

Charles d'Orléans

One Hundred Selected Ballades and Rondeaux

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Introduction

Charles D'Orléans (1394-1465) became Duke of Orléans in 1407, after the assassination of his father. His grandfather was Charles V of France, his uncle Charles VI. Charles himself was captured at the battle of Agincourt in 1415, at the age of twenty, and spent twenty-five years confined in England, ransom being denied him on the instructions of Henry V, due to his political importance. His ballades and rondeaux in French, are some of the finest and most delightful lyric works of the later medieval period, and herald the formal elegance and individual style of the Renaissance.

He was eventually released in 1440, supposedly 'speaking better English than French,' and on his return to France married, at the age of 46, his third wife, the fourteen-year-old Marie of Cleves, their son later becoming Louis XII of France. Though Charles also wrote a number of less-distinguished poems in English, during and after his imprisonment, it is the poems in his native tongue that entitle him to rank among the great lyricists.

Ballades

(En la forest d'ennuyeuse tristesse)

Through the Forest of Gloomy Sadness,
I chanced to make my way one day,
And there I met with Love's Goddess
Who spoke and asked why I did stray.
I said: 'Fortune decreed this day,
And exiled me, here, long ago,
Rightly I call myself, always,
A man who wanders a path unknown.'

Smiling, in her great humbleness,
She answered: 'Friend, if you could say
Why you are filled with this distress,
I'd seek to help you in every way:
I set your heart on the road that day,
To joy. Who has led it awry so?
It troubles me now to see you stray,
A man who wanders a path unknown.'

'Alas!' I said, my sovereign Princess,
What should I say? You know my fate.
It's Death, who brings us mournfulness.
He has taken the one I loved away,
She in whom all my fond hopes lay,
Who guided me: as my friend below,
While she lived, so I need not play
A man who wanders a path unknown.

Blind I am, cast adrift today:
Here and there with a staff I stray
Lest I'm quite lost, feeling my road:
Great shame it is, I must be alway
A man who wanders a path unknown.'

(Belle, bonne, nompareille, plaisant)

Fair lady, pleasing, without peer,
I beg that you might pardon me,
If I, that your grace attend on here,
Come before you on bended knee.
I can muse no longer, privately,
But you must know of my distress,
As she who might my solace be,
For I hold you my sole mistress.

Strength of love demands, I fear,
That I speak of my ills so openly,
For to your true service I adhere,
Since the first day that I did see
Beauty that none doth come near,
That would bring joy in excess,
If as your servant I might appear,
For I hold you my sole mistress.

May you grant me a gift so dear,
For I dare not ask it, certainly.
Yet if it please that, year by year,
I might spend life thus, my plea
Is: refuse not my request sincere,
But suffer so my youth to bless.
Naught else offers such cheer,
For I hold you my sole mistress.

(Dame, qui cuidiez trop savoir)

Lady, who think yourself so wise,
– Though your wisdom to folly turn –
Who think to deceive, with your lies
And pretty ruses, those who yearn,
Thinking a welcome they discern,
Though swiftly tangled in your net,
No, you shall not my homage earn,
You will not own my presence yet!

You seem to think that my two eyes
Do not perceive your every turn!
Yet I see your tricks, and I discern
Your thoughts, such things I spurn:
Your follies are your own concern;
Go play elsewhere, and others fret,
But you shall not my homage earn,
You will not own my presence yet!

You'd have perfected your disguise,
If you my defence should overturn,
For night and morn, tis no surprise
To me of your false ploys to learn.
You summon: but only fools return.
Amuse yourself, fresh lies beget:
But you shall not my homage earn,
You will not own my presence yet!

(N'a pas long temps qu'alay parler)

Tis not long since that I sought
To address my heart, secretly,
Counselling it that it ought
To scorn all amorous reverie.
But it answered, traitorously:
'I beg you, your speech arrest,
With God's aid am I a lover;
Since I've chosen the loveliest:
For thus do my eyes discover.'

I said: 'Pardon me, if I wrought,
Ill, for I swear to you, sincerely,
That I wish only to see you taught
Good counsel, given most loyally.
Will you, without hope of mercy,
End your life by grief possessed?'
'No,' said my heart, 'I'll see better.
My lady doth to sweet love attest:
For thus do my eyes discover.'

'Do you think then to know aught,
From but a single glance merely,'
I said, 'command all her thought;
Or from her sweet greeting only?'
'Be silent!' it cried, 'For truly,
Naught I credit thus expressed,
But I will at all times serve her,
For with all virtue is she blessed:
For thus do my eyes discover.'

(En ce joyeux temps du jour d'uy)

At this joyous time, this day
On which we shun displeasure,
In the smiling dawn of May,
When all seek sweet leisure,
I find myself, beyond measure
Removed from all happiness,
Filled thus with grief entire,
– I lie not – which I possess
All contrary to my desire.

Love, I encounter none today,
Who wins not some pleasure,
Except myself who is, I'd say,
The sorriest Frenchman ever,
Since I lost hope, my treasure;
For when, to you, as I confess,
To pledge myself I did aspire,
I thought not to know distress,
All contrary to my desire.

Since this state I now betray,
I must due penitence measure,
Fled to Loyalty, where I stay,
And in whom I trust forever.
Nor Suspicion, whose pleasure
Tis to thwart me, with excess
Of suffering and torment dire,
Shall thereby achieve success,
All contrary to my desire.

Many a time I seek redress,
Towards fair solace would retire,
Yet naught find but doth oppress,
All contrary to my desire.

(Loué soit celui qui trouva)

Praised be the first who found,
Long since, the art of writing;
Great comfort to lovers, bound
In martyrdom, they did bring;
For when lovers cannot sing
Of their lady, all is torment
While solace it doth represent,
If, through letters, they can send
News, and so their ills present,
As both a good and loyal friend.

When a lover conveys something
Of the grief with which he's crowned,
As soon as onward it doth wing
To her by whom he's spellbound,
– If she's pleased to hear it sound –
There she can view, to all intent,
His mind's sorry government.
And Pity she can then extend,
For him true recompense invent,
As both a good and loyal friend.

My heart has long been pining,
In such a state, for I have found
It knows no peace until it bring
Itself to write, its pain expound
To the fair one, here earthbound.
And if, then, to some small extent,
It might the news of her augment,
She with whom none can contend,
All ill's forgot, by which tis rent
As both a good and loyal friend.

Lady, God grant that my lament
You'll hear, and an ear will lend
To all I endure, though innocent,
As both a good and loyal friend.

(En la nef de bonne nouvelle)

Aboard the vessel of good news,
Hope has embarked fair Comfort,
To carry it to my sad heart whose
Love is great – my lady's thought.
So may it reach, in joy, the port
Of desire, and to journey surely
Over the sea of Fortune, swiftly
Find a fair wind out of France,
Where dwells my mistress bright,
Who is my sweet remembrance,
My treasure and my true delight.

I hold to her greatly, my muse,
For I have heard faithful report
That gainst Suspicion – I accuse
The rebel, who's unjustly brought
Me to harm – she oft has sought,
With all her strength to succour me.
And so she sends, beyond the sea,
This vessel, pleasure to advance
So furnishing my fortress aright,
My heart's hope there to enhance,
My treasure and my true delight.

Thus my will is such I choose,
And shall forever, to consort
Till my death, and ne'er refuse,
With Loyalty, my last resort
And refuge, my heart's fair port.
I shall dwell there endlessly,
In my thanks to Love be free,
Who granted me acquaintance
With a princess of such might,
So loyal, true in every glance,
My treasure and my true delight.

God guard that vessel carefully
From such brigands as may be,
Who with Suspicion make alliance;
For, if he can, he well may blight
Its voyage here and seize, by chance,
My treasure and my true delight.

(I'ay ou tresor de ma pensee)

In the treasury of my thought
I have a mirror that this year
Love, as a fair gift, has bought
For me which to me is dear,
Where I view the beauty clear
Of one that they rightly name
The most beautiful in France;
And love to gaze into that same,
Waiting on the winds of chance.

Naught pleases more, in short,
Nor of more value doth appear,
Since to its glass I oft resort,
Lamenting my harsh fate here;
Nor hath my heart joy, I fear,
Unless a view of her it claim
Those eyes, that joyous glance,
Passing time within its frame,
Waiting on the winds of chance.

I dream, whene'er I'm brought
Within its shining depths to peer,
That all sadness shuns its court.
Thus I, finding there good cheer,
And Loyalty's fair counsel near,
Desire to set it, such is my aim,
In my deep coffer of remembrance,
Closely guarding its bright flame,
Waiting on the winds of chance.

