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Ballad 114, Rondeau 44, and Chanson 53 by Charles d'Orléans

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Samuel N. Rosenberg
Ballad 114

Gazing out toward the country of France,
It happened one day, at Dover by the sea,
That I recalled the sweet pleasure
That used to be mine in that land,
And in my heart I started to sigh,
So great was the comfort I found,
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

I realized then it was not very wise
To keep such sighs stored in my heart,
When I see that the way is now clear
Toward good peace, which can benefit all.
That thought turned concern into comfort,
But still left my heart with a constant desire
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

Onto the ship of Hope I then loaded
All of my wishes, bidding them sail
Over the sea, with no stop or delay,
To give my good greetings to France.
God soon grant us good, lasting peace!
If it so comes to pass, I'll then be able
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

Peace is a treasure beyond facile praise.
Warfare is hateful, and I value it not.
War right or wrong has left me unable
To see the land that my heart truly loves.

Charles d'Orléans
Ballade 114

Samuel N. Rosenberg
Rondeau 44

The year has shed its old cloak
Of wind, of cold, and of rain,
And donned leaves bright as flame
For its sunlit, stylish new coat.

There's no bird from whose throat
We don't hear this proclaimed:
The year has shed its old cloak!

Every river and spring, every moat,
Is dressed in robes bright and gay,
Silver and gold on display.
Everyone's clothed to evoke
A year that's shed its old cloak!

Charles d'Orléans
Rondeau 44

Samuel N. Rosenberg
Chanson 53

Charles d'Orléans
Chanson 53

Must we really lose our sight?
Do our eyes no longer dare
To gaze upon our object of desire?
Disdain is quite a hostile lord,
Insisting on enslavement of a lover.

Will you let yourself be crushed,
Love, and seek no remedy?
Can no one stand against Disdain?
Must we really lose our sight?
Do our eyes no longer dare
To gaze upon our object of desire?

Our eyes are truly meant to serve
And carry every pleasure back
To hearts that feel no end of woe.
Disdain attempts to close those eyes;
Is it right to tolerate such spite?
Must we really lose our sight?

Commentary

Charles d'Orléans (1394–1465) composed numerous lyrics in several genres and even some in the language of England, where he spent 25 years as a captive, following the French defeat at Agincourt. The first poem in this group of three is no doubt one of his best known: a ballad that expresses the prisoner's longing for his native land. A typical *ballade*, its rhymes are the same in all three stanzas, with all final lines the same; the third stanza is followed by a shorter *envoy*. In its sense and line-to-line development, my translation is faithful to the original text, as it is to the rhythmic model; instead of rhyme, however, it is limited to irregularly placed phonic echoes.

The *rondeau* that follows is no doubt equally well known. Here, in addition to its other faithfully imitative features, I have introduced the same homophonic structure; perfect rhyme, however, is replaced by assonance.

To round out this generically varied selection, I have translated a *chanson* expressing the frustration of a man ignored or rejected by the beautiful lady whose lover he would like to be. Besides illustrating Charles's adherence to his era's well-defined poetic structures and patterns of recurrence, it exemplifies his penchant for the use of personified abstractions.

Here a few lexical choices that may be of interest. The obvious opening of the *Rondeau* would use "Time" for *Le temps*; I chose "The year" instead in order, as in the French, to establish an iambic meter with a monosyllable. I rejected "The season" as rhythmically disruptive and semantically too limited. As for failing to translate *beste*, there was simply no room in line 5 for both animals and a meaningful rhyme in *-oa-*; it seemed to me sufficient to let birds alone take on the task of emitting sounds.

As for the Chanson's *Dangier*, it is surely one of the translator's most challenging nouns, for it is clearly a cognate of "danger" and yet here, as is usual, it must be understood otherwise. Its etymon is *dominiarium*, from which stem multiple meanings clustered about the notion of power-dominance-superiority. In this instance, the allegorical personification "Disdain" struck me as a fitting choice. The penultimate line of the poem refers to the French noun with the simple pronoun *le*; this seemed to me to call for non-repetitive explicitation—a word rhyming, moreover, with "sight"; the context made "spite" look semantically acceptable.