

The Testament by Francois Villon with facing Notes
Metric translation with altered rhyme scheme
Stephen Eridan

Notes are based primarily on the critical volumes of Rychner & Henry,
L. Thuasne and B. Sargent-Baur,
as well as *Daily life in the Middle Ages* Clara and Richard Winston American Heritage NY
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In my thirtieth year of age,
I had drunk deep of my disgrace,
Left somewhere between fool and sage,
From all the grief I had to face;
Ev'ry bit of which I received
By Thibaud d'Aussigny's command;
Not my bishop, or I'm deceived,
Though he walks the streets cross in hand.

Neither my bishop nor my lord,
I received nothing but his dung,
I'll never offer him my sword,
Nor serve him when the bell is rung;
On a small hard loaf I was fed,
Downed with water the summer through;
Not a man to be large-hearted,
Let God give him all that he's due.

I'm sure there is someone who'll say
That I only know how to curse,
But please, don't throw my words away,
I have no ill humor to nurse;
So what I say I won't say twice,
Any mercy he's shown to me,
Let Jesus king of paradise
Give him as much unstintingly.

And if he's caused me grievous pain
Beyond my powers to express,
I hope that God wouldn't refrain
From giving him anything less;
"But the Church says it's expected
That we'll pray for our enemies";
I'll reply, " I stand corrected,
I will abide by God's decrees."

So I'll pray for him in earnest,
By the soul of the late Cotart;
But how? Because I lack the zest
To read it, it'll be by heart,
And in the way the Picards pray;
If he's heard nothing of their zeal,
I urge him to brook no delay
In going to Douai or Lille.

1. line 6-x

Thibaut d'Aussigny bishop of Orleans from 1452-1473 and also had administrative rights in Meung sur Loire. Technically, Villon as a Parisian clerk (cleric) was subject to the bishop of Paris, thus the quibble over d'Aussigny not being Villon's bishop.

2. 34-x Jean Cotart see ref ln.1230

3. 35-x Picards were viewed as heretics in part because they thought prayer was useless. Additionally, the cities mentioned had no Picards anyway, but the region of Flanders was known as Picardy.

But if he wants prayers he can hear,
By the one true faith I do swear,
Though it won't go to ev'ry ear,
He'll get his wish, 'cause I'll take care
To read from my psalter for him
(Not bound in leather like a purse)
Straight from the psalm Deus laudem,
What I think is the seventh verse.

Now to the bearer of the Word,
To Jesus who has raised the dead,
Please allow my poor prayer be heard,
By Him who holds my mortal thread,
Who has given His benison
And delivered me from death's dance,
Praise Mary and her blessed Son,
And Louis the good king of France.

To whom let God grant Jacob's luck
And Solomon's august grandeur;
No one doubts his prowess and pluck,
He has much of both, to be sure;
Methuselah may he outlive,
So that with all the permanence
This transitory world can give,
His name will hold in remembrance.

With twelve fine sons for his domains,
All conceived in the marriage bed,
And his precious blood in their veins;
As good they'll be and great-hearted
As Saint Martial and Charlemagne;
This to the ex-dauphin I send:
I wish him a life without pain,
And then Paradise at the end.

As for goods I haven't many,
And though my health is somewhat poor,
I still have my wits about me,
The few God lent me I assure,
For I've borrowed none from others;
Which brings me up to the present,
Drawing up between these covers,
This my last will and testament.

4. 47-x The psalm Deus laudem involves several curses. Probably the one intended is “ may his days be few and his bishopric taken from him”.

Written in the year sixty-one,
When the good king had set me free,
From the hard prison at Mehun,
And thus gave back my life to me;
And so, while I have life and breath
I give thanks for what I've gotten
To him, until I meet my death,
Good acts must not be forgotten.

It's true that after cries and moans,
And deep sadness mixed with sorrow,
And bitter tears and anguished groans,
And unbearable days of woe,
Heartache untangled my feelings,
No sharper than a ball of wool,
More than Averroes' readings
Have opened up Aristotle.

There where my evils were greatest,
As I walked alone in my loss,
God, who the Apostles attest
Inspired the pilgrims of Emmaus,
Showed me a city on a hill,
That's blessed with hope and His presence;
The most wretched sinners God will
Hate nothing save their persistence.

I'm a sinner, I know it well,
But God doesn't want to lose me,
But to repent and in truth dwell
With all others as company;
Though in my sin I may be dead,
Yet God and His mercy still live;
If I face my conscience with dread,
By His grace so will he forgive.

And as the following theme goes,
Which was placed at the very start
Of the great Roman de la Rose ,
"We have to pardon the young heart
In its youth, when we see it grown
Old in its age," alas, it's true,
But those who'd do me in have shown
They'd rather not have me age too.

5. /82-x The recently crowned
Louis XI entered Meung on
Oct. 2, 1461. By tradition,
prisoners were freed when a
new King entered a town for the
first time. D'Aussigny didn't
attempt to hide or move Villon
to prevent his release, indicating
that he bore no particular
grudge against Villon.

6. 95-x Averroes was a 12th
century Arab philosopher.

7. 100 The risen Christ
appeared to wandering
disciples at Emmaus.

8. 113-x Actually the
quote comes from a different
work by the co-author of the
Roman de la Rose, Jean de
Meun.

If by dying, in any way,
I could increase the common good,
I would condemn myself today
To hang as an evil man should;
But I'm harmless to one and all,
Standing up or laid down below,
Mountains never move at the call
Of any poor man, to or fro.

There was a man, Diomedes,
In the time Alexander reigned,
Who was brought to him on his knees,
Thumbs and fingers tied and chained;
He was bound this way like a thief,
As a pirate he'd roamed the sea;
Thus he came before the great chief
Who then pronounced his death decree.

The emperor began to bellow,
"Why are you a vile marauder?"
The condemned man replied in woe,
"Why do you call me a robber?
Because I maraud with my crew
In a puny little galley?
If I could arm myself like you,
Why, then an emperor I would be.

"But what's the use? Lady Fortune,
Who has brought me to this sad mess,
Remains the one who calls the tune,
And against her pull I'm helpless;
Some such excuse must be proffered,
And know that in dire poverty,
As you may have already heard,
There exists no great honesty."

When the emperor had thought about
Diomedes' words, by fiat,
He said "Your luck I'll turn about
From bad to good," and did just that;
From this time he became worthy,
And he gained wide respect thereby;
Valerian told this story,
A great Roman of times gone by.

9. In 159 The attribution to
Valerian is mistaken but the
historical source and truth of
this story is also not clear.

If God just had turned me towards
Some merciful Alexander,
Changing luck to push me forwards,
Why then if I'd thought to wander
Into crime, I'd give up today,
Condemning myself as I stood;
Necessity leads men to stray,
And hunger drives wolves from the
wood.

My youth, how I mourn for those days,
When more than most I got it on;
Now upon my shoulders age lays;
Youth gave no hint it would be gone,
It didn't sneak away at night
Or take the first horse it could find;
All of a sudden it took flight,
And didn't leave a gift behind.

It's gone and I stay on weary,
Poor in knowledge and muddled too,
Blacker than any mulberry,
Without goods, down to my last sou;
And the least of my kin, likewise,
Want me to wear sackcloth and ash,
Forgetting their natural ties,
For my lack of a bit of cash.

No fear I've frittered it away
On fine foods or on lechery;
I haven't pawned my goods to pay
For things my kin wouldn't buy me;
At least I haven't cost them dear,
I think I'm an honest witness,
I can defend my conduct here;
If you've done no wrong, don't confess.

I've loved before and do admit,
I'd love again if possible,
But saddened heart and starving pit,
Never more than a third part full,
Drop me from the ranks of lovers;
By now another fills the role,
Who gets a full plate at suppers,
For a hot fire requires some coal.

Ah God, if only in my days
Of heedless youth, I had started
To set myself in better ways,
I'd have a warm house and soft bed.

Ah God, if only in my days
Of heedless youth, I had started
To set myself in better ways,
I'd have a warm house and soft bed;
I shouldn't have run from that school,
But I could bring forth only jeers;
As I write these words of a fool,
My eyes are welling up with tears.

I took the words of Solomon
At face value, yes foolish me,
When he declares "Rejoice my son
In the time of your youth" but see
His thoughts later change their tenor,
For he then says "Childhood and youth",
Aye," are ignorance and error";
He puts it thus, I speak the truth.

And so my days meet their reaper,
Much as Job has said of the strands
In a cloth just when the weaver
Gathers burning straw in his hands;
Then if he spies a hanging thread,
It's razed in the space of a breath;
Now I don't face my woes with dread,
Because ev'rything ends in death.

Where are the young and jaunty men
I hung out with in the old days?
So tuneful and so well spoken,
In word and deed they all won praise;
Some lay stiffened and cold as ice,
And for those one would look in vain;
Let them find peace in paradise,
And may God save those who remain.

And others, from God's good graces,
Are great men and well respected;
Others beg and press their faces
Against shop windows to see bread;
Still others entered the cloisters
Of Celestines and Carthusians,
Booted like fishers for oysters;
See how varied are their stations.

10. 209 A reference to lines in
Ecclesiastes.

11. /238-x The Celestines
were a religious order
founded by Pope Celestine V.
The Carthusians were an
order of reformed
Benedictines.

To the masters, God give good deeds
And lives lived in comfort and peace,
Since they've already filled their needs,
I'll refrain from speaking my piece;
To the poor ones, including me,
Who have nothing, God give patience,
As for the others, don't worry,
For they have ev'ry indulgence.

They have the best wines often
broached,
Sauces, soups and bisques, fat fishes,
Also tarts, flans, eggs fried and poached,
Whipped up in various dishes;
The stonemasons they don't admire,
Who are always acting highflown;
No cupbearer do these require
Since each one leaps to pour his own.

I've gone into this digression
Without much thought of where it leads,
I'm no judge or clerk to pardon
Or punish anyone's misdeeds;
Of all I'm the most unworthy,
Praise be to Jesus in heaven,
May they be satisfied through me,
What I have written is written.

I'd just as soon get off this stick,
And talk of something more pleasant,
Who wouldn't dislike the topic,
It's annoying and unpleasant;
Poverty, sullen and froward,
Irritable, always unkind,
Is quick to vent her cutting word,
Or not daring, keep it in mind.

From childhood I've seen penury,
For mine, ever without solace,
My father never had money,
Nor did his father, named Horace;
Poverty has shadowed us all;
On the graves of my forefathers,
May their souls answer to God's call,
One doesn't see crowns or scepters.

12. 264 A reference to Pilate's
words (in John).

When I gripe about being poor,
Often my heart will say to me,
Man, do you have to be so dour,
And down in the dumps constantly,
'Cause wealth like Jacques Coeur's
passed you by;
Best to make coarse cloth your costume
Poor, than once as a lord on high,
Wear a winding sheet in your tomb.

"Once as a lord..." What have I said?
Why, he isn't still a lord then?
As a psalm of David stated,
"His place shall not know him again"
I won't belabor the issue,
It's not my problem as sinner;
It's something the Church should review,
So go and bother the preacher.

