

Alain Chartier

‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’, and other poems

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Introduction

Alain Chartier (c1385-1430) was born in Bayeux. He studied, like his elder brother Guillaume, later Bishop of Paris, at the University of Paris, the Sorbonne. His brother Thomas was notary to the king, and another brother, Jean, a monk of St. Denis, and a chronicler of royalty. A follower of the Dauphin, later Charles VII, Alain acted as his royal clerk, notary, and financial secretary. In 1424 he was sent on an embassy to Germany, and three years later on a mission to negotiate the marriage of James I of Scotland's daughter, Margaret, with the Dauphin, later Louis XI. 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', the title of which John Keats famously used for his own dissimilar though related poem, was written in 1424. Alain wrote other verse, and a number of conventional political works critical of wanton corruption and abuses of power within the social order. He was a younger contemporary of the poet Christine de Pisan, and an older contemporary of the nobleman and poet Charles D'Orléans, though not engaged in the battle of Agincourt (1415) where the latter's capture led to his being detained for twenty-five years in England.

Translator's Note

Due to the limited number of rhymes available in modern English compared to Alain Chartier's French, the rhyme scheme of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' has been altered throughout, in order to produce viable English rhyming verse, while preserving the basic structure of the poem. A few minor changes to the content have also been made, which do not substantially alter the sense and intent of his verse, while this translation is much closer in meaning to the original than the 15th century translation of Sir Richard Roos, the Lancastrian poet, which did however have the virtue of preserving the original rhyme-scheme, enabled by the English language of his day. The poem is written in octaves or 'huitains' each of eight lines of octosyllables, and so each of its hundred verses has the same number of syllables as a chessboard has squares, while the dialogue in the poem between the Lady and the Lover, in which the Lady it should be noted has the last word, may be considered a game of chess, a courteous 'duel', which may well have attracted Keats to the poem, as being relevant to his own relationship with Fanny Brawne.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

I rode, not long since, pensively,
A man woeful, and dolorous,
Grieving deeply, forced to be
The saddest of the amorous;
For Death with his cruel dart
Had stolen from me my Mistress,
And left me, languorous at heart,
Upon the path of mournfulness.

I said: 'Now, I must cease to speak,
Nor ever seek another rhyme,
Nor joy nor laughter more must seek,
Instead go weeping for all time.
I must engage myself with woe,
For I've no pleasure now nor ease;
Let it be writ: to that I go
That me nor other folk shall please.

Whoe'er would my desire constrain
To writing only joyous things,
My pen could not such words attain,
Nor my speech e'er grant them wings.
My lips they could no longer smile,
Except my eyes gave them the lie,
For the heart would scorn such guile,
True tears descending from each eye.

I leave it to those sick with love,
That set their hopes on faithfulness,
Sweet songs and ballads to approve,
That may their feelings thus express;
To the grave hath my lady taken
In her keeping, God rest her soul,
All my feelings, left me forsaken;
By the grave are they swallowed whole.

From this time on I hold my peace,
For I am weary now of speech,
Let others spend thus their life's lease
For mine is done; silence I preach.
Fate has marred the coffer wherein
I chose to store my wealth betimes,
All of those goods that I did win
From my fair youth, in better times.

Love had governance of my wit,
God pardon me, if ill I wrought!
If I did well, I'm done with it;
It brought, and it granted me, naught.
For, with the death of all my good,
So, my wealth with her has died,
Death sets a bound, tis understood,
My heart shall never override.'

Thinking such thoughts, and full of care,
I rode upon my way, all morn,
Till I was but a pace from there
Where I would lodge from eve till dawn.
Yet now, my journey being done,
As my dwelling I thought to see,
By chance, I heard a tune begun
In a garden; sweet minstrelsy.

And I was withdrawing, instantly,
Into a private place nearby,
When two good friends did suddenly,
Sure I'd arrived, my face espy.
They came to me, and so did strive,
Part by sheer force, part by request,
That, lest I escape not alive,
I joined the feast, at their behest.

On entering, I was well received
By the ladies and maidens there,
Welcomed, if I was not deceived,
By those who were both good and fair:
And they held me, of courtesy,
All the day long, thus engaged,
Had sweet and pleasant speech with me,
And gracious was the role they played.

