

43

Plustricherous qe Jason a Medée,
A Deianire ou q'ercules estoit,
Plus q'eneas, q'avoit Dido lessée,
Plus qe Theseüs, q'Adriagne amoit,
5 Ou Demephon qant° Phillis oubloioit,
Te° trieus, hélas, q'amer jadis soloie,
Dont chanterai desore en mon endroit,
C'est ma dolour qe fuist ainçois ma joie.

Unqes Ector, q'ama Pantasilée,
10 En tiele haste a Troie ne s'arroit
Qe tu tout nud n'es deinz le lit couché,
Amis as toutes, quelque venir doit:
Ne poet chaloir, mais q'une femme y soit.
Si es comun plus qe la halte voie.
15 Hélas, qe la fortune me deçoit:
C'est ma dolour qe fuist ainçois ma joie.

De Lancelot si fuissetz remembré
Et de Tristrans, com il se contenoit,
Generides, Florent, Partonopé° —
20 Chascun de ceaux sa loialté guardoit.
Mais tu, hélas: q'est ceo qe te forsvoit
De moi, q'a toi jammais null jour falsoie?
Tu es a large et jeo sui en destroit.
C'est ma dolour qe fuist ainçois ma joie.

25 Des toutz les mals tu q'es le plus maloit,
Ceste compleignte a ton oraille envoie.
Santé me laist et langour me reçoit.
C'est ma dolour qe fuist ainçois ma joie.

5 MS Erasure after qant; space for two or three letters filled in with a small cross resembling those found in the margins.
Very faint cross drawn in the margin.

6 Mac Je

19 MS par Tonope

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°More treacherous° than Jason to Medea
or than Hercules was to Deianira,
more than Eneas, who abandoned Dido,
more than Theseus, whom Ariadne loved,
5 or Demophon when he forgot Phyllis,
I find you, alas, whom I used to love,
for which I shall sing from now on with regard to myself,°
it is my grief that formerly was my joy.°

Never did Hector,° whom Penthesilea loved,
10 arm himself at Troy in such great haste
°as you, completely naked, have lain down in bed,
ami to all women, whoever is to come:
it cannot matter, as long as it's a woman.
Thus you are more common than the highway.°
15 Alas, that Fortune deceives me:
it is my grief that formerly was my joy.

°If you were mindful of Lancelot
and of Tristram, how he behaved,
Generides, Florent, Partonopé –
20 each of these preserved his loyalty.
But you, alas: what leads you away°
from me, who was never false to you a single day?°
You are at large and I am in distress.°
It is my grief that formerly was my joy.

25 You who of all evils are the most accursed,
I send this complaint° to your ear.
Health takes leave of me and languor° takes me in.
It is my grief that formerly was my joy.

In both 40 and 43, the disappointed lover refers directly to the singing of his or her song (40.23, 43.7), but where in 40 the song trails off into silence and an acknowledgment of its own futility, in 43 it becomes the woman's final weapon in response to her betrayal; and as she expresses both her sorrow and her anger, the lyric and the moral are even more closely intertwined than in 41 and 42. The formulaic collocation of the refrain, "C'est ma dolour qe fuist ainçois ma joie" (43.8), like the blame of Fortune (43.15) and the woman's languishing in sickness (43.27), is a lyric commonplace, as is, somewhat less typical for Gower, the woman's

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reference to her singing (43.7) and her allusion to her "compleignte" (43.26). Her protest of her own fidelity despite her lover's treachery (43.21-22) is a nearly universal motif in earlier poems in which a woman blames her lover for his change of heart. Among the many examples that she cites, those in the first stanza—Jason and Medea, Hercules and Deianira, Aeneas and Dido, Theseus and Ariadne, Demophon and Phyllis—are all of course familiar from *CA*; all also appear in Ovid's *Heroides* and four of the five in Chaucer's *LGW*. Both Medea and Dido, however, are also cited more than once by women in earlier lyrics as fellow victims of betrayal in love, and in the third stanza, Lancelot and Tristram are among the very small number of medieval figures whose names appear in the lyrics of Gower's predecessors.

