

48

- Amour est une chose merveilouse  
Dont nulls porra savoir le droit *certein*.  
Amour de soi est la foi tricherouse  
Que plus promette et meinz apporte au mein.  
5 Le riche est *povere et°* le courtois vilein,  
L'espine est molle et la rose est urtie.  
En toutz erreurs amour se justefie.
- L'amier° est douls et la doulçour merdouse,  
Labour est ease et le repos grievein,  
10 Le doel plesant, la seurté *perilouse*,  
Le° halt est bass, si est le bass haltein.  
Qant l'en mieulx quide avoir, tout est en vein.  
Le ris en plour, le sens torne en folie.  
En toutz erreurs amour se justefie.
- 15 Amour est une voie dangereouse.  
Le *pres* est loign, et loign remaint *proschein*.  
Amour est chose odible et *graciouse*.  
Orguil est humble et service est desdeign;  
L'aignelle est fiere et le leon humein;  
20 L'oue est en cage, la merle est *forsbanie.°*  
En toutz erreurs amour se justifie.
- Ore est amour salvage, ore est soulein.  
N'est qui d'amour poet dire la sotie.  
Amour est serf; amour est *soverein*.  
25 En touz° erreurs amour se justifie.

5 et. *Tironian et*, the only instance in 50B. Mac's textual note to line 4 evidently refers instead to this line, but he reads *e* instead of the common *Tironian* symbol.

8 MS La mier

11 MS La

20 MS fors banie

25 touz. Mac emends to toutz.

48

- Love is a wonderful thing  
about which no one could know the true certainty.  
Love is in itself a treacherous° faith°  
that promises more and delivers less to hand.
- 5 The rich one is poor° and the courtly boorish,  
the thorn is soft and the rose is nettle.  
In all errors love finds justification.
- The bitter is sweet and sweetness foul,  
labor is ease and rest difficult,  
10 grief pleasant,° safety perilous,  
the high is low and the low is lofty.  
When one most expects° to have it, all is in vain.  
Laughter into tears,° sense turns into folly.  
In all errors love finds justification.
- 15 Love is a dangerous path;  
the near is far° and far remains close by.  
Love is a thing hateful and gracious.  
Pride is humble and service is contempt;  
the lamb is fierce and the lion humane;  
20 the goose is in the cage, the blackbird is ousted.  
In all errors love finds justification.
- °Now is love wanton,° now is it single.  
There is no one who can tell the foolishness of love.  
Love is a serf; love is sovereign.  
25 In all errors love finds justification.

48 is the first of the four poems with which *50B* concludes, which offer general reflections on the nature of love without reference to the persona's own experience. In another abrupt shift, it offers a starkly different view of love from the four ballades that precede, and it invites a particularly close comparison to 47: where 47 proclaims the diversity of the experience of love (lines 15-17), 48 agrees that love is without any "droit certain," any fixedness or certainty, and echoing the "joie" and "suspir [sighing]," the "santé [health]" in which the persona languishes with which 47 concludes, it proceeds to list the many other contradictions and irrationalities of love. But where 47, written from the point of view of one who experiences love, reaffirms the persona's commitment, despite love's uncertainty, to love well, 48 views love from the outside and sees only its "errours" and its "sotie [foolishness]."

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*Balade 48*

Poems presenting general reflections on love make up a small but important category among Gower's predecessors. One may cite Machaut, *Lou.* 96, and Granson 23, 33, 44, 56, 58, and 68, his "Dit de Loiauté." The most common theme of such poems, however, is more like that of 47 than of 48, the need for loyalty and virtuous conduct in love, offered as advice to those who seek happiness in love. 48 borrows its imagery elsewhere. The *loci classici* for the description of love in terms of contradictions are Meter 5 of Alanus de Insulis' *De Planctu Naturae* and Reason's speech in Guillaume de Lorris' portion of *RR* (4263-4300). Gower himself draws upon the same imagery elsewhere, in *VC* 5.53-78, in the 15 lines of hexameters beginning "Est Amor" that appear among other Latin verses appended to *Tr* and to *VC*, and in *CA* 1.vv. 7-8. (He also uses very similar language, not with reference to love at all but to the effects of various sins, in *MO*, e.g. in 1355-56, 1487, 6820-28, 8317-20.) Most of the specific observations about love in 48 have some reflex in one or more of these sources (see the notes below). In *DPN*, *RR*, and *VC*, such observations are offered as part of a general warning against the dangers of love. Removed from its moralizing context, similar language also appears in a great many lyrics to express the helplessness and emotional turmoil associated with love. The few instances of such oxymora earlier in 50*B* are typical of what Gower would have found among his predecessors: 3.1-3 ("me fait languir en joie"); 9.20-22, 25-29 ("je ris en plours et en santé languis"); 13.2, 24 ("les douls mals que j'endure"), and the two passages at the conclusion of 47 (lines 22, 24). (One recalls also Amans' reference to his "jolif wo" in *CA* 1.88; cf. "le jolif mal," 13.24. See also *CA* 5.5993-95.) In 36.15 and 37.22-24, Gower also uses some of the same imagery to express the gap between the persona's wishes and what he has achieved. But none of the preceding poems in 50*B* presume to comment upon love itself, being occupied as they are with the persona's private experience with the person to whom they are sent. In addressing itself to an impersonal audience—it is the only poem in the collection without an explicit "I" or an explicit addressee—48 has clearer links to the moralizing mode than to the lyric.