(Se je povoye mes souhaits)

If my longing and my sighs
I could command to fly away
When within my heart they rise,
I would despatch them this day,
Beyond the sea, o'er the way,
To one who, with every breath,
I love, my earthly delight,
Whom I shall take, till my death,
For my sovereign mistress bright.

Alas! Will I ever meet her eye?
Sweetest Thought what do you say?
Hope has promised me yes, then why
Am I made to suffer such long delay,
And why, if I ask his help, when I
Am in greatest need, is he asleep?
Thus do I suffer day and night,
Great trouble and sorrow I reap,
For my sovereign mistress bright.

I find no peace, none, under the sky,
Ill-Fortune wishes my peace away.
All in all, I wish time would fly,
Yet I say naught from day to day,
Thinking to have, if then I may,
Through Loyalty my refuge ever,
The gift of joy, granted outright,
In recompense for all I suffer
For my sovereign mistress bright.

(Fresche beauté, tresriche de jeunesse)

Fresh beauty, a wealth of youthfulness,
Bright glances, arrows lovingly sent,
Pleasant speech that wise words bless,
A form with all feminine graces blent,
Nobility, yet paired with sweet intent,
A humble address, where joy is shown,
And truth doth its fairest face display,
Winning praise from one and all, I say:
Such great virtues doth my lady own.

Song and dance suit this fair princess
So perfectly, all the joys we frequent,
That of them we count her the mistress.
And so graciously all she does is meant,
That none might such fair grace augment.
She might hold courtesy's chair alone:
On seeing her, those with wisdom may
Gain and those who do attention pay:
Such great virtues doth my lady own.

Goodness, Honour and Gentleness
Have her heart in their government,
And Loyalty night and day no less.
Nature showed all her finest intent
In forming her, and her graces lent:
She the most accomplished known,
Who is living in this world today,
I praise, yet say but what all do say:
Such great virtues doth my lady own.

More than woman she seems, a goddess.
I think that God to this world has sent
Her, solely to show His fine largess,
These highest gifts He doth present
In her, with such great abandonment.
She has no peer; what different tone
Should I adopt, what tune now play?
All insufficient the words I weigh:
Such great virtues doth my lady own.

If any there are who drown in sadness
Now let them view true joy's advent!
I'm sure all lingering trace of illness
Will swiftly flee, and their pain relent,
And be thus replaced by true content.
Paradise is in her company known,
She pleases all, none doth she dismay,
Who sees her, would but have her stay:
Such great virtues doth my lady own.

All ladies who hear the sweet ascent
Of this praise, and my love's extent,
Forgive me now, and may I atone!
I speak not thus to lessen your sway,
But, as hers, my loyalty must display:
Such great virtues doth my lady own.

(Le lendemain du premier jour de may)

The morning after the first of May
While I lay sleeping in my bed,
All in a dream, at the break of day,
I thought I saw a flower that said:
'My friend, to trust I e'er was wed;
I thought you ever of my party;
And yet you have forgotten me,
The green leaf you now support.
I wonder you work so cruelly:
I did no wrong to you, I thought.

Thus was I filled with sore dismay,
Speaking what came into my head:
'Fair flower, I ne'er in any way
Thought that you might be misled;
For if by chance I served instead
The leaf, all this year, faithfully,
Should I be banished recklessly?
No, I have done but as I ought.
Though I did serve another party,
I did no wrong to you, I thought.

Despite that, I honour you today
Willingly, for to that I'm bred,
All for love of the flower I say
I've loved. God willing, I'll be led
To her, in heaven when I am dead,
So, flower, now I pray you dearly,
Lament not, for you witness clearly
There's no reason to grieve for aught,
If I but did what I must, you see.
I did no wrong to you, I thought.

The truth is this that I say to thee,
Let Love judge me in Love's court.
Sweetest flower, I'll cry not mercy;
I did no wrong to you, I thought.

(Je ne crains Dangier ne les siens)

Nor Suspicion, nor aught of his,
Do I fear, in my mighty fortress,
Where my heart hides all its bliss,
Its comfort, and its true happiness;
And I've made Loyalty its mistress,
Who will guard the place securely.
I defy Suspicion, all his crudeness,
For the God of Love will aid me.

And Reason will be mine in this,
Such the promise he doth profess,
And Hope too shall not go amiss,
My dear friend, whose great prowess
Has often chased away Distress,
And harmed Suspicion grievously.
But I care naught for his sadness,
For the God of Love will aid me.

Tis why, to you, my heart, this is
My sole request: that you express
Courage; attack, all fear dismiss,
Defy Suspicion, and seek redress!
If you could but find the hardiness
To assail him, he'll bend the knee.
I'll assist you in all faithfulness,
For the God of Love will aid me.

If you will help, my fair princess,
I think full soon that hour I'll see
When great good I shall possess;
For the God of Love will aid me.

(Quant Souvenir me ramentoit)

When Memory doth for me recall
That great beauty which twas plain
Was hers, whom my heart did call
His lady, who o'er him did reign,
And of all good the true fountain,
She, who has passed, but recently,
I say, while weeping tenderly:
'We cleave but to this world in vain.'

For in times past it did befall
That Creseid, Yseult, Elaine,
And many another, beauties all,
Were sung of, and in noble strain.
Yet, at the last, to his domain
Death snatched them piteously;
From all of which we clearly see:
'We cleave but to this world in vain.'

Death would wish to cast his pall,
– Well I know – and spare no pain,
Over all pleasure, hold us in thrall,
And have no worldly joy remain,
Such beauty escorting in his train,
From the world; for it seems to me,
That, without them, in all verity,
'We cleave but to this world in vain.'

Love, indeed, this truth is certain,
Death opposes you most cruelly;
If you lack, for that, true remedy,
'We cleave but to this world in vain.'

Note: Creseid is the Cressida of Troilus and Cressida; Yseult is the Isolde of Tristan and Isolde, Elaine is Helen of Troy.

(I'ay fait l'obsequ de ma dame)

These obsequies for my lady
I've performed at Love's shrine,
While sad Thought sang a lordly
Mass for her pure soul divine.
Many a candle there doth shine,
Of sad sighs, among the rest;
Her tomb of regrets is dressed
With tears, freshly shed anew,
And all around it, most richly,
Is inscribed: 'Here lies, truly,
The paragon of earthly virtue.

Above her, a stone's set, wholly
Of gold and sapphires its design.
For sapphire stands for loyalty,
And joyfulness doth gold define.
The two there fittingly entwine,
For God, that made her, blessed
This noble lady and His bequest
Of joyfulness, with loyalty too,
On forming her so wondrously,
He'd portray; for such was she,
The paragon of earthly virtue.

Speak no more! The heart in me,
Fails, on hearing of her benign
Deeds, performed with honesty,
The judgement of all who repine,
That knew her counsel, as tis mine.
I think it was at God's behest
That she has gone to be his guest
In paradise, where saints review
As fair an ornament as might be,
She whom all here name, freely,
The paragon of earthly virtue.

Tears and sighs naught can do:
All must die, or late or early,
And none view here, eternally,
The paragon of earthly virtue.

(Mon coeur au derrain entrera)

My heart, at last, you'll travel to
That paradise where lovers meet,
Or a mighty wrong be done you,
For you've suffered bittersweet
Travails, many a sad conceit,
To serve your beauteous mistress.
Suspicion holds you cruelly too,
In the purgatory of deep Distress.

That false traitor's held you in mew
Long years, among his hideous suite.
Yet Hope says he'll be banished anew,
And I must not doubt, tis no deceit.
Yet long the delay, and thus I entreat:
God grant Hope may keep its promise
Towards my heart, lest sad ill ensue,
In the purgatory of deep Distress.

Love will give alms, for they are due
To you, in mercy, nor shall mistreat
One, whom each he and she will view,
Who serve Love here, and shall greet
With true respect, to see Love treat
Him graciously, with great kindness,
And save a poor sufferer from defeat,
In the purgatory of deep Distress.

(Douleur, Courroux, Desplaisir et Tristesse)

Grief, and Pain, Care, and Sadness,
Though my torment, night and day,
Such that I fear I'll die of distress,
I'll ne'er be so much in your sway
That my true wish can be sent astray,
My desire, to serve that fair one,
From whom I think to win, and may,
The very best gift under the sun.