Soon they dined, the tables were set;
The ladies sat where they might please.
And when once seated, without fret,
The noblest men ensured their ease.
Such they were as did so promptly.
They served in company, together,
Whose judges showed not, visibly,
For whom they cared: one, or another.

One, midst the others, I did see,
Who, often there, did come and go,
Like to one ravished utterly,
Scarcely a sound made, to and fro.
His face seemed restrained, indeed,
Though his desire passed all reason,
Which often his glance did lead
To stray elsewhere, out of season.

He forced himself to show good cheer,
And feigned an aspect of false joy;
And not with pleasure, but in fear,
His voice in singing did employ,
For there a most plaintive measure
Would sound in his every tone,
And echo, to his displeasure,
Like some bird in the wood, alone.

A host of men that hall did fill,

But he, above all, seemed to be
Most lean and weary, pale and ill,
His speech quavering, fearfully.
He scarcely seemed one of that throng.
Dressed all in black, with no device.
He seemed, in truth, like one who long
Had felt his heart gripped in a vice.

He feigned on all there to attend,
And did so well, as was his way,
But Love constrained him in the end
That fired his heart, both night and day,
For his Mistress whom he could see;
While I took note of his sad gaze
That e'er settled, piteously,
On her, whene'er his eyes he'd raise.

Often his face away he turned,
To look elsewhere among that host,
Yet ever again his gaze yearned
Towards the place that pleased him most.
I saw the dart fly from those eyes,
Each feather a humble request,
And said, for one: 'God's aid! Likewise,
I was, as you are now, possessed.'

Then swiftly he would go aside,
To quieten his countenance,
And there most tenderly he sighed
All full of grievous remembrance;
Then he'd take up his role again,
And turn to his former service,
Yet, judging from his face, was fain
To make but sorry toil of this.

After dining, the guests advanced
To dancing, each and every one,

And this sad lover he too danced,
With one or other, spurning none.
He showed a cheerful face to all,
To this one, that one, he would go,
Yet ever returned, as if in thrall,
To her whom he did treasure so.

His choice was fine, it seemed to me,
Among the ladies dancing there,
Could one but win his heart as truly
As that sweet beauty, in his care.
Who'll trust his eyes' testimony,
Without some other mark or sign,
A thousand deaths he'll die, ere he
Attains that for which he doth pine.

In the dance she failed in naught,
Neither too forward, nor too shy,
Gifted with every virtue sought
To crown a lover's heart thereby.
Young, gracious, fresh, complete,
Calm and tranquil, without plaint,
Noble mien, and speech as sweet,
Beneath the standard of Restraint.

Yet of their feast I grew weary,
For joy weighs on the woeful heart,
And out of the press I took me
Behind a trellis, there apart.
Clothed with leaf, it was a wonder,
Fine green willows, interlaced,
With the leaves, and wood thereunder,
No eye could see where I was placed.

The Lover, he led his Lady
To the dance when twas his turn,
Then to a grassy bank where she

Might sit with him on their return.
None else had they in company,
For none sat there but these alone,
And naught was there twixt them and me
Except the trellis, I dare own.

I heard the Lover give a sigh;
Near to, desire e'er grows greater.
Yet, with the woe he felt thereby,
Not one word did he dare utter,
But, languishing beside his cure,
From healing balm did nigh expire;
For flames do burn us all the more
The closer we approach the fire.

His heart, it swelled within his chest,
Constrained by anguish, and by fear,
And nigh on broke within his breast;
One and the other cost him dear,
His great desire by shame restrained,
That advancing, this holding back.
No little suffering is maintained
In one whose heart such wars attack.

He'd oft have found the means to speak,
If fear had not so stilled his tongue,
But in the end his heart did seek
To utter what his lips ne'er sung.
And, turning then to his Lady,
He spoke low, as he wept apace:
'An ill day was that one for me
On which I first did see you face.

Such ill I suffer, burning, ardent,
Of which I'd gladly die for you,
And yet you care not, are content
To grant me cause for grief anew.

For I see it troubles you not,
All this that I now choose to name;
Yet, it does you, my worth forgot,
No less honour, nor brings you shame.

