

41

- Des fals amantz tantz sont au jour *present*
Dont les amies porront bien doloir.
Cil qui plus jure et fait son serement
De bien amer plus pense a decevoir.
- 5 Jeo sui de celles une, a dire voir,
Qui me compleigns d'amour et sa feintise,
Par quoi, des° fals amantz pour peas avoir,
Bon est qe bone dame bien s'avise.
- 10 Ascuns y ad qui voet bien amer sent,
Et a chascune il fait bien assavoir
Qu'il l'aime sanz nulle autre soulement.
Par tiel engin destorne le savoir
De l'innocent qe quide recevoir
De ses amours la loialté *promise*.
- 15 Mais pour garder s'onour et son devoir,
Bon est qe bone dame bien s'avise.
- 20 Les lievres de la bouche q'ensi ment
Cil tricheour tant beal les° sciet movoir
Q'a peine est nulle qe *parfitement*
Sache en ceo point le mal *aparcevoir*.
Mais cil q'ensi d'amour son estovoir
Pourchace ad bien deservi la Juise.
Si dis pource q'a tiel mal remouvoir,
Bon est qe bone dame bien s'avise.
- 25 Tu q'es au matin un et autre au soir,
Ceste balade envoie a ta reprise
Pour toi guerpier et mettre a nonchaloir.
Bon est qe bone dame bien s'avise.

7 Mac de
18 MS le

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41

- °There are so many false lovers at the present time
whose ° *amies* can well be in sorrow.
The one who most swears and makes an oath
to love well most thinks to deceive.
- 5 °I am one of those women, to tell the truth,
who complain about love and its deceit,
because of which, to have peace from false lovers,
it is good that a good woman take good care.°
- There is a certain one° who wants to love a hundred,°
10 and to each woman he makes it well known
that he loves her exclusively, without any other.
With such a trick° he deflects the better judgment
of the innocent one° who expects to receive
the promised loyalty in love.°
- 15 But in order to protect her honor and her duty,
it is good that a good woman take good care.
- The lips of the mouth that lies in such a way°
this deceiver° knows how to move so beautifully
°that there is hardly any woman who perfectly
20 can detect the harm in this situation.
But he who obtains his needs in love
in such a way well deserves condemnation.°
I say so because in order to expel such evil,
it is good that a good woman take good care.
- 25 °You who are one thing in the morning and another at night,°
this ballade I send in your reproach
In order to renounce you and reject you.°
It is good that a good woman take good care.

41 is the first of five ballades in which the persona is a woman. These fall into two groups. In 41, 42, and 43, the women denounce false lovers, while 44 and 46 contain sincere professions of love, set in alternation with similar declarations offered by men. Gower is not the first male poet to assume a woman's voice: one thinks of Ovid's *Heroides*. Closer to Gower's time, Machaut left 41 such poems—ballades, rondeaux, virelais, motets, and *complaintes*—not counting 24 others (mostly rondeaux) attributed to Toute Belle in *Voir Dit*. (On the latter, see the table and discussion in Leech-Wilkinson and Palmer's edition, pp. xl-l.) Deschamps left another

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45, not counting those in which a woman participates in a dialogue; Froissart 16; and Granson 5; and another 23 are found among the poems in the Pennsylvania manuscript. (For lists, see my essay on "Gower's Ballades for Women," in *Studies in the Age of Gower: A Festschrift in Honour of Robert F. Yeager*, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning [Cambridge: Brewer, 2020], 79-97. The notes that follow are taken in large part from this essay.) Unless one or more of the latter were in fact written by a female poet, yet unknown, or Tote Belle did compose her own poems, as Leech-Wilkinson and Palmer suggest, the first true voice of a woman comes from Christine de Pizan, who in turn left more than a hundred poems in the voice of a man. Deschamps offers the greatest variety, imagining a wide range of dramatic situations, but among the poems that can be categorized, by Deschamps and the other poets, the most common themes are declarations of love and laments about the pains of separation, employing diction and formulae not altogether different from those of the poems on the same subjects spoken by a man. In distinction to the men's poems, there are only a small number in which a woman complains of unrequited love or blames a man for his "durté [hardness]" (see Machaut 254, Deschamps 305, and Mudge 29). There is a larger number in which a woman claims that her lover has proved disloyal and has turned his attentions to another, the reverse of the situation that Gower treats in 40, above. Among the poems written by men, however, the smallest category consists of those in which a woman laments not that her lover has abandoned her but that she realizes that he was false from the beginning. I know of only three, Machaut 265 and Deschamps 477 and 478.

