

25

Ma dame, si ceo fuist a vo plesir,
Au plussovent jeo vous visiteroie,
Mais le fals jangle et le tresfals conspir
De mesdisantz m'ont° destorbé la voie,
5 Et *vostre* honour sur toute riens voldroie;
Par quoi, ma dame, en droit° de ma partie,
En lieu de moi mon coer a vous envoie,
Car qui bien aime ses amours tard oblie.

Ils sont assetz des tiels qui de mentir
10 Portont le clief pendant a lour curroie;
Du quoi, ma dame, jeo ne puiss sentir
Coment aler; ainçois me torne envoie.
Mais sache dieus, par tout uque jeo soie,
D'entier voloir sanz nulle departie
15 A vous me tiens, a vous mon coer se ploie,
Car qui bien aime ses amours tard oblie.

De vo *presence* a long temps abstenir
Grief m'est, en cas q'a force ensi feroie,
Et d'*autrepart*, si jeo voldrai venir,
20 Sanz *vostre* esgard ceo faire ne porroie.
Comandetz moi ceo qe jeo faire en doie,°
Car vous avetz de moi la seignorie.
Tout est en vous, ma dolour et ma joie,
Car qui bien aime ses amours tard oblie.

25 As mesdisantz, dont bon amour s'esfroie,
De male langue dieus les motz maldie,
Q'en lour despit a *vostre* amour m'otroie,
Car qui bien aime ses amours tard oblie.

4 MS mout. See the note to 12.21.

6 en droit. See the note to 12.2.

21 MS endoie

25

My lady, if it were to your pleasure,
I would visit you as often as possible,
But the false gossip° and the evil plotting°
of slanderers° have blocked° my way
5 and above all else, I wish for your honor,°
because of which, my lady, as for my part,
in place of myself I send you my heart,°
for he who loves well late forgets his love.°

°There are enough of those who carry the key
10 of falsehood hanging from their belts,
because of which, my lady, I cannot think
how to proceed; instead I turn away.
But may God know, wherever I am,
with my whole will, undividedly,°
15 I remain loyal to you,° my heart submits° to you,
for he who loves well late forgets his love.

To abstain for a long time from your presence
is sorrowful for me, when by necessity I do so,
and on the other hand, if I wished to come,
20 I couldn't do so without your decision.°
Command me what I ought to do,
for you have lordship over me.
All depends on you, my sadness and my joy,
for he who loves well late forgets his love.

25 Of the slanderers, whom good love fears,
May God curse the words of the evil tongue,
for in defiance° of them I submit to your love,
for he who loves well late forgets his love.

25 is the first in a long series of ballades, extending to 47, that are addressed either to the lady or by a lady to a man throughout, as in 1-12 (35, 36, and 41 being the exceptions, for different reasons discussed below). Most of the poems in 13-24, by contrast, speak of the lady in the third person before turning to address her in the envoy.

It offers Gower's only treatment of the "mesdisantz," the "detractors" or "slanderers," one of the most common recurring themes in the poetry of his fourteenth-century predecessors. The "mesdisantz" are the successors to the figure of "Malebouche" in *RR* (who does not entirely

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disappear from the lyrics: see Machaut, *Lai* 23.101ff.; Deschamps 44 and 45; Granson 22). The poems dealing with the "mesdisantz" offer several variations on the theme: in some, they have maligned the lover/persona, who therefore urges his lady not to believe them as he proclaims his faithful love (Machaut, *Lou.* 127, 183, 187; Granson 35); in others, he has already lost her affection because she did believe them (Machaut, *Lou.* 108, 192; Deschamps 529); in others the male persona simply chooses to ignore them, in order to increase their envy all the more (Machaut, *Chans.Bal.* 15; Mudge 72); in some, it is the woman who fears their effect upon her reputation (Froissart, *Bal.* 19 and numerous poems by Christine de Pizan); and in others, the woman speaks up to dismiss their slander (Deschamps 703, 737; Froissart, *Buisson* 2707 ff.). In another group, their precise action is unspecified, but either by slandering both man and woman or simply by drawing unwanted attention to their relationship, they cause them to be separated, as in Gower's poem, for the sake of the lady's good name (Machaut, *Lou.* 70.1-5, 128; Deschamps 645, 667, 720; Froissart, *Buisson* 2456 ff., 2746 ff.).

Gower's poem offers a mixture of motifs. It begins with the forced separation and the persona's concern for his lady's honor, but it proceeds to an affirmation of love more typical of the poems in which the man's honor is at stake rather than the lady's. In stanza three, as the persona places the decision on whether to continue the separation on the lady herself, his concern for his own happiness seems to have taken over from his worries about her honor. And the envoy, in which the persona curses and chooses to defy the slanderers, turns to the threat of the "mesdisantz" to love itself rather than to the honor of either.