Alas, how would it harm you Lady,
If an honest heart may speak true,
If honour and no blame you'd see
Were you mine, and I held to you?
I challenge naught of right, e'en so,
My will to yours doth surrender;
You wish is mine, to that I go;
Better service, thus, to render.

Though I may in no way deserve,
By such service, your sweet grace,
Yet suffer me, at least, to serve,
Nor your displeasure ever face.
Without reward I'll serve, I swear,
In true faithfulness observing:
That Love for this did me prepare,
To serve you now, in everything.'

The Lady answered soft and low,
Once she had heard all he had said.
No change of colour did she show,
But spoke with confidence instead:
'Fair sire, whene'er will you forego
Such foolish thoughts, and let them be?
Why not seek, here, to end your woe,
And grant your heart peace, and be free?'

The Lover:

'None there is that may peace obtain
But you, with whom this war was born,
For twas your own eyes writ them plain,

Those missives that put me to scorn.
And yet sweet glances, with their art,
Played herald to this rejection,
By which you promise, on your part,
To shun my trust and my affection.'

The Lady:

'He hungers but to live in woe,
And of his heart he keeps loose guard,
Who at the glance of an eye, lo!
His joy and peace doth disregard.
If I, or she, should glance at you,
Eyes are so made, looks to declare,
No guard I'll take but thus I'll do;
Who takes it ill, let him beware!'

The Lover:

'If one, perchance, harms another
Because of the blow that he felt,
Although he could do no other,
Why should sadness and woe be dealt?
And since Fortune, and cruelty,
Delivered not this bitter pain,
But your fair youth, your great beauty,
Why then display such deep disdain?'

The Lady:

'No such disdain would I display
Towards you, nor none would I show,
Nor hatred, nor great love, I say,
Nor your own private thoughts would know.
In thinking so, you might perceive
Some little thing as pleasing, though
You would then but yourself deceive;

Not for aught would I wish it so.'

The Lover:

Whate'er has brought me to this ill,
Tis not thinking has deceived me,
But Love has pressed me close, until
Into your toils I've plunged deeply.
And since it comes about that I
Seek mercy of you, I'll confess
Tis best my life should end thereby:
Who dies swiftly, languishes less.'

The Lady:

'So amorous a malady
Scarce ever brought a man his death,
But men claim so, more readily
To win their comfort, in a breath.
They complain, and suffer loudly,
Who grieve not the most, tis true;
And if Amor wounds so deeply,
Better one should weep than two.'

The Lover:

'Alas, my Lady, twere better,
Of goodness and of courtesy,
To make two joyous together,
Than destroy one needlessly.
I've no desire to do aught
But to serve you, and so please,
But fair exchange here is sought,
Sweet pleasure to replace unease.'

The Lady:

‘Naught do I seek of love to know,
Nor desire, nor hope, I treasure;
If I escape your unease so,
I’ll regret not your sweet pleasure.
Let them choose who will, I say,
I am free, and would be ever,
Never giving my heart away,
To make another my master.’

The Lover:

‘Love which shares both joy and woe,
Frees women from service, wholly,
And sees them, for their part, also,
Mistress and ruler of us, truly.
Their servant has no advantage,
Except for his reward, solely:
And he who has once paid homage
Renouncing it costs him dearly.’

The Lady:

‘Yet women are not so stupid,
So witless, so filled with folly,
That for a few pleasantries, hid
In fine words, of which you’ve many,
They’ll believe such things today,
Relinquishing all doubts and fears,
Rather they’ll turn their heads away,
And to such talk will close their ears.’

The Lover:

‘There is no singer who can sing,
And with skill, and wit, doth labour,
Who sadder plaint to you can bring,
Than he who love’s ills doth savour.’

For he who sings with cheerful mind
He scarce conceals his feigning,
But melancholy thoughts you'll find
Yield words while truth maintaining.'

The Lady:

'Love is a cruel flatterer,
Harsh in his deeds, a sweet liar,
Who to folk comes as avenger,
That to his secrets do aspire.
He makes them abide by his rule,
His entrance seeming happy,
But hard the lessons in his school,
For those that repent their folly.'

The Lover:

'The sweeter both God and Nature
Have made the pleasures of true love,
By that much is the blade sharper,
And the harsher its faults do prove.
Who is not cold, desires not heat,
One to counter the other's sought;
And no one knows a joy complete
That never against sorrow fought.'