The poets were certainly not unaware that a man might cheat and lie in order to win a woman's love. The elderly knight in Machaut's *Dit dou lyon* gives large space to the tricks and false countenances by which women are deceived (939-88, 1119-1212), and in *100B*, the alternative to "loiauté" that is presented by the woman in the dialogue consists of making multiple promises and deliberately playing the field. In the lyrics, however, only very rarely is this subject treated from the point of view of the female victim. Christine is much more aware of the fragility of love than the male poets are: her woman speakers commonly ask for reassurances of fidelity both in professing their own love and when the lovers must temporarily be apart, and proportionally, she has a greater number of poems on the effects of a change of heart upon the one who is left behind. She also has more to say about "lovers" who are false from the very start. There are two ballades in which she warns other women against being deceived (*100B* 53, "Autres" 43; cf. also *100B* 4.4-5) and three in which a woman expresses hesitation to commit herself because of her fear that her suitor might be less than sincere ("Autres" 23, *100BD* 4, 20). But she has only a single poem in which a woman expresses her belief that the man with whom she was in love has been false to her all along (*100B* 13).

But that is precisely the theme in Gower's first three poems: not merely that her lover has left her for another but that he has had multiple loves, of which she was only one, and that all of the promises that he made to win her love were lies. In large part Gower treats this as a moral issue rather than an emotional one, an occasion for the denunciation of the man's character and conduct rather than as a source of sorrow and disappointment for the woman who has been betrayed. Gower thus makes little use of the language with which earlier women complain of their deceit, and he draws the language of their denunciation less from earlier lyrics than from the catalogs of sins in two of his own longer poems, the *Mirour de l'Homme* and the *Confessio Amantis*.

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This is especially true in 41. The poem begins with a broad comment on false lovers in general that would not be out of place either in Genius' instruction or in *MO*, and only lines 5-6 refer directly to the experience of the persona (and also serve to identify her as a woman). The rest of the poem not only echoes particular observations about sinful behavior in the two longer poems, but in adopting a very similar moral stance, it also adopts several of their devices and recognizable habits of expression, as detailed in the notes below. The fit is comfortable. The woman is also able to make use of some of the diction of earlier love poetry (see the notes to lines 5-6 and 18 below), in at least one case with a twist (line 27), at the same time that she incorporates other words more familiar from moral poetry and that occur in *50B*, at least, for the very first time. The ostensible address to a single person is also consistent with the rest of *50B*, but in using "tu" instead of "vous," the woman not only displays her contempt, she also adopts another device from *MO*, which also frequently addresses sinners in the singular and as "tu." Combined with other similar devices (see the notes to lines 9 and 18), the effect is to make the poem less about a particular man than about the type of behavior that such an individual represents, and it ends, like so many passages in Gower's more explicitly moral poems, with a warning for other potential victims.

In assessing the relations among Gower's three texts, we can assume the priority of *MO*. Because of the uncertain dating of the poems in *50B*, we cannot be as sure that *CA* came first, but it is more reasonable to think that the experience of denouncing the sins in love in the longer poem influenced the writing of this group of ballades than to think that the influence went the other way. The incorporation of this new moral language into lyric poetry gives the women speakers in these three ballades a much more powerful voice than any of their female predecessors: they are not merely passive victims but active agents in the men's condemnation, and if their feelings emerge, it is through the vigor of their denunciation rather than from the words they use with reference to themselves. At the same time, Gower revivifies that language too. These women are no less earnest than the spokesperson for moral reform in *MO*, but they have much better reason to be, and Gower perhaps realized that in placing it in a setting in which the speaker has so personal a stake, the language that he uses has a much more powerful claim upon our attention than it does in either *CA* or *MO*, and that the ethic that it supports is for that reason all the more compelling.

- 1-4 The complaint about the evils of the present day is a universal staple of moral literature, and statements about "le temps present [the present time]" or "le jour present [the present day]" occur throughout *MO*, particularly in the discussion of the different professions (18420-26604; e.g., 18660, 18812, 19978) but also earlier (e.g., 7133, 11029, 13749). The behavior that Gower describes in these lines echoes the description of "Fals-Semblant" in *MO*: "Quant l'en meulx quide avoir honour, / De sa parole plus y ment [When one most expects to be treated with honor, the more he lies in his speech]" (*MO* 3563-64). *MO* does not have a great deal to say about conduct in love, but it does condemn those who use deceit in seduction (8689-92) as it does the man who, guilty of "Foldelit ['Mad delight,' or Wantonness]," "quiert nouvelle a chescune hure ['seeks a new woman every hour]" (9372); and he condemns the prevalence both of "foldelit" "au jour d'uy [today]" (9269) and of adultery "au temps present [at the present time]" (8797). There are also repeated references to the hidden faces of deception in other contexts, e.g. in 1065-67, 3484-86, 3561-64, 4363-65, 6623-24. Genius too often refers to the prevalence of the sins that he denounces (as in *CA* 1.655, 2.2089,