That said, it is nonetheless remarkably free of the harshest language of its more moralizing predecessors. Its strongest terms, "folie," "erreur," "sotie," fall far short of the warnings against the evils that love incites in *DPN* (M5.37-44, 59-60) or the threat of blind self-destruction invoked in *VC* (5.139-40, 225-30) or "Ecce patet tensus," the Latin verses that follow 50*B* in the Trentham manuscript. Love in 48 is "mervelouse"; it is full of contradictions, but these are mostly the confusing emotional effects of love upon the one who experiences it, as in the lyrics; and while love deceives with hope (as many of the speakers in earlier ballades will attest), and while the refrain is certainly discouraging, both ethically and emotionally, there is no suggestion either that love is the cause of evil conduct or that it can in any way be avoided by one who tries. Rather than condemning love, 48 shakes its head in wonderment at its foolishness, but in doing so, it offers a kind of challenge. Inconclusive in itself, it is certainly not the final word. Instead, it opens the way for the three ballades that follow, which introduce a different, wiser "I" into the collection, and each of which responds directly to some portion of 48, using its own language to resolve the dilemmas that it poses, following a path that is anticipated in 47 in the commitment to "bien aimer [love well]."

- 2     *true certainty*. There is more than one possibility for "droit certain." The translation offered here follows Macaulay (in his note to this line, 1:469), who takes "certein" as a noun meaning

### *Balade 48*

"certainty," a use confirmed in *AND* s.v. "certein," 1, and *DMF* s.v. "certain," I.A.4, and that works well in contrast to the many contradictions and "errours" of love that the poem goes on to list. (Cf. also 9.21 and the use of "nouncertein" in 24.17.) But of the eight uses of the noun "certein" in *MO*, this sense applies only in 28331. The most common use in *MO* (e.g. in 23792, 24068-69) is "obligation, duty, what is owed," and thus instead, or in addition, we might possibly translate "droit certein" as "the true cost" of love. In *MO* 10893-94, the noun occurs in the lines "Car le certain pourra nully / Savoir du fin [for no one can know *le certain* of the outcome or end]," where it apparently means "the truth, the true nature," a sense that also works well in this line (in which case "droit" merely adds emphasis). "Droit," as an adjective, normally precedes the noun it modifies, e.g. in 4<sup>1</sup>.3, 8.6, *et al.* "Droit" is also a very common noun, however, and "certein" is more commonly used as an adjective than as a noun, and when it is, it normally follows the noun, as in 33.9, opening up a different way of construing the phrase. The noun "droit" also has a very wide range of meanings. One possibility comes from 7.1, "De fin amour c'est le droit et nature," where I translated "droit" as "law." This line similarly might mean "No one can know the fixed law of love," that is, since there is none, as the poem goes on to explain. All of these senses might be present at some level as we proceed.

- 3 *treacherous faith*. Cf. *DPN* M5.1, "fraudique fides . . . iuncta [and loyalty joined to trickery]"; M5.62, "fides non habuisse fidem [faith not to have faith]"; *VC* 5.62, "dubitata fides [uncertain faith]"; "Est Amor" 15, "fides . . . dolosa [deceitful faith]."  
*treacherous*. I.e., not merely "dangerous" but "deceptive, unreliable." See the note to 43.1.
- 5 *The rich one is poor*. Cf. *DPN* M5.31, "dives eget Cressus [the rich Croesus is needy]"; *VC* 5.71 "prosperitas pauper [poverty-stricken wealth]."  
*the courtly boorish*. Cf. *MO* 16795-97, "fole compaignie . . . des courtois les fait vilains [foolish company . . . makes boors of the courteous]."
- 6 *the rose is nettle*. Cf. *VC* 5.58 and "Est Amor" 15, "urticata rosa [nettled rose]"; also 36.15, 37.24.
- 7 *In all errors love finds justification*. This is the only use of "errour" in 50B. Where the word occurs in *MO*, it most commonly designates a moral failing (e.g. 1492, 27308). See also the "pius error [pious sin]" of *VC* 5.53, *CA* 1 *vv.* 7. Here its sense must emerge from the surrounding lines, which do not describe sins so much as intellectual confusions brought to life. For a Latinate author such as Gower (as for Milton; *Paradise Lost* 4.239), "errour" probably also retained some of its literal etymological meaning of "wandering, going astray"; cf. *DMF* s.v. "erreur<sup>1</sup>," A.1; "Est Amor," line 17, "Fixus in ambiguus motibus errat amor [immovable, love wanders in uncertain motions]"; and "Ecce patet tensus," line 3, "cecus tamen errat ubique [the blind one wanders everywhere]." "Se justefie" might be an active verb with a reflexive object (as in *MO* 20982, 25952), "justifies or defends itself," personifying "love"; or it might have passive sense, as in *MO* 23325, 24624, "le tort se justefie [wrong is defended or becomes justified]." Gower does not use "se justefie," here or in *MO*, to mean "is justified" as a way of asserting the correctness of something that might otherwise not be excused. This line invites comparison to the final line of *Tr* (18.27), "L'amour parfit en dieu se justifie [perfect love finds justification in God]." *AND* s.v. "justifier," cites both lines from Gower (and only these lines) for the reflexive use of the verb, meaning "to justify oneself." My translation of both lines tries to bridge all the possibilities while avoiding the possible ambiguity.
- 8 *the bitter is sweet and sweetness foul*. Cf. *DPN* M5.7-8, "sibi dulcor amarus / cuius odor sapidus insipidusque sapor [sweetness bitter to itself, whose odor is savory and whose savor is insipid]"; M5.63, "dulcia proponit, assumit amara [it offers what is sweet, it takes what is bitter]"; *RR* 4284 "douce saveur mal savoreuse [an ill-tasting sweet taste]"; *VC* 5.49 "dulcescit amarum [bitterness turns sweet]."