I'm not, it's plain to any eye,
An angel's son wearing a crown
Of the brightest stars in the sky;
My father's body was laid down
Under a stone, rest him easy,
And my mother will die also,
Poor woman, she knows it must be,
And the son will surely follow.

I know that with rich and poor men,
Nobles, peasants, kind and stingy,
Wise and foolish, priests and laymen,
Small and great, handsome and ugly,
Ladies with their collars laid up,
No matter what their position,
Whether in kerchiefs or made up,
Death grabs them without exception.

Whether Paris' or Helen's death,
Whoever dies, he feels such pain,
That he lies gasping for each breath,
His gall bursts forth under the strain,
The sweat he sweats like no other,
From a pain no one can lessen;
There's no child, sister, or brother.
Who would trade places with him then.

13. /285-x Jacques Coeur,
who died in 1456, was a very
rich financier who was falsely
accused and imprisoned.

14. 309 A reference to the
distressing habit of prostitutes
in imitating the fashions of the
highborn. Women's clothes in
this time were generally long
covering the legs and often
extending to the floor, whether
in a regular weight dress or a
heavier overdress or coat.
Women's hats were an essential
part of their clothing since only
young unmarried girls and
prostitutes walked outside
without a hat. Of course
prostitutes often would wear
hats resembling those in fashion
by better society. This led to
laws specifying who could wear
which style of hat.

Death makes him shudder and whiten,
The neck puff up, the flesh distend,
The nostrils flare, the veins tighten,
Joints and sinews swell and extend;
Woman's soft and tender body,
So smooth and inviting to men,
Must you too feel this agony?
Yes, or living enter heaven.

**

Please tell me where, in what country,
Is the lovely Roman, Flora,
Or Thais, who was said to be
Cousin to Archipiada;
And Echo, each sound who'd recall,
Playing over pond or river,
With a beauty surpassing all?
Where are the snows of last winter?

Where is the learned Heloise,
For whom stood Pierre Abelard
Gelded and monked at St Denis?
For his love he suffered so hard;
I ask as well, where is the queen
Who coaxed Buridan to enter,
Then tossed him in the Seine unseen?
Where are the snows of last winter?

And Blanche the swan-white queen,
where is
She who chanted the siren's strain,
Big-footed Berte, Beatrix, Aliz,
And Haremburgis holding Maine,
And Joan of Lorraine, the good maid,
At Rouen the English burned her;
To where, dear Virgin, have they made?
Where are the snows of last winter?

Prince, ask me now where they remain,
Or in the days that come after,
And you'll ever hear one refrain,
"Where are the snows of last winter?"

*

15. /330-x

Flora refers either to the goddess or a Roman courtesan mentioned by Plutarch.

16./331-x

Thais, a Greek courtesan of Alexander the Great

17.331-x

Archipiades for Alcibiades, an Athenian general noted for his good looks and mistakenly thought to be a woman in the sexually unambiguous and historically confused Middle Ages.

18./333-x Echo refers to the nymph punished by Juno into repeating others' words.

19./ 337-x Heloise was the pupil of the noted scholar Abelard. Their love affair was discovered and her relatives castrated Abelard as punishment.

20./341-x Buridan was a 14th century scholar, associated in various tall tales with a fictional unsavory queen of Navarre.

21./345-x The reference is not clear but possibly Blanche of Castile, the mother of St Louis is intended.

22.347-x Big footed Berte refers to the mother of Charlemagne. Beatrix and Aliz were characters in romances along with Berte.

23./348-x Haremburgis or Erembourg, the countess of Anjou and Maine in the 12th century.

Calixtus the Third, where is he?
Last of his name to die, he stood
For four years in the papacy;
Charles the Seventh known as "The
Good",
Alphonso king of Aragon,
And Artus the duke of Bretagne,
And his grace the duke of Bourbon?
But where is the proud Charlemagne?

The Scottish king I also list,
Half of whose face, say those who saw,
Was crimson as an amethyst,
From his forehead down to his jaw;
The king from Cyprus of great fame,
Alas and that good king of Spain
I just can't remember his name?
But where is the proud Charlemagne?

Let me have sense to fall silent,
This world is but a cheat and fraud;
Who is there to make death relent,
Or find ways to gain equal odds?
But I'll ask one question further:
Lancelot the king of Behagne,
Where is he? Where's his grandfather?
But where is the proud Charlemagne?

Where is Claquin the good Breton,
Or the count Dauphin of Auvergne,
And the late duke of Alençon?
But where is the proud Charlemagne?

*

For even if it be the Pope,
Who puts on his alb and amice,
Using his holy stole as rope
On the devil, with his malice
Rising up in evil flower,
He dies the same as his servants,
Swept off by a greater power,
Where the wind blows, they will go
hence.

24./349-x Joan of
Lorraine or Joan of Arc who led
the French resistance to the
English occupation of France in
the years just prior to Villon's
birth. She was burned at the
stake by the English and
Burgundians after her capture in
1431.

25. 357 The initial names
referred to in this ballade refer
to royal figures that died
between the time of Villon
writing *The Lay* in 1456 and
The Testament in 1461-2. They
are compared to the long dead
Charlemagne.

26. 385 Villon wrote this
concluding lament to the dead
in a very rough version of Old
French. It should be noted that
Villon likely never read much
of anything after graduating
from the University in 1452 and
was relying on memory for the
various quotes and references
made.

Also in Constantinople,
The emperor of the golden ball,
Or the king of France most noble,
Who was exalted above all
Other kings, serving God's glory
By building churches and convents;
If everyone knew their story,
Where the wind blows, they will go
hence.

The dauphin with his possessions
Of both Vienne and Grenoble,
Or the nobles and eldest sons
Of Dijon, Salins and Dole,
Or the same count from their party,
Heralds, trumpeters, attendants,
Didn't they all eat heartily?
Where the wind blows, they will go
hence.

Princes will meet their death some day,
Sue for mercy or vow vengeance,
Any and all who pass this way,
Where the wind blows, they will go
hence.

**

Since even popes, kings, and king's sons,
Who were conceived in wombs of
queens,
Have been reduced to skeletons,
To reign in turn new kings and queens,
Myself, a poor packman from Rennes,
Won't I die? Sure, when God wants me,
But if I've had my fun often,
An honest death will come easy.

Nothing will last long in this life,
Though rich scoundrels might not think
so;
Above us hangs the mortal knife;
This comforts the sad, old fellow,
Who was well-noted in his prime,
For his light and amusing wit,
Who'd now be thought, if he made time,
A dirty old man or nitwit.

27. 417 The reference or
meaning is not clear.

If he was known for his humor,
He no longer leaves them laughing,
An old monkey is such a bore,
Making faces and chattering;
If he simply smiles and stays dumb,
Ev'ryone thinks he's losing it,
If he speaks they say, "Oh ho hum;
How many times with that stale bit."

So he's forced to go out begging,
Driven on by necessity,
But he thinks of death with longing,
While sadness pains his heart daily;
If the fear of God weren't in him,
He'd commit a horrible act,
Though he may yet find life too grim,
And turn sinful wish into fact.

For the poor women it's the same,
Shriveled with age and penniless,
When they see young girls with no
shame,
Enjoying a thriving business;
They complain to God by what right
Were they born so soon, to suffer?
Our Lord keeps mum as well he might,
He'd never find a fight tougher.

The Helmet Seller I hear then,
As she laments her lost beauty,
Wishing she were a girl again,
And crying out despairingly,
"Ah, cruel, unforgiving old age
Why have you rushed to bring me low?
What keeps me from striking in rage
And killing myself with the blow?"

"Beauty's native rights you've shaken,
And thereby stripped me of my sway
Over clerks, merchants, and churchmen,
For then no man along the way
Would have refused me anything
(Though later repentance maintain)
If I'd just let him have a fling,
With what tramps now view with
disdain.

28./454-x The Helmet
Seller was a mistress of a rich
official, Nicholas d'Orgement,
in her younger days in 1395-
1400. She fell on hard times
after his disgrace and death
in 1416. She would have
been over 80 years old if still
alive at the time.

"Many a man I turned down cold
Which, I admit, wasn't too bright;
A sharp cad had me in his hold,
Who used it freely through the night;
So I played around on the side,
By my soul, I loved him dearly,
But he just took me for a ride
And loved my money more than me.

"He could bat me around silly,
Or kick me, I wouldn't notice,
And even if he'd crippled me,
He could just come ask for a kiss,
And how happy he'd make me feel;
That villain, so tainted within,
Would press me close to him... big deal -
-
And what's left? Only shame and sin.

"Dead for thirty odd years he's been,
And now I'm left old and gray-haired;
Those good times, alas, way back when,
What I was then and how I've fared;
When I look at myself naked,
And see how I've become a fright,
Poor, dried up, scrawny and wasted,
I could almost scream at the sight.

"Now what's become of the smooth skin,
The arching eyebrows, the blond hair,
The bewitching eyes that pulled in
The cleverest men in their snare,
The nose proportioned perfectly,
The little ears so impious,
The dimpled chin, cheeks all rosy,
And the lips bow-shaped and luscious.

"The shoulders petite and well-bred,
The long arms with their tapered hands,
The small breasts, the buttocks rounded,
High and broad, flawless as the stands
For all the jousts that love may bring,
The wide loins and in there hidden
Between firm thighs, the charming thing,
In its little silken garden.

29. 493 A rather typical
description from the Medieval
period of feminine beauty and
its passing, except for the
touching and poetic last stanza.

"The forehead lined, the hair all gray,
The eyebrows patchy, the eyes dim,
Which used to be sparkling and fay,
And beguiled many a victim,
The nose hooked down far from beauty,
The ears hairy and folded in,
The cheeks sunken, dead and pasty,
The chin wrinkled, the lips dry skin.

"Human beauty at candle-end,
The shoulders hunched up and lumpen,
The arms shortened, the hands stiffened;
As for the breasts they're all shrunken,
And the buttocks have come to the
same;
The sweet thing, ugh! And the thighs
too,
They're just sticks, thighs only in name,
Like sausages, mottled all through.

"So we bemoan our used-to-be's,
Foolish crones, talking a jawfull,
Huddled down low on bended knees,
All in a heap like tangled wool,
Hugging a faint fire of hempstalk,
That soon flames up and soon flames
out,
And yet once we were all the talk;
So will men and women turn out.

**

"Now listen up pretty Glover,
You who studied under me once,
And you too Blanche the Shoefitter,
It's time you stopped being a dunce;
Let a man share all that he owns,
Take with both hands, one day you'll see
Who pounds on the door for old crones,
No better than withdrawn money.

"As for you sweet Sausage filler,
I remember how you could dance,
And Guillemette the Tapester,
Best give your man another chance;
Too soon you'll be out of service,
When you've gotten old and bony,
Your solace an old priest's service,
No better than withdrawn money.

30./536-551-x Pretty Glover,
Blanche the Shoefitter etc.
Prostitutes had a storefront or
ostensible occupation that
served as their 'front' for their
actual business in order to
avoid the harassment given
by the police to street
walkers.

"Jeanneton the Bonnetmaker,
Two lovers are better than one,
And you Catherine the Purse-seller,
Best keep the father and the son;
She who's lost her looks won't find men
Sending gifts, just their mockery;
Love won't find ugly old women,
No better than withdrawn money.

"Girls, please be still for a moment,
And hear why I cry mournfully,
I can't spend again what is spent,
No better than withdrawn money."
*

In this fashion these girls were taught,
By one both lovely and good once;
Wise or foolish, well said or not,
I've had my clerk, Fremin the dunce,
As sharp as me in ev'ry wise,
Take it down in his best scrollwork;
I'll curse if he's done otherwise;
The master is judged through the clerk.

A man in love, I clearly see,
Runs the risk of getting taken,
But some might wish to refute me
For thinking so, and say "Listen,
If the games of those named before
Have gone and rubbed you the wrong
way,
Don't you lay the blame at love's door,
For these are women gone astray.

"Since they just make love for silver,
Love by the hour is all you get,
Gaily they'll love clerk or miller
And leave them broke with no regret;
They'll play with any man they can;
Thus, virtuous women are best,
By God, for an upstanding man,
And take care to avoid the rest."

Pockets were not part of
clothes before the
Renaissance so this led to a
variety of purses, bags and
pouches the smallest of
which could be hung from
the belt.

31./565-x Fremin is a
fictitious person invented for
the occasion.

If I heard that said by someone,
I wouldn't think too much of it;
For he jumps to the conclusion
(Or so it seems from where I sit):
Look for love in the right places -
But these girls who act so untrue,
With whom I trade badinages
All day, weren't they once honest too?

Yes, they were honest in their ways,
Beyond reproach in all they'd done;
In truth, in their earlier days,
All of them took up with someone,
Before they had earned their bad names,
A clerk, a layman, a prior,
Trying their best to cool love's flames,
Hotter than St. Anthony's fire.

It can be said that these lovers
Observed the words of the decree,
Their affairs stayed under covers
To which no one else was privy;
Their strong passion wanes in time,
though,
Because she who loved only one
Moves on, and after letting go,
Finds loving them all much more fun.

Why do they do it? I wager,
And I'm not knocking their honor,
That it stems from female nature
To love many men with ardor;
Other reasons I won't reveal,
But at Rheims and Troyes, they tell me,
As well as St. Omer and Lille,
Six workmen will do more than three.

Now these fool lovers get the bounce,
And the ladies have won the match;
It's the only result that counts,
Ev'ry promise contains a catch
That a tender kiss never shows;
"In hunting, hawking, love and war,
"For one joy a thousand sorrows,"
Ev'ryone says, but who keeps score?

32. 599 A skin disease
prevalent in the Middle Ages.

33./601-x The decree in
question is not known,
although it may refer to the
commonplace of concealing
an affair.

*

So fill up on love at the trough,
Go to the festivals in town,
And come back home no better off,
With nothing busted but your crown;
Love makes us beasts in its madness:
Solomon an idolater,
And strong Samson shorn and eyeless;
The less it's fooled with, the better.

It made the minstrel Orpheus,
With flutes and reeds playing medleys,
Risk death from direful Cerberus,
The four headed Dog of Hades;
Narcissus, fair as a damsel,
His beauties mirrored in water,
Drowned himself for love in a well,
The less it's fooled with, the better.

Love made the brave knight Sardana,
Who the kingdom of Crete had won,
Assume a woman's persona,
To join the virgins as they spun;
And King David ignored God's wrath,
Despite his sageness as leader,
Seeing shapely thighs in the bath,
The less it's fooled with, the better.

Amnon wished to shame and defile
His sister Tamar, the beauty,
In wicked incest, all the while
He pretended to eat pastry;
Herod sent John, the great prophet,
Off to the executioner
For dances, leaps, and lovesongs yet,
The less it's fooled with, the better.

As for my own tale on this theme,
Beaten stark naked, all too true,
Like dirty laundry in a stream,
Who made me drink this bitter brew?
No one but Katherine de Vauselles -
Noel was there as onlooker,
At his wedding beat him as well,
The less it's fooled with, the better.

34./630-x Solomon king
of Israel, noted for his
wisdom and for the size of
his harem. The two were not
viewed as contradictory.

35./631-x Samson was
seduced by Delilah, a Philistine,
and blinded.

36./633-x Orpheus a
Greek mythological musician
who went down to Hades to
retrieve his dead wife Euridice.
He had to pass by Cerberus, the
guardian dog of Hades. For
some reason, Villon assigns
Cerberus four heads instead of
the customary three.

37./637-x According to
Greek myth, Narcissus drowned
trying to embrace his handsome
reflection in the water. His story
is somewhat out of place here
since it was due to self love
rather than love of woman.

38./641-x Sardana or
Sardanapalus, a legendary king
of Assyria. The reference is not
known.

39./645-x King David of
Israel seduced Bathsheba and
sent her husband Uriah to his
death in battle.

40./649-x Amnon brother
of Absalom violated his sister
Tamar after feigning illness. He
was killed by Absalom.

41./653-x Herod,
enamoured of his step daughter
Salome, agreed to grant her one
wish. She demanded the head of
John the Baptist.

42./657-x Villon refers to
a personal incident of which
nothing is known outside of the
mention here.

But will this young bachelor tire
Of fooling around with the chicks?
Nope, even if he's cooked in fire,
Like any rider of broomsticks;
He finds girls sweeter than civet,
But will be suckered forever,
Makes no diff'rence, blonde or brunette,
The less it's fooled with, the better.

And she to whom I gave my heart,
And served with truest loyalty,
With pain and grief the greater part,
And enduring such agony,
If, at the outset, she had said
What she thought of me (but no way),
I wouldn't have hesitated
In getting myself far away.

The words I wanted to tell her,
She was always ready to hear,
Without showing what her thoughts
were;
What's more, she would let me draw
near,
While I whispered such sweet nothings,
How I got taken for a ride
As she played upon my feelings,
But she was just laughing inside.

My mind had become such a hash,
I thought one thing was another;
That wheat flour was nothing but ash,
And old furnace slag was pewter,
That a mortar was a felt hat,
And that snake eyes were big winners
(The huckster can trick them like that
And sell for lanterns cow bladders).

That the sky was a copper pan,
And the clouds were made of calfskins,
A windmill was a lady's fan,
That the Vespers were the Matins,
A beer barrel was a flagon,
A hangman's noose was a tether,
A battering ram a wagon,
And a fat priest a lean soldier.

43. 661 Possibly Villon
displeased Katherine de
Vauselles in some way and was
“punished”.

44. 663 A wedding custom of
the time involved exchanging
blows between the guests to
better remember the occasion.

45. 667 Witches in the Middle
Ages could be male or female.

46. 672 The woman referred
to is not clear, although
possibly it's Katherine de
Vauselles.

This is how love spun me around,
Kicked me out and threw me over;
The sharpest man that could be found,
His wits as fine as pure silver,
Would have gotten duped just the same,
Attempting the measure of her;
Now one and all give me the name
Of the mad, defiant lover.

And so I denounce love as cursed,
And defy it in blood and fire;
Death rushes to do me its worst,
And these girls close their eyes tighter;
I've put my fiddle on the shelf,
The lovers I leave evermore,
If I used to be one myself,
I declare that I am no more.

I've tossed that feather to the wind,
Let those who wish find where it went,
So before I lose my own wind,
I'll return to my main intent,
And if anyone badgers me
For slandering love in this way,
Let this answer make him happy:
A dying man should have his say.

Now I'm forced to endure my gall
As I cough up, white as cotton,
Gobs as large as a tennis ball;
What can I say? that Jeanneton
No longer sees me as her beau,
But as a worn-out old drayhorse;
In years, I'm just a young fellow,
But my voice sounds old, harsh and
hoarse.

Thanks be to God and Tacque Thibaud,
For forcing cold water on me,
Not upstairs, but way down below,
And eating anguish-pears daily
In chains ... When I recall these scenes,
I pray for him et reliqua
That God will give him, by all means,
What I'm thinking et cetera.

48./737-x Thibault
d'Aussigny here is associated
with a despised favorite of
Duke Jean de Berry .

49. 738 Prisoners were tortured
by forced ingestion of large
amounts of water.

50. 740 Devices of torture or
general mistreatment.

51. 742 The remaining amount
after settlement of an account.

Needless to say, I bear no grudge
Against him and his lieutenant,
Or even his deputy judge,
Who's agreeable and pleasant;
(The others don't merit mention,
Wee master Robert excepted;)
I love the three of them as one,
As le Lombard loves the Godhead.

I've kept in mind that I wrote down
Some bequests as a legacy,
In fifty-six when I left town,
That some without respect to me
Were pleased to name a testament;
The wish was theirs and theirs alone,
But so what? You know the lament -
No one is master of his own.

But I'm not taking back those things,
All I own I've put on the bar;
I haven't lost my fond feelings
Toward the Bastard of the Bar;
I leave my old mats to improve
The three bundles of straw he got;
They'll keep him firmly in the groove,
And hold him steady in his trot.

And if somehow a legatee
Ends up not getting my bequest,
I order that they're to go see
My heirs after I'm laid to rest;
But who are they? Well, this is who:
Robin Turgis, Prouvins, Morreau,
Who got all I can lay claim to,
Down to my bed, and I said so.

Enough, except for one more thing,
Then I'll start on the will promptly;
My clerk Fremin who's listening,
If not asleep, will vouch for me:
I here declare no one's left out
Of this current inheritance,
But please don't bruit this news about,
Except in the kingdom of France.

52.746-x The lieutenant
or prosecutor was Pierre
Bourgoing.

53. /747-x The official
possibly refers to Etienne
Plaisance (Pleasant).

54. /750-x Master Robert
was probably the court
assessor or executioner.

55. 752 The reference is
probably to Peter Lombard's
teachings of the unity of the
Holy Trinity.

56. 754 Villon refers to his
earlier poem The Lay or
Legacy.

57. Perrenet of the Bar,
mentioned in The Lay,
seemingly a pimp.

58./774-x Jean Moreau
sold meat, Jean de Provins
was a pastry chef and Robin
Turgis was proprietor of the
tavern La Pomme de Pin.

I feel my heartbeat grow ragged,
And I'm losing the strength to speak,
Fremin, sit down here by the bed,
So no one can eavesdrop or peek;
Quickly, the ink, pen, and paper,
Write down word for word what I say,
Make copies of the will later,
And now I begin straightaway:

In the name of God eternal,
And of the Son born of virgin,
With the Father, co-eternal,
One with the Holy Ghost within ,
Who places those lost through Adam
Throughout the heavens singing lauds....
Who can believe, in all wisdom,
Dead people become demigods.

For body and soul, they were dead,
Doomed forever to perdition,
Souls in flames and bodies rotted,
No matter what their condition;
All the same, I make exception
For the prophets and patriarchs;
According to my conception,
Their backsides don't show the fire's
marks.

If someone says " You've come undone
To say something so contentious,
When you're not a theologian;
You're simply being outrageous";
I'd point them to what Jesus said
Of the rich man stretched out in fire,
Not taking rest in a soft bed,
And Lazarus rising higher.

If he saw Lazarus' finger
Burning, he'd not seek cooling there,
Or want that hand to pour water
For him, anytime, anywhere;
Drunks who guzzle drinks night and
day, Down there will find it tough going,
From the higher prices they'll pay;
God keep us from that, no joking.