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2.2771, 3.828, *et al.*). He also describes “Falssemblant” in terms very much like those in *MO* (CA 2.1918-19). He denounces falsity in love on multiple occasions (e.g. 1.1198-1204, 5. 3208-17, 5.5168-74) and also those who “love” more than one (5.2453-88, 5.7778-88), as does Amans (2.475-81). And in the passage most like these lines from the ballade, Genius warns against the prevalence of False-Witness in love in his and Amans’ own time:

*Riht so ther be, who that hem knewe,
Of thes lovers ful many untrewe:
Nou mai a womman finde ynowe,
That ech of hem, whan he schal wowe,
Anon he wole his hand doun lein
Upon a bok, and swere and sein
That he wole feith and trouthe bere;
And thus he profreth him to swere
To serven evere til he die,
And al is verai tricherie.
For whan the sothe himselven trieth,
The more he swerth, the more he lieth.*

(CA 5.2885-96)

- 2 *whose*. In translating, there are three possibilities here. As a relative, “dont” might refer to “amantz,” which is how I have translated it, or to the whole preceding clause: “for which their *amies* can well be in sorrow.” And because of Gower sometimes uses of “dont” instead of “que” after “tant” (see the note to 4¹.11), this could also be “so many false lovers . . . that their *amies* can well be in sorrow.” Not having to translate, Gower did not need to choose.
- 5-6 The stance of complaint provides one point of intersection between lyric poetry and moral literature. Lovers frequently complain (3.3, 12.26, 14.21, 39.19, 40.7) or make their “compleignte” (9.42; see also 42.27, 43.26), as do, for different reasons, those who protest the evils of their times, as in *MO* 23306, 24949-50, 25172-74. When coupled with the refrain, there is also some parallel here to CA 1.92 *vv.* 1-8, in which Gower’s narrator offers himself as an example of one overcome by love as a warning to others.
- 8 *take good care*. Gower uses the “bon est qe [it is good that]” formula more than a dozen times in *MO* (e.g. in 14194, 14503, 15725) and twice in combination with “s’avisier,” in lines nearly identical to this refrain, but with reference to a king: “bon est que Roy s’avise [it is good that a king think carefully]” (22295) and “De fals Judas l’essamplement / Bon est que chascun Roy s’avise [It is good that every king think carefully about the example of Judas]” (23180-81). In both these cases the context is a warning against misconduct; here the warning is more like those against becoming a victim of another, as in *MO* 9145-47, 21325-27, 25297-99, 26123-24, or CA 2.2140-43, 2.2306-08, 3.951-69, 3.1067-83. This is the only such warning in *50B*, and the tone of warning is also nearly unprecedented in earlier love lyrics. I can cite only Deschamps 434 and 497.19, “Sage dame doit aviser icy [a wise woman should think here],” in a poem about choosing an *ami* wisely. The verb “s’avisier” recurs in 45.10, 46.13, and 51.5. The sense of the reflexive verb ranges from “consider, think about” to “beware, take care.” (See *AND* s.v. “avisier,” v.refl.; *DMF* s.v. “avisier,” II.D.1.b.). Especially in Gower, when one is urged to think about the bad consequences that might ensue from one’s actions, whether on earth or in heaven, the injunction to “think about it” contains an implicit warning. When “s’avisier” is modified by “bien,” something like “take good care” seems to be the more appropriate translation, as in 46.13, “Mais pour les gentz tresbien m’avisierai [but because of the people I take good care],” where the context is the young woman’s fear of gossip, or in these passages from *MO*: “Dont falt que l’Alme bien s’avise / Que Resoun ne luy soit divise, / Pour soy

defendre et saulf garder [Therefore the soul should take good care that Reason not be separated from it, to defend it and safeguard it]"(1033-35); and "N'est homme qui tant bien s'avise / Qe Triche ne le triche au fin [There is no man who takes such good care that Fraud does not defraud him in the end]" (26123-24).