- 9 *rest difficult*. Cf. DPN M5.16, “*egra quies* [troubled peace];” RR 4271, “*repos travaillant* [laborious rest]”; VC 5.54 and CA 1.vv. 7, “*vexata quies* [disturbed peace]”; “*Est Amor*” 14, “*quies operosa* [busy peace].”
- 10 *grief pleasant*. Cf. 9.25; DPN M5.6, “*tristicies leta* [happy sadness]; M5.10 and CA 1.vv. 8, “*suave malum* [pleasant pain].”  
*safety perilous*. Cf. 9.27; and (for contrast) RR 4271, “*douz perilz* [sweet danger].”
- 11 *low is lofty*. Cf. 9.21; Whiting L530, “Love makes low things high” (with one citation), and in a different context, CA 8.2262, “And thing which nou is lowe is eft alofte.”
- 12 *most expects*. Gower commonly uses “*mieux quide*” for illusions or for disappointed expectations. See the note to 16.15.
- 13 *laughter into tears*. Cf. 9.26; DPN M5.16, “*risus flebilis* [tearful laughter]”; RR 4295, “*ris plains de pleurs et de lermes* [laughter full of crying and tears]”; Granson 40.4, “*Rire en plorant* [laughing while crying]”; VC 5.59 and “*Est Amor*” 6, “*flens risus* [weeping laughter].”  
*sense turns into folly*. Cf. DPN M5.2, “*mixtus cum ratione furor* [madness mixes with reason]”; M5.15, “*Insiapiens ratio, demens prudentia* [foolish reason, mad wisdom]”; M5.61, “*ratio rationis egere* [reason to lack reason]”; RR 4293, “*fos sans* [foolish sense]”; VC 5.65, “*irracionalis racio* [unreasonable reason].”
- 15 *dangerous path*. Cf. VC 5.55, “*via devia* [devious path].” In 11.23, its only other appearance in 50B, Gower uses “*dangerouse*” to mean “*disdainful*,” echoing the most common use of “*danger*” in the lyrics. Here it appears to draw from the more modern sense of “*peril*.” Gower plays with the juxtaposition of the two senses in 30, and he may be doing so in this line as well.
- 16 *near is far*. Cf. 9.22.
- 17 *hateful and gracious*. Cf. RR 4274, “*desagraable et gracieuse* [disagreeable and gracious].”
- 19 *the lamb is fierce and the lion humane*. Cf. VC 5.75, “*agna ferox, leo mitis* [a fierce lamb, a gentle lion].”  
*humane*. AND s.v. “*humain*,” a., 2; DMF s.v. “*humain*,” B.
- 20 Yeager: “I.e., the bird kept for its melodious song is replaced by a goose.” For the “*merle*” as songbird cf. 36.3.
- 22-25 In 48-50, the last four lines function not as an “*envoy*,” addressing the intended audience of the poem, but instead as a concluding short stanza. [51] omits the final stanza entirely.
- 22 *wanton*. Cf. MO 9159-60, “*Mais trop devient sa char salvage / Qant son corps a luxure meine* [But her flesh becomes too wanton when she leads her body to lust].”  
*single*. That is, “*exclusively for one*.” On the range of meaning of “*soulein*,” see the note to 36.11. For a usage very close to that in this line ( but with somewhat better contextual clues) see 40.21. The precise sense of both these adjectives emerges from their opposition.
- 24 *a serf . . . sovereign*. Cf. VC 5.71-72, “*princeps servus* [a servile prince].”