If I suffer, through you, pains in excess,
Then Hope's counsel doth them allay,
Who promises that my sole mistress
Twill tell of the ills that on me weigh,
That in the devotion which I display,
I suffer more ills than anyone.
Then I shall have, if it so convey,
The very best gift under the sun.

Spare me no part then of your harshness!
For I'd have you see, with scant delay,
That I'll win comfort from happiness;
For I cannot remain for long this way,
Which is why I easily hold at bay
These ills, with which I'm overrun;
And shall gain, much to your dismay,
The very best gift under the sun.

I am he whose heart's clad in grey,
Yet sing thus, to all and everyone:
I'll have, with Loyalty my mainstay,
The very best gift under the sun.

(Quant je suy couschié en mon lit)

When I am lying in my bed
I never can rest there in peace:
All the night my Heart's well read
In Sweet Thought's fair history,
He has me listening carefully.
Who dare disobey? Not I,
For fear He may angered be:
So I let sleep slip by.

In that book are written, I said,
The tales of my wondrous lady:
Often hearing them in my head,
My Heart laughs right joyfully,
They are praised so truthfully,
And they raise him so on high:
Of them I too am never weary:
So I let sleep slip by.

If my eyelids seek rest instead,
And Drowsiness makes them heavy,
My Heart berates them, and yet
Still can't gain the mastery:
He sighs there, ceaselessly,
All to himself, without a lie
Soothing him is hard for me:
So I let sleep slip by.

Oh! Love, I cannot easily
Rule my Heart, day and night
He wishes to serve you, endlessly:
So I let sleep slip by.

(Se Dieu plaist, briefment la nuee)

Soon, if God wills, the shadow
Of my sorrow will pass away,
When the lovely one, I love so,
And fine weather, are on display:
Know you when twill be; that day?
When the sweet light, in gracious wise,
Of your beauty itself shall play
Through the windows of my eyes.

For then thought's chamber will glow
With great joy and, with sweet array
Of delights, present its lovely show.
And my heart will awake that day
That with grief doth so often lay,
And sleep no more, when brightness flies
And its rays strike, with God's good aid,
Through the windows of my eyes.

Alas! When may I hope to know
Such a happening, such a day?
My mistress I have longed for so,
Soon will it be, do you think, oh say?
For my heart will languish alway
In gloom, without power to rise,
Until it sees that brightness play
Through the windows of my eyes.

Comfort into my heart will flow,
As great as any beneath the skies,
When it looks out at you, love, so,
Through the windows of my eyes.

(Ce premier jour du mois de may)

This very first day of the month of May
Is treating me courteously:
For just as I feel naught today,
At heart, but pain and misery,
The day is also equally
Troubled, rain-drenched, and windblown:
How otherwise it used to be
In days that I have known.

I think he's doing his best, I'd say,
To keep me faithful company:
And I'm content, in truth, for they,
The wretched, find their thoughts may be
Greatly lightened, in tragedy,
When a faithful friend they own.
I have proved it certainly,
In days that I have known.

Alas! I've seen May, happy, at play,
So lovely for all who may be,
That I could never fully relate
All the pleasure, the jollity
Of which he had the mastery:
For Love in his abbey alone
Appointed him head of the See,
In days that I have known.

The times now run beyond me,
May God better them swiftly,
For Pleasure is lying low,
Who used to live so joyously
In days that I have known.

(En regardant vers le païs de France: Mai 1433)

Gazing towards the shores of France,
From Dover Castle, beyond the sea,
I recalled the delights fair chance
Had brought me in that dear country.
Heart-sighs the memory drew from me,
Thinking how sweet if I might but go
And visit that France, that I love so.

I knew the folly of such a stance,
Twas unwise to sigh, in such degree,
Within my heart, for I saw, perchance,
The road to peace opening, presently;
Thus solace came to set thought free.
My heart still longed to voyage, though,
And visit that France, that I love so.

Thus with my yearnings, at a glance,
I loaded Hope's vessel, with the plea
That over the waters they might dance,
And commend me to France speedily.
May God bring peace and not tardily!
For, if it come, I the same might know,
And visit that France, that I love so.

Peace is a treasure praised endlessly.
I hate war; and prize it not, you see,
For, rightly or wrongly, I cannot go,
And visit that France, that I love so.

(Je fu en fleur ou temps passé d'enfance)

Of my lost days of childhood, the flower,
Later, in youth, I became the fruit:
Then, green, unripe, from the tree of Pleasure,
My mistress, Folly, cast me at its foot.
Because of it, Reason, who when it suits
Puts right all things, without ill intention,
In her great wisdom, did as she should:
I'm left to ripen on straw in prison.

And I've lingered an endless time here,
With not a taste of the air of freedom:
Yet I rest content: for doubtless I fear
Tis all for the best though I've become
By idleness drained as age draws on.
In me every spark of foolish passion
Is dead since, hid from everyone,
I'm left to ripen on straw in prison.

God forge us a peace, that's my desire!
Then I'll be quickly refreshed for one,
Wiped clean of the stain of unhappiness,
In France again, there, taking the sun:
I wait fair weather, a humble man,
Hoping that God will grant salvation:
That's why He's done what He has done:
I'm left to ripen on straw in prison.

I'm a fruit of winter, and so less tender
Than fruit of summer: thus their decision
Is to let my hard greenness turn softer:
I'm left to ripen on straw in prison.

(Balades, chansons et complaintes)

Ballads, songs and plaintive rhymes
All are long forgot, by me,
For I've been held an endless time
Numbed with sadness and ennui.
Yet to dispel anxiety,
As I once did, I'll try and see
If I can make true poetry.
At least I'll do my very best,
Though I know, and understand,
I'll find the language of my land
All rusted away by this Neglect.

The stream of pleasant words runs dry,
In me, now stale with age's folly,
But I'll still follow my desire
Even with true speech denied me.
So I beg all who heard me speak
Long ago in youthful freshness,
When I was full of joyousness,
To excuse what they may reject.
Never before have I seemed a man
So coarse of speech, in truth I am
All rusted away by this Neglect.

Lovers have words that please the eye,
And language all fresh and green,
All the pleasures that they try,
Speak for them: I too have been,
Though no more, of that company;
There I found the loveliest speech,
Most easily, whenever I wished;
So I squandered all my finesse,
And I'll find whate'er I retain,
When tis put to the test again,
All rusted away by this Neglect.

I should be immune from all this,
But they may say I yield amiss
Without a blow, where we expect,
Good Hope says, a youth renewed:
So I'll go burnish my heart anew,
All rusted away by this Neglect.

(Je meurs de soif en couste la fontaine)

I die of thirst beside the fountain,
Trembling with cold and love's fire;
Blind I am, yet I see things plain;
Witless; and yet of wisdom's choir,
Full careless; yet discipline admire.
But to this one thing I am wed:
Well or ill, I'm by Fortune led.

Now I gain time, now tis lost again;
I laugh when all things seem dire;
All hope gone, I hope maintain;
Filled with regret, to joy aspire;
Naught pleases, yet I still desire;
Joyful, sad thoughts fill my head;
Well or ill, I'm by Fortune led.

I talk too much, in silence strain:
Fear, yet with courage am afire;
Sadness happiness doth enchain:
In one of the two states I suspire,
And feign good cheer, when in the mire:
Am in good health yet almost dead,
Well or ill, I'm by Fortune led.

Prince, one day, on some vast pyre
I'll heap my wealth and fate entire,
Risk all at hazard for, as I've said:
Well or ill, I'm by Fortune led.

(Le premier jour du mois de may)

The very first day of the month of May
I found myself in fair company
Among those, truth tis I say,
Adorned with grace, completely;
And to stave off melancholy
It was ordained that we select
As Fortune herself might elect,
Either the leaf full of verdure
Or the flower to keep eternally.
I took the leaf for my livery,
As at a chance I did venture.

Not long after this, I may say,
I saw I had chosen full wisely,
For, since death took my love away,
The flower, blessed with every beauty,
That was my soul and my lady,
She who, dear in every respect,
Did, of her grace, my love affect,
I, in other flowers, find no cure.
So thus my choice did well agree,
Twas in accord, with my destiny,
As at a chance I did venture.

Thus I bear ever the leaf today,
And ne'er omit it forgetfully,
And hold myself, in every way
In my power, of her true party.
For no flower do I harbour envy,
– Let him who may with it be decked! –
For the flower I've loved, so perfect,
More than I e'er loved any creature,
From this world was forced to flee,
Who gave me her love graciously.
As at a chance I did venture.