- 9 *There is a certain one.* "Ascuns" could be a reference to a specific known individual, "a certain one," but the context suggests that the woman persona is describing a general type instead, for certainly there is more than one man who behaves in this way. The indefinite "ascuns" is more often used in the plural, as in 47.12 or MO 14654. But Gower also uses it in the singular, as in MO 20246, where clearly more than a single priest is being described, and, closer to the present passage, MO 25106-07, where he is discussing those who impede justice. "Ascuns y ad qui point ne vient / A les assisses [there is "ascuns" who does not come at all to the "assises"]," he writes, and the singular referent in this sentence, also clearly describing a general sort of behavior rather than a specific person, becomes plural in the next stanza: "ceste noble gent . . . quident . . . [these noble people believe]" (25117-18). Gower here adopts from MO another device used for the condemnation of sins in general, and we wouldn't be unjustified in translating "'Ascuns y ad" as "there is a certain type" or even as "there are some."

who strongly wishes to love a hundred. The man who would love a hundred women recalls Genius' definition of Coveitise in love in CA 5.2453-98, especially 5.2462-63: "And thus he set him to coveite, / An hundred though he sihe aday." Amans expresses his fear of just such "comun" lovers, "That wol noght holden hem to thre, / Bot welnyh loven overal" (CA 2.474-81). See also Gower's description of the wanton lover in MO 9371-72, who "tant est plain de variance / Q'il quiet novelle a chescune hure [is so changeable that he seeks a new woman every hour]."

- 12 *trick.* This is the only appearance of "engin" in 50B. It is a common word in MO, usually in negative contexts. It is less common in CA, but Gower twice uses the verb "enginen," "to trick or deceive," with reference to seduction (1.878, 5.4571).

deflects the better judgment. "Destorner [turn away, divert, deflect]" is perhaps not the verb that we would expect here. The infinitive "savoir [to know]" can be used as a noun in a variety of senses, including "knowledge gained by study," "knowledge gained by experience," "wisdom," and "prudence." (See DMF s.v. "savoir," IV.) In this line "better judgment" is suggested by the context.

- 13 *the innocent one.* This is the only appearance of "innocent" in 50B. Of the dozen uses in MO, only two refer to the guiltless (17153, with reference to Adam and Eve before the fall, and 25070). The rest refer to guileless victims, usually of another's deception, though not in the context of seduction, as in 6235-38, with reference to "Covoitise." See also MO 3561, 3537, 6406 *et al.* In CA, Gower uses both "innocence" and "innocent" with reference both to the guiltless and to the deceived, and in most of the latter instances, the victim is a woman. See, for instance, CA 1.852, 4.766 5.3207-10, 5.6341, 6.1978, and 7.4915; and in a passage already cited in the note to line 9 above, Amans expresses his fear of the others who court his lady, "And evere I am adrad of guile / In aunter if with eny wile / Thei mihte hire innocence enchaunte" (CA 2. 479-81).

- 14 *in love.* More precisely, this might be "from his love" or even "from her love." See the note to 2.5 and compare the use of "ses amours" and "mes amours" in the lines cited there.

- 17 *The lips of the mouth that lies in such a way.* The mouth, the tongue, and the lips (as in MO 2810, 2814, 4506, 4515) are commonly cited as the sources of harmful and deceptive speech, but nowhere else in so graphic and compelling a way. The force of the image derives from the focus on the movement of the lips as a metonymy for the deceptively attractive words of the seducer. There is a distant echo here of MO 8677-80, with reference to a seducer:

Ja Tullius, qui plus habonde
Du Rethorique, en sa faconde

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Ne parla meiux que cil ne fait,
Ainçois q'il vierge ensi confonde.

[Cicero, who most abounded in rhetoric, never spoke better in his eloquence than he does before he confounds a virgin.]

The rest of the same stanza describes the seducer's promise of marriage. See the note to 42.14.

- 18 *this deceiver*. The use of singular "cil [this]" follows from the focus on the singular example in the preceding stanza (see the note to line 9), and it echoes similar references to typical sinners in the singular in *MO*; e.g. "cil glous [this glutton]" (7732), "cil adversier [this adversary]" (7763), "cil pilour [this pillager]" (20167).

This is the first appearance of one of the derivatives of "tricher [to trick, to defraud]" in *50B*. The others occur in 43.1, another of the ballades spoken by a woman, and 48.3, the summary of the deceptions of love that prepares the way for the conclusion. It offers another point of intersection between two different worlds of poetry. "Tricherie" (most often in the phrase "sanz tricherie") occurs as the alternative to fidelity in, for instance, Machaut, *Lou*. 47.31, 65.3, 220.6; while the whole group of words derived from "triche [fraud]" is common both in *MO* (see especially 6505-88 and 25237-26436) and *CA*, for instance in 1.828, 1.1033, 1.1218, 5.874, 5.2894, and 7.5287, all of the latter with specific reference to seduction.