The most arresting image in the poem, however, is found in the second stanza, in the unflattering comparison to Hector (43.9-13). This level of abuse does not occur in any of the earlier contemporary lyrics in a woman's voice, and the closest parallel is to be found in Gower's account of the life of a prostitute in *MO*. In the envoy, when the woman addresses her poem to "De toutz les mals, tu q'es le plus maloit [you who of all evils are the most wicked]" (43.25), she uses a word, "maloit" (the opposite of "benoit [blessed]," which appears in 39.R), that is not found in any earlier lyric that I know of and that Gower himself uses elsewhere only in *MO* (4194, 8925, and 16126). The line with which she dismisses her lover after comparing him to Hector—"Si es comun plus qe la halte voie [Thus you are more common than the highway]" (43.14)—is proverbial in character, but it appears in writing only in earlier moral literature, including twice in *MO*, one of these again with reference to a prostitute. And in her final list of examples in stanza three, rather than using the figures from the past to describe how devoted she is or, conversely, how guilty is her betrayer, as in earlier poems by her counterparts, she instead attempts to hold up examples of virtue for her lover's instruction. Hesitantly, and with quick recognition of its very futility, she slips in to the role of Genius here, or of the narrator who attempts to correct the sins of others in *MO*.

But while in this poem and in the two that precede, Gower borrows diction, habits of expression, and the monitory stance of *MO*, he does not also adopt its moral framework. Apart from the one allusion to a "vie seinte [holy life]" (42.20), there is nothing in these ballades about sin, about the temptations of the flesh versus the needs of the soul, or about the punishments that await the sinner and the rewards for the virtuous. *MO* is, to say the very least, deeply distrustful of all fleshly desire, and in its treatment of "Foldelit," for instance, it reduces the familiar pose of the devoted lyric lover to mere wantonness (*MO* 9421-32). The remedy that *MO* offers is "Aspre Vie [Harsh Life]," including fasting, sleeping on the ground, and other ways of mortifying the flesh (*MO* 17965-18324). The ballades are even further removed from the ethical perspective of *VC*, which treats the perils of the flesh all but exclusively from a male point of view and sees women rather than men as the deceptive seducers: "Est mundus fallax, mulier fallacior ipso [The world is false, and woman even falsier]" (*VC* 5.450; see also *VC* 4.555-76, 5.273-74, 5.333-34, 5.339, 5.353-80). More broadly, the deceptions in love of which the women in Gower's ballades complain are, from the perspective of *VC*, but one aspect of the untrustworthiness and inherent instability of all life in this world (*VC* 7.435-42). Such is not the ethic of *50B*, nor, it is fair to say, of *CA*. We return to Hector. What seems at first like a throwaway at the end of the line that introduces him—"Unqes Ector, q'ama Pantasilée [Never did Hector, whom Penthesilea loved]" (43.9)—is actually an affirmation that there are men who

are worthy of a woman's affection, and as the speaker implies a contrast to her own position, there is perhaps even a hint of envy for her more fortunate predecessor. The next two women's poems, numbers **44** and **46**, are very much about the qualities that make a man worthy of love, and Gower introduces two such men in **45** and **47**.