Nor leaf nor flower can here endure
But for a time; for, indeed, in me
That truth was proven, utterly,
As at a chance I did venture.

(Je, qui suis Fortune nommee)

I whom Fortune people name
Demand now the reason why
I am thought of such ill-fame,
That none do here on me rely.
And constancy in me deny;
For as their hand I seize on so
I raise them upward to success;
Whence they all downward go,
For I am she who is mistress.

So I wrongly take the blame,
For I but play the role that I
Was set, that God did frame,
Long ago, ordained on high,
To correct the world thereby.
And so if, from me, doth flow,
Oftentimes, wealth in excess,
I may revoke what I bestow,
For I am she who is mistress.

My custom is e'er the same,
All know it, and so testify,
There is naught new in the game,
Thus I do, and must comply.
I mock at those who decry,
Malcontents, the to and fro:
Let them greet joy or distress
Equally, whate'er wind blow;
For I am she who is mistress.

Accept it then, all, high or low,
Young or old, who wits possess;
Whoe'er knows not, yet I know,
For I am she who is mistress.

(En acquittant nostre temps vers jeunesse)

To pay homage now to youthfulness,
The New Year and the season's beauty,
Filled with pleasure and joyfulness,
– Each of which we all prize greatly –
We are come for this mummery,
The good, the fair, pleasant, gracious,
Ready to dance, and from care be free,
Awakening thought sweet and joyous.

So banish indifference, idleness,
Tedium, sadness, anxiety,
For chill winter, in his rude dress,
Is discomfited, and forced to flee!
April and May the sweet life see;
With them, prepare, along with us,
To receive their pleasant company,
Awakening thought sweet and joyous.

Venus too, so noble a goddess,
Who of woman must mistress be,
Offers you comfort and largesse,
And pleasure enriched by artistry,
And charges you to do your duty,
Acquit yourselves while true to us;
Aid all we do, and work diligently,
Awakening thought sweet and joyous.

(Par les fenestres de mes yeulx)

Through the windows of my eyes,
In times past, when I took the air,
– God save me – it seemed the skies
Shone on greater beauties there,
Than they do now, yet I'm aware
That I was aflame with joyousness,
At the hands of my lady Youthfulness.

Now I am older, tis small surprise,
If I read in joy's book so fair,
Then bright glasses, better spies
To read its letters, I must wear...
Yet what I see doth not compare!
Oh, I knew not such feebleness
At the hands of my lady Youthfulness.

Young folk, for you doth time devise
Such a fate, if you follow me where
I'm gone; for none still, I surmise,
Lacks oft of foolishness his share;
Such that Reason shall not forbear
To count the cost of our sad excess,
At the hands of my lady Youthfulness.

God shed his grace now everywhere!
And those who wander let Him spare,
And, at His pleasure, their path redress,
At the hands of my lady Youthfulness.

(En la forest de Longue Actente)

Through the Forest of Long Delay,
On paths diverse, this year, I rode,
And, passing swiftly on my way,
The journey of desire I followed.
My escort all before me flowed,
Who went my lodgings to prepare,
In the castle of Destiny,
And, for my heart and I, find there
Thought's most pleasant hostelry.

I'd forty mounts with me each day,
And others with my escort showed,
More than sixty, in truth, I'd say,
Without the mules and their load.
A rough camp was our poor abode,
If there was but little room to spare;
However it did much content me
To take for a night, and better fare,
Thought's most pleasant hostelry.

I spent my wealth; each day's affair
Some bold adventure it bestowed,
About which Fortune doth despair,
For Suspicion such doth forebode.
But from my hopes – if they do bode
Well, and keep their promises fair –
I think to form so great an army
I'll gain, despite my foes, I swear,
Thought's most pleasant hostelry.

True God of paradise, my prayer,
Is that your grace I might yet see,
Such that I find, beyond all care,
Thought's most pleasant hostelry.

(Le beau souleil, le jour saint Valentin)

Not long past, in the early morning,
The white sun, and his candle-shine,
Into my close chamber came stealing
Upon that day of Saint Valentine.
All the brightness he had brought
Wakened me from the sleep of Care,
In which I'd passed the whole night there,
On the hard bed of Wearied Thought.

On that day, too, the birds came flocking
To share what they had of Love's treasure,
Aloud in their own sweet Latin calling,
Demanding Nature grant equal measure;
All she ordained for them they sought:
A mate that is, as each might select.
Their noise was such none could have slept
On the hard bed of Wearied Thought.

Drenching my pillow with tear on tear,
I wept for my cruel destiny,
Saying: 'You birds can have little fear
Of finding the joy and pleasure you seek:
Each one an agreeable mate has caught
While I've none, for Death's betrayed me,
Taken my mate, so I languish sadly,
On the hard bed of Wearied Thought.

Let them choose a Valentine as they ought
Those men and women of Love's party,
This year I'm alone, no ease for me,
On the hard bed of Wearied Thought.

(Mon coeur vous adjourne, Viellesse)

Age, you've had my heart arraigned,
By Right, the officer of the court,
Before Reason, the judge ordained
To try where true justice is sought.
Since the claim you have brought
There, against my heart and I,
You have, by means of tyranny,
Delivered us to Melancholy,
Not knowing the reason why.

Youth, it was, that once retained
Us; raised us with tender thought;
In pleasure, solace we obtained,
And every kind of joyous sport:
Yet otherwise you have wrought.
You, i' faith, are shamed thereby,
Who, in wretchedness and misery,
Consume our time, so uselessly,
Not knowing the reason why.

What purpose indeed is gained,
If we in sorrow's net are caught?
With cruelty, thus maintained,
Can truth and honour consort?
No, for all hold you as naught,
Age, and they give you the lie,
Crying: 'That old rascal, he
With every ill keeps company,
Not knowing the reason why.

Saint Martin's Day has brought
A time when advocates purport
To plead a case, and judges try.
Take good counsel, is my plea,
And launch no action, recklessly,
Not knowing the reason why.

Note: Saint Martin's Day, falling on the 11th of November, was a time when the lawyers' clerks in Paris staged mock trials, the 'causes grasses', intended to mock their elders.

(Yeulx rougis plains de piteux pleurs)

Red eyes, wet with bitter tears,
Ribs where hope dies, inwardly,
Head filled with its sad fears,
Delirium, thoughts all at sea.
Body riddled, of comfort free,
A heart laid on a bed of nails,
Such the misery that prevails,
Come the winds of melancholy.

Migraine, whose ardour sears,
Vertigo, since sleep doth flee,
Fever's hot quivering spears,
Sharp pains troubling reverie,
Thirst unquenched and, cruelly,
Sorrow, that doth sweat full pails,
Stammering, as all speech fails,
Come the winds of melancholy.

Gout, that now torments our peers,
Colic, from sheer stupidity,
Gallstones, to assail our years,
Rage, induced by utter folly,
Swellings, raised by the dropsy,
Ills that leave us thin as rails,
Deafness, that our state entails,
Come the winds of melancholy.

Naught can cure our malady,
Not medicine, or surgery,
Astrologers, enchanters' tales,
Can ease the sad heart's travails
Come the winds of melancholy.

(De jamais n'amer par amours)

Sometimes I long, in my despair,
Never to love through love again,
Since I'm so often forced to bear
A weight of grievous hurt and pain.
Yet, in the end, the truth is plain,
Whatever pain I might endure,
I tell you, now, most sincerely,
I know no way to make secure
My heart that holds the mastery.

I've known many a strange affair,
Yet treat them all in careless vein,
Thinking to gain my safety there
Where solace or sweet hope remain.
Alas, if I had the power, I'd fain
Find the surest way to withdraw –
By the oath I owe Love, be free –
And never let it wander more,
My heart that holds the mastery.

For I see, clearly, with sweet care
Love well knows how the heart to gain,
Wishing to keep what it doth snare,
And rest forever where it doth reign;
Nor all the ills it doth ordain
Wishes to know of, or deplore.
Pleasure's its ploy to compass me,
Working to catch for evermore
My heart that holds the mastery.

Such speech as this I do abhor,
But, by God, in whom I believe,
Tis come of longing to restore
My heart that holds the mastery.

(Bien moustrez, Printemps gracieux)

Sweetly you show us, gracious Spring,
What office you serve when here,
For Winter sorrow to hearts doth bring,
But you spread fresh joy and cheer.
As soon as he sees you venture near,
He and his wretched retinue
Are forced to swiftly disappear,
As we joyously welcome you.

