Short Poems by Geoffrey Chaucer

This edition is intended for students just beginning to read Chaucer and does not reflect any single manuscript reading (it combines readings from the Benson and Fisher editions). Glossed words are in bold. The letter è indicates that an unstressed e should be pronounced. The letter é indicates that e should be pronounced with French stress.

Merciles Beauté
A Triple Roundel

I
Your yèn two wol slee me sodenly; eyes
I may the beautée of hem not sustenë, them
So woundeth hit throughout my hertë kenë.

And but your word wol helen hastily unless will heal
My hertës woundë, while that hit is grenë,
   Your yèn two wol slee me sodenly;
   I may the beautée of hem not sustenë.

Upon my trouthe I sey you feithfully faith
That ye ben of my lyf and deeth the quenë; are
For with my deeth the trouthe shal be senë.
   Your yèn two wol slee me sodenly;
   I may the beautée of hem not sustenë,
   So woundeth it throughout my hertë kenë.

II
So hath your beautée fro your hertë chacëd chased
Pitée, that me ne availeth not to pleynë; not complain
For Daunger halt your mercy in his cheynë. scorn holds

Giltles my deeth thus han ye me purchacëd; have
I sey you sooth, me nedeth not to feynë;
   So hath your beautée fro your hertë chacëd truth [it] needs
   Pitée, that me ne availeth not to pleynë.

Allas, that Nature hath in you compassëd die
So greet beautée, that no man may atteynë
To mercy, though he stervë for the peynë.
   So hath your beautée fro your hertë chacëd
   Pitée, that me ne availeth not to pleynë.
   For Daunger halt your mercy in his cheynë.
III
Sin I fro Love escaped am so fat,
I never thenk to ben in his prison lenë;
Sin I am free, I counte him not a benë.

He may answere, and seyë this and that;
I do no fors, I spekë right as I menë.
  Sin I fro Love escapëd am so fat
  I never thenk to ben in his prison lenë.

Love hath my name ystrike out of his sclat,
And he is strike out of my bokës clenë
For evermo; ther is non other menë.
  Sin I fro Love escapëd am so fat
  I never thenk to ben in his prison lenë.
  Sin I am free, I counte him not a benë.

Explicit

Latin: “it ends”
To Rosemounde

Madame, ye ben of allë beauté shrynë
As fer as cercled is the mapamoundë,¹
For as the cristal glorious ye shynë,
And lykë ruby ben your chekës roundë.
Therwith ye ben so mery and so locoundë
That at a revel whan that I see you dauncë,
It is an oynement unto my woundë,
Thogh ye to me ne do no daliauncë.

For thogh I wepe of terës ful a tynë,
Yet may that wo myn hertë nat confoundë;
Your semy voys that ye so small out twynë
Maketh my thoght in joy and blys haboundë.
So curtaysly I go, wyth lovë boundë,
That to my self I sey, in my penauncë,
“Suffyseth me to lovë you, Rosëmoundë,
Thogh ye to me ne do no daliauncë.”

Nas never pyk walwed in galauntynë²
As I in lovë am walwed and ywoundë;
For whych ful ofte I of my self devynë
That I am trewë Tristan³ the secoundë.
My lovë may not refreydë nor affoundë;
I brenne ay in an amorousë plesauncë.
Do what you lýst, I wyl your thral be foundë,
Thogh ye to me ne do no daliauncë.

TREGENTIL CHAUCER

French: “very gentle”

¹ From Latin mappa mundi.
² “There was never a pike [large fish] wallowed in galantine [wine] sauce”.
³ Refers to the famous lover of Iseult in courtly literature.
Gentilesse

The firstë stok, fader of gentillessë—
What man that claymeth gentil for to be
Must folowe his trace, and all his wittë dressë direct
Vertu to sewe, and vicës for to fle.
For unto vertu longeth dignité, follow
And nought the revers, savëly dar I demë, belongs
Al were he mytré, coroune, or diademë. safely

This firstë stok was full of rightwisnessë, although wear mitre
Trewë of his word, sobrë, pitous, and free, righteousness
Clene of his gost, and loved besinessë, compassionate
Ayeinst the vyce of slouthe, in honestëe; spirit
And but his heir love vertu as did he, unless
He is noght gentil, thogh he richë semë,
Al were he mytré, coroune, or diademë.

Vycë may well be heir to old richessë,
But ther may no man, as men may well see,
Bequethe his heir his vertuous noblessë
(That is appropred unto no degré appropriated
But to the firstë fader in magestée,
That maketh his heyres hem that him quemë), them please
Al were he mytré, coroune, or diademë.

Explicit

Chaucer’s words unto Adam, his owene scriveyn

Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifallë scribe
Boëce¹ or Troylus² for to wryten newë, Boethius anew
Under thy long lokkë thow most have the scalë³ scale
But after my makyng thow wrytë morë trewë! unless poetry faithfully
So ofte a daye I mot thy werk renewë must
It to correcte and ekë to rubbe and scrapë; also rub out
And al is thorougly negligence and rapë! haste

1. Chaucer’s translation of Boethius’ De consolation philosophiae.
2. Chaucer’s poem Troilus and Criseyde.
3. A skin disease.