1-6 The first five examples, all of women who were betrayed, all also appear in *CA*: Jason and Medea in 5.3247-4222; Hercules and Deianira in 2.145-2307; Eneus and Dido in 4.77-137; Theseus and Ariadne in 5.5231-5495; and Demophon and Phyllis in 4.731-878. Jason and Medea also appear in *Tr* 8, Hercules and Deianira in *Tr* 7, both as examples of falseness in marriage. The use of examples from classical literature and romance is also a common device in the lyrics (see Wimsatt, *French Contemporaries*, 69-76). Jason's betrayal of Medea is cited elsewhere as an example of falsity in love (e.g. in Machaut, *VD*, Letter 40, p. 527; Deschamps 434.17-21; Granson 20.1-7); Jason and Eneas are cited together in Mudge 4.9-10, 17-8 (rpt. Wimsatt, *Poems of 'Ch'*, 47-48) and 60.4, 26-8 (rpt. Wimsatt, *ibid.*, 24-25). In all these poems the speaker is a woman. In another, spoken by a man (Mudge 63.7 [rpt. Wimsatt, *ibid.*, 30-31]), Dido is listed among other great heroines, and Froissart, *Bal.* 6.1 and Granson 18.18 both refer to Jason and Medea in contexts other than that of betrayal. On the possible links between the latter two poems and Gower's ballade, see Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, pp. 256-61.

1 *treacherous*. "Tricherous" was evidently not that common in Middle French (cf. the note to 41.18). *AND* s.v. "tricherus" provides only two citations; *DMF* s.v. "trichereux" only one, from *MO* 213. Gower, however, uses the word six other times in *MO*, in *Tr* 4.11, and in *50B* 48.3. *MED* s.v. "trecherous" would lead us to believe that it is much more common in Middle English, citing, among many others, *CA* 2.3019, the only appearance of the word, however, in Gower's English works.

7 *with regard to myself*. *DMF* s.v. "endroit," II.B.1.c. Cf. "endroit moi," 20.23.

8 On the formulaic collocation of joy and sorrow see the note to 2.8.

9 *Hector*. Gower uses Hector as an exemplum of warrior-like bravery in *VC* 4.971-72, 6.922, 6.975, 6.1291, as do Deschamps, 308.288, 432.12, Christine de Pizan, *100B* 4.19, 92.5, and many others. *whom Penthesilea loved*. Cf. *CA* 4.2135-47, 5.2547- 51. Hector also stands with Penthesilea in the procession of lovers in *CA* 8.2525-27. As Macaulay observes in his note to the first of these passages (2:508), Benoit tells the story of Penthesilea in *Roman de Troie*, lines 23357 ff. As in the classical texts in which she is mentioned, she arrives in Troy after Hector has been killed; and on learning of his death, she proclaims to Priam in her grief, "Plus l'amoë que rien vivant [I loved him more than any living thing]" (23405). Guido recounts the same episode more briefly in *Historia*, Book 28. Penthesilea comes to aid of the Greeks with a thousand of her warriors "because of her great love for Hector" (trans. Meeks, p. 204).

11-13 Cf. *MO* 9208-12, with reference to the prostitute:

Trop vilement son corps y paine
 Qant est a chescun fol compaigne,
 Qe riens luy chalt quel ordre il ait;
 Ainz quique voet venir au fait,
 Elle est tout preste en son aguait.

[Very wrongfully does she use her body when she is a foolish companion to every man, so that it doesn't matter to her what rank he has. Instead, whoever wishes to come for the deed, she is fully ready in her waiting place.]

There is also a faint echo of the portrait of the wanton lover in *MO* 9378-80: "Ne chalt si dames ou pucelles, / Nounpas les bonnes mais les belles, / Des quelles poet avoir sa proie [It doesn't matter if they are women or maidens, not the good ones but the fair ones, of whom he can have his prey]."

