

50

De vrai honour est amour tout le chief,
Qui le corage et le memorial
Des bones mours° fait garder sanz meschief.
De l'averous il fait franc et loial,
5 Et de vilein courtois et liberal,
Et de couard plusfiers qe n'est leoun.
De l'envious il hoste tout le mal.
Amour s'acorde a nature et resoun.

Ceo q'ainz fuist aspre, amour le tempre suef;
10 Si fait du guerre pes, et est causal
Dont toute vie honeste ad soun relief.
Sibien les choses qe sont natural
Com celles qe sont d'omme resonal,
Amour *par* tout sa jurediccioun
15 Claime a tenir, et *par* especial,
Amour s'acorde a nature et resoun.

Au droit amant riens est pesant ne grief
Dont conscience en soun judicial
Forsvoit; mais li malvois plus qe la Nief
20 Est en tempeste, et ad son governal
D'onour perdu, *sique* du pois equal
La fortune est et la condicioun
De l'omme; et sur tout le plus cordial
Amour s'acorde a nature et resoun.

25 N'est qui d'amour poet dire le final,
Mais en droit° moi c'est la conclusioun:
Qui voet d'onour sercher l'original,
Amour s'acorde a nature et reson.

3 MS bonesmours: es possibly in a different hand, filling up the space before mours. Cross drawn in margin. See the note to this line in the commentary.

26 en droit. See the note to 12.2.

50

Of true honor the whole source° is love,
which causes the disposition° and memory
of virtuous conduct° to be preserved without harm.°
°It makes the miser generous and loyal,
5 and the villein courteous and free,°
and the coward fiercer than a lion.
From the envious it takes away all evil.
Love is in accord with Nature and Reason.°

What was formerly bitter love sweetly tempers;
10 thus it makes peace from war,° and is the cause°
that every virtuous life has its relief.
°Just as much the things that pertain to nature
as those that belong to reasonable man,
Love claims to have jurisdiction° everywhere,
15 and in particular,
love is in accord with Nature and Reason.

For a true lover° nothing is difficult or grievous
such that° conscience in its judgment
goes astray. But the wicked one more than a ship
20 is tempest-tossed° and has lost
his rudder of honor, °so that of equal weight
are fortune and the condition
of the man. And above all, the most heartfelt°
love is in accord with Nature and Reason.

25 There is no one who can have the last word° on love,
But as for me, this is the conclusion:
For the one who wishes to seek the origin of honor,
love is in accord with Nature and Reason.

The first line of 50 echoes the refrain (and final line) of 49, affirming love as the source of honor, but without qualification now. It is love alone, not “good” love, as experienced by the “true” lover (line 17); those who do not experience its benefits are not lovers at all but merely “li malvois [the wicked]” (19), for whom honor provides no rudder. 50 thus continues the response to 48, but in different and more specific terms. Using some of the same imagery as 48, it substitutes a wholly different definition of “love,” accepted as virtuous by its very nature, whose effects are not evidence of its “errours” but of its benefits: it makes the villein courteous

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(line 5; cf. 48.5), it gives bravery to the coward (line 6; cf. 48.19), it makes the bitter sweet (line 9; cf. 48.8), and rather than encouraging “wandering” (see the note to 48.7), it prevents the conscience from going astray (lines 17-19). Where 48 declares, “N’est qui d’amour poet dire la sotie” (line 23), 50 replies, conceding the diversity of love, “N’est qui d’amour poet dire le final” (line 25), but it concludes by affirming love’s power to reconcile the two opposing parts of human nature, “Amour s’accorde a Nature et Resoun.”

In placing Nature in conjunction with Reason, 50 recalls the moral formulation underlying much of Genius’ advice to Amans in *CA* (see the note to 49), which in turn derive from the discussion of the relation between Nature and Reason among Gower’s predecessors in works such as *RR* and *DPN*. In these works, there is disagreement over Nature’s moral status, a vexing question that recurs in *CA*, where Nature sometimes appears to encourage immoral conduct (e.g. in 3.169-81) and elsewhere to forbid it (7.4297-99), and in *MO*, where Nature leads young women to fornication, the “pecché de nature” (8636-37; cf. also 9113 with regard to incest), yet she also joins God in condemning “Foldelit [Wantonness]” (9504-05, 9515). Gower avoids these more difficult questions in his ballade. In emphasizing the reconciling power of love, he doesn’t pause to consider what effect Nature might have without the balancing force of Reason. Instead, he affirms that one may lead a virtuous life and yet follow the demands of Nature too, echoing the most optimistic of Genius’ moral counsel for Amans (e.g. 7.5372-83, quoted in the note to 49 above). He also offers, as the poet’s “final word,” his most optimistic view of the power of human love.