The Lady:

'Pleasure is not the same for all,
Sweet to you proves bitter to me,
No more shall you see me in thrall
To love, nor the will of any.
None can claim one as a lover
Except the heart admits the word;
Force can tame the free will never,
Nor rule, ere ever it be heard.'

The Lover:

‘Ah, my Lady, God aid me not,
If any other right I sought,
Except to show I am forgot,
And seek your mercy, as one ought!
If e’er I might mar your honour
May God, and my fate, confound me,
And I no more joy discover
In this world, nor eternally!’

The Lady:

‘You, and all who so swear, I’m sure,
Condemn yourselves, in speaking ill,
Not thinking your oaths but endure
While your words are echoing still.
And Gods and his Saints laugh also,
Naught in such oaths doth firm appear;
While the wretches that swear them so
Weep, thereafter, many a tear.’

The Lover:

‘Who seeks pleasure dishonourably,
He is a man who lacks all feeling,
E’en to be named he’s unworthy,
Or, above the ground, have being.
Speech that’s true, heart’s loyalty,
Ever maintain a man’s good name,
But he who treats his faith lightly
Loses his honour and finds shame.’

The Lady:

‘Courteous mouth and wicked heart,

They should ne'er be found together,
Yet, made one by the feigner's art,
Malice mates one with the other.
False-Seeming reigns in virtue's stead,
In those whose speech feigns honour,
Though honour in their heart be dead,
With never a tearful mourner.'

The Lover:

'Who thinks not ill, the good shall see;
God grants our true deserts ever.
So, for love of God, think of me
And the pain that I now suffer!
Let not my ruin come, nor death,
Through your great sweetness, destroy me,
Grant me your grace with every breath,
And that I live, you'll guarantee.'

The Lady:

'A fickle heart, and pleasure's folly
That proves best if it soon goes by,
They brought you this melancholy,
Yet your ill has a cure, say I.
But set your mind at liberty,
For one tires of the sweetest game,
You'll get no help or harm from me,
Believe: to me tis all the same.'

The Lover:

'Who hath a falcon, dog or deer,
Follows, loves, fears them, without doubt,
They guard it well and hold it dear,
Harm it not, nor chase it about.
Yet I, who've set my heart upon

Your sweet self, and never alter,
I am less prized than anyone,
And, neath the lowest, ranked lower.'

The Lady:

'If I, to all, do show good cheer,
Of courtesy, with honest heart,
Tis not to your prejudice here;
I seek to use on you no art.
Yet lovers are so little wise,
And their beliefs do weigh so light,
They'll think a thing to them applies,
Whose service to their cause is slight.'

The Lover:

'If I, through love and loyalty,
Should lose the welcome strangers know,
Then that loyalty's worth to me,
Less than those who but come and go,
That mean little or naught to you;
And, it would seem to me, you'd lack
That courtesy whose lesson true
Is: love for love one should give back.'

The Lady:

'True courtesy is so allied
To honour it loves and holds dear,
That it will ne'er to aught be tied,
Neither by love nor prayer here.
And yet its good cheer it will share
When tis right and fitting ever;
Constraint, and reward, and prayer,
With courtesy go ill together.'

The Lover:

'I ask no reward through loving;
To deserve such is beyond me;
Grace and pardon, I come seeking,
Since I fail of death or mercy.
To do good, where good is lacking,
That is courtesy just and fair,
Yet rather one's own be greeting
Than every good with strangers share.'

The Lady:

'Yet I know not what you call good,
Ill gains from good not otherwise;
Yet they're too generous who would
Lose, thus, the good name that they prize.
One should not give at all, unless,
The request is right and fitting,
If honour's lacking, I'll confess,
What's left is but a worthless thing.'

The Lover:

'The mortal creature ne'er was born,
Nor could be born beneath the sky,
None but yourself, both eve and morn,
To whom your honour's dear as I
Do hold it, who but lives to serve,
In youth and age, with all I own,
Nor lips nor eyes, nor sense reserve,
But they are yours, and yours alone.'