59. 801 Conventional
Christian doctrine, however
vulgar the expression, related to
the Harrowing of Hell by Christ
and the redemption of the saints
of the Old Testament.

60. 820 The well known
parable in Luke, comically
embroidered by Villon.

In the name of God, as I said,
And of his glorious Mother,
With pure thoughts may this be drafted
By me, thinner than a specter;
It was by divine clemency
If the flux didn't do me in;
Of other pain and injury,
I hold my tongue and now begin.

First, I offer my soul before
The high and holy Trinity,
And ask Our Lady as sponsor,
The bearer of divinity;
From Heaven's nine Orders I pray,
On the charity they afford,
To bring this gift the final way
To the precious throne of the Lord.

Item, I bequeath my body
To our own great mother, the Earth;
Since hunger waged its war fiercely,
The worms won't find it of much worth;
Send it to her without delay,
From earth it came, to earth it goes;
Unless they've strayed too far away,
All things seek their place at the close.

Item, to my more than father,
Master Guillaume Villon, who's been
More gentle to me than mother
To her own newly begotten;
He's saved me from scrapes and follies,
And doesn't like this one a bit;
I'm begging him on bended knees
To leave me all the joy of it.

To him I leave my library,
And "The Tale of the Devil's Fart",
Which good master Guy Tabarie,
Truthful man, engrossed for his part,
In notebooks under a table;
Although it was clumsily done,
The subject is so notable,
The gaffes are easy to pardon.

61. /850-x Guillaume de
Villon, chaplain of St Benoit
and legal guardian of
Francois Montcorbier who
took his name.

62./858-x The Devil's
Fart was a large stone on the
house grounds of Madame de
Bruyeres. A confrontation
between the police and students
over the stone actually
happened, but it is not known
whether Villon actually wrote a
Tale about it.

Item, I give my poor mother,
Who has suffered because of me
Sorrows one after another,
God knows, to say to Our Lady
(I've no other fortress to where,
Body and soul, I can turn to,
When my woes are too much to bear,
And poor woman, for her that's true):

Our Lady of heaven, regent of earth,
Empress over the infernal region,
Even though I know myself without
worth,
Please receive me as your humble
Christian,
And let me be chosen for redemption;
Your holiness, my lady and mistress,
Is greater by far than my sinfulness,
And without it no soul could hope to vie
For safe entry into heaven's fastness,
Inside this faith I want to live and die.

You know how much I belong to your
son,
May he cleanse my sins so my soul's
increased,
And forgive me as he did the woman
Of Egypt or Theophilus the priest,
Who through you was acquitted and
released,
Even though he'd drunk from the devil's
glass;
Keep me ever from coming to that pass,
Virgin, whose pure womb was sanctified
by
The sacrament we celebrate at Mass,
Inside this faith I want to live and die.

63./859-x Guy Tabarie
was an accomplice of Villon
and others who robbed the
College of Navarre in 1456.
Tabarie boasted of his
exploits in the tavern and
was subsequently arrested
and tortured into a
confession in which he
implicated Villon, Colin de
Cayeux and others. Villon
was forced to flee Paris and
wandered the northern
French countryside for the
next 4 years until he ended
up in the prison at Meung.

64./885-x The Egyptian
refers to a prostitute Mary
converted to Christianity.

65./886-x Theophilus, a
legendary story of his pact with
the Devil was well known in the
Middle Ages

I'm just an old woman, poor as can be,
Who knows nothing and cannot read or
spell;
On the walls of my parish church I see
Paradise painted with harp and angel,
And the lake where they boil the
damned in hell;
One frightens me, one gives great
happiness,
Give me the joyful place, Virgin goddess,
On whom sinners such as us must rely,
Filled with ardent faith in true
sincereness,
Inside this faith I want to live and die.

Virgin mother of God, you bore,
princess,
Iesus whose reign on earth is limitless,
Lord Almighty who took on our
weakness,
Left heaven and came down as savior,
On His blood death is mastered
evermore,
Now such is our Lord that we signify,
Inside this faith I want to live and die.

**

Item to my love, my dear rose,
I won't leave my heart or liver,
She'd like something better than those,
And money I needn't give her -
What then? A big silk purse might do,
Filled up tight with coins, long and large,
But hang any man, and me too,
Who gives her his ecu or targe.

For she gets enough without me,
Not that this is a great concern,
My deepest griefs are history,
And the old fires no longer burn;
I call on the heirs of Michault,
Who was known as The Great Fucker;
Pray for him before you let go,
Laid near Sancerre at Saint-Satur.

66. 900 Villon takes the liberty
of inserting his adoptive name
in the envoi to Mary of his
mother's prayer.

67./915-x Ecus were
gold coins, while targes were
shields or coins with shields
depicted on them.

68./922-x Michault, a
legendary womanizer. Saint
Satur may have been used as his
gravesite purely for the pun on
Satur (satyr).

I have this ballade to send her,
With the lines all ending with R;
Let's see - Who should be messenger?
I know! Perrenet of the Bar;
But if he should meet on the way
Her young lady with the bent nose,
He's to say to her straightaway,
"Filthy slut, where you've been God
knows."

**

False beauty, who treats me like a
sinner,
Really rude, while feigning to be tender,
A love that's colder than any winter,
Now ruined, I can name the pretender;
Curvaceous thief, my poor heart's
tormentor,
Oblique pride, man's dark executioner,
Icy eyes, won't Justice as protector
Stretch a hand to a man going under?

Much better to have searched for
another
As anodyne, I'd still have my honor,
Rushing to her, a fool like no other,
Turning tail I've increased my dishonor,
Help, all of you, it's more than I can
bear,
Alas, not a scratch but torn asunder,
Or will Pity upon hearing my prayer,
Stretch a hand to a man going under?

A time is coming that will wither, tar
And wilt your blossoming, fragrant
flower;
I'll laugh if my mouth will open that far,
By then, though, you'd think it was a
glower;
I'll be old, you, ugly, drained of color,
Live it up before the way gets rougher,
And don't sink ev'ryone in this dolor,
Stretch a hand to a man going under.

**

69./935-x The letter R
was a symbol of treachery at
the time.

70./937-x Mentioned
earlier, Perrenet was a pimp and
probably other things as well.

71.939-x Lady with the
bent nose, probably refers
ironically to her servant rather
than to dear Rose.

72. 942 There is an acrostic in
the initial letters of this ballade
spelling out Francois and
Martha. It is very unclear
whether Martha is the False
Beauty or is the other woman
mentioned in the second stanza
he regrets not accepting.

Most amorous prince and greatest lover,
Don't be annoyed with your petitioner,
But ev'ry true heart must, by Our Father,
Stretch a hand to a man going under.

**

Ythier Marchant I can't forget,
To whom I left my hardest stick,
This little rondelay he'll get,
So he can set it to music-
A **De profundis** for the lute,
To lament his former girlfriends;
About whom I'll always stay mute,
Or we'd never again be friends.

*

Death, I find your judgment unfair,
You have snatched my mistress below,
But still you won't lift your shadow,
And serve me up ever worse fare;
Since then I can't escape despair,
But in life how was she your foe?
Death, I find your judgment unfair,
You have snatched my mistress below.

We were two, with one heart to share,
Since it's dead I must die also,
Yes or live on only in show,
By heart, like the phantoms in air.
Death, I find your judgment unfair,
You have snatched my mistress below.

*

Item to master Jean Cornu,
I would like to do my utmost,
Because he came to my rescue,
Whenever I needed him most;
Thus Pierre Bobignon's garden
I give him, which I used to rent,
But fix up the gable again,
And find out where the front door went.

72. 970 he Lay, Villon
bequeathed a short sword to
Marchant, who was from an
influential family in law.

73. 972 This rondelay is in fact
shorter than customary, but for
unclear reasons. There seems to
be some sexual reference.

74. 990 Jean Cornu is also
mentioned in The Lay, paired
with Marchant. Jean le Cornu
was secretary to King Charles
VII.

75./995 Pierre Bobignon was a
lawyer for the Chatelet prison in
Paris. It is not clear if Villon is
alluding to squatting in the
house while the owner was
away or possibly to a burglary
of things Villon had previously
stolen and left there. No honor
among thieves.

I once lost, for lack of that door,
A hoe handle and some stoneware;
Even with eight falcons or more,
You couldn't catch a lark in there;
To be secure nail the house tight;
I put a crossbar out for show,
Whoever swiped it gets off light -
A bloody night and low pillow!

Item because St. Amant's wife
Scorned me as a repugnant leech;
(If guilt now cuts her like a knife,
Then God's mercy she should beseech)
A new bequest I stipulate:
"The White Horse" which can't move its
ass,
I pair off with a mare as mate,
And "The She-Mule" a hot jackass.

Denis Hesselin I assign,
Since he's an Elect of Paris,
The fourteen casks of Aulnis wine
I stole at great risk from Turgis;
If, by drinking, he imperils
His very judgment and reason,
Then put water in the barrels,
Many a home wine has undone.

Item I give my rapier
To Master Guillaume Charruau,
Without sheath, as he's my lawyer-
Yes, Marchant got it first, I know;
And one reau, which will seem more
In small change, I also donate,
Gathered up in front of the door
At the Templar's country estate.

Item my attorney Fournier,
All of his toils I reimburse,
With something that he need not share,
Namely, four fistfuls from my purse;
In many a case he saved me,
Absolved in the court's opinions,
And justly, by God almighty;
Still, a good cause needs champions.

By the 15th century houses in
the city were generally two
stories tall, with the
occupant's business trade
activities reserved for the first
floor and the living space on
the second. The kitchen
however was in the back of
the first floor quarters.

76./1006-x St Amant was
another royal secretary. The
circumstances between his
wife and Villon are unknown.

77./1014-x Denis
Hesselin, a Parisian official in
charge of the collection of
taxes on wine.
The reference seems to be to
some prank wherein Turgis
received barrels of water
instead of wine.

78. If Charruau was a lawyer,
he was obscure in reputation.
Reau is a gold coin but is a
homonym of rot (belch). The
Knights Templar had been
destroyed a century before
and their estate near Paris
would have been in poor
shape.

79. 1030-x Fournier was
an attorney for the town of St
Benoit where Guillaume
Villon lived.

Item I give to master Jacques Raguier, Grève's "The Big Wine Cup",
But only if he pays four plaques,
No matter that he thus gives up,
In grief, what covers calf and shin,
And wears small shoes, bared to the
knee,
Should he, upright or not, drink in
The Pine Cone Tavern without me.

Item Nicholas de Louviers
And Mereboeuf, two fine gentlemen,
Since they have no herds in their care,
I won't give them cows or oxen,
Rather falcons and falconers,
I'm not joking here any more,
So they can catch quails and plovers,
Without fail from Machecoue's store.

Item should Turgis find me here,
Then I'll pay him back for the wine;
But he would have to be a seer
To locate these lodgings of mine;
He gets my rights in government,
Due me as native of Paris;
As for me Poitevin accent,
Two ladies gave me the practice.

They're charming and lovely women,
And both live at Saint Generoux,
Near the town of Saint Julien,
Bordering Bretagne or Poitou;
But I be in no rush to say
Where exac'ly these lassies roam;
Certie, I weren't born yesterday,
I look to keep my loves at home.

