Ballades

François Villon

Sundry Ballades

François Villon

Villon's Ballade for his Mother

I

LAdy of Heaven, Regent of the earth,
Empress of all the infernal marshes fell,
Receive me, Thy poor Christian, 'spite my dearth,
In the fair midst of Thine elect to dwell:
Albeit my lack of grace I know full well;
For that Thy grace, my Lady and my Queen,
Aboundeth more than all my misdemean,
Withouten which no soul of all that sigh
May merit Heaven.' Tis sooth I say, for e'en
In this belief I will to live and die.

II

Say to Thy Son I am His,—that by His birth
And death my sins be all redeemable,—
As Mary of Egypt's dole He changed to mirth
And eke Theophilus', to whom befell
Quittance of Thee, albeit (so men tell)
To the foul fiend he had contracted been.
Assoilzie me, that I may have no teen,
Maid, that without breach of virginity
Didst bear our Lