

Performing Forces

Villon	bass-baritone
Ythier	low tenor
Beauté	soprano
Heaulmière	alto
Gallant	high tenor
Gantière	soprano
Villon's mother	alto
Voice from church	soprano
Priest	bass taille, as deep as possible
Brothel keeper	basso profondo
6th pendu	male voice (may be performed by cello or contrabass)

Flute (doubles piccolo)

Oboe

Saxophone

Bassoon

French horn

Trumpet

Trombones (2)

Percussion (drums, bells, nose-flute, timpani)

Four "bass bells" (prepared piano or synthesizer)

"Nose-flute" (or 'common flute' executing an overblown descending glissando)

Mandolins (plural)

Piano

Violin

Cello

Contrabassi (3 or 4)

Notes regarding the libretto

The libretto that follows is reprinted from the liner notes of the Fantasy Records 1972 recording of *Le Testament* (Fantasy #12001, Peter Dale Scott, trans.), with several changes that reflect the editors' current research:

"Dame du ciel" precedes "Vergine Rucele" (also known as "Mère au Sauveur").

Line 888 from "Dame du ciel" inadvertently omitted by Antheil in the 1923 score is placed in brackets. Manuscript variants used by Pound for lines 889 and 890 are given for the first time. His use of these *ms* variants is consistent from the 1921 version forward through all versions of the opera.

"Vergine Rucele" is sung by Voice from church, a soprano.

"Suyvez Beauté" consists of the first two lines only, rather than the entire verse.

"Gaita de la tor," the 13th-century song contained within "Père Noé," is included in the libretto for the first time. The first line of each *Le Testament* excerpt is numbered according to its place in such editions as those by Anthony Bonner (*The Complete Works of François Villon*, a Bantam Classic) and Galway Kinnell (*The Poems of François Villon*, A Signet Classic).

Synopsis

Ezra Pound's one-act opera *Le Testament* is a setting of selected poems from a long poem of the same name by François Villon (1431-?), plus one miscellaneous poem, an epitaph. Scene One opens on a square fronted by a brothel, a bar and a church in Villon's Paris, circa 1462. Condemned to death and with a warrant out for his arrest, Villon sits before the tavern writing his "last will and irrevocable testament." Too poor to have material goods, he wills his poetry and his wit to friends and enemies alike. Three arias on the pervasiveness of death, and two arias of regret for lost youth and for lost beauty set the mood: time is the evil. This is confirmed with the boisterous arrival of the old whore Heaulmière who sings of lost charms and old beaux. A procession of colorful characters from Villon's Paris follows: a gallant en route to the brothel sings of love; Villon's mother sings for the salvation of all; Bozo the drunken brothel keeper sings of his sordid life with Fat Margot; the spent gallant stumbles from the brothel to renounce love. The scene climaxes with a group drinking song in praise of Noah and the vine, the arrival of the police and the arrest of Villon. The opera concludes with an eerie and preternatural scene evocative of the Noh drama: six corpses strung from the gibbet sing for the salvation of their souls (*Ballade aux Pendus*).

Libretto

Villon

Et mourut Paris ou Helène, (313)
Quiconques meurt, meurt à douleur.
Celluy qui perd vent et alaine,
Son fil se crève sur son cueur,
Puys sue Dieu sçait quelle sueur!
Et n'est qui de ses maulx, l'allège :
Car enfans n'a, frère ne soeur,
Qui lors vouldist estre son pleige.

Le mort le fait fremir, pallir,
Le nez courber, les veines tendre,
Le col enfler, la chair mollir.
Joinctes et nerfs croistre et estendre.
Corps féminin, qui tan test tendre,
Polly, souef, si precieulx,
Te faudra- il ces maulx attendre?
Ouy, ou tout vif aller ès cieulx.

Paris dies and Helen dies;
whoever dies dies in such pain
that his breath fails,
his gall bursts upon his heart,
and he sweats— God what sweat!
None can alleviate his pain :
no child, brother or sister
in that moment wills to take his place.

Death makes him tremble and turn pale,
deforms his nostrils, swells his veins,
inflates his neck, weakens his flesh;
joints and nerves dilate and distend.
O body of woman, so tender,
smooth, soft and precious,
do these evils await you too?
Yes, except that you enter heaven alive.

Villon

Dictes- moy où, n'en quel pays, (329)
Est Flora, la belle Romaine;
Archipiada, ne Thais,
Qui fut sa cousine germaine;
Echo, parlant quand bruyt on maine
Dessus rivière ou sus estan,
Qui beauté eut trop plus qu' humaine?
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

Où est la très sage Heloïs,
Pour qui fut chastré et puis moyne
Pierre Esbaillart à Saint- Denys?
Pour son amour eut cest essoyne
Semblablement, où est la royne
Qui commanda que Buridan
Fust jetté en ung sac en Seine?
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

La royne Blanche comme ung lys.
Qui chantoit à voix de sereine,
Berthe au grand pied, Bietris, Allys;
Harembourges, qui tient le Mayne,
Et Jehanne, la bonne Lorraine,
Qu'Anglois bruslèrent à Rouen;

Tell me where— in what land
is Flora the beautiful Roman,
Archipiada or Thais
who resembled her so
or Echo speaking across still pools
or rivers when one called,
whose beauty was more than mortal?
Where are the snows of yesteryear?

Where is wise Heloise, for whom
Peter Abelard was castrated
and made a monk at Saint- Denis?
For her love he accepted these trials.
Where now is the queen
at whose command Buridan
was thrust into the Seine in a sack?
Where are the snows of yesteryear?

The queen white as a lily
who sang with the voice of a siren,
broad- footed Bertha, Beatrice, Alice,
Arembourg who held Maine
and Joan, the good maid of Lorraine
burned by the English at Rouen;

Où sont-ils, Vierge souveraine?...
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

Prince, n'enquerez de semaine
Où elles sont, ne de cest an,
Que ce refrain ne vous remaine :
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

where are they, Sovereign Virgin?
Where are the snows of yesteryear?

Prince, ask not in a week
or in a year where they are:
I could give you only this refrain :
Where are the snows of yesteryear?

Ythier

Mort, j'appelle de ta rigueur, (978)
Qui m'as ma maistresse ravie,
Et n'es pas encore assouvie,
Se tu ne me tiens en langueur.
Onc puis n'euz force ne vigueur;
Mais que te nuysoit-elle en vie,
Mort?

Deux estions, et navions qu'ung cuer;
S'il est mort, force est que devie,
Voire, ou que je vive sans vie;
Comme les images, par cuer,
Mort?

Death, I appeal your hardness
which took my mistress away
and you will not be satisfied still
until I too languish.
Since then I've had no strength, no vigor;
in her life, what harm did she do you,
Death?

We were two but with one heart.
If it is dead I too must pass away.
Yes, or live without life
like images in stone
Death?

Villon

Je plains le temps de ma jeunesse, (169)
Ouquel j'ay plus qu'autre gallé,
Jusque à l'entrée de vieillesse,
Qui son partement m'a celé.
Il ne s'en est à pied allé,
N'à cheval; las ! et comment donc?
Soudainement s'en est vollé,
Et ne m'a laissé quelque don.

Allé s'en est, et je demeure,
Pauvre de sens et de sçavoir,
Triste, failly, plus noir que meure,
Qui n'ay ne cens, rente, n'avoir;
Des miens le moindre, je dy voir,
De me desadvouer s'avance,
Oublyans naturel devoir,
Par faulte d'un peu de chevance.

I regret the time of my youth
(when, more than others, I lived in joy
until the onset of old age),
which disappeared behind my back.
Not on foot did it leave, alas,
or on horseback; how then?
Suddenly it stole away
and left me nothing.

It's gone and I am left behind,
impoverished in wit and knowledge,
saddened, discouraged, blacker than ripe,
without income, rents or possessions.
My most distant relative, to tell the truth,
seeks to disown me,
forgetting nature's due
because of a slight lack of fortune.

Villon

Advis m'est que j'oy regretter (453)
La belle qui fut heaulmière,
Soy jeune fille souhaitter
Et parler en ceste manière :

I thought I heard complain
the fair one who once was helm-maker,
wishing herself a girl again
and speaking in this manner :

La Heaulmière

“Ha ! vieillesse felonne et fière, (457)
Pourquoy m’as si tost abatue?
Qui me tient que je ne me fière,
Et qu’à ce coup je ne me tue?”

“Tollu m’as ma haulte franchise
Que beauté m’avoit ordonné
Sur clerchez, marchans et gens d’Eglise;
Car alors n’estoit homme né
Qui tout le sien ne m’eust donné,
Quoy qu’il en fust des repentailles,
Mais que luy eusse abandonné
Ce que reffussent truandailles.

“A maint homme l’ay reffusé,
Qui n’estoit à moy grand saigesse,
Pour l’amour d’ung garçon rusé,
Auquel j’en feiz grande largesse.
A qui que je feisse finesse,
Par m’ame, je l’amoye bien !
Or ne me faisoit que rudesse,
Et ne m’amoyt que pour le mien,

“Jà ne me sceut tant detrayner,
Fouller au piedz, que ne l’aymasse,
Et m’eust-il fait les rains trayner,
S’il m’eust dit que je le baisasse
Et que tous mes maux oubliasse;
Le glouton, de mal entaché,
M’embrassoit... J’en suis bien plus grasse !
Que m’en reste-il? Honte et peché.

“Or il est mort, passé trente ans,
Et je remains vieille et chenue.
Quand je pense, lasse ! au bon temps,
Quelle fus, quelle devenue;
Quand me regarde toute nue,
Et je me voy si très- changée,
Pauvre, seiche, maigre, menue,
Je suis presque toute enragée.

“Qu’est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheueulx blonds, sourcilz voutlyz,
Grand entr’oeil, le regard joly,
Dont prenoye les plus subtilz;
Ce beau nez droit, grand ne petiz;
Ces petites jointes oreilles,

Ah, traitorous, fierce old age,
why have I been undone so soon?
Who cares now if I strike myself
and kill myself with that blow?

You took from me the mighty power
my beauty gave me
over clerks, merchants, churchmen:
once there was no man born
who would not give me everything
he owned (with some regret possibly)
to make me yield
that which beggars now refuse.

I refused many men—
showing thereby little guile—
for the love of a crafty boy
to whom I offered myself.
And though I deceived him now and then,
upon my soul, I loved him well.
He in turn was cruel
loving me only for what I earned.

If he had dragged me through the mud
or walked on me, I’d have loved him;
had he crippled me, he had only
to demand I kiss him
to make me forget my woes.
The glutton, tainted with evil,
would embrace me—a lot of good it did me !
What is left me? Sin and shame.

He’s been dead now these thirty years
and I remain, old and gray.
When I recall the good times—
what I then was, what I’ve since become—
when I look at myself naked
and see myself so changed,
poor, thin, dried-up, shriveled,
I almost go mad.

Where is the smooth brow,
the blonde hair, the curved eyebrows,
the doe’s eyes, the piquant glance
able to snare the subtlest,
the perfect nose, neither large or small,
the delicate shapely ears,

Menton fourchu, cler vis traictis,
Et ces belles lèvres vermeilles?

“Ces gentes espaulles menues,
Ces bras longs et ces mains tretisses;
Petitz tetins, hanches charnues,
Eslevées, propres, faitisses,
A tenir amoureuses lysses;
Ces larges reins, ce sadinet
Assis sur grosses fermes cuysse,
Dedans son joly jardinet?

“Le front ridé, les cheveux gris,
Les sourcilz cheuz, les yeulx estaintz;
Qui faisoient regars et riz;
Dont maintz marchans furent attainctz,
Nez courbé, de beauté longtains;
Oreilles pendans et moussues;
Le vis pally, mort et destaintz;
Menton foncé, lèvres peaussues:

“C'est d'humaine beauté l'yssues !
Les bras courts et les mains contraictes,
Les espaulles toutes bossues;
Mammelles, quoi ! toutes retraictes;
Telles les hanches que les tettes.
Du sadinet, fy ! Quant des cuysse,
Cuysse ne sont plus, mais cuyssettes
Grivelées comme saulcisses.

“Ainsi le bon temps regrettons
Entre nous, pauvres vieilles sottes,
Assises bas, à croppetons,
Tout en un tas comme pelottes,
A petit feu de chenevottes,
Tost allumées, tost estaintes;
Et jadis fusmes si mignottes ! ...
Ainsi en prend à maintz et maintes.”

the dimpled chin, the bright, pretty face
and those beautiful red lips?

Those graceful small shoulders,
long arms and pretty hands,
small breasts, plump buttocks,
high, smooth and well-shaped
for tourneys of love,
those large loins, the vulva
placed between broad firm thighs
in its little garden?

My forehead is wrinkled now, my hair gray,
my eyebrows fallen, my eyes dim,
whose look and laughter
brought many to their downfall;
my nose, its beauty gone, is hooked;
my ears hang down, furry as moss;
my face is pale, lifeless, faded,
chin peaked, lips withered.

So this is the end of mortal beauty :
the arms short and fingers stiff,
shoulders hunched,
the breasts—how? completely shriveled
and hips and teats the same;
the vulva? Fie ! The thighs
thighs no longer but skin and bone
mottled like sausage.

Thus we lament the good times
among ourselves, poor old idiots,
squatting on our haunches
like lumps in a heap
by a meager hemp-stalk fire
kindled so soon and so soon gone out,
who once were so pretty . . .
so it goes for each and all.

The Gallant

Fausse beauté, qui tant me couste cher, (942)
Rude en effet, hypocrite douceur;
Amour dure, plus que fer, à mascher;
Nommer que puis, de ma deffaçon seur
Cherme felon, la mort d'ung povre coeur;
Orgueil mussé, qui gens met au mourir;

False beauty which costs me dear,
harsh behind a tender mask,
love tougher to chew than iron,
harbinger of my downfall;
treacherous charm, death of my poor heart,
indocile pride which sends men to their
destruction,

Yeulx sans pitié ! Ne veult droicte rigueur,
Sans empirer, ung pauvre secourir?

eyes *sans* pity : will not justice, instead of
worsening things, help a poor man?

La Heaulmière

“Or y pensez, belle Gantière, (533)
Qui m’escolière souliez estre,
Et vous, Blanche la Savetière,

Now think things over, pretty glover
who used to be my student,
and you Blanche, the slipper- maker

La Heaulmière, First Whore

Ores est temps de vous congnoistre.
Prenez à dextre et à senestre;
N’espargnez homme, je vous prie :
Car vieilles n’ont ne cours ne estre,
Ne que monnoye qu’on descrie.

it’s time you think of yourself:
take from the right and left—
no man spare, I pray you :
old, you’ll have no more vogue or place
than coins out of circulation.

“Et vous, la gente Saulcissière,
Qui de dancer estes adextre;
Guillemette la Tapissière,
Ne mesprenez vers vostre maistre;
Tous vous faudra clorre fenestre,
Quand deviendrez vieille, flestrie;

And you, graceful sausage- seller,
at dancing so adept;
Guillemette the tapestry- maker,
don’t do your master in, since
soon you’ll have to close up shop.
When you’re old and tainted

La Heaulmière, First and Second Whores

Plus ne servirez qu’un vieil prebtre,
Ne que monnoye qu’on descrie.
“Jehanneton la Chaperonnière,
Gardez qu’ennuy ne vous empestre;
Katherine la Bouchière,
N’envoyez plus les hommes paistre :
Car qui belle n’est, ne perpetre
Leur bonne grace, mais leur rie.
Laide vieillesse amour n’impetre,
Ne que monnoye qu’on descrie.

you’ll serve some old priest
like coins out of circulation.
Joan the bonnet- maker,
don’t let your lover snare you;
Catherine the purse- seller,
no longer send your men to pasture :
for those who aren’t so pretty
do not jeer but smile.
Old age will frighten love away
like money out of circulation.

Envoi: La Heaulmière, Whores, Villon’s Mother

(cracked, sarcastic, as it were, out of tune)

“Filles, veuillez vous entremettre
D’escouter pourquoy pleure et crie;
C’est que ne puy remède y mettre,
Ne qu’à monnoye qu’on descrie.”

Girls, for your own sake,
listen to why I weep and cry:
I can’t get around anymore
like coins out of circulation.

Villon’s Mother

Dame du ciel, regente terrienne, (873)
Emperière des infernaulx palux,

Lady of Heaven, Earth’s regent,
Empress of the infernal shores,

Recevez- moy, vostre humble chrestienne,
Que comprinse soye entre voz esleuz,
Ce non obstant qu'oncques rien ne valuz.
Les biens de vous, ma dame et ma maistresse,
Sont trop plus grans que ne suis pecheresse,
Sans lesquelz biens ame ne peult merir
N'avoir les cieulx, je n'en suis jengleresse.
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

A vostre Filz dictes que je suis sienne;
Que de luy soyent mes pechez aboluz :
Pardonnés moi comme à l'Egyptienne,
Ou comme il feit au clerc Theophilus,
Lequel par vous fut quitte et absoluz,
[Combien qu'il eust au diable fait promesse].
Preservez- moy, que point je ne face cesse;
Vierge portent me vouillies impartir
Le sacrement qu'on celebre à la messe.
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

Femme je suis povrette et ancienne,
Ne riens ne sçay; oncques lettre ne leuz,
Au moustier voy dont suis parroissienne
Paradis painct, où sont harpes et luz,
Et ung enfer où damnez sont boulluz :
L'ung me fait paour, l'autre joye et liesse.

La joye avoir fais- moy, haulte Deesse,
A qui pecheurs doivent tous recourir,
Comblez de foy, sans faincte ne paresse.
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

Vous portastes, Vierge, digne princesse,
Jesus regnant, qui n'a ne fin ne cesse.
Le Tout- Puissant, prenant nostre foiblesse,
Laisa les cieulx et nous vint secourir;
Offrist à mort sa très chère jeunese;
Nostre Seigneur tel est, tel le confesse,
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

Envoi

receive me, your humble Christian,
that I may be among your elect,
even though I have been unworthy.
Your bounty, my Lady and my Mistress,
is far greater than my sins:
without it no soul can have merit
or enter heaven. I tell no falsehood:
in this faith I would live and die.

Tell your Son I am His;
let Him pardon me and forgive my sins
like those of the Egyptian
or of Theophilus the clerk
who, through you, was acquitted and absolved
[though he had made a pact with the devil].
Trust me, but I would never do such a thing;
Virgin who, undefiled, bore
the sacrament we celebrate at Mass.
In this faith I would live and die.

I am a woman poor, old
and ignorant, never having learned to read.
But in my parish church I see
a Paradise painted with harps and lutes
and Hell where the damned boil;
one frightens me; the other gives joy and
happiness.

Let me have that joy, exalted Goddess
to whom sinners all must come,
filled with faith, without sloth or pretense;
in this faith I would live and die.

You bore, Virgin, rare Princess,
Jesus whose reign is endless.
The all- powerful who took up our weakness,
left heaven to come and save us
and offered to Death his dearest youth.
Our Lord He is: thus do I acknowledge him.
In this faith I would live and die.

Voice from the Church

[by Williaume li Viniers (13th cent.) in *Langue D'oc*]
Vergine pucele roi auz
En cui li douz Jhesuchris
Li dous glorieus joiaus
Fut conceüs et norris.

[trans. Ezra Pound]
Maiden and virgin loyal
In whom here Christ's Godhead
As a child glorious royal
Was conceived, born, nourished

Bien fu vos cuers raemplis
De sagrasse et de s'amor
A cel ior Que sains esperis
I ot le fill dieu asis.

Douce dame emperiaus
Es merée flors de lys
Douz vergiers especiauz
Ou li sains fruis fu cueillis

Souverains rosiers eslis
Vous a portastes la flor
Et l'odor Par cui paradis
Nos fu ouvers e promis.

Sweet maid by thy heart full fed
May his love and his grace allay
Thee this day, when the Holy Ghost
by God Son honoured Thee most

Lady imperious
O marvelous fleur de lys
The holy fruit for us
Thou hast born specially

Ah, rose branch and sovran tree
Thou hast the flower and the fleet
Odour sweet, whereby paradise
Shall be brought before our eyes.

The Priest

Suyvez beauté courez au festes, (625)
ai mez, ai mez tant que voudrez . . .
[A variation on Villon's Double Ballade,
"Pour ce, ayez tant que voudrez,
Suyvez assemblées et festes..."—*Ed.*]

Pursue ye beauty, run to feasting
Love light, desire all that ye will . . .
[trans. by Ezra Pound]

Bozo

Se j'ayme et sers la belle de bon haict, (1591)
M'en devez- vous tenir à vil ne sot?
Elle a en soy des biens à fin souhaict.
Pour son amour ceings bouclier et passot.
Quand viennent gens, je cours et happe un pot:
Au vin m'en voys, sans demener grand bruyt.
Je leur tendz eau, fromage, pain et fruit,
S'ils payent bien, je leur dy que bien stat:
"Retournez cy, quand vous serez en ruyt,
En ce bourdel où tenons nostre estat !"

Mais, tost après, il y a grand deshait,
Quand sans argent s'en vient coucher Margot;
Veoir ne la puis; mon cueur à mort la hait.
hatred Sa robe prens, demy- ceinct et surcot:
Si luy prometz qu'ilz tiendront pour l'escot.
Par les costez si se prend, l'antechrist,
Crie, et jure par la mort Jesuchrist,
Que non fera. Lors j'enpongne ung esclat,
Dessus le nez luy en fais ung escript,
En ce bourdel où tenons nostre estat.

...

De paillarder tout elle me destruiet,
En ce bourdel où tenons nostre estat.

If I love and serve my pretty lady gladly,
must you find me vile and foolish?
She has everything a man can desire.
For her love I don sword and shield;
when people come, I run and get a pot
to fetch, silently as possible, the wine;
I serve them water, cheese, bread and fruit.
If they pay well, I say that's good;
"Please come back whenever you're in a rut
to this brothel where we ply our trade."

But other times there is much commotion
when Margot, penniless, comes home to bed;
I can't stand to see her and feel a deadly
I snatch her dress, her belt and slip
and swear I'll use them to raise some cash.
Arms akimbo, she cries, "You Antichrist!"
and swears on Jesus' death
I won't. Then I grab a club
and with it inscribe a message on her nose
in this brothel where we ply our trade.

This lechery of hers will destroy me
in this brothel.

Envoi

Vente, gresle, gelle, j'ay mon pain cuict !
Je suis paillard, la paillarde me suit. . .
[Pound used only two lines of the final strophe
and two lines of the seven-line envoi.—*Ed.*]

Come wind, hail or frost—my bread is baked :
I'm a lecher and she's a lecher with me.

The Gallant

Je renye Amours et despite, (713)
Et deffie à feu et à sang.
Mort par elles me precipite,
Et ne leur en chault pas d'ung blanc.
Ma vielle ay mys soubz le banc;
Amans je ne suyvray jamais;
Se jadis je fuz de leur ranc,
Je declaire que n'en suys mais.

Car j'ay mys le plumail au vent:
Or le suyve qui a attente;
De ce me tays dorenavant.
Poursuyvre je vueil mon entente,
Et, s'aucun m'interroge ou tente
Comment d'amours ose mesdire,
Ceste parole les contente:
"Qui meurt a ses loix de tout dire."

All loves I renounce and curse
and defy with fire and blood.
They hurl me to my death
without a second thought.
I've put my fiddle away; no more
will I spend time with lovers.
If once I was among their ranks
I swear I am no more.

I've put the feather upon the wind:
follow it who wills.
And now I'll drop this theme—I must get on
with what I set out to do.
Should someone ask me, or inquire
how I dare to complain of love,
let this saying suffice him:
"A dying man may speak his fill."

The Chorus of Drinkers

Père Noé, qui plantastes la vigne; (1238)
Vous aussi, Loth, qui beustes au rocher,
Par tel party qu'Amour, qui gens engigne,
De voz filles si vous feist approcher,
Pas ne le dy pour le vous reprocher;
Archetriclin, qui bien sceustes cest art,
Tous trois vous pry qu'o vous veuillez percher
L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotard !

Jadis extrait il fut de vostre ligne,
Luy qui buvoit du meilleur et plus cher;
Et ne deust-il avoir vaillant ung pigne,
(hu et hu et hu et hu et hu et)
Certes, sur tous, c'estoit ung bon archer;
On ne luy sceut pot des mains arracher,
Car de bien boire oncques ne fut faitard.
Nobles seigneurs, ne souffrez empescher
L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotard !
(hu et hu et hu et hu et hu et)

Father Noah who planted the vine
and you also, Lot, who drank in the cave
until Cupid, who makes men fools,
made you approach your daughters
(I don't say this to reproach you),
Architriclinus, well-versed in this art—
all three, I pray you, harbor
the soul of the late Master Jean Cotart.

He was one of your own,
he who drank the best and the costliest
without a penny to his name.
(hu et hu et hu et hu et hu et)
Surely he put it down with the best
no one could make him let go of his pot;
never was he derelict at this business.
Noble lords, permit no obstacles in the way
of the soul of the late Master Jean Cotart.
(hu et hu et hu et hu et hu et)

Gaita de la tor
(anonymous, 13th century)

Gaita de la tor,
Gardez entor les murs,
se Deus vos voie,
Cor sont a sejour
Dame et seignor,
Et larron [lai] vont en proie . . .
pum ump pum pum . . .

Guard of the tower,
Guard well the walls,
and God be with you;
Beating hearts now rest
Lady and lord,
Immune to the stealth of dawn . . .
pum ump pum pum . . .