Item and to Jean Raguier,
Sergeant of the Twelve, heaven knows,
A rich cheesecake as daily fare,
Until his life comes to a close,
Pilfered off of Bailly's buffet,
Where he may poke his snout and feast,
Then wet his throat at Maubué,
For with food he's a real beast.

80. Jacques Raguier was mentioned in The Lay. His father may have been a royal chef. Plaques are small coins or scabs and the jibe seems to refer to some skin disease of the legs.

81. Louviers and Marboeuf were mentioned together in The Lay. They were drapers, perhaps given to affectations above their station.

82. 1056-x The owner of the Pine Cone Tavern and a victim of Villon. Villon refers here to his hideout while waiting for word as to the disposition of his case with the College of Navarre. Presumably Guillaume Villon handled the negotiations. Villon was permitted to return given the repayment of his share of the robbery, but it is not known whether the money was repaid.

83./1058-x All Parisians had this right by birth, including Turgis, so Villon offers him nothing.

84./1063-x St Generou and St Julien were towns but not near each other. Only St Generou is close to Brittany (Bretagne).

Item to the Prince of Fools goes
The splendid fool Michault du Four,
Who sometimes comes up with bon
mots,
As well as sings "**Ma Douce Amour**";
I'll say hello out of routine,
Though he doesn't dress as one ought;
He's truly a fool when he's seen,
And he's funniest when he's not.

The Eleven Twenty Sergeants,
Who're as honest as you can get,
And I note two of their nice gents,
Denis Richier and Jean Vallette,
For their fine felt hats of the force,
I give them each a braided cord;
I mean the ones on foot, of course,
The others I've always ignored.

And to Perrenet one time more,
To wit, the Bastard of the Bar,
A clean lad who's good to the core,
On his 'scutcheon replace the Bar
With a card deck marked for gambling,
And three loaded dice squared up true,
But for loud or silent farting,
He's to get the quartan ague.

Item Cholet should not further
Plane, groove, finish, dovetail or fit,
Or band casks and kegs together;
He's to trade his entire toolkit
Even up for one Lyon sword,
Keeping only his cooper's maul;
For though he hates banging a board,
He has a sly love for a brawl.

Item I bequeath Jean le Lou,
Man of means and canny buyer,
Because his active days are through,
And Cholet's no good as spier,
A fine little pointer puppy,
Who'll catch ev'ry chick it describes;
The long cloak has space a plenty
For stashing them from prying eyes.

85. 1070 Jean Raguier was a member of the personal guard of the Provost of Paris. Bailly was a rich solicitor. Maubue was a nearby fountain so the drift of this stanza is clear.

86. 1079 Michault du Four was a policeman involved in the investigation of the Navarre College robbery and therefore not a favorite of Villon.

87. 1086 The Paris foot police, who probably lacked the cornete or cord. The others Villon ignores are the mounted police since they patrolled outside Paris.

88. 1094 The fascination with Perrenet continues, with a reference to the bar sinister of illegitimate birth.

89. /1102-x Cholet did odd jobs including barrel maker and occasional policeman in between his apparent petty burglaries. Jean le Lou apparently hung out with him. They are both mentioned in The Lay. Wood was the most common building material and many carpentry tools still used today were readily available to medieval carpenters such as saws, adzes, mallets chisels hammers. Due to the expense of nails and screws, many joints were fashioned out of interlocking wood. This is still seen in Oriental furniture.

Item I give the Woodworker,
A hundred spikes both heads and tails,
Made from good Saracen ginger,
Not to line his boxes with nails,
But so flank with ass closely fits,
And hams are joined with sausage links,
So that milk rises to the tits,
While down to the balls the blood sinks.

Item to Captain Jean Riou,
Both for himself and his archers,
I give six wolf heads for a stew,
Snatched from the butcher's hulking curs
(Swineherds don't get this kind of meat),
And boiled in wine far past its time;
To share in this delicious treat
A man would gladly stoop to crime.

Although the meat is not as light
As feathers, cork or eiderdown,
It's fine for camping overnight,
Or when forces besiege the town;
But if the dogs aren't worth their weight,
And the wolves were all caught by traps,
As his doctor, I advocate
He skin the dogs' fur for cold snaps.

Item Robinet Trascaille, who
In his duties (how well to fare),
Doesn't go on foot as quails do,
But rides on a fine looking mare,
From my own cupboard I furnish
A bowl he's ashamed to ask for;
His house has ev'ry other dish,
So he won't need anything more.

Item I give Perrot Girart,
The guild barber of Bourg la Reine,
Pans and a retort for my part,
Since he works hard for little gain;
Yet at his house I stuck my fork,
Some half a dozen years ago,
For a whole week into roast pork -
The Abbess of Pourras swears so.

90./1118-x Jean Mahe the
Gold Woodworker, was a
torturer at the Chatelet. The
bequest is obscure but
presumably involves sadistic
sexual acts.

91./1126 Jean Riou
dealt in skins when he wasn't
captain of the 120 archers
which was a ceremonial force
rather than a fighting unit.

92. Trascaille was a Treasury
official of note. The bequest
is obscure.

93. As a barber Perrot Girart
already had the items
bequeathed. The reference to
eating in his house in 1455 is
significant since it was around
the time when he was in hiding
pending the legal determination
his killing of the priest
Sermoise was in self defense.
Huguette du Hamel was the
debauched abbess whose
company Villon kept, it seems.

Item to the good Mendicants,
The Holy Ones and the Beguines,
Ev'rywhere they make their presence,
And Turlupins and Turlupines,
Soups and flans from the Jacobins
I send them as my oblation,
And later behind bed curtains,
They can discuss contemplation.

Yet this gift doesn't come from me,
But rather from ev'ry mother,
And God, who rewards them amply,
For the many pains they suffer;
These fathers must have strength and
life,
The ones in Paris like the rest;
If they give pleasure to some wife,
It proves they love her husband best.

When Jean de Pollicieu made free
To speak against the Mendicants,
They forced him to stand publicly
And recant it and do penance;
Master Jean de Meung had jeers
For them, as did Matheolus,
But what the Church of God reveres,
Must also be revered by us.

So I, their servant, for my part,
In ev'rything I do and say,
Will honor them with all my heart,
And uncomplainingly obey;
You'd be a fool to make a fuss,
For in private, in the pulpit,
Or other ways I won't discuss,
They're apt to make you regret it.

Item to friar Baude, who's found
At the Carmelite's residence,
Still hale and stepping with a bound,
A helmet and pikes for defense,
If while at play in "The Green Cage"
In come Detusca's policemen;
If he wields his sword at his age,
The Vauvert devil's here again.

94. 57. 1159-x The Devotes
(Holy Ones) and Beguines
were mendicant friars.

95./1161-x Turlupins and
Turlupines were monks and
nuns of a heretic nudist sect
who were wiped out at the
beginning of the 1400s.

96. 1174 Jean de Pollicieu was
a 13th century theologian forced
to recant his critique by the
Pope.

97.1190-x Friar Baude
was Baude de la Mare. The
Carmelites were another
Mendicant order.

98./1194-x Detusca is
possibly a reference to Jean
Turquant a police officer. The
Green Cage was presumably
a brothel.

99. /1197-x Vauverte was
a former royal residence
thought to be haunted.

Item the Keeper of the Seal,
Who has chewed on lots of bee shit,
Because he deserves a good deal,
Shall get his seal moistened with spit,
Then afterwards crush flat his thumb,
So he can make an even press;
I mean the bishop's factotum,
Let the rest look to God's largess.

I leave milords the auditors,
For their barn, fine new wainscoting,
And to those whose rear ends have sores,
A pierced chair for better seating;
But they must fine little Macée
Of Orleans, who took my belt,
And make her come to court to pay,
She's the worst shit I've ever smelt.

Item I give the promoter,
Sire Francois De la Vacquerie,
A Scottish neckpiece hung tauter,
And lacking the gold filligree,
For when he got the accolade,
At both God and St. George he swore;
When people hear the part he played,
They crack up and let out a roar.

To Jean Laurens, I won't do ill,
Since his bloodshot eyes look so bleak;
His parents' sins follow him still,
Who drank ev'ry day of the week;
I leave the linings of my bags,
To wipe his eyes when he gets up;
I'd give silk rather than these rags,
But he's not a rich archbishop.

Item to master Jean Cotart,
He was my lawyer in Church Court
(For that I owe him one patart,
The thought has just brought me up
short;
That's where Denise had me driven,
On the charge that I had slurred her)
To help his soul enter heaven,
I've set down this prayer on paper.

100. 1198 Richard de la Palu.
The reason for Villon's
antipathy is not clear.
Beekeeping was quite
widespread in the Middle
Ages since honey was a
cheaper and more available
sweetener than cane sugar.

101. 1206 The auditors were
Royal accountants. The pierced
chair may be a jocular reference
to an outhouse seat.

102. 1210 Mace was a man not
a woman. He was a bailiff for
the Duke of Berry. Why Villon
hated him is unclear.

103./1214-x Francois de la
Vacquerie was a prosecutor
for the Church. He was
presumably subjected to a
beating.

104. 1230 Jean Laurens was
another prosecutor bent on
bedeviling Villon in the
Navarre robbery.

105./1222-x Jean Cotart,
another Church prosecutor
who died in 1461. He
apparently did not prosecute
Villon. A patart was a small
coin. Denise is not known.

**

Father Noah who planted the
grapevines,
And you, Lot, who got so drunk in the
cave,
That you took your daughters like
concubines,
Of course clownish Love made you
misbehave;
(I don't say this from any bad humor)
And Architriclinus skilled in this art,
Please make room, I pray the three of
you for
The soul of the late good squire Jean
Cotart.

He was a man of your stripe in his day,
Drinking only from the costliest jug,
Though he had less inclination to pay;
The way his right hand took hold of the
mug,
He must have been a fabulous archer,
As a drinker he was a man apart,
Noble lords, don't hold up any longer
The soul of the late good squire Jean
Cotart.

Like a drunkard I've seen him lurch and
clump,
Many a time on his way home at night;
Once he raised himself one hell of a
bump,
Falling into his bed, man what a sight;
Search the world over you'd never have
found,
A man less likely to stop once he'd start,
So open the gates when you hear
resound The soul of the late good squire
Jean Cotart.

Prince, he couldn't spit as far as the
floor,
"My throat's on fire" he'd cry with all his
heart,
Each drink left him as thirsty as before,
The soul of the late good squire Jean
Cotart.

106./1243-x The
Architriclinus was governor
of the feast cited in the
Gospels, not the name of a
person as thought in the
Middle Ages.

**

Item the junior Merle I ask
To manage my money-changing
(I don't find it a pleasant task)
Provided he's always exchanging
To strangers, and friends as well,
Six Breton targes for three ecus,
For two angelets a big angel,
For a lover needs revenues.

Item while I was on this trip,
My three poor orphans, so I heard,
Have now passed their apprenticeship,
And aren't the dimwits once whispered;
No children from here to Salins
Studied harder at their lessons;
By the Order of Mathurins,
That's time well-spent by such young
ones.

