36

Pour comparer ce Jolif temps de Maii,
Jeo le dirrai semblable a Paradis,
Car lors chantont et Merle et Papegai,
Les champs sont vert, les herbes sont floris.
Lors est nature dame du paiis,
Dont venus poignt l'amant au tiel assai
Q'encontre amour n'est qui poet dire Nai.

Qant tout ceo voi et qe jeo penserai
Coment nature ad tout le mond suspris
Dont pour le temps se fait minote et gai,
Et jeo des autres sui soulein horpris
Com cil qui sanz amie est vrais amis,
N'est pas mervaile lors si jeo m'esmai,
Q'encontre amour n'est qui poet dire nai.

En lieu de Rose urtie cuillerai,
Dont mes chapeals ferrai p*ar* tiel devis
Qe toute joie et confort jeo lerrai
Si celle soule en qui j'ai mon coer mis
Selonc le point qe j'ai sovent requis
Ne deigne alegger les griefs mals qe j'ai,
Q'encontre amour n'est qui poet dire Nai.

Pour pité querre et pourchacer m*er*cis
Va t'en, balade, u jeo t'envoierai,
Q'ore en certein jeo l'ai t*res*bien apris,
Q'encontre amour n'est qui poet dire nai.

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36

In comparing° this joyful° time of May,
I would call it similar to paradise,
for then sing both the blackbird and the parrot,°
the fields are green, the plants are in flower.
Then is Nature mistress of the country,
and° Venus pricks the lover in such a way
that in face of love there is none that can say no.°

When I see all this and when I think
how Nature has overtaken the whole world
so that for the season it becomes elegant° and gay,
and I, alone, am excluded from the others°
as he who without *amie* is a true *ami*,°
then it's no wonder if I am dismayed,
for° in face of love there is none that can say no.

Instead of a rose, I will pick nettles,°
with which I will make my chaplet in such a way
that I will give up all joy and comfort
if she alone on whom I have set my heart
with regard to that which I have often requested
deigns not to relieve the grievous pains I bear,
for in face of love there is none that can say no.

To seek pity and to obtain mercy
go, ballade,° where I will send you,
for now I have well learned for certain
that in face of love there is none that can say no.

The association between the rebirth of nature in the spring and the onset or the joys of love has a long history, and it is a commonplace in the poetry of Gower's most immediate predecessors, both in the *dits amoureux* and in the lyrics. In the *dits*, the model is set by *RR*, in which the narrator's dream begins in May, "el tens enmoreus, plain de joie, / el tens ou toute rien s'esgaie [the season of love, full of joy, the season when everything is joyful]" (48-49). Three of Machaut's *dits* begin in springtime, though Machaut sets two of them in April rather than May (*Behaingne* 1-9; *Lyon* 1-33; see also *Vergier* 1-36), all celebrating the joy that accompanies the new season. In his lyrics, Machaut has fewer occasions to refer to the seasons, but in *Lou* **18**.1-6, instead of celebrating its joys, he uses the contrast to the effects of spring to heighten the true source of his feelings:

Feuille ne flour ne verdure
Ne douceur de temps pascour
Ne nulle autre creature
Fors vous, dame de valour,
Ne pueent mettre en baudour
Mon cuer.

[Neither leaf nor flour nor greenery nor the sweetness of the Easter season nor any other creature but you, my worthy lady, can put my heart in joy.]