Tying the stanzas together is the refrain, perhaps the single most repeated line in all of Middle French poetry, occurring in a great variety of different contexts (see the note to line 8 below). Gower himself uses a variation on this line twice in *MO*, both times, however, with reference to one's love of God. It is cited apparently as the first line of a familiar song in some manuscripts of Chaucer's *PF* and also in the post-Chaucerian "Parliament of Birds," a song that we have to presume would be concerned with some form of romantic love, but the only surviving song in which it is the first line is a thirteenth-century hymn to the Virgin by Moniot d'Arras. Moniot's editor suggests that his song is based on two earlier surviving *chansons* in which the context is strictly secular (but which cannot be Chaucer's reference, since the line in question is not the first line in either). These two poems contain the earliest known examples of the line; the second also provides the only other known instance in which the setting, as in Gower's poem, is a separation for which the persona blames the "mesdixans" (line 10). In several later examples, the line serves within a reassurance of fidelity from one lover to another, as in Gower's stanza two. Gower would almost certainly have come across the line in the works of Machaut, but perhaps not before he had already cited it in *MO*. The variety of its surviving appearances suggests that it occurred many other times which have left no record. We should presume that Gower came across it more than once and that no particular version served as his source.

- 3 *gossip*. "Jangle" (or "gengle") and words derived from it are used for a wide variety of forms of speech, from frivolous gossip to boasting, but in the lyrics they occur most often with reference to the false report of those who slander either the lover or his lady, whether or not these are labeled "mesdisantz" (Machaut, *Lou.* 190.8, *Chans.Bal.* 15.5, 40; Deschamps 528.23, 695.8, 699.3; Froissart

Bal. 19.18, *Buisson* 2712, 2758; but cf. Mudge 67.13, where “jangler” refers to a lover’s meaningless prattle). See also *AND* s.v. “jangle,” 1, “gossip, slander,” citing the present line, and *DMF* s.v. “jangle,” B. This is Gower’s only use of “jangle” in *50B*. He uses it along with various related forms—“jangler,” “janglerie”—eight times in *MO* with reference to idle speech generally but only once in the context of malicious gossip, in the section on “Detraccioun” (2621). By contrast, at least 8 of the 13 occurrences of one or another form of “jangle” in *CA* refer to gossip of this sort, in the lesson on “Detraction,” for sure (2.398, 425, 452, 526), but also in “Cheste [Chiding]” (3.832) and in Amans’ confession on “Hate” (3.887, 929, 941).

plotting. “Conspir” does not appear in *AND*, which does however list “conspirer,” “conspiracie,” and “conspiracion.” The only citation in *DMF* s.v. “conspire” dates from “c.1474-1500.” This is the only appearance of the word in *50B*, but it occurs ten times in *MO* (e.g. at 6566). Merriless and Pagan, p. 131, list it among Gower’s neologisms.

4 *slanderers*. See *DMF* s.v. “mesdisant,” where 11 of the 14 citations are from Machaut and a twelfth is from Christine de Pizan. This listing under-represents Christine, for whom the “mesdisantz” are an important recurring theme in both her “Cent balades” and her “Cent balades d’amant et de dame.” *blocked*. *AND* s.v. “desturber,” 4.

5 The lover’s concern for his lady’s honor is a conventional motif; cf. 4².18, and among the poems already cited, Machaut *Lou.* 127.7, 187.15, Deschamps 529.15, and the woman’s assertion of her need to protect her honor in Froissart, Bal. 19. Troilus cites his concern for Criseyde’s honor as a justification for his inaction in *T&C* 4.564-67.

7 Gower returns here to an image he also uses in 3.9-10, 6.18-19, 9.10-12

8 The line is proverbial (and recognized as such in Gower’s time; see below). Using readily available sources, I have found the following, listed in approximately chronological order. (Most of those not attributed to another source are from Hassell A65.)