Winter makes fields feel age's sting,
And snow to white boughs adhere;
So cold, the rain wets everything,
While we crouch by the fire; tis drear;
No none go forth at this time of year,
We're like hawks still kept in mew;
But you return to us all that's dear,
As we joyously welcome you.

Winter, the heavens blanketing,
Cloaks with cloud the sun's bright sphere,
But, God be praised, at your coming
The skies will once again shine clear;
More beautiful all things appear.
Winter has vanished, tis true;
For, Spring, you banish all fear,
As we joyously welcome you.

Rondeaux

(Le temps a laissé son manteaux)

Winter has cast his cloak away
Of wind, and cold, and falling rain;
Dressed in embroidery again,
The clear and lovely light of day.

There's not a bird or beast, I say,
But in its own tongue sings so plain:
'Winter has cast his cloak away.'

Fountain, river and stream that play
Wear, with their bright livery
Silver drops of jewellery:
Everything makes its fresh display:
Winter has cast his cloak away.

Note: This rondeau was set to music by Debussy in his 'Trois chansons de France,' L115(102).

(L'un ou l'autre desconfira)

One or the other must win, say I,
Either my heart or Melancholy;
If Fortune doth with one agree,
The other 'Mercy, I yield!' will cry.

Tis enough if their judge am I,
To put an end to all their folly.
One or the other must win, say I.

God knows if my heart will sigh,
If it should conquer, joyously,
In this season where all is happy.
We'll see what happens, by and by:
One or the other must win, say I.

(Il faudroit faire l'arquemie)

He'd have need of alchemy
Who'd transmute such falsity,
Changing to true loyalty
What's forged of pure mendacity.

Tis to drown the mind in folly,
Waste good time on vanity.
He'd have need of alchemy
Who'd transmute such falsity.

The more devoted to its study
The less he'd end in certainty;
No good's forged of malignity,
The two things are so contrary.
He'd have need of alchemy
Who'd transmute such falsity.

(L'ostellerie de pensee)

The lodging-house of thought
Full of Sighs that come and go,
Whether they be mighty or no,
Is open to all when tis sought.

None are refused for naught,
Fair welcome it will bestow,
The lodging-house of thought.

Pleasure, beloved resort,
Oft lodges there, but Sorrow
Harms it, power doth borrow,
When it occupies its court,
The lodging-house of thought.

(Armez vous de joyeux confort)

Arm yourself with joyous comfort,
I beg of you, my poor heart,
Whom Distress with his vile art,
To wound to death thus has sought.

To its covering shield resort,
Till his warlike mood depart;
Arm yourself with joyous comfort,
I beg of you, my poor heart.

Watch, if he with sleep consort!
Hope cries he will take the part
Of overlord, and fate outsmart,
If Suspicion grieve you aught.
Arm yourself with joyous comfort,
I beg of you, my poor heart.

(Sauves toutes bonnes raisons)

All your fine reasons you may save,
Better to lie and have peace, forsooth,
Than be chastised for telling the truth;
That's why, my heart, we thus behave!

Keeping the silence of the grave
Loses naught, best to stay aloof;
All your fine reasons you may save.

Destroy the peace, a gift God gave,
Speak out, and set light to the roof;
Or learn to be silent, and seek proof,
And await your season to be brave;
All your fine reasons you may save.

(Saint Valentin dit: 'Veez me ça!')

Saint Valentine cries: 'See, I'm here!'
And tempts everyone to choose:
'Let those who would, not refuse;
The custom tis, of many a year!'

If Ash Wednesday doth appear,
And cries: 'Hola!', which will lose?
Saint Valentine cries: 'I am here!'
And tempts everyone to choose.

In brief, one must prove sincere,
And one's prayers at morn peruse;
Yet after dinner, one may amuse
Oneself in choosing, for, I fear,
Saint Valentine cries: 'I am here!'

Note: Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, falls forty-six days before Easter. If Easter falls on April 1st, then Ash Wednesday falls on February 14th, and coincides with Saint Valentine's Day. This occurred in 1431 during Charles' days in England, and in 1442, 1453 and 1464 thereafter.

(Quant j'ay ouÿ le tabourin)

Whenever I hear the tambourine
Sound, to greet the month of May,
I rest in bed, I shun the fray,
And on the pillow my head I lean.

Crying: 'Tis early yet, I ween,
I'll sleep again until full day',
Whenever I hear the tambourine
Sound, to greet the month of May,

Let young folk their profits glean!
While with Nonchalance I stay,
And take my profit another way,
Finding a closer neighbour, pray,
Whenever I hear the tambourine
Sound, to greet the month of May,

Note: This rondeau was set to music by Debussy in his 'Trois chansons de Charles d'Orléans,' L99(92).

(Yver, vous n'estes q'un villain!)

Winter, you're coarse, at best!
While Summer's pleasant to see;
As April and May, who company
Her, at eve and morn, attest.

In Summer the fields in flower,
Wear their livery of verdure,
And many another colour,
By sweet decree of Nature.

But you, Winter, invite as guest
The snow, wind, rain, or hail;
We should banish you to jail!
In honest words expressed:
Winter, you're coarse, at best!

Note: This rondeau was set to music by Debussy in his 'Trois chansons de Charles d'Orléans,' L99(92).

(O tresdevotes creatures)

O devotees, you creatures
Of the hypocrisies of Love,
In what strange ways you move,
Pursuing your adventures!

You hope, so bland your features,
We blind, deaf fools will prove.
O devotees, you creatures
Of the hypocrisies of Love.

You cannot serve two masters.
Follow separate stars above,
Take street or field, they'll prove
To be of diverse natures,
O devotees, you creatures
Of the hypocrisies of Love.

(De quoy vous sert cela, Fourtune)

How does this serve you, Fortune?
Your aim now long, now short;
Now on the wane, now you sport
In full splendour, like the moon.

Never the same, now late, now soon,
All novelties gather at your court.
How does this serve you, Fortune?
Your aim now long, now short.

For such is your habitual tune,
That when to pleading I resort,
You flee; as, after you, I cavort,
And yet to pity you're immune.
How does this serve you, Fortune?

(Le premier jour du mois de may)

On the first day of the month of May,
By darkest green and brown oppressed
– Alas! – I found my heart thus dressed,
God knows, in what piteous array!

I asked my heart to advise me, pray,
Whence came this habit it professed,
On the first day of the month of May,
By darkest green and brown oppressed.

It answered: ‘I know, and I could say,
Yet never by me shall it be expressed.
Affliction has brought it me this day,
Upon me his livery thus he pressed,
On the first day of the month of May,
By darkest green and brown oppressed.

(Vous vistes que je le veoye)

You've noted I have seen
What I would not reveal,
And your eye doth glean
More that I would conceal.

The eye from ambush keen
Leaps out, and truth doth steal.
You've noted I have seen
What I would not reveal.

Too wise those of folly clean,
When Pleasure they do feel,
That with the heart doth deal
As it is wont to do, unseen.
You've noted I have seen
What I would not reveal.

(Dedans l'abisme de douleur)

Within the abyss of distress,
Poor lovers' souls find torment,
Yet, my ladies, you're content
To show them little kindness.

Rescue them from out duress,
Where they suffer and lament,
Within the abyss of distress,
Poor lovers' souls find torment.

If you show not your sweetness,
Blame will oft your path frequent;
The devil, Suspicion, will relent,
And hear your prayerful address:
Within the abyss of distress
Poor lovers' souls find torment.

(Que je vous aime maintenant)

Oh, how I love your scheming,
Though I know your manner
Shows a will inconstant ever,
Enveloped in false seeming!

I trust it not your gleaming,
Tis the dress you wear forever;
Oh, how I love your scheming.

Fret not, pursue your dreaming!
Perfect your work, a clever
Mistress at your weaving ever!
The more I see, the more I sing:
Oh, how I love your scheming.

(Vengeance de mes yeulx)

Vengeance on my eyes,
Could but my heart achieve!
From them it doth receive
Such ills, in many a guise.

Love, that the gods mortifies,
Now to your duty cleave;
Vengeance on my eyes,
Could but my heart achieve!

If they, unwished-for spies,
Thus their deceits still weave,
Then they, both morn and eve,
I'll denounce to the skies:
Vengeance on my eyes,
Could but my heart achieve!

(Vivre et mourir soubz son danger)

To live and die all in his power,
This, Melancholy seeks for me;
Nor doth relent a single hour,
That pleasure I might barely see.

To live so, and thus grief empower,
Would, on my part, be mere folly;
To live and die all in his power.