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- 14 *you are more common than the highway*. Cf. MO 8952, where the adulterous wife “est plus comune que la voie [is more common than the street]”; 9229-37, telling the prostitute that her body is “ensi comun . . . comme sont les voies [as common as the roads]”; and CA 5.2497, regarding the one who is covetous in love: “Thus is he comun as the Strete,” cited as proverbial by Whiting S831. For the use of “comun” in this context, see also *Tr* 17.8., “N’est pas compaign q’est comun a chascune [He who is common to every woman isn’t a ‘companion’]”; CA 5.1425-29, regarding Venus and the women who follow her example; and Amans’ expression of his anxiety in CA 2.474-75, “Bot for al that myn herte arist, / Whanne I thes comun lovers se.” See also Whiting C64, “As common as the Cartway,” citing *Piers Plowman* A 3.127, B 3.131.
- 17-20 The broken syntax of the opening of this stanza is itself expressive of the intensity of the woman’s feeling.
- 17-19 The last set of examples is of men who were loyal. Lancelot and Tristram were of course widely known. Their names appear together Machaut, *Lai* 10.166-67, Mudge 49.1-2, as do those of Guenever and Iseult, along with other heroines, in Deschamps 305.1-3, Mudge 63.7. Granson cites Tristram alone in 12.15, as does Froissart in Bal. 1.25. . Both men appear with their respective queens in the procession of lovers in CA 8.2500-02, but Gower cites them disapprovingly, for their “folie” and presumably for their breach of marriage, in *Tr* 15.1-4. Generides and Pantonopé are far less familiar. There are two different romances of Generides in Middle English, both from the late 14th century, and though a French source is possible, none survives (see Lillian Herlands Hornstein, “Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends,” in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, ed. J. Burke Severs, Fasc. 1 [New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967], 148-49). The only surviving Middle English romance of Partonope dates from the fifteenth century, but earlier French analogues also exist (Hornstein 149-50). The stories of both heroes are long and complicated, but both end with a reunion with the beloved. Florent is known only from CA 1.1407-1861. (There is an earlier English romance known as *Le Bone Florence de Rome*, but the eponymic figure is a princess.) While Genius offers the tale as a lesson in Obedience (1.1401), it would not ordinarily be thought of as an example of truthfulness in love. Gower’s citation of his own story may be relevant to the dating of the composition of at least this ballade.
- 21 *leads you away*. With the “de moi” in the next line, the verb “forsvoit” suggests a physical or emotional separation, but the verb could also be used, without such a qualifier, to mean “to lead astray” in the moral sense, as in 50.19 and in MO 10874-76: “Ly deable y vient pour essayer, / au fin qu’il par temptacioun / Pourroit la raisoun forsvoier [The devil comes to test, so that by temptation he might lead reason astray],” a meaning that hovers, at least momentarily, as the verb stands without its object at the end of the line. (Gower uses the same verb in a somewhat different sense, with reference to his possibly defective French, in *Tr* 18.25.)
- 22 For a woman’s similar protests of her own fidelity see Machaut, *Lou.* 224.2, 265.9-10, Rond. 18.5-6; Deschamps 719.8-13; Granson 20.16-17, 34.9-11; Mudge 68.19-20; and Penn 64.14, 280.9-10.
- 23 *you are at large and I am in distress*. This line echoes the refrain of 37, but it contains a play on words not present in that line that cannot easily be captured in translation. A “destroit,” most literally, is a confined place (*AND* s.v. “destreit¹,” 1; *DMF* s.v. “destroit¹,” II.A), providing the opposition to “at large” as well as the parallel to 37.R. Cf. MO 18321, and 17923-24, where “destroit” is opposed to “franche [free].” But it was also commonly used figuratively for “distress,” “difficulty,” and “anguish” (*AND loc.cit.*, 3, 4; *DMF loc.cit.*, II.B), as in 27.19, “le destroit de ma douleur [the anguish of my sorrow],” the primary operative sense here. One could be tempted to translate “You are at large and I’m in a tight spot.”
- 26 *complaint*. See the notes to 9.42, 42.27.

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- 27 *langour*. Surprisingly, this is Gower's only use of this noun, despite his frequent use of the verb "languir." (See the note to 3.2.) Like the verb, the noun can refer to any kind of illness, but it is the most common word for the type of illness suffered by those who are in love. See *AND* s.v. "langur"; *DMF* s.v. "languer."