(Père Noé, continued)

Comme un vieillard qui chancelle et trepigne
L'ay veu souvent, quantd il s'alloit coucher;
Et une fois il se feist une bigne,
Bien m'en souvient, à l'estal d'ung bouchier.
Brief, on n'eust sçeu en ce monde chercher
Meilleur pyon, pour boire tost et tart.
Faictes entrer quant vous orrez hucher
L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotard.

Staggering and reeling like a drunk
I saw him go off to bed,
and once, I remember, his head got
scarred on a butcher's stall. In brief,
in all the world one couldn't find
a lush better to drink with day and night;
therefore, when you hear a whistle, open the gates
for the soul of the late Master Jean Cotart !

Père Noé qui plantastes la vigne
Vous aussi, Loth, qui beustes ou rocher
Tous trois vous pry que vous vueillez percher
L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart.
Toujours crioit, "Haro, la gorge m'art !"
Tous trois vous pry que vous vueillez percher
L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart.

Father Noah who planted the vine
and you also, Lot, who drank in the cave
all three, I pray you, harbor
the soul of the late Master Jean Cotart.
He'd always shout, "Help ! My throat's on fire!"
All three, I pray you, harbor
the soul of the late Master Jean Cotart.

Villon

On ne les aime . . .

One loved them . . .

Chorus

L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart.

The soul of the late Master Jean Cotart.

Villon

Que pour l'heure . . .

For an hour . . .

Chorus

L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart.
Père Noé qui plan . . .

The soul of the late Master Jean Cotart.
Father Noah who plan . . .

Chorus of the Hanged

Frères humains, qui après nous vivez,
N'ayez les cueurs contre nous endurciz,
Car, si pitié de nous pouvres avez,
Dieu en aura plustost de vous merciz.

Brothers who live on after us,
do not harden your hearts against us,
for, if you have pity on us poor men,
God will show his mercy on you sooner.

Vous nous voyez cy attachez cinq, six :
Quant de la chair, que trop avons nourrie,
Elle est piéça devorée et pourrie,
Et nous, les os, devenons cendre et pouldre.
De nostre mal personne ne s'en rie,
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

Se vous clamons, frères, pas n'en devez
Avoir desdaing, quoyque fusmes occis
Par justice. Toutesfois, vous sçavez
Que tous les hommes n'ont pas bon sens assis;
Intercedez doncques, de cueur rassis,
Envers le Filz Marie,
Que sa grace ne soit pour nous tarie,
Nous preservant de l'infemale fouldre.
Nous sommes morts, ame ne nous harie;
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

La pluye nous a debuez et lavez,
Et le soleil dessechez et noirciz;
Pies, corbeaulx, nous ont les yeux cavez,
Et arrachez la barbe et les sourcilz.
Jamais, nul temps, nous ne sommes rassis;
Puis çà, puis là, comme le vent varie,
A son plaisir sans cesser nous charie,
Plus becquetez d'oyseaulx que dez à couldre.
Ne soyez donc de nostre confrairie,
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

Prince Jesus, qui sur tous seigneurie,
Garde qu'Enfer n'ayt de nous la maistrie:
A luy n'ayons que faire ne que souldre.
Hommes, icy n'usez de mocquerie
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !
[from the miscellaneous poems of François Villon]

Envoi

You see strung up here five, six :
as for our flesh, which we have too well fed,
it is already devoured and rotten
and we, the bones, turn now to dust and ashes;
let no one laugh at our misery
but pray God absolve us all.

If we dare call you brothers, do not
be disdainful, though we have been killed
by justice. All the same, you know
that all men are not wise and strong;
intercede for us now that we are dead,
with Mary's Son
that His grace shall not cease for us,
and that he preserve us from infernal thunderbolts;
we are dead: let none harry us
but pray God absolve us all.

The rain has scoured and cleansed us
and the sun dried and blackened us;
maggies and crows hollowed out our eyes
and plucked away our beards and eyebrows;
never, no time, are we at rest,
but, driven by the changing wind,
back and forth at its pleasure,
pecked at by birds more than is a thimble.
Be not of a brotherhood like ours
but pray God absolve us all.

Prince Jesus, who is master of all
let not Hell hold us in sway;
we would have there no transactions or debts.
Men, here there is no jesting,
but pray God absolve us all.

Finale

Icy se clost le Testament
Et finist du povvre Villon.

[Pound uses only the first two lines of the closing
ballad of *Le Testament*.—*Ed.*]

Here ends the Testament
and here is the end of poor Villon.