The Lady:

'A great charge hath he in keeping
That honour serves, and would maintain,

But risks his labour and his living
That other's wish doth entertain.
He to whom honour doth belong
Should not wait upon his brother;
The less of his own he doth retain
That too much doth heed another.'

The Lover:

'Your eyes, they have so set your mark
On my heart, if I find honour
In aught upon which I embark,
It is from you derived ever.
Fortune decrees it is my fate
To hold my life at your mercy,
Thus, it is right to contemplate,
Serving your honour, ceaselessly.'

The Lady:

'Attend to your honour alone,
If you would best employ your time.
Wait not on mine, but on your own
Act not lacking reason or rhyme.
Tis good to fear, and to restrain
A heart too foolishly deceived,
Tis better to bend with the strain,
Tremble, rather than be un-leaved.'

The Lover:

'Consider, my Lady, since Love
First delivered my heart to you,
Tis impossible I could prove
Otherwise, whate'er might ensue.
I leave you free in every way,
Nor can this gift e'er be withdrawn;

I must be patient, come what may,
Nor must amend it, eve or morn.'

The Lady:

'I do not call that thing a gift,
That's offered one who takes it not.
If its recall be not as swift,
Abandonment must prove its lot.
He takes the thing too much to heart
Who gives to one who doth refuse;
While he is wise, who ne'er doth part
With gifts another will not use.'

The Lover:

'He must not think such idly given,
That serves a Lady of high worth.
If to use my time I'm driven
In this manner, no man on earth
Can say I'm faint of heart, or wrong
In making this request of you,
By which means Amor has long
Won many a heart good and true.'

The Lady:

'If my fair counsel you would hear,
Seek one nobler, lovelier still,
Who in love might prove as dear,
And better suited to your will.
He's far from comfort, and in pain,
Who seeks trouble enough for two;
Yet the prize he'll oft fail to gain
That doubles not his stake anew.'

The Lover:

‘The counsel that you grant to me
Is better said than acted on;
Forgive me, if I shun it wholly.
For I’ve a heart, so true a one,
It can attach to naught at all
Not in accord with loyalty.
And on no counsel need I call
But on pity, and clemency.’

The Lady:

‘Wise, he who, folly once begun,
How to end that same doth know;
But wisdom’s lacking in the one
That would, and yet cannot, do so.
Who good counsel fails to hear,
But pursues a desperate suit;
The only good he’ll find, I fear,
Is but to die in that pursuit.’

The Lover:

‘Yet I’ll pursue mine while I may,
And as long as my life shall last.
And if I die, still loyal, someday,
I’ll feel no grief for what is past.
Though your harshness ensured my death
Far less sorrowful I would be,
Faithful, dolorous to my last breath,
Than if I’d lived and loved falsely.’

The Lady:

‘You shall have none of that from me,
Nor harsh nor cruel I’ll be to you,

Nor were it right if you thought me
One that's sweet and will prove true.
Who seeks what's ill, let him suffer,
I can give and speak scant comfort,
Nor care to seek for it either.
Let who wishes waste their effort.'

The Lover:

'Once, indeed, we should seek to win
All the good that lies in our way,
If the heart's seized by love within,
And should love's tribute thereby pay.
For free will doth believe and hold,
That we are harsh, and lack reason,
If our heart's so proud and cold,
One sole body is its prison.'

The Lady:

'I know of cases so wondrous
They make me recall, frequently,
That entering in is perilous,
And more so yet the winning free.
Scarce can good come of the matter,
Such that I do not wish to try
An ill pleasure, seeking better,
And pay too dear a price thereby.'

The Lover:

'You have no reason, certainly,
Nor should suspicion move you so,
To set yourself so far from me,
For, of your goodness, you must know
The evidence is before you
By which my faithfulness is shown;

My long service proves it true,
Nor can be hidden; more, tis known.

The Lady:

‘Right faithful that one may be called,
And the name doth suit him well,
That deserves and although enthralled
Hides, and guards, whate’er good befell.
He who pursues, and begs, and prays,
Shows not a loyalty that’s sound,
For such do seek and purchase grace,
That lose it once the thing is found.’

The Lover:

‘If my faithfulness causes me
To love one that doth love me not,
And hold her dear, then tis my lot
To love her that’s my enemy.
If pity that doth now but sleep,
Would put an end to all my ill,
Such gracious comfort would but keep
Me faithful, and more loyal still.’