To seek revenge, and not cower,
With Solace I must allied be;
And Dear Delight, in company,
I would follow to her bower.
To live and die all in his power,
This, Melancholy seeks for me.

(Traytre Regart, et que fais tu)

Traiterous Glance, what would you?
Some new quest, have you in view?
Without due warning, you let fly,
And never know the reason why,
Nor care a whit for what you do.

You're stubborn in your boldness too,
And with your anger all subdued;
Change your foolish ways, say I!
Traiterous Glance, what would you?

You should be beaten naked through
The streets, with a birch or two,
According to the laws on high,
For faith and loyalty you deny;
Tis seen in all that you pursue.

Traiterous Glance, what would you?
Some new quest, have you in view?

(Aidez ce povre cayment)

Come help this poor mendicant,
To you, Sad Sigh, I him commend.
For if alms-giving you intend,
Aid him in his predicament!

So wretched now is his torment,
It seems he doth on death attend,
Come help this poor mendicant,
To you, Sad Sigh, I him commend.

Full generous be your intent,
So he dies not – may God defend
Him – and thus you need not repent,
On the day of Love's Last Judgement!
Come help this poor mendicant,
To you, Sad Sigh, I him commend.

(Et bien, de par Dieu, Esperance)

My God, Hope, is this perchance,
Your desire and your pleasure?
Detaining me, at your leisure,
My fate forever in the balance?

One day kindness is your stance,
The next you hide your treasure;
My God, Hope, is this perchance,
Your desire and your pleasure?

And yet, now I am in the dance,
So I must tread to its measure,
Knowing not the steps forever.
Thus I retreat then I advance;
My God, Hope, is this perchance,
Your desire and your pleasure?

(Tousjours dictes: 'Je vien, je vien!')

Ever you cry: 'I come, I come!'
Hope, I know you all too well;
With you I can scarcely dwell
For with promises I'm numb.

If, in need, tis you I summon,
Carelessly, you wave farewell;
Ever you cry: 'I come, I come!'
Hope, I know you all too well.

You treat me ill, nor e'er dispel
The sighs that in me find room;
Granting naught, such my doom,
For in fine nothings you excel.
Ever you cry: 'I come, I come!'
Hope, I know you all too well.

(Pour nous contenter, vous et moy)

To satisfy us, you and I,
Desire spares naught, loyally
Braves every possibility,
Advances, not asking why!

‘Command me,’ is ever his cry,
‘Ask me aught, I’ll do my duty!’
To satisfy us, you and I,
Desire spares naught, loyally.

‘If I should fail to satisfy,
By Love’s laws I must be
Cast aside, without mercy!
Take my hand; on me rely.’
To satisfy us, you and I,
Desire spares naught, loyally.

(Riens ne valent ses mirlifiques)

They are naught these snippets
These baubles, these trinkets:
Where are you from little pedlar?
Your tray's not worth a medlar,
It seems; no more your pockets.

You hold them dear, like relics.
Do you wish them set in lockets?
They'll not bring you a denier:
They are naught these trinkets
These baubles, these snippets.

They're everywhere such packets,
In every woman's plackets,
So turf out all your pannier,
And I can make a search here,
For something more authentic!
They are naught these snippets
These baubles, these trinkets.

(Laissez aler ces gorgias)

In winter, let the popinjay
Go and whistle up the birds!
See, like frost, those absurds,
It only makes their faces grey.

God knows their arms well may
Freeze, those cut-sleeved herds!
In winter let the popinjay
Go and whistle up the birds!

Shoes, that long points betray,
On his feet each fowler girds;
Cold will find, mark my words,
Under his bare toes, its way.
In winter, let the popinjay
Go and whistle up the birds!

Note: Written in mockery of the élégants, the freluquets, with their long pointed padded shoes, and slashed sleeves, going in winter to hunt birds by imitating their call.

(Passez oultre, decevant Vueil!)

Desire, deceiver, flee what's mine!
Whither that flag do you advance,
Formed of a fair, inviting glance
Under Sweet Welcome's ensign?

Cross you not the boundary line
Of my estate! Elsewhere go prance;
Desire, deceiver, flee what's mine!

You'd have me evermore repine,
And by your art all folk entrance,
Ah! Sable-clad in guile's sly dance,
A clear eye doth your wiles divine!
Desire, deceiver, flee what's mine!

(Onquez feu ne fut sans fumee)

Never the smoke without the fire,
Nor sad heart without thought's choir,
Nor comfort without hopefulness,
Nor happy glance without joy's caress,
Nor bright sun till the cloud lifts higher.

Swiftly, my judgment you'll acquire;
May the wise amend it, as they desire!
What I know I speak, I do confess:
Never the smoke without the fire.

For amusement laughter we require,
Regret a sigh must ever inspire,
A wish is born of longing's excess,
Doubt of a shift in the eye's address –
Tis a thing experience proves entire:
Never the smoke without the fire.

(Ne bien ne mal, mais entre deulx)

Nor well nor ill, but twixt the two
Is how, this day, I find my heart,
Solace and Grief take either part;
Heart sits between, as it oft will do.

It asks of me: 'What would you do?'
Far better if naught my lips impart.
Nor well nor ill, but twixt the two
Is how, this day, I find my heart.

To ladies, and proud peacocks too,
I vow, should Fortune set me apart,
Of Happiness I'll request the art
Of staying true, while I sigh anew,
Nor well nor ill, but twixt the two.

(A trompeur trompeur et demi)

Error on error's heaped alway;
For we do reap as we do sow.
Such do I witness here below:
Such the rule all, and I, obey.

Am I now fluent, in all I say?
From such nettles soup must flow.
Error on error's heaped alway;
For we do reap as we do sow.

Who has not language to convey
His meaning, in speech, must go
Find a translator, as we all know;
And thus, in one or other way,
Error on error's heaped alway!

Note: In the source text, French proverbs are used, which have no exact equivalent in English, a problem Charles no doubt experienced often, during his time in England.

(I'ayme qui m'ayme, autrement non)

I love who loves me, or I love none;
Yet none here do I hate, I know,
For I'd much rather things did go
According to the rule of Reason.

I'll repeat it often, alas, I'm one
Who'll hold ever to this bon mot:
I love who loves me, or I love none;
Yet none here do I hate, I know.

And my sad heart has, sewn upon
His hat, thoughts embroidered so.
For I came from him an hour ago,
And he it was gave me this song:
I love who loves me, or I love none;
Yet none here do I hate, I know.

(Avez vous dit – laissez me dire! –)

Have you e'er said – let me speak! –
You lovers who discourse of love:
'Holy Virgin, who dwells above,
How long shall I martyrdom seek?'

You mock me? I hear you shriek!
Think you the contrary to prove?
Have you e'er said – let me speak! –
You lovers who discourse of love:
'Holy Virgin, who dwells above,
How long shall I martyrdom seek?'

I cannot without sighing speak;
For I can recount move on move
In love, all which I disapprove,
That steal all joy, if truth you seek.
Have you e'er said – let me speak! –
You lovers who discourse of love:
'Holy Virgin, who dwells above,
How long shall I martyrdom seek?'

(L'abit le moyne ne fait pas)

The habit doth not the monk make,
The worker by his work is known;
A pleasant face is often shown
That doth hide a fierce toothache.

With sober steps one's way to take,
Doth not one with the wise enthrone;
The habit doth not the monk make,
The worker by his work is known.

A subtle meaning hides its wake,
Enveloped in speech high-flown,
So the heart's desire's unknown.
The habit doth not the monk make,
The worker by his work is known.

(Qui est celluy qui s'en tendroit)

Who is he who can refrain
From scorning Melancholy,
When before our eyes we see
All the world now green again?

Health doth over illness reign,
A dead is now a living tree.
Who is he who can refrain
From scorning Melancholy?

The unhappy man we deign
To call a wretch, lost in folly;
Drive him from our company,
And, rightly, of him complain.
Who is he who can refrain
From scorning Melancholy,
When before our eyes we see
All the world now green again?

(Ostez vous de devant moy)

Depart from before my eyes,
By your sworn oath, Beauty,
For far too oft you tempt me!
Tis wrong; seek peace, be wise!

When I see you, neath the skies,
My state's a mystery,
Depart from before my eyes,
By your sworn oath, Beauty.

Many a delight that I surprise
In you, troubles too easily
My thought, leaves it unfree.
Such all sight of you implies.
Depart from before my eyes,
By your sworn oath, Beauty.