- 19-20 Gower uses similar language in *MO* to describe the helplessness of the victims of sin, with reference to "Tricherie" and its companions, for instance: "Q'au paine ascuns serra si sage, / Qui n'ert deceu par leur menage [Hardly anyone will be so wise who will not be deceived by their confederacy]" (6586-87); with reference to libidinous friars: "Car tant y ad des limitantz / Par les hostealx et visitantz, / Q'au paine nuls s'en poet defendre [For there are so many limiters and visitors throughout the homes that hardly can anyone defend himself]" (21328-30); with reference to the power that a woman might have over a king: "Maint Roy en est trop malbailly, / Q'au peine nuls se sciet garder [Many a king is injured by them, for hardly does any know how to protect himself]" (22781-82); and in a passage with several points of contact to 41, "N'est homme qui tant bien s'avise / Qe Triche ne le triche au fin [There is no man who takes such good care that Fraud does not defraud him in the end]" (*MO* 26123-24). See also *CA* 1.1220-21 (in a passage cited for the reference to "tricherie," 1.1218, in the note to line 18 above), "For feigned semblant is so softe, / Unethes love may be war."
- 22 *well deserves condemnation*. This is the only appearance of "juise [condemnation or punishment]" in *50B*, but the line as a whole echoes several similar passages in *MO*, for instance with reference to "Orgueil [Pride]" (*MO* 2508) or the incestuous prelate (*MO* 9101-2), each of which is "bien digne de [or "a"] la Juise [well worthy of condemnation]."
- 25-28 In the envoy to a ballade, the speaker typically turns to address his or her listeners directly—whether real, as when the poet speaks to a particular audience, or fictive, as when the persona addresses his final words to his lady. These lines are consistent with the convention, and also, in the use of "envoie" (26), with the largest number of the poems in *50B* in which the persona sends his or her poem to the addressee in writing. The designation of the addressee, however, in the present tense, "Tu q'es au matin un et autre au soir," seems much less a resumption of the personal voice of lines 5-6 than a continuation of the rebuke of the hypothetical seducer, the "cil tricheour" and the "cil q[e]," of the preceding stanza, both referring to the indefinite "ascuns" of line 9, and the address to "tu" is another of Gower's stylistic habits in *MO*, as he turns to address directly the malefactors that he condemns. "He, pute, q'est ce que tu dis? [Hey, whore, what do you say?]" (*MO* 9238), he writes, in the middle of two stanzas addressed to a prostitute (9229-52). Elsewhere he similarly addresses, among many others, a murderer (5051), a man guilty of Delicacy (8110), a

bishop (19069), a lord (23269), and a knight (23564), all as "tu." The "tu" and "toi" of this envoy appear to be just as hypothetical as the "bone dame" of the refrain, and like the rest of the poem, the envoy appears to be addressed not to a particular man but to the type of man of whom all women must beware.

- 25 Gower describes Hypocrisy in similar terms in *MO* 1129-35:

Ipocresie est ensi belle,
Sicome ly vern que l'en appelle
Noctiluca, c'est tant a dire
Luisant de nuit sicomme chandelle,
Mais du cler jour que riens concelle
Quant hom le voit et le remire,
Lors c'est un verm q'om fait despire.

[Thus Hypocrisy is beautiful, like the worm that is called "Noctiluca," which is to say "glowing at night," like a candle, but when one sees it in bright day which conceals nothing, then it's a worm that one despises.]

- 27 *renounce you and reject you*. Gower upends a traditional motif in this line. Both "guerpir" and "mettre a nonchaloir" are commonly used both in the lyrics and in contemporary *dits*. For "guerpir," see 20.20; Machaut *Lou.* 53.19, 56.6; Deschamps 719.16; Granson 20.10, and *DMF* s.v. "guerpir," B, "Domaine amoureux," with numerous citations from Machaut. For "mettre a nonchaloir" (word by word, "to place in indifference"), see Machaut, *Lou.* 267.15, 270.17, and *DMF* s.v. "nonchaloir," II, again with numerous citations from Machaut. In all such poems, of course, the persona laments being rejected without justification by his or her partner. Here she uses the same expressions with full justification to reject hers.