The Lady:

‘A grievous thought the mind to fill,
And one most contrary to joy;
Yet the minds of those who are ill,
Most perversely they do employ.
A heart at odds has he that soon
Strives to make his sickness worse;
Faithfulness is to him no boon,
If faithful sighs he doth rehearse.’

The Lover:

‘He will be abandoned by all,
Stripped of honour, and undone,
Who ignores, and ensures the fall
Of the gift of grace, he has won,
From his Lady who, it may be,
Returned the man from death to life.
Who mars himself, so viciously,
More than deserves to meet the knife.’

The Lady:

‘There is no court, nor judge it seems,
To whom the wronged may have recourse;
One curses, one condemns such schemes,
But none are put to death, perforce.
Things are allowed to run their course,
And far worse mischief they commence,
And bring sad ladies, sans remorse,
More pain, by some renewed offence.’

The Lover:

‘Although they neither hang nor burn
Those who commit such acts of crime,
I’m sure a sorry end they earn,
Though it may take some little time;
While all their honour, thus, is lost,
For such false deeds are so accursed,
That honour vanishes, to their cost,
Wherever men display their worst.’

The Lady:

‘Of that, these days, they have no fear,
Those who do say, and will maintain,
That those who hold loyalty dear,

For many a day, naught shall gain.
Their hearts go, and return again,
So well they train them to the lure,
And then their flight they may restrain,
Until those hearts are loved once more.'

The Lover:

'Yet once one's heart is truly set
Upon a thing that's good and true,
One should be firm, and ne'er upset
By aught, despite what others do.
As soon as love is granted me
All other pleasures may go by,
Such love I'll not part from swiftly,
While a soul in my flesh doth lie.'

The Lady:

'That you love truly, as one ought,
In that may you not be deceived?
For little knowing what you sought,
You may err in what you perceived.
Better yourself to recover,
And to sweet reason have recourse,
Rather than wait, foolish ever,
Hoping for some relieving force.'

The Lover:

'Reason, advice, counsel and sense,
Are bound by Love's seal every one,
Against such bond I've no defence,
Therein lies no rebellion.
They're melded so with my desire,
And so bound there, alas, say I,

They cannot be restored entire,
Unless pity shall break the tie.'

The Lady:

'Who for himself no love doth show,
He is by Love itself forgot;
If pity for Self you forego
Pity from others you'll see not.
But be sure of this, that ever
I'll be the same as e'er I was;
Expect to receive no better,
And be thankful for your loss.'

The Lover:

'This one firm hope I harbour though:
That such a Lady could not fail
Of Pity that constrained, I know,
Allows Resistance to prevail.
Should Pity see my power decline
Of loving truly, she'll depart
From where she dwells; the good that's mine
I'll lose, and suffer for my part.'

The Lady:

'Abandon your purpose wholly;
The longer such things you pursue
The less you'll have of joy, surely,
Or peace, without an end in view.
If on fond hopes you must depend,
What's that but mere stupidity?
You'll know for certain, in the end,
That hope the beggar's wage must be.'

The Lover:

‘You may speak so, if you so wish,
For power enough you now possess!
I’ll not suffer hope to perish
That makes my suffering seem less.
For if Nature has placed in you,
And with sweet labour, so much good,
She would not such a task pursue,
Then not add pity, when she could.’

The Lady:

‘Pity should be reasonable,
And disadvantageous to none,
To those in need beneficial,
Nor harm the compassionate one.
If to another pity’s shown,
Yet to oneself one is cruel,
Pity as pitiful is shown,
Love, turned to hatred, proves mortal.’

The Lover:

‘To comfort those all comfortless
Is no cruelty; such earns praise.
But you, whose heart seems merciless,
Though in so fair a flesh, always
Will garner blame, and win dispraise,
For the cruelty there within,
Should pity, that ends all malaise,
To your proud heart ne’er enter in.’

The Lady:

‘Should he, who tells me I’m beloved,
Even if I believed it so,
Blame me, if he’s not approved,

In that his wishes I forgo?
If such comfort I should dispense
That would be improper pity,
And if afterwards I saw sense,
What but woe would it offer me?’