(Esse tout ce que m'apportez)

Is this all you bring to me
On your day, Saint Valentine?
Except for hope then, must I pine,
And linger here, in misery?

Scant encouragement I see
To make true happiness mine:
Is this all you bring to me
On your day, Saint Valentine?

I hear not one word from thee,
Except, in Latin: 'The day is fine'.
Old relic in old satin, no sign
Of aught but these, you decree.
Is this all you bring to me
On your day, Saint Valentine?

(C'est par vous seullement, France)

Through you alone, Confidence,
Do I now find myself deceived;
A brave defence had I achieved,
If I'd but known all in advance.

Besides, when one is in the dance,
All that's said must be believed;
Through you alone, Confidence,
Do I now find myself deceived.

With you I've shunned acquaintance,
Since by me you were perceived,
Surprised me, and were received:
Through you alone, Confidence,
Do I now find myself deceived.

(Par vous, Regart, sergent d'Amours)

By you, Fair Glance, Love's officer,
They are arraigned, our poor hearts,
Oft when surrounded by sweet arts,
Yet, oft, of their foes a prisoner.

Before the court, that tries a lover,
Its justices, and their counterparts,
By you, Fair Glance, Love's officer,
They are arraigned, our poor hearts.

And swiftly you bind them over,
So they may further feel your darts;
As subjects, servants, for their part,
Endure many a strange manoeuvre;
By you, Fair Glance, Love's officer,
They are arraigned, our poor hearts.

(Quant oyez prescher le renart)

When the subtle fox doth start
To preach, divert your gaze,
Listen not to what he says,
For he is often served by art.

He plays the hypocrite's part,
Hiding behind every phrase.
When the subtle fox doth start
To preach, divert your gaze.

Let God's deeds be things apart,
For I respect religion's ways,
Nor gainst all my standard raise;
Each must look to his own heart!
When the subtle fox doth start
To preach, divert your gaze.

(Comme j'oy que chascun devise)

As I oft hear, the world decrees
That none are ever at their ease;
A lovely song may well annoy;
Too long delight will ever cloy;
Drink the wine, and find the lees.

Too much speech will oft displease;
Scratch the itch, it ne'er will cease;
Overuse doth the pot destroy.
As I oft hear, the world decrees
That none are ever at their ease.

After hot days we're bound to freeze,
After shirts, robes down to our knees.
The wheel turns, and the world's a toy:
All longings of their own enjoy,
Whether laymen or God's trustees.
As I oft hear, the world decrees
That none are ever at their ease;

(C'est la prison Dedalus)

Like the maze Daedalus wrought,
Is this, my prison of Melancholy;
Just when I think I may win free,
I find myself more deeply caught.

And sometimes I conclude I ought
To forget sweet Pleasure utterly;
Like the maze Daedalus wrought,
Is this, my prison of Melancholy.

Never was Tantalus so fraught,
None suffered so, not even he,
Nor monk – however solitary –
Nor hermit, recluse, like to me.
Like the maze Daedalus wrought,
Is this, my prison of Melancholy.

Note: Daedalus, in Greek mythology, was the maker of the Cretan Maze at Cnossos. Tantalus was condemned to perpetual hunger and thirst.

(Dedens la maison de Doleur)

Within the court of Sadness,
I behold their piteous dance;
Care, and Age, and Pain advance,
As if by heart, their steps address.

Ill-Fortune's tabor does not bless
Aught with rhythm, as they prance;
Within the court of Sadness,
I behold their piteous dance.

Their chant is that of tearfulness,
Devoid of melody, set by chance;
From tedium, as if in trance,
I fall asleep, as they progress;
Within the court of Sadness,
I behold their piteous dance.

(Flyez vous y, se vous voulez)

Go, fly there, if you will,
To Hope, that promises well,
Yet oft doth dreams dispel,
As many a heart knows still.

When Desire the heart doth fill,
Oft Hope fails to weave its spell.
Go, fly there, if you will,
To Hope that promises well.

Pale sorrow, their minds distil:
I'd have, in my citadel,
Not two but the one love dwell.
When the birds rise o'er the hill,
Go, fly there, if you will,
To Hope that promises well.

(En la forest de longue actente)

In the Forest of Long Delay,
All I see is so marred today
By the winds of ill Fortune,
And i'faith, about so strewn,
That now I have lost my way.

Once joy's rent I would pay,
Youth its costs would defray.
Now I must sing another tune,
In the Forest of Long Delay.

Age, that troubles me, doth say:
'You've not a coin of youth's outlay,
That you possessed at your high noon;
Days, months, years; gone too soon.
So rest content, ask naught I say,
In the Forest of Long Delay.

(Le trouveray je jamais)

Shall I discover ever
A loyal heart, joined to mine?
That to me would so incline
From me it would not sever?

Oft, with sighs, I endeavour
To so devise, and not repine.
Shall I discover ever
A loyal heart, joined to mine?

I might as well abstain however,
For, with certainty, I divine
That such is not in fate's design:
Flawed, are all things whatsoever.
Shall I discover ever
A loyal heart, joined to mine?

(Ma plus chier tenue richesse)

The treasure I hold most dear
Is kept under lock and key
In thought's deep treasury,
By Hope, my goddess here.

If you'd seek what I revere,
Ask not, tis hidden you see,
The treasure I hold most dear.

With my treasure alone, clear
Of the crowd, I wander free;
So pass my time, pleasantly,
And relinquish, without fear,
The treasure I hold most dear.

(Monstrez les moy, ces povres yeulx)

Show yourselves, those sad eyes
All disfigured to meet the day!
A worsened state they now betray
Than at yesterday's bright sunrise.

Are they such as we recognise?
Seen at morn, to bring dismay;
Show yourselves, those sad eyes.

Have they wept before what they prize,
Inspired by grace and beauty, pray?
Or borne their sorrow, hidden away,
In some dark place, as I surmise?
Show yourselves, those sad eyes.

(Anuy, Soussy, Soing et Merancolye)

Tears, Pain, Care and Melancholy,
If my poor life you hold but cheap,
If toward death you'd have me leap,
Then force me more deeply to weep,
So a single act might end your envy!

Have I spoken fair? No, let me,
With Hope's counsel, make my plea:
Spare me, yourselves from error keep,
Tears, Pain, Care and Melancholy.

What words are these? In reverie,
It seems I speak unknowingly,
From one thing to another leap:
Am I mazed? Do I wake or sleep?
Deliver me from all such folly,
Tears, Pain, Care and Melancholy.

(Pource que Plaisance est morte)

Since Pleasure is dead and gone,
This May is dressed in black;
Tis pity to see my heart, alack,
Grieving so, with abandon.

And I clothe myself as one
Ought to, on duty's track;
Since Pleasure is dead and gone,
This May is dressed in black.

The season weeps, here and yon,
All joy it would seem to lack,
And with hail and thunder-crack,
The fields would rain thereon,
Since Pleasure is dead and gone.

Note: This rondeau was set to music by Debussy in his 'Trois chansons de France,' L115(102).

(C'est grant paine de vivre en ce monde)

To live in this world brings only pain,
Yet a deeper pain it is to die;
In life, great torments multiply,
Death's threshold merely to attain.

And if great joy I should chance to gain,
It will never last; see it swiftly fly.
To live in this world brings only pain,
Yet a deeper pain it is to die.

Let them my foolish Self arraign,
If I do aught but live well, say I,
And seek a good end, by and by,
Alas! There's naught that care can buy.
To live in this world brings only pain,
Yet a deeper pain it is to die.

(En ne peut server en deux lieux)

No man can serve in two places,
One must choose: Here or there!
Draw straws for it, you who dare,
Better or worse, such the case is!

What say you, whom youth embraces,
Or you, age, of this whole affair?
No one can serve in two places,
One must choose: Here or there!

Thus the world its journey traces:
Do good, you'll find it everywhere;
Each will be paid, fair and square,
Witness the gods, their red faces!
No one can serve in two places,
One must choose: Here or there!

(Quant tu es courcé d'autres choses)

When anger doth in you renew,
My heart, tis best to leave you be;
Indeed some strange commentary
I'd read, if I consulted you.

You dare not e'en show your true
Pain, that you might solace see;
When anger doth in you renew,
My heart, tis best to leave you be.

These lips you close, wisely, too,
And so ensure no breath can flee,
No word escape that holds the key
To secrets the world might view;
When anger doth in you renew,
My heart, tis best to leave you be.