So they should receive more schooling;
Where? master Pierre Richier's class;
The Donatus is too grueling,
And I want something they can pass;
I much prefer that they study
Ave salus, tibi decus,
And not fool with profundity,
For scholars seldom win status.

They'll study that much and then whoa!
I forbid them to go further;
As for learning the Great Credo,
Boys like these would find it murder;
I tear in two my long tabard, Sell half of
it for good money,
And with the gains buy them custard,
For what child doesn't love pastry.

107. 1266 Germaine de Merle
was a moneychanger. The terms
are favorable to Villon as one
might guess.

108./1275-x Girard
Goussyn, Colin Laurens and
Jean Marceau are referred to
here from The Lay. They
were very old and rich
speculators in salt and other
commodities.

109. /1278-x Salins was a
French city known for its salt
mines. Smoking drying
salting flesh – preserve foods
through dehydration.
Smoking was expensive
while drying was not always
practical. Salt used to
preserve as much or more
than for seasoning food. Sea
salt used by most lower
classes but was grittier than
mined salt. Same process
used in cheeses and butter.

110./1280-x Mathurins
(Mathelins), a religious order.

111./1283-x Pierre Richier
was a master of theology.

112./1284-x Donatus was a
late Roman author of a
grammatical text widely used
in the Middle Ages but also
has the secondary meaning
'to give'.

113./1287-x Ave salus... A
complicated pun mixing
prayer and money.

And I want them taught some graces,
Even if it takes a few belts,
They'll draw their hoods to their faces,
While hooking their thumbs in their
belts,
Saying, "Huh? What? Don't be silly."
And acting extremely polite,
So that most people will agree,
"These youngsters have been brought up
right."

Item and my poor little clerks,
Standing straight as reeds, these children,
To whom I gave my grants and perks,
Seeing them bare, I forbore then,
And assigned them the unpaid rent,
Nearly in the hand already,
On some date due for settlement,
On the house of Guillaume Gueldry.

Although they're young and jump about,
It's nothing that gets me upset,
Some thirty or forty years out,
They'll have changed a lot, I would bet;
It's only right to coddle them,
They're truly wonderful children,
I wouldn't beat or throttle them,
Because boys grow up to be men.

I'll see that they collect their slice
Of the Eighteen Clerks' full stipend,
You won't find them acting like dormice,
Who stay asleep three months on end;
It's such a shame when young folk sleep
In their youth more than is required,
For then they have long hours to keep
When they're old and are truly tired.

To help, I'll write the Collator
Duplicate letters of reference;
If they don't pray for their sponsor,
Have their ears tweaked for impudence;
Some find it puzzling at the least,
I love them above all others,
But by my faith in fast and feast,
I've not set eyes on their mothers.

114./1306-x The clerks
were Guillaume Cotin and
Thibaut de Victry and
mentioned in The Lay. They
were very old and rich
counselors to the Parlement.

115./1322-x The 18 Clerks
was a college for poor clerks
associated with Notre Dame.

Item I give Michault Cul d'Ou,
And also Sire Charles Taranne,
A present of a hundred sous
(And how? It will fall like manna);
I leave them sheepskin boots also,
The soles as well as the uppers,
If they give to Jehanne my hello,
And to another friend of her's.

Item to the lord of Grigny,
To whom Bicêtre went before,
I give the Tower of Billy,
But if a window or a door
Is missing from neglect or theft,
He's to fix it up regardless,
And then coin money right and left,
I haven't much and he's got less.

Item to Thibaut de la Garde ...
Thibaut? um, he's named Jean, I know,
I'll give nothing I can't discard,
This year I've seen enough things go,
May God give something back, Amen -
"The Wine Keg" yes! that's more than
fair,
Though Genevois as oldest then,
Has the redder nose to drink there.

Item to keep Basanier well,
Who books crooks at the Chatelet,
I leave cloves from Jean de Ruel,
He should go fill up a basket;
Mautaint and Rosnel get the same;
With the cloves to cure jail fever,
They'll serve with humble, honest aim,
The lord who serves St. Christopher,

To whom this ballade I present,
For his lady who's all things good,
If love hasn't such a present
For us all, do you think it should?
For he won the jousts for this belle,
King Rene of Sicily staged,
Where he said little but fought well,
The fights Troilus or Hector waged.

116. 1338 Two rich clerks.
The bequest is a sexual joke of
some kind. Jeanne was a
common name for a prostitute.

117. Phillipe Brunel a lesser
nobleman prone to lawsuits. He
was mentioned in The Lay.

118./1354-x Jean (Thibaut)
de la Garde was a rich dealer
in spices. Thibaut was slang
for a cuckold.

119./1360-x Etienne
Genevoys, a lawyer at the
Chatelet

120./1362-x Pierre
Basanier, an official at the
Chatelet prison.

121./1365-x Jean de Ruel ,
an auditor at the Chatelet.

122./1366-x Mautaint and
Rosnel, officials at the
Chatelet

123./1369-x A reference to
the provost Robert
d'Estouteville (chief of police)
of Paris and the boss of
Basanier et al.

124./1374-x A reference to
a tournament held by King
Rene of Sicily at which
D'Estouteville competed. It is
not known whether he 'won'
his future wife Ambroise de
Lore in that way.

**

At daybreak the hawk begins its
preening,
Morning revels with joy and noble grace,
Brightly the thrush warbles its song on
wing,
Rolling under her mate's feathered
embrace;
Overwhelmed by desire I offer you,
Ioyfully those things that lovers treasure,
Shouldn't the book of love contain them
too?
Ever to this end we are together.

Dearest lady and my heart's sole delight,
Ending only when death overtakes me,
Laurel who graciously fights for my right,
Olive branch who restores tranquility;
Reason urges me not to break the bonds
Encircling me, but to pull them tighter
And with this desire my heart
corresponds;
Ever to this end we are together.

And what's more, when troubles are sent
my way
By Fortune, which often shows its dark
side,
Your gentle gaze turns that malice away,
As a mild breeze shunts a feather aside;
The seed I sow isn't lost in your field,
Since the fruit will assume my character,
God commands I till and nurture its
yield,
Ever to this end we are together.

Princess, in closing let me say to you,
That my heart remains with you forever,
And I'm certain your heart reflects this
too,
Ever to this end we are together.

**

124. Tournaments were popular but often restricted and condemned for violence and expense. They were generally a social occasion in this period and could be staged with weddings, political treaties etc. Jousts could take the form of duels or melees where two teams fought each other and some could be on foot using blunted poleaxes.

125. Ambroise de Lore is spelled in the acrostic in this ballade

Item I leave Sir Jean Perdrier,
And François his younger brother,
Nothing, though they were quick to
share,
And helped me out like no other;
And yet François, my dear old friend,
Between pleading and berating,
At Bourges made sure to recommend
I try seared tongues, red and flaming.

I read Taillevent afterwards,
The chapter on the fricassee,
But going backwards or forwards,
They aren't discussed that I could see;
I assure you it was Macquaire,
Who makes devils smell good roasted,
By cooking them wrapped in their hair,
Who sent this recipe instead.

**

In red and white arsenic's smoking
dregs,
In saltpeter, quicklime, and orpiment,
In washwater rinsed off a leper's legs,
In boiling lead as softening agent,
In soot and pitch with lye as reagent,
Freshly made from the turds and piss of
Jews,
In the stinking muck scraped off feet and
shoes,
In blood of asps and drugs intensified,
In the vomit a fox or badger spews,
In worse, these envious tongues should
be fried.

In the brains of a cat that hates to fish,
Old and black, who's lost ev'ry tooth it
had,
Or use an old mongrel's, it's less
anguish,
One that foamed and slavered as it went
mad,
In drinking water that rats have turned
bad,

126./1406-x Jean and
François Perdrier were
merchants and officials in
Paris. The reference to
Bourges and their connection
with Villon are not known.

127./1414-x Taillevent is a
reference to Guillaume Tirel,
royal cook to King Charles VI
and author of a well known
cookbook. It does not
contain any reference to
fricassee as Villon notes.

128./1418-x Macquaire,
another well known French
cook.

In the sweat that flows from a sick
mule's pores,
With frogs, toads and other slimy
horrors,
Also noble birds which have putrefied,
Cut to small pieces with a sharp scissors,
In worse, these envious tongues should
be fried.

In sublimates that can blacken the skin,
In the navel of a snake with venom,
In the dried blood in a barber's basin,
Seen on the night that the full moon has
come,
Green on the sides and black at the
bottom,
In oozing carbuncles, sores and
chancres,
In tubs where wet nurses wash their
diapers,
In the bidets that bad girls sit astride
(If you're puzzled, whores are the best
teachers),
In worse, these envious tongues should
be fried.

Prince, these delicacies through the
brownstained
Seat of someone's drawers then should
be strained,
If bolting cloth or sack isn't supplied;
Above all, with pig shit let them be
drained,
In worse, these envious tongues should
be fried.

**

Item master André Courault
Receives "Franc Gontier Refuted",
But the tyrant in all his show,
His actions I've not disputed;
The Sage would never want to see
A poor man offend those on high,
Lest they spread their nets secretly,
And he be enmeshed going by.

129./1457-x Andre
Courault, counsellor at the
Treasury and to King Rene,
who was rather partial to
pastoral poetry. The Sage is
Solomon.

But Gontier, bah, he has no men,
And his kin aren't better than mine;
That's what our quarrel here has been;
He says that his poverty's fine,
And boasts of it the whole year through,
Believing happiness to be
What is misery in my view;
Which one of us is wrong? Let's see.

**

A plump canon lounges by the fireside,
On a plush carpet and a soft pillow,
Lady Sidonia stretched by his side,
Darling, fragrant, glistening, white as
snow,
Sipping spiced wine together all aglow,
Laughing, stroking, kissing into the night,
Naked flesh on flesh pressed tight in
delight,
Through a peephole I could see them
coining;
Then I knew that to make sorrow take
flight,
The high life is the greatest thing going.

If Franc Gontier and Helen, his
girlfriend,
Had got used to the sweet life in this
way,
Their black toast wouldn't be so ill-
leavened
With onions that foul the breath the
whole day;
All their curds and vegetable consomée
Aren't worth one garlic for all I can see;
They tell us to sleep beneath the rose
tree -
Can that beat the comfort a bed would
bring?
What would you say? Don't even count
to three;
The high life is the greatest thing going.

130./1458-x Franc Gontier
was the hero of pastoral
poems by Philippe de Vitry.
These were later satirized by
others including Pierre
d'Ailly.

131./1459-x The tyrant is a
reference to a line in the
satirical poem by d'Ailly. The
Sage is a reference to
Ecclesiastes.

132./1475-x Lady Sidonia
was a character in a prose
romance current at the time.

Coarse bread of oats and barley they live
on,
And drink only water from the brooklet,
But all the birds from here to Babylon
Wouldn't keep me on that kind of diet
For a morning before I'd get upset;
By God, let Franc Gontier go on and
dine,
With his Helen under the eglantine;
I don't mind if that's the line they're
throwing;
But though their life at the plough may
be fine,
The high life is the greatest thing going.

Prince, decide so we can go home to
bed,
But while I don't mean to be provoking,
When I was small I often heard it said,
The high life is the greatest thing going.