The Lover:

‘Harder than black marble, I vow,
That heart pity cannot enter!
Harder to bend than an oak bough,
What gain to you to show such rigour?
Rather you’d wish to see me die
Here before you, for your pleasure,
Than show comfort, though I sigh,
Stalling death that haunts me ever.’

The Lady:

‘You may find comfort for your ill,
And grant me ease: no longer plead,
Or die to please me, if you will,
I cannot pledge to sate your need.
My heart for others I’ll not change,
Whether they cry, weep, laugh or sing.
And, if I can, I shall arrange
That none shall boast of anything!’

The Lover:

‘I am no singer, that is sure,
It suits me rather to go weep.
I am no boaster, furthermore,
Close silence I prefer to keep.
None should seek to love ever
If he’s no heart to keep it hid;
In the boaster there’s no honour,

His tongue shall mar whate'er he did.'

The Lady:

'Evil-Tongue keeps a splendid court,
Each there but studies to speak ill.
False lovers, that the times do sport,
Practise, there, buffooneries still.
The most secret would have one bray
That he's suspected of something.
And aught that men to women say
One should mistrust; it bears a sting.'

The Lover:

'Of some tis true and e'er will be,
The whole world does not act as one.
Through goodness, virtue all may see,
Villainy by the evil done.
Can it be right, if some bring shame
Upon their speech and speak but ill,
That the good are treated the same,
By, thus, denying their goodwill?'

The Lady:

'If the vile spoke but to the vile,
The mischief there might be forgot.
But all those who do such revile,
The noble and the good, whose lot
Is to defend that fair condition,
Are first to fall into the mire,
And freely do their hearts abandon
To slack faith, and play the liar.'

The Lover:

‘Now I see straight how these things are,
That one is shamed for doing good,
Since pity, right, justice, dwell far
From the hard hearts of womanhood.
Must they be treated all the same,
The humble servants and the ill?
And for the sins of those to blame
Must he that’s good be punished still?’

The Lady:

‘I possess nor power nor will
To punish any, whate’er befall,
Yet to escape from all that’s ill,
Tis good to guard oneself from all.
False-Seeming feigns humble and sweet,
To catch the ladies in his snare,
So, each of us must prove discreet,
Lest we be taken unaware.’

The Lover:

‘Since not a single word of grace
Can be wrung from so hard a heart,
God witness what I must embrace,
The shame brought by so harsh a dart!
To Him I pray, that I might see
Pity, which He forgot in you,
Or that life He might end in me
Lost all too swiftly to His view...

The Lady:

‘My heart and I have not harmed you,
Done naught of which you might complain.
None but your own deeds should you rue:
Judgement against yourself obtain.

Once and for all, believe this true,
That naught of me shall you attain;
Your words but trouble me anew,
Enough I've said, to make all plain.'

Grieving the man, rose to his feet,
And left the feast, weeping anew,
Like to one dying in defeat,
His heart nigh on broken in two.
He cried: 'Death, hasten now to me,
Destroy my reason, tis my wish,
End this existence, suddenly,
This sad life where all is anguish!...

I know not how he went from there,
Nor to what place he went that day,
But to him his Lady gave no care
As to her friends she made her way.
And, later, I was told, that he
Tore at his hair in his distress,
And mourned so disconsolately
He was a dead in a week or less.

So, lovers all, I beg you, flee
The boaster and the slanderer,
Denounce such wretches endlessly,
For they do seek your harm ever.
Because the truth they'll ne'er avow,
Refusal fortifies her tower,
And so, for more than ten years now,
Love's realm has bowed to her power.

And you, Fair Maids and Ladies, all
In whom honour's born, be you
Not so cruel, but heed my call,
Each, and every one, of you;
Nor let yourselves resemble her

Whom you shall hear me name, for she
Is one many a true lover
Might call 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.

**'Fire, fire, that seeks to burn my heart entire' ('Au feu, au feu qui
trestout mon cueur ard')**

Fire, fire, that seeks to burn my heart entire,
With a fiery brand, born of the sweet desire
In a lovely glance, alight with loving flame!
Grace, mercy, comfort, succour here I claim;
God aid you, if you'll save me from the pyre.