Note: For lifting the lid on secrets the French text employs the phrase 'descuevre le pot au roses' an expression in use from the thirteenth century, indicating the perfume pots, scented with rose petals, where ladies hid love tokens or private notes, and indicating, by innuendo, the lady herself.

(Parlant ouvertement)

Speaking thus, quite openly,
Of the acts of the god Amour,
Has he not many a trick and more,
In his command, and armoury?

Indeed he does; yes, assuredly,
For who'd dispute his store,
Speaking thus, quite openly,
Of the acts of the god Amour?

If you go seeking diligently,
Knock at every single door,
You'll hear all folk deplore
His antics here, plaintively,
Speaking thus, quite openly,
Of the acts of the god Amour.

(Alez vous ant, allez, alés)

Off with you now, away, away,
Grief and Care and Melancholy!
Think you to take control of me
For all my life, as yesterday?

I promise you, no, never, I say:
Reason shall have the mastery.
Off with you now, away, away,
Grief and Care and Melancholy!

If you ever come back this way
You and your whole company,
May God curse you then, all three,
And whatever brought you, I pray:
Off with you now, away, away,
Grief and Care and Melancholy!

(Tant sont les yeulx de mon cuer endormis)

So closed are the eyes of my heart, asleep
In indifference, they'll not ope again;
For of beauty I do not dare, or deign,
To speak as I did, but silence keep.

I've learnt by heart all one may reap;
For the book of joy I take up in vain.
So closed are the eyes of my heart, asleep
In indifference, they'll not ope again.

All say my sight is buried so deep,
No hues, no colours with me remain;
I say naught, see naught; God sees plain!
Seductive glances haunt not my brain,
So closed are the eyes of my heart, asleep
In indifference, they'll not ope again.

(Pour empescher le chemin)

To block the path we weave,
A lover's all that we require,
Who, musing on his desire,
Goes dreaming morn and eve.

With a blow, the man reprieve,
He's fast asleep, if you inquire;
To block the path we weave,
A lover's all that we require.

A pail of water will relieve
The fellow, it doth transpire;
If spur-points fail to inspire
His palfrey, or him aggrieve.
To block the path we weave,
A lover's all that we require,
Who, musing on his desire,
Goes dreaming morn and eve.

(Jaulier des prisons de Pensee)

Gaoler of the prison of Thought,
Care, let my heart go free!
For, fainting, my heart I see
Is in the dark depths caught.

And may a fair oath be wrought,
That it shall return, speedily,
Gaoler of the prison of Thought,
Care, let my heart go free!

If it should die there of aught
No honour to you twill be.
Let it go forth, such my plea,
So that its ransom may be sought.
Gaoler of the prison of Thought,
Care, let my heart go free!

(Helas! me tuerés vous?)

Alas, why do you slay me so?
For God's sake, withdraw that eye,
That, with its loving greeting, nigh
Kills me; naught can ease the blow!

Such kindness doth sweetly flow,
From your heart, I yield and die.
Alas, why do you slay me so?
For God's sake, withdraw that eye.

How can my death bring aught, my woe,
To you, how serve my every sigh,
When humbly, without pride, I cry
For mercy, from all here below?
Alas, why do you slay me so?

(I'ay esté poursuivant d'Amours)

Love's pursuivant I have been,
But Love's herald, now am I;
Above Love's tourney, on high,
I am placed, to judge the scene.

If aught there untoward I glean,
Lord, how I shout it to the sky!
Love's pursuivant I have been,
But Love's herald, now am I.

If lovers do true love demean,
Their misdeeds I swiftly spy.
For I let no false step go by;
All Love's journey I have seen:
Love's pursuivant I have been,
But Love's herald, now am I.

Note. The pursuivant carried the challenge to the proposed adversaries before a tournament. The herald announced the encounters and acted as judge.

(En regardant ces belles fleurs)

Gazing at these spring flowers
Whose love the time desires,
Each its beauty now attires
In sweet hues; bright showers.

Each one so scents the hours
Never a heart but it inspires,
Gazing at these spring flowers
Whose love the time desires.

The birds, in their fair bowers,
Dancing among flowery spires,
Tenors, countertenors, choirs,
In counterpoint air their powers,
Gazing at these spring flowers
Whose love the time desires.

Note: This rondeau was set to music, for voice and piano, in 1914 by André Caplet, friend and orchestrator of Debussy. He also set poems by Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baudelaire and Verlaine.

(As tu ja fait, petit Souspir?)

Are you done now, little Sigh?
Is the heart you've devastated
To that final passing fated,
And no remedy but to die?

Greatly are you gone awry;
All swiftly, sadly desecrated.
Are you done now, little Sigh?

Love should the malefactor try,
So your sentence Love has stated.
Seek your freedom, though belated!
Save yourself, and swiftly fly!
Are you done now, little Sigh?

(Mon cuer se combat a mon eueil)

With my eye my heart doth fight,
I never find the two agree;
The heart says that the eye doth see
In ways that aggravate its plight.

I would know what's true and right:
Who in the wrong appears to be?
With my eye my heart doth fight.

If I find Fair Welcome might
Have cast a spell upon them, she
To death shall be condemned by me.
Must I suffer pride's dark blight?
With my eye my heart doth fight.

(Mon cuer, estoupe tes oreilles)

My heart, now, defend your ears,
From dark melancholy's breeze!
If it enters, twill not cease
To arouse there deadly fears.

Asleep, awake, when it appears
Do as I say now, heed my pleas.
My heart, now, defend your ears.

Grief unparalleled, for years,
It doth cause, whence maladies
Hard to cure, upon you seize.
Take Reason's counsel, heed my tears;
My heart, now, defend your ears.

(Les en voulez vous garder)

Would you stop them flowing
Those rivers that run by,
Or, while they're flying high,
Catch herons as they're going?

Dreaming about such things
Is a game for fools, say I:
Would you stop them flowing
Those rivers that run by?

As Fortune wishes, bowing,
Let time go past with a sigh.
Let all those things pass by,
That cannot help their going.
Would you stop them flowing?

(Dedens mon livre de pensee)

In my Book of Thought today,
I found my Heart there writing
A true history of sighing,
With tears adorned in every way,

Erasing the deeply loved display,
The picture of sweetness, dying,
In my Book of Thought today.

Where did my Heart find this, say?
Great drops of sweat are falling,
With all the pain and toiling,
He expends each night, and may
In my Book of Thought today.

(Les fourriers d'Esté sont venus)

The heralds of Summer are here
To ready his living room,
His carpets from the loom
Of flowers and leaves appear.

Carpets of grass spread near,
Green velvet fields assume,
The heralds of Summer are here.

God be thanked there's joy and cheer,
In hearts that were full of gloom.
Winter be gone! Be off with you!
For you must disappear:
The heralds of Summer are here.

(Que me conseilliez vous, mon coeur)

How do you counsel me, my heart,
Shall I seek that lovely girl again?
Go tell her of the mortal pain,
I suffer from Love's piercing dart?

For your good, for honour's part,
To hide your counsel's right, tis plain.
How do you counsel me, my heart,
Should I seek that lovely girl again?

She's so full of the sweetest art,
I must find there mercy's strain;
So that good news I may obtain
Tis best that from here I depart.
How do you counsel me, my heart?

(N'est elle de tous biens garnie ?)

Is she not blessed with every grace,
She that I love so true?
And, by my faith, I swear, too,
Of her equal there's no trace.

What say you? Is it not the case?
How does it seem to you?
Is she not blessed with every grace,
She that I love so true?

Her dancing; singing; laughing face,
Whatever she seeks to do;
Taking an honest view,
Without favour or flattery new:
Is she not blessed with every grace?

(Je ne prise point telz baisiers)

I think little of kisses like these
Given in everyday address
A matter of mere politeness:
With too many beneficiaries.

One can enjoy a thousand free;
In all their numbers, valueless;
I think little of kisses like these
Given in everyday address.

But do you know of those that please,
The secret ones that joy has blessed?
The rest are nothing, you must confess,
Merely the way one greets a guest.
I think little of kisses like these.

(Dieu! Qu'il la fait bon regarder)

God, how sweet it is to see her,
She so graceful, good and lovely!
For the virtues that are in her,
All to praise her now are ready.

Who is there could weary of her?
Every day renewed, her beauty,
God, how sweet it is to see her
She so graceful, good and lovely!

This or that side of the water,
I know neither maid nor lady,
Of perfection wrought, as she;
Tis a dream to think upon her.
God, how sweet it is to see her!

Note: This rondeau was set to music by Debussy in his 'Trois chansons de Charles d'Orléans,' L99(92).