He echoes here a move also made by some of his thirteenth-century predecessors, who sought, according to Dragonetti (pp. 183-85, 187), not just to valorize love itself by denying an external cause but also implicitly to critique those poets who celebrated in far simpler terms the association between human love and the natural world. Machaut's successors tended to be more celebratory, echoing instead much of the language one finds in *RR* and in Machaut's *dits*. From Froissart, for instance, we have a 461-line poem in praise of "Le Joli mois de Mai [the lovely month of May]" in which the warmth of the season inspires the narrator's thoughts on love. Among the lyricists, Deschamps leaves at least ten poems linking love to the arrival of May, six of them presuming an occasion of joy (**306**, **316**, **419**, **441**, **560**, and **974**); and Christine de Pizan as well has a number of poems either encouraging lovers to enjoy the coming of May or describing her own contentment (e.g. *Autres* **9**, **10**, **25**, **28**, **44**, and **52**). (See also Mudge **6**, **72**). As a third variation on the theme, both Deschamps (**415**, **420**, **476**, **744)** and Christine (*100B* **34**, *100BD* **79**) also have a smaller number of poems in which the persona evokes the joys of the season in order to heighten by contrast the description of his or her own sorrow, usually because of a separation from the beloved. (See also Granson **2**, **3;** and Mudge **22**, **65**.) This motif too has roots in earlier poetry (see Dragonetti, 188-90), and Gower uses a version of it in *50B* **35**, in which the persona cannot enjoy the same pleasures as the other birds, and in *CA* 1.98-107, in both cases because a man's love is unrequited.

36 and **37**, both set in May, draw much of their imagery from these earlier poems, but they use it in a typically Gowerian way. In **36**, the first stanza is the most celebratory: it re-uses familiar imagery to link the paradise-like setting to the onset of love, and the refrain serves to describe the persona's own condition in conventional and unsurprising terms. But the refrain is rather broad in its implication, and over the course of the poem we learn that, as for Amans, there is at least one person who is unaffected by the season and who in fact does say no, at least to the persona, despite his repeated entreaties. As in **34** and **35**, the refrain shifts in implication from one stanza to the next. In the second stanza, it conveys the persona's puzzlement in the face of the evident contradiction, and in the third, it expresses the pain and helplessness of his subjection rather than the irresistibility of the joys of love. In the envoy, finally, as he sends his poem to his lady in the hope of obtaining her "pity" and her "mercy," the refrain describes not just his own feeling but what he expects of hers, and he places his hope in the very expression that has already proved to be so unstable. Uniquely in *50B*, moreover, rather than addressing the lady directly, he addresses the envoy to his poem: "Go, ballade, where I will send you." In a quite literal way, he again counts on poetic language alone to bring about the change that he desires, the same tradition of poetry that provides the basis for the expectation expressed in the final instance of the refrain. It is not persuasive: there is no reason to think that the woman will

be moved or that a mere trope will prevail over a woman's freedom to make her own choice; and in our perception of the gap between the persona's hope and reality, there is the germ of a very different critique of the tradition on which his poem is based, a critique that emerges more strongly in **37**.

1 *In comparing*. On the "pour" plus infinitive construction, see the note to **11**.5. The use of "comparer" without a prepositional phrase ("to X") is unusual, but *DMF* provides other examples s.v. "comparer," A.1.
joyful. This earlier, very common sense of "jolif" lies behind Modern English "jolly." By Gower's time "jolif" had also taken on some of the connotations of Modern French "joli [pretty]," as in Froissart's "le temps estoit si bel et si jolys [the weather was so beautiful and so pleasant]," cited in *DMF* s.v. "joli," II.C.1.a, a sense that obviously works well in this line too.

3 *then sing both the blackbird and the parrot*. *RR* 76-77: "Lors s'envoise /le papegauz et la kalandre [for then rejoice the parrot and the lark]." (On the "kalandre,"see the note to **12**.1.)
Papegai. Macaulay: "This seems to stand for any bright plumaged bird. It is not to be supposed that Gower had the definite idea of a parrot connected with it."

6 *and*. As in **34**.3, the "dont" is imprecise. If we take it as a relative ("by which"?) rather than as a weak conjunction, the antecedent might be the preceding clause, implying that Venus works under the aegis of Nature. "Dont" might also be "donc [then]," implying both a temporal sequence and possibly a cause and effect but somewhat less oversight on Nature's part. Yeager's "whereupon" effectively combines the two. See *DMF* s.v "donc," I, and cf. lines 10 and 16 below.
in such a way. That is, more precisely, "in such a test or trial." Macaulay, in his note, suggests "'with such trial,' i.e. 'so sharply'." The expression "au tiel assai" invites filling in the details from context. Cf. *DMF* s.v. "assai," B, "affrontement, assaut [clash, assault]," where the "test" occurs on a field of combat.

7 *no*. On "Nai," see the note to **17**.21.

