possession," but that seems to be the meaning, rather than any more specific sense, e.g. with reference to a foreign country. Gower uses the same rhyme pair for a similar distinction in MO 11710-11.
- 15 Gower labels the refrain a proverb, but it is not recorded in either Hassell or Whiting.
- 20 Since Gower's "qe" might function as either subject or object, the subject of "meine" might be either "vertu" or "fortune." In 10.8, Gower refers to "la fortune qui les amantz meine [the fortune that guides lovers]," but "it is not a virtue that Fortune leads" doesn't make much sense. "Vertu" is the more likely subject. On the various possible senses of "vertu" see the note to 21. Both "force" and "moral virtue" seem to be in play in this line. It may be intended to suggest that the vicissitudes of love, which resemble the unpredictable turns of Fortune, can somehow be regulated or overcome by good moral conduct, an underlying assumption of much of Genius' counsel in CA and of the ballades with which 50B concludes.
- 21 *exclusively for one*. On this use of "souleine" see the note to 36.11. One might translate instead "your affection is not for one alone."
- 26 An echo of 37.23.
- 27 *Cupid*. The only other reference to Cupid in 50B occurs in 27.2, where he inflicts a wound upon the persona. Here his role is much broader, in guiding the persona's fortunes in love, more like that of Amours in poems by Machaut and his successors.