**

Item since she knows her Bible,
I ask Mlle. de Bruyères
To preach from all but the Gospel,
A task her alumnae should share,
And reform the girls in the street,
Whose tongues are sharper than the rest;
But the graveyard's no place to meet,
No, the Thread Market would be best.

**

Well known the women of Venice
And Florence are for wagging tongues,
And they're never out of practice,
The oldest still wear out their lungs;
Yet be they Lombards or Romans,
Or Genovese, it's still a lock,
Piedmontese or Savoisiens,
Those Paris girls can really squawk.

133./1507-x Madame
Bruyeres was involved with
various good works after her
husband died. Prostitutes
often used cemeteries to troll
for business. The Thread
Market was near the
Cemetery of Innocents.

I've heard the Neapolitans
Are rare scholars in yammerings,
And the Spanish and Catalans
Run off a stream of jabberings;
Yet be they Greek or Egyptian,
Hungarian or other stock,
German women, even Prussian,
Those Paris girls can really squawk.

The Lorraines and Swiss can't hack it,
Nor can the women of Calais;
Two fishwives could start a racket
Out on the Petit-Pont and flay
Them, and the Toulousians, Gascons
(Haven't I taken quite a walk?),
The English, Picards and Bretons,
Those Paris girls can really squawk.

Prince to the Parisian women,
You must give the top prize for talk;
Don't tout the Italian women,
Those Paris girls can really squawk.

**

I see them sit by twos and threes,
With their skirts folded carefully,
In churches and monasteries;
Draw close, as quiet as can be,
You'll overhear such opinions,
Beyond even Macrobius;
These are very worthwhile lessons;
Listen up, and act studious.

And to Montmartre on the hill,
Almost antediluvian,
I give and append the foothill,
Which is called Mount Valerian;
I also give up a quarter
Of my indulgence earned at Rome,
Thus more good Christians can enter
This abbey which no man calls home.

134. 1547-x Macrobius, a
well known Roman scholar.

135. A nearly derelict convent
run by a few nuns who
reputedly prostituted
themselves.

Item chambermaids and stewards
From proper homes (it's only right),
Are to make tarts, cakes and custards,
And then carouse around midnight
(Seven, eight pints just to begin),
While lord and lady sleep in bed;
Then later, controlling the din,
I'll teach them to play "ass" instead.

Item to those genteel girls, who
Have a father, mother, and aunts,
I can give nothing of value,
Since it all went to the servants;
How wonderful if these sweet belles,
Who have made do with a smidgen,
Could get their hands on choice morsels,
That the Jacobins have hidden,

Or Celestines and Carthusians;
Even though they're ruled from above,
They're known for their large provisions
Of the things these girls have need of;
Just ask Jacqueline or Perrette,
Or Isabelle who says, " Oh My!"
Since they're so famished and upset,
God will forgive you when you die.

Item and now to Fat Margot,
Her sweet face so pretty in paint;
By my faith in bilord, bigod,
She's as devout as any saint;
I love her for her own true ways,
And she me, the dearest baby;
Who first sees her in coming days,
Should read her this ballade for me.

**

If I love and serve this woman gladly,
Must you think of me as pervert or sot?
She can please whatever your taste may
be,
I'd take up shield and sword for fair
Margot;
When customers come I run for a pot,

136./1583-x Fat Margot,
probably a conventional
name for a prostitute rather
than a specific acquaintance.
Or maybe she was. By Lord
by God was an oath popular
with the English occupiers of
Paris in the 1420's.

And soundless pour wine for the
occasion;
I offer cheese, fruit and bread to each
one;
If they pay well, I tell them, "You're
God's own,
Come back again when you're hot for
some fun,
In this whorehouse where we've taken
our throne."

But when Margot comes to bed
penniless,
Then I confess she's more than I can
bear;
I can't look at her in my bitterness;
I grab her jacket, dress and underwear,
And grimly swear I'll keep them as my
share;
She puts her hands on her hips, "You
no-good...
AntiChrist", she cries out, by all that's
good,
I'd better not; then my answer is shown,
As I write across her nose with firewood,
In this whorehouse where we've taken
our throne.

When we've made our peace she lets a
fart go,
Bigger than a dung beetle by the sound,
Laughing out loud she calls to me
"Gogo",
Whacks my ass and pounds my head till
I'm crowned;
Both of us drunk we sleep as if
spellbound,
And when we wake, she starts to feel
horny,
So to preserve her fruit she mounts on
me; Pressed flat underneath I can only
groan,
As she takes away all my lechery,
In this whorehouse where we've taken
our throne.

Venus and Mars, I must follow my star,
I'm a lecher and she's just as vulgar;
Like one of us more? Why? We're on a
par,
Like follows like, bad rat for a bad cat,
Only filth suits what we are and that's
that;
Now we're stripped of honor down to
the bone,
In this whorehouse where we've taken
our throne.

**

Item to Big Jeanne from Bretagne,
Also to Marion l'Idolle,
Go the public schools to maintain,
Where pupils take the teacher's role;
This deal is practiced far and wide,
Except in the jail at Mehun;
So I ask, " Why hang signs outside
To tout a trade that's this common?"

Item and for Noël Jolis,
Fine willow branches that I'll trim
From my own tree, but only this,
For I've disinherited him;
Since good often comes from scourges,
Why would anyone be angry?
Two hundred and twenty lashes,
He gets at the hands of Henry.

Item but what can I do for
The Hotel-Dieu and poorhouses;
This isn't the place for humor,
Since the poor bear enough crosses,
Ev'ryone sends them their hindmost;
My goose went to the Mendicants,
The poor will see the bones at most;
The little man gets the remnants.

137./1628-x Marion l'Idolle
was a well known madam.

138. 1636 Noel Jolis was
mentioned previously as
witness to Villon's beating in
a stream possibly at the
instigation of Katherine de
Vauselles.

139./1644-x The Hotel
Dieu was the city hospital.
Hospitals or hotels-Dieu
could be quite large with a
staff of nuns, priests, doctors,
apothecaries as well as cooks
and bakers. The one in Paris
was well endowed by the
Kings.

Item I leave to my barber,
By the name of Colin Galerne,
Near Angelot, the herb dealer,
A big ice block (from where? the Marne);
To make his winter more content,
He's to press it to his tummy;
If that's how his winter's spent,
Next summer he'll feel less crummy.

Item nothing to the Foundlings,
It's the lost ones I must console;
I've no doubt they've got their lodgings
At right, with Marion l'Idolle;
Just one quick lesson from my school
I'll read them, so they needn't fret;
Since they don't want to play the fool,
They'll listen, it's the last they get.

"My dear lads, what makes you heave-to
The finest rose you had to show;
My clerks whose fingers are like glue,
If you venture to Montpipeau
Or Rueil, best guard life and limb;
In those places for a frolic,
Thinking an appeal would spring him,
Colin de Cayeux lost his quirk.

"This isn't some silly shell game,
When body and soul are in play;
For if you lose, you die in shame,
And repentance provides no stay;
If you win, you won't have as wife,
Fair Dido, the queen of Carthage;
Only a fool would pledge his life
To gain such a mess of pottage.

"Bear with me just a little more,
There's a saying known far and wide:
The winecart driver drinks his store,
Winter indoors, summer outside;
The silver you've got won't lay roots,
So you might as well spend it fast;
Who do you see getting its fruits?
Ill-gotten gains will never last.

140. 1660 A reference to his
criminal buddies in the gang
known as the Coquillards.

141./1671-x Montpipeau
and Rueil were towns near
Meung and Paris respectively.
A pun is intended since
'piper' was to cheat at dice
and 'ruer' was to strike.

142./1674-x Colin de
Cayeux was a criminal
associate of Villon and
partner in the College of
Navarre robbery. He was
caught and executed in 1460.

**

"Whether you trade indulgences,
Play false at bones, counterfeit coin,
Stack the cards, for connivances
Men are boiled, that's the crowd you'll
join,
Or the traitors and heretics,
Whether rapists, thieves, cozeners,
Where goes the booty from these tricks?
All to the girls and taverners.

"Play cymbal, rhyme and pluck the lute,
Acting like some dopey mummer,
Do sleight of hand and blow the flute,
In cities and towns each summer,
Stage acts, farces, moralities,
Cards or ninepins, come up winners,
It goes real quick, now hear me please,
All to the girls and taverners.

"Hey, don't waste your life with such
fools,
Till the fields as long as there's light,
Brush and tend the horses and mules,
Even if you can't read or write,
You can do alright with some care,
But if you keep cutting corners,
Won't you just fork over your share,
All to the girls and taverners.

"Pants, laced doublets and softest hose,
Also your best leathers and furs,
Before you do worse just take those,
All to the girls and taverners.

**

143./1692-x a reference to
the trade in forged Papal
bulls or documents bearing
the Papal seal.

Men's clothes in the 15th
century consisted of outer
clothes such as tunics/doublets
capas, cloaks, houppelandes.
The tunic/doublet became more
tailored and somewhat shorter
in length where it ended mid
thigh. It could have buttons or
laces in front, but to put on it
was generally pulled over the
head. There were usually
eyelets at the lower hem to tie
the laces of a man's long hose.
Cote hardies and houppelandes
were basically long heavier
coats more or less tailored
depending on the style in
fashion. Hats and hoods were
common. Hoods could be part
of the outer garment or separate.
Furs in the Middle Ages were
generally worn as inner linings
rather than on the exterior
except for collars and hems.

"Yes you my boisterous buddies,
Sick in your souls, though full-blooded;
All of you beware that foul breeze
That turns men black after they're dead;
It has a bad bite so steer clear;
Try and find a way to get by,
And for God's sake keep one thought
near,
That a time will come when you'll die."

Item and to the Fifteen Score,
Otherwise called the Three Hundred
Of Paris, Provins I ignore,
(Just those to whom I'm indebted)
Shall go with my full indulgence,
My large eyeglass without the case,
To sort out at the Innocents,
The high and mighty from the base.

For here no one laughs or rollicks,
Of what value were their riches?
None take part in bedroom frolics
Or enjoy the feasts and dances,
Or pour out wine and raise the glass,
And be ready for more, dusk or dawn;
Because all of these pleasures pass,
And the guilt of them lingers on.

For these skulls that I consider,
All piled up in the charnelhouse-
Each one was Finance Minister,
No less than of the Royal House,
Or maybe they were all porters;
I could say yes, maybe or no,
Because bishops or lamplighters,
I don't have any way to know.

Those of women who formerly
Had cuddled up with someone dear,
Of which some had authority,
Over the rest who served in fear,
I see them now all satisfied;
Pell mell they've been thrown together;
Rank and title are set aside,
And none are called clerk or master.

144./1728-x The Fifteen
Score was a hospice for the
blind near the cemetery of
the Innocents. The cemetery
contained the bones from
disinterred graves.

Now they are dead and their bodies,
God save their souls, have all rotted,
Whether they were lords or ladies,
Or how lovingly they were fed
On whipped creams, frumenty, and rice;
Into dust their bones have dissolved,
No more moved by laughter or vice;
By the mild Jesus be absolved.

That to the dead I dispense,
And one more prayer I send fullspeed
To the courts, palaces, regents,
To all who hate the sin of greed,
Who for the sake of the public,
Get worn out working until dawn;
By God and by St. Dominic,
May they be absolved once they're gone.