- 1 *source*. A common use of “chief” (*AND* s.v. “chef¹,” 4; *DMF* s.v. “chef,” II.2.c), echoing “miere” in 49.25 and anticipating “original” in 50.27. Cf. *CA* 4.2326-27: “For love above alle othre is hed, / Which hath the vertus forto lede.”
 - 2 *disposition*. “Corage” is not the heart as physical organ but as the seat of thought or emotion (*DMF* s.v. “courage,” A.1). Here it suggests the disposition to good conduct that is embedded in one’s character (*DMF*, loc.cit, A.3.b).
 - 3 *virtuous conduct*. “Bones mours” (together with its opposite, “males mours”) is a common phrase in *MO*, e.g. at 1752, 8671. It also occurs in 38.18. One has to wonder if a distracted scribe might originally have written “bon(s) amours,” requiring the correction (see the textual note).
harm. The range of meaning of “meschief” is rather broad in both French and English, but the context here may suggest the rather specialized meaning of “offense” or “wrong.” *AND* s.v. “meschief,” 3; *DMF* s.v. “méchef,” I.A.3; *MED* s.v. “mischief,” 4.
- 4-7 Cf. *CA* 4.2296-2304:

For evere yit it hath be so
That love honeste in sondri weie
Profiteth, for it doth aweie
The vice, and as the bokes sein,
It makth curteis of the vilein,
And to the couard hardiesce
It yifth, so that verrai prouesse
Is caused upon loves reule
To him that can manhode reule.

- 5 Whiting L531, “Love makes the villain (*churl*) courteous, etc.,” citing *CA* 4.2300 (quoted in the preceding note).

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All three of the key words in this line can have both a social and a moral sense. "Vilein" can be "serf" or "base, uncouth"; "courtois" can be "courtly" or "courteous"; and "liberal" can be "free" in the senses both of "not in bondage" and "generous." See *AND* s.v. "vilein," a. 1, 2; *DMF* s.v. "vilain," I.A, B; *AND* s.v. "corteis"; *DMF* s.v. "courtois"; *AND* s.v. "liberal," 1, 2; *DMF* s.v. "liberal," A, B.

- 8 *Love is in accord with Nature and Reason.* One wants this to mean "Love brings Nature and Reason into accord," but such, alas, is not the case. That would be "Amour acorde Nature a Raison" or "od Raison." See *AND* s.v. "acorder," v.a., 2; *DMF* s.v. "accorder," I.A.3. As written, there is an implicit "both" before "Nature and Reason." M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 360, translates the refrain, at least in its final instance in line 28, in the subjunctive: "let Love agree with Nature and with Reason," but "acorde" is Gower's normal indicative form (e.g. in *MO* 3810 *et al.*), and the wish is less consistent with the rest of the poem than an affirmation.
- 10 *makes peace from war.* Love is a "bellica pax [warlike peace]" in *VC* 5.54, *CA* 1.vv. 7, "Est Amor" 1. Cf. *DPN* M5.1, "pax odio . . . iuncta [peace joined to hate]"; *RR* 4263 "pez haïneuse [hateful peace]." *the cause.* *AND* has no entry for "causal"; *DMF* lists it only as an adjective, and only with two later citations; but see *MED* s.v. "causāl," n. (one citation from Trevisa, dated "a1398"), and *MO* 17009, 26665. Merrilees and Pagan, p. 131, suggest that Gower's is the first known use of the word.
- 12-13 Not attached syntactically either to the clause that precedes or to the one that follows, these two lines seem to serve as a proleptic appositive to "par tout" in line 14.
- 14-15 *have jurisdiction.* For "tenir jurediccioun" see *DMF* s.v. "jurisdiction," A.
- 17 *true lover.* "Droit amant" echoes "droit amour." See the note to 4¹.3.
- 18 *such that.* Or "for which."
- 20 *tempest-tossed.* From Yeager; more precisely, "in tempest." Cf. *MO* 8623-25, with reference to the five daughters of "Luxure [Lechery]": "Sicomme la mer plain de tempestes / Les niefs assorbe, ensi font cestes / A quique soit leur dru ou drue [Just as the sea full of tempests engulfs ships, so do these to whoever (male or female) is their lover]"; or for a different use of the image, 30.1-4.
- 21-23 *so that . . .* I take this to mean that love, for the "wicked" man, is subject to all of the unpredictable vagaries of fortune. Gower conjoins "weight" and "fortune" in a very different way in 13.4-6.
- 23 *heartfelt.* From the root of "cordial" in "coeur [heart]." *AND* s.v. "cordial," and *DMF* s.v. "cordial," B, both translate as "sincere." Gower uses "cordial" in a similar way in *MO* 13533, with reference to love of God, and 27351, with reference to the speaker's song. The enjambment here, with the adjective modifying the noun in the next line, is a bit unusual for Gower, but there is another example in [51].7-8.
- 25 *last word.* So translated by Legge (note to line 8 above), 360. Though it is persuasive in context, I can find no other examples of "final" in this sense. As a noun, "final" appears almost exclusively in the common phrase "au final [in the end, in conclusion]," as in *MO* 9, 3321, *et al.* Cf. *CA* 8.3106, "And now to speke, as in final," cited in *MED* s.v. "fināl," 1.(d), "in final, in conclusion."