- Two very similar anonymous *chansons* (for which we do not have the music), “Quant voi venir la gelee” and “En yver an lai jallee” (both 13th century), line 19. See Holger Petersen Dyggve, “Moniot d’Arras et Moniot de Paris, Trouvères du XIII^e siècle: Édition des chansons et étude historique,” *Memoires de la Société Néo-Philologique de Helsinki* 13 (1938): 146-49. Spoken by a man, the first blames the “lausengier [dishonest flatterers]” (line 28), the second the “mesdixans” (line 10) for his forced separation from his beloved (who in both cases happens to be married). These and the song of Moniot d’Arras, next on the list, are cited by Charles Muscatine in *Chaucer, Works*, p. 1002.
- Moniot d’Arras (fl. 1213-39), “Ki bien aime a tart oublie,” the first line of a song for which the music is preserved, referring to the narrator’s love of the Virgin Mary. See Dyggve (as above), 70, who suggests (p. 146) that the two preceding songs served as Moniot’s model.
- Montpellier Codex, ff. 240^v-241^r, “Biaus douz amis, or ne vouz anuit mie,” line 3, “Car on dit qui bien aime a tart oublie,” spoken by a woman reassuring her lover during their separation, though the cause is not described. Yvonne Rokseth, ed., *Polyphonies du XIII^e siècle: le manuscrit H 196 de la Faculté de médecine de Montpellier*, 4 vols. (Paris: Éditions de l’Oiseau Lyre, 1935-39), 1.240^v-241^r (facsimile), 3:21 (transcription).
- Paris, Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève, MS 550, ff. 282^v-294^v, a late 13th-century compilation of proverbs. Morawski, no. 1835.
- *Les Propriétés des choses selon le Rosarius (B.N. f. fr. 12483)* [c.1330], ed. Anders Zetterberg and Sven Sandqvist, *Études romanes de Lund*, 52 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), “De sa perte avoit grant paour, Quar qui bien aime a tart oublie, Si com il apert en Marie.” Not seen; cited in *DMF* s.v. “aimer,” I.B.4.

- Machaut, *Remede* 4258: “Car qui bien aime, a tart oublie.” The narrator describes the depth of his commitment to his lady.
- Machaut, Lai 22.1 (“Le Lay de plour”): “Qui bien aime a tart oublie.” Spoken by a woman mourning her lover’s death, promising to keep him in her memory.
- Machaut, Motet 3.39: “Qui bien aime a tart oublie.” Also spoken by a woman mourning her lover’s death..
- Machaut, *Voir Dit*, Letter 10 (p. 122): “qui bien aime a tart oublie.” The narrator offers general reassurance to his lady.
- Machaut, *Voir Dit*, Letter 30 (p. 394): “qui bien aime a tart oublie.” The narrator seems to gently reprimand his lady.
- Machaut, *Voir Dit*, 7372, in the description of a painted image of “Vraie Amour”: “Car qui bien aime a tart oublie.”
- Deschamps 1345.R, “Car je voy bien: Qui aime, a tart oublie.” This ballade, in which the poet thanks ladies who had prayed for him believing that he had died, is the only other example listed here in which the line appears in a refrain.
- Gower, MO16990, “N’est pas amy qui tost oublit,” in the discussion of Virginity, describing the perfect love of God. Though we cannot be sure of the date of composition of Gower’s ballade, this and the next item appear to be the first recorded appearances of this proverb from a writer in England.
- Gower, MO 27867, “Car qui bien aime point n’oublie,” describing the Virgin Mary’s love of God.
- “Qui bien aime a tart oublie” appears in some manuscripts of *PF* after line 677 in place of the “roundel” that is printed from other copies in the standard editions of the poem. (See Charles Muscatine’s note in Chaucer, *Works*, 1002.) It apparently indicates either an actual song that the birds are heard singing or the tune to which the birds’ “roundel” was sung.
- Philippe de Mézières, *Songe du vieil pelerin* (1386-89), Book 1, chapter 6 (ed. Joël Blanchard [Geneva: Droz, 2015], 1:164), “Et non pourquant il se dit en proverbe: qui bien aime a tart oublie.” “Doulce Amour” (a figure for God’s charity) describes her love even for those who have sinned.
- *Roman de Cardenois* (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 10264) (a late 14th-century prose romance with extensive borrowings from Machaut), ed. Marcello Cocco (Bologna: Pátron, 1975), 186, 208. Each of the main characters cites this line in their reassurances to one another. Cited by Lawrence Earp, *Guillaume de Machaut: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1995), 366.
- Jean Régnier, *Les Fortunes et Adversitez* (c. 1432), 969, the final line of a *chanson* promising not to forget his lady during their separation; ed. E. Droz (Paris: Champion, 1923), 37.
- The post-Chaucerian “Parliament of Birds” (c. 1430), line 32, “Qui bien aime tard oublie,” as in *PF* (above), evidently identifying a song that the narrator hears the birds singing. Eleanor Prescott Hammond, “A Parliament of Birds,” *JEGP* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1908): 106.
- *La Vie de nostre benoist Sauveur Ihesuscris et la sainte vie de Nostre Dame*, ed. Millard Meiss and Elizabeth H. Beatson (New York: The College Art Association of America, 1977), 118. In this early 15th century French prose life of Christ, as she mourns Jesus at his sepulcher, “On pouvoit bien aplicquer en celle heure a la benoiste Magdaleine le proverbe qui dit: ‘Cueur qui bien aime a tart oublie.’” Cited in *DMF* s.v. “aimer,” I.B.4.
- Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des dames* (1440-1442), ed. Robert Deschaux (Classiques Français du Moyen Âge, Paris: Champion, 1999), 12961, with reference to one whose lady has died: “Qui sa dame aime tart l’oublie.” Cited in *DMF* s.v. “aimer,” I.B.4.
- Jean Miélot, “Qui bien aime, tart il oublie” (1456). “Proverbes en françois. Die Sprichwörterammlung Jehan Mielot’s,” ed. J. Ulrich, *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Literatur*, 24/1 (1902), 198. Cited in *DMF* s.v. “aimer,” I.B.4.