Item to Jacques Cardon, nothing,
Not that I find him unworthy,
But I've no proper offering,
Except for this rustic ditty,
To the tune of "Marionette",
Composed for Marion Peautarde,
Or "Open Your Door, Guillemette",
It goes very well with mustard.

Returning from the harsh prison
In which I very nearly died
If Fortune feels ungratified
Doesn't her wrath seem overdone
It would seem after all she's done
That she should be well satisfied
Returning from the harsh prison
In which I very nearly died

But if she's filled with unreason
And no longer let's me abide
May it please Our Lord to provide
My ravished soul a safe station
Returning from the harsh prison
In which I very nearly died.

145. 1776 Jacques Cardon was a merchant mentioned in The Lay. The rondeau Villon bequeaths him is a typical courtly song rather than a rustic or obscene ditty. Further it seems to refer in general terms to Villon's own circumstances. It is puzzling why this should be the bequest to a merchant.

Item I make master Lomer
A man ev'ryone will cherish,
By the fairy powers I bear;
Although he's never to languish
For proper dame or common slut,
He gets a hundred screws one night,
Which won't even cost him a nut,
To beat Ogier the Dane outright.

To the wan lovers I provide,
With Alain Chartier's legacy,
A holy font by their bedside,
Which tears will fill all too quickly,
And a verdant sweetbriar spray,
To use as an aspergillum,
If, for poor Villon's soul, they say
A psalm or two in days to come.

And to Jacques James, I believe
Who for wealth would give up his life,
All the women he wants I'll leave
As fiancées but none for wife;
For whom is it for? His kindred?
It's only for his pile he cries,
Yet what came from the sows, I've read,
Should by rights belong in the sties.

Item the downcast mareschal,
Who once paid my debts, will forthwith
Get a job more congenial,
Shoeing ducks as country blacksmith;
I send these jokes as what passes
For amusements, but if not such,
He can roll them up for matches;
Fine singing can bore you as much.

And the Knight of the Watch shall get
The two cutest little pages,
Philibert and chubby Marquet,
Who despite their tender ages,
Have served the Provost of Marshals,
And therefore gained much in
shrewdness;
Alas, if they're served dismissals,
Then they'll just have to go shoeless.

146./1796-x Master Lomer
was a priest of Notre Dame
who was given the thankless
task of driving prostitutes
from Paris.

147./1797-x Fairies were
thought to have the power to
give a person sex appeal.

148./1803-x Ogier the
Dane was a character in
popular tales but Villon
probably intended another
character, Olivier, who made
more relevant boasts
concerning the Greek
emperor's daughter.

149./1805-x Alain Chartier,
royal secretary and lyric poet.

150./1812-x Jacques James
was possibly the owner of a
brothel. If he was a clerk he
would not have been allowed
to marry.

151./1820-x The marechal
was possibly Pierre de Breze.
A blacksmith was called a
marechal-ferrant, hence the
pun.

152. 1830 Both were possibly
old policemen.

Item to Chappelain I pass
My chapel of simple tonsure,
Where you only do a dry Mass,
Which cuts out the literature;
I'd also give my curacy,
But care of souls isn't his trade;
Confessions aren't his fancy,
Except for lady and chambermaid.

Because he knows what my plans are,
That upright man, Jean de Calais,
Who's not laid eyes on me thus far,
And if asked my name couldn't say,
Perceiving some difficulty
Anywhere in this testament,
Should prune it like an apple tree,
I give him here my full consent:

To explain and annotate it,
To stipulate and describe it,
To trim or elaborate it,
To line it out and prescribe it,
With his own hand; if he can't write,
To interpret and give it sense,
Using his judgment, wrong or right;
In this, he has my confidence.

If an heir unbeknownst to me,
Has passed on to their great reward,
I give him full authority,
Acting as a faithful steward,
To ensure that these terms are met,
And find an alternative heir,
And not put it in his pocket;
His conscience is my safeguard there.

Item my sepulcher must rest
At Saint Avoye, yes I'm sure,
And so that I'm seen at my best,
Not in the flesh, just a picture,
Have them do my full length portrait
A tombstone? No, with all that weight,
I fear that the floor would give way.
In ink, if there's cash stashed away;

153. Jean Chapelain was a
police guard at the Chatelet
prison.

154./1845-x Jean de Calais
was a notary at the Chatelet
who verified wills.

155./1868-x Saint Avoye
was a convent. The chapel
was on an upper floor, thus
the joke about the floor
giving way

Item around my pit please place
The words below, just as written;
For the best look use upper case;
If you can't come up with a pen,
Then try a chunk of coal instead,
Though don't scrape or chip the plaster,
As some remembrance once I'm dead,
Such as befits a born prankster.

HERE LIES AND SLEEPS IN THIS ATTIC,
WHOM LOVE'S ARROW CLAIMED AS
VICTIM,
A POOR AND OBSCURE SCHOLASTIC,
FRANÇOIS VILLON, AS WE NAME HIM;
HE DIDN'T HAVE A FURROW ON
EARTH,
WHETHER TABLES, CHAIRS, BREAD,
BASKET,
HE GAVE OUT EV'RYTHING OF
WORTH,
GALLANTS RECITE NOW THIS VERSET:

**

LET HIM REST IN ETERNITY,
OH LORD AND LIGHT TO WHOM WE
KNEEL,
HE HAD NO MONEY FOR A MEAL,
OR EVEN A SPRIG OF PARSLEY,
THEY SHAVED HIS HEAD, BROWS AND
BODY,
LIKE A TURNIP YOU SCRAPE OR PEEL,
LET HIM REST IN ETERNITY,
OH LORD AND LIGHT TO WHOM WE
KNEEL.

Plaster was quite common
and Paris had particularly
good gypsum plaster still
known as plaster of Paris.

THE LAW EXILED HIM CRUELLY,
AND WHACKED HIS ASS WITH COLD
HARD STEEL,
EVEN THOUGH HE CRIED "I APPEAL!"
WHICH ISN'T TOO SUBTLE A PLEA,
LET HIM REST IN ETERNITY,
OH LORD AND LIGHT TO WHOM WE
KNEEL.

**

Item I would like them to swing
The great bell made of glass for me,
Though whenever it starts to ring,
All hearts stop momentarily;
It has saved many a good folk
As all men know, in days of old,
From armed brigades or lightning stroke,
At its sound, all evil stopped cold.

Give the ringers four loaves of bread,
If that's too few, half a dozen;
(More than the rich would have them
fed)
But the kind they threw St. Stephen;
Vollant knows how to make ends meet,
I'll let him be one, in my view,
He'll last a week with this to eat;
Jean de la Garde can be one, too.

To accomplish all the bequests,
I nominate executors,
Who'll find this suits their interests,
And aren't too tough on their debtors;
There's no braggart among these men,
Yet, thank God, each is well-to-do,
Which is why they were all chosen
Get out a pen, here's six for you.

156./1905-x The bell of
glass is a reference to the bell
La Jacqueline in Notre Dame
which had cracked.

157./1916-x Vollant was
another rich salt merchant.

One is master Martin Bellefaye,
The Lieutenant of the Provost;
Who's next? Um, now who can I say?
Ah! If it would please him the most,
Then I select Sire Colombel,
He'll perform the task worthily;
And the third? Michel Jouvenel,
Once and for all I name these three.

But in case they excuse themselves,
Concerned by the initial fees,
Or totally recuse themselves,
Then I replace them as trustees,
With three others in my favor:
The noble squire, Philippe Brunel;
And the second? His close neighbor,
Master Jacques Raguier will do well.

Master Jacques James will make three,
All men of wealth and character,
Anxious for their souls, they humbly
Venerate and fear Our Father;
They'll make up any shortfall,
So that this testament won't fail;
No one's going to pay them a call,
Thus their slightest whims will prevail.

And the Master of Testaments
Won't force me to pay quid or quod;
I'll have a young priest for defense,
By the name of Thomas Tricot;
I'd happily drink on his bill,
But it could cost me my cornet;
If he played handball with more skill,
I'd give him the Hole of Perrete.

As for the placement of the lights,
I leave it to Guillaume du Ru;
The choice of pall bearers by rights,
The executors should see to;
My beard and hair, penis and brow,
Again the cold sweats have begun;
Pain presses, the time has come now,
To beg for ev'ryone's pardon.

158. 1928 All three men
named here were rich,
important individuals, not well
suited to be Villon's executors.

159. 1942 The following three
men Brunel, Raguier and James
are lower in station but still well
above Villon.

160./1952-x The master of
testaments was the
ecclesiastical judge who
settled disputes over wills.

161./1955-x Thomas Tricot
was a priest of Meaux and
possibly a younger
schoolfriend of Villon.

162.1959-x The cornet was a
tassel attached to a man's hat
denoting rank. The Hole of
Perrette was an indoor tennis
court, but the obscene jest is
clear.

163./-1961-x Guillaume de
Ru was a rich wine merchant.

**

So to Devotes and Mendicants,
To Celestines and Carthusians,
As well as idlers and gallants,
Serving wenches and courtesans,
In jackets and hip hugging skirts,
Boyfriends of old flames, in fashion
In tight boots, denying it hurts,
I beg for ev'ryone's pardon.

Winking tarts with their breasts pushed
up,
To lure in better customers,
Jugglers and monkeys with the cup,
Swindlers and sly rabble-rousers,
Jesters, fools, clowns and harlequins,
Six by six whistling songs as one,
And even small waifs and urchins,
I beg for ev'ryone's pardon.

Save those who kept me in the dark,
The traitorous stinking bastards,
Gnawing stale crusts and shitting bark,
Who couldn't scare me now three turds;
I'd fart and belch in their honor,
But I'm sitting and can't raise one;
So as not to cause a furor,
I beg for everyone's pardon.

And let their fifteen ribs be whacked,
With a large and heavy bludgeon;
Then bashed by lead weights till they've
cracked,
I beg for ev'ryone's pardon.

**

164./1974-x The reference
is to the fashion by young
galants to wear one narrow
boot of yellow leather.

165. 1984 A reference to
Thibaud d'Aussigny and his
imprisonment.

This clause stands as the end and close,
Of poor Villon's last testament,
See him in his final repose,
Put on red vermillion raiment,
When the bell tolls for his service;
As love's martyr he came to die,
Attesting this on his testis,
The while he waved this world goodbye.

And I certainly think he's right,
Like a drudge he was set upon,
By his loves, purely out of spite,
And chased from here to Roussillon;
There isn't a branch or a thorn,
That didn't catch him going by,
Leaving his clothes tattered and torn,
The while he waved this world goodbye.

Thus it was as the record shows,
Just one rag was all that he wore;
As he died, to top his sorrows,
Love's sharp point pierced him to the
core,
And the pain keener than the prick
From a baldric's tang made him sigh
(Which seems to us most fantastic),
The while he waved this world goodbye.

Prince, with all of the merlin's grace,
Hear how well he prepared to die,
The blackest wine he gulped apace,
The while he waved this world goodbye.

FINIS

166. 1996 The concluding
ballade speaks through
another's voice as though
Villon is now dead.

167. A Latin joke: attested by
one is attested by none