Flame, heat, hot coals, scatter; higher, higher,
Thick smoke and sparks go flying from the fire;
A fire burns me that ever flares the same.
Fire! Fire!

Strike, shoot, and drive this danger far away,
This fierce foe; drown me both night and day,
In the lake of pity, tears; these embers tame;
No other source of comfort can I name,
Aid, alas! Ere too great proves your delay!
Fire! Fire!

Ballad of The Lost (Lover) Ballade de L'Amie Perdue)

I was but born to meet with every ill.
Every assault of Fortune to endure.
The semblance of good? That I know not still;
Ne'er any such, nor any joy, I saw.
A hundred times better were I no more,
Than live a life so full of grief and woe.
The contrary to all I wish, I know,
Since Fortune swore, on a day, to slay me.
That life goes on displeases, certainly,
This life no longer filled with deep feeling,

But immeasurable sorrow's killing me,
Now my Lady is no longer living.

I have lost all courage, savour, sense.
To mourn, apart, is all my employment.
In grief, regret, my riches are immense,
Yet nothing in this world yields enjoyment.
Whatever lies below the firmament,
All wearies me: the air, the moon, the sun,
I'd have the Day of Judgement here begun,
Since all my joy is in the tomb immured,
And death, so cruel to me, doth woe afford,
Taking one who brought me joy in serving,
And for whom I have endless pain endured,
Now my Lady is no longer living.

I wait only to embrace my dying.
To life my heart now proves an enemy.
Death is cowardly, in not complying,
Since he slays each and every one but me,
Sparing nor the beautiful nor wealthy.
And yet despite all the fruitless working
Of grief and torment, there I go seeking
The death, in fear, that their pain might conjure.
Ah! Why did she with but half-death injure
Me, without its true completion bringing?
My fate is but to live on in languor,
Now my Lady is no longer living.

'Or my deep desire shall sate me' ('Ou mon desire m'assouvira')

Or my deep desire shall sate me,
Or my sorrow else will slay me,
Through you, fair one, in a moment,
If my heart but seeks an easement
Of the sorrow I feel nigh me.

One of the two I'll know, truly,
No longer shall hope deceive me;
Or harsh words are your intent,
Or my deep desire shall sate me.

All good or ill shall flee from me,
Whene'er from your sweet mouth only,
There comes refusal or assent,
As your lips deliver judgement;
Then either my woe must end me,
Or my deep desire shall sate me.

**'Near to my lady, far from my desire' ('Près de ma dame et loing de
mon vouloir')**

Near to my lady, far from my desire,
Filled with longing that doth fear resemble,
My heart doth fail me, my lips they tremble,
When they must utter that which they desire.

I say: 'Fair one, from sorrows I expire,
Yet fear almost makes my lips dissemble,
Near to my lady, far from my desire.

To not one other thing do I aspire,
But her in whom all virtues assemble,
Dare I surmount that which makes me tremble,
Seeking what worth in me must e'er inspire,
Near to my lady, far from my desire.

**'Rich in hope and poor in other treasure' ('Riche d'espoir et povre
d'autre bien')**

Rich in hope and poor in other treasure,
Full of sorrow, and empty of delight,
I beg you, my loyal mistress, of right,

Take not from me what's mine in full measure.

If I should lose it, all that I, at leisure,
Have secured, then I am empty quite;
Rich in hope and poor in other treasure.

Suffering for you, all at your pleasure,
I suffer only ill both day and night;
I love too deeply what is e'er in flight.
May Pity make me hers in full measure,
Rich in hope and poor in other treasure.

**'Sorrowful pleasure, and dolorous joy' ('Triste plaisir et douloureuse
joye')**

Sorrowful pleasure, and dolorous joy,
Tedious comfort and bitter sweetness,
Tears, laughter, memory, forgetfulness,
Accompany me, who thus lone hours employ.

They are concealed, the woes that life destroy,
In my heart, behind my eyes' deep darkness,
Sorrowful pleasure, and dolorous joy.

They are my wealth, the share that I enjoy,
Such that Trouble envies me to excess;
Twould be well if he saw me garner less,
Since he lacks that which Love doth here deploy:
Sorrowful pleasure, and dolorous joy.

The End of the Selected Poems of Alain Chartier