- Jean Molinet, "Complainte sur la mort de Madame d'Ostrisse," 280: "Car qui bien sa dame aime, tard l'oublie" ("Noblesse" praises the affection of the widower for the deceased); "Ung dictier de Renommee, Vertus et Victoire," 160: "Coeur qui bien aime tard oublie" ("Renommee" speaks of her love for Burgundy, known for both fame and virtue). *Les Faictz et Dictz* [1482-83], ed. Noël Dupire (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1936), 1:172, 1:199.
- "Proverbes en rimes," late 15th century, line 304, "Car qui bien aime, tart oublie"; a man asks to be remembered in his absence. Grace Frank, "Proverbes en rimes (B)," *Romanic Review* 31 (1940): 209-38, at 215, from London: British Library MS Add. 37527, f. 19^v.
- Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Eurialus und Lukrezia* (1490), ed. Elise Richter (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1914), 101. Not seen. Cited in DMF s.v. "aimer," I.B.4.

For the equivalent in English, Whiting L565 cites *Cursor Mundi* (ed. Richard Morris, EETS, o.s. 57 [London: Trübner, 1874], 4510, "Qua leli luues for-gettes lat" (with variations in spelling in other copies), where the context is a rebuke of the ungrateful butler who left Joseph languishing in prison in Genesis 40-41. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, 3rd ed., rev. by F.P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 755, adds six more citations from the 16th to 19th centuries. Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, 246-50 discusses the implications of Gower's use of this line in the central ballade of 50B.

love. On the singular, see the note to 2.5.

- 9-10 Yeager (p. 141) suggests that "perhaps" there is a phallic reference here, citing Exeter Book Riddle 44. Such a figurative use of "key" also occurred to the author of the late fifteenth-century text cited in DMF s.v. *clef*, B.1, "Contexte grivois [bawdy context]." It's an odd choice of image whatever the case, nor is it clear whether it refers to those with whom the persona is falsely associated by the slanderers (for which the phallic reference might be crude but appropriate) or (perhaps more likely?) the "mesdisantz" themselves, whom he blames for their false accusations (for which it would not).
- 14 *undividedly*. See the note to 4². For a similar construction, see Froissart, *Esp. Am.* 2441-42: "Tenès ma foi, m'amour entiere / Sans departir [you have my commitment, my entire love, undividedly]."
- 15 *I remain loyal to you*. Cf. 27.13. While the context in both cases makes the meaning clear, this is not a common use of "tenir." It is not recorded in AND s.v. "tenir," either for the reflexive use or in the list of phrases, under "se tenir a"; but see DMF s.v. "tenir," IV.B.3.a., "Se tenir a qqn. Être du parti de qqn, être fidèle à qqn' [to be of someone's party, to be faithful to someone]," with three citations, including one from Froissart.
- submits*. AND s.v. "plier," v.refl. 1: "be subject to, obedient to." For Gower's use of this verb see the notes to 3.16, 9.3.
- 20 *decision*. Macaulay, in his glossary s.v. "esgard," gives "counsel," citing Gower's only other use of the noun "esgard" in MO 21060, "A vostre esgard le vuil lesser," which more clearly means, however, "I wish to leave it to your judgment or decision," as defined in AND s.v. "agard," 6. ("Agard" or "aguard" is evidently the more common Anglo-Norman spelling; cf. 9.39, MO 4997, 14034, 17148, 25252.) Many of the citations under this definition and under those for phrases using "agard" come from formal judicial contexts. See also DMF s.v. "esgard," II.B: "[Jugement porté sur qqn ou qqc., décision concernant qqn ou qqc. [judgment passed upon someone or something, decision concerning someone or something]."
- 27 *defiance*. "Despit" covers a range of attitudes, but all with considerably more force than Modern English "in spite of." AND s.v. "despit¹," DMF s.v. "despit."