10 *elegant*. *AND* s.v. "minot," citing this line. See also *DMF* s.v. "mignot."

11 *and I, alone, am excluded from the others*. The sense is clearer than the grammar here. "Horspris" is normally a preposition (*AND* s.v. "forspris"; *DMF* s.v. "horspris"), but in *MO* 23777 Gower writes "De tieux taillages sont horspris [from such taxes they are exempt]," using "horspris" as an adjective as he does here. The precise sense must be inferred from context. "Soulein" offers two possibilities, however. As noted above at **35**.8, there is only a single citation in *DMF* s.v. "solain," from *MO* 73, suggesting that this is an Anglo-Norman usage. *AND* s.v. "sulein" provides citations to support both "alone" in the sense of "solitary" and also in the sense of "exclusively" (cf. "soule" in line 18). Gower uses the word in both senses in the dozens of its appearances in *MO* (spelled variously "solain," "solein[e]," "soulain[e]," and "soulein[e]"). In *MO* 13417, for instance, he writes "Modeste auci n'est pas souleine [Modesty too is not alone; that is, she has companions]," the sense in which he also uses the word in **22.**21, **24**.19, **35**.8, and **35**.11; but in *MO* 10564, "C'est pour l'amour de dieu soulein {it is for love of God alone, that is, exclusively]," as in **10**.1, **17**.20, **40**.21, and **48**.22. For this line, therefore, we might have "I am alone, excluded" or "I alone am excluded." And perhaps the point is that each applies equally well to the persona.

12 On the construction see the note to **7**.7. On "ami(s)" and "amie" see the note to **4**[1].7.

14 *For*. The sense of "q[e]" is determined by what precedes. Lines 7 and 25 demand "that"; line 21 demands "for" or "since." Either works here. (*DMF* s.v. "esmayer," II, provides two contemporary examples in which "s'esmaier" is followed by a clause beginning with "que [that]."") But the difference is felt more strongly in the translation than in the French.

15 As Macaulay observes (in his note to *MO* 3721), "The opposition of rose and nettle is common in our author," citing **37**.24 and *VC* 7.181. See also **48**.6, *MO* 9977-78, 11278-80, 20938, 25304-05 (in addition to other references to the nettle, e.g. at 3538, 26489-94); *CA* 2.401-02, 5.6411* *vv*. 1; and *VC* 2.59-60. In most of these, the contrast serves to distinguish sin from virtue or to reveal the nature of hypocrisy. The use of the comparison to express differences in fortunes in love goes back at least to Ovid. In his note to *VC* 2.59-60, Macaulay cites Ovid, *Remedia Amoris* 46, "et urticae proxima saepe rosa est [often is the nettle near the rose]." Godefroy, Supp. s.v. "ortie" cites Gautier D'Arras, *Eracle* (c. 1180), line 1275 "Car feme prendre est mout granz chose, / Cil prent l'ortie et cil le rose [for to take a wife is a serious matter; some take nettle and some a rose]." The rosebud with which the narrator becomes infatuated in *RR* is surrounded by briars and "orties" (line 1676). In *T&C* 1.948-49, the context is the promise of joy after sorrow. Whiting, N94 and N95, lists some mid- to late fifteenth-century examples of the opposition of rose and nettle, but I find no reference in Hassell, nor do I know of any similar use of the comparison among the fourteenth-century lyricists that preceded Gower.

23 *go, ballade.* This is one of only four ballades in *50B*, apart from **48**-**[51]**, that are not addressed to the recipient (see the note to **17**). This is the only one that addresses the ballade itself. One will think on Chaucer's "Go, litel book, go, litel myn tragedye" (*T&C* 5.1786) and of Gower's "Vade, liber purus [go, fair book]" in the explicit to *CA* (8.3172 *vv.* 6). J.S.P. Tatlock, "The Epilog of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *MP* 18 (1921), 627-30, traces the motif to Ovid. He provides other examples from Italian sources and from French and Provençal poets of the 12th and 13th centuries, but he observes that "It is not a usage of the French lyrists whom Chaucer was most familiar with" (p. 629, n. 2), nor do I know of any similar examples among Gower's 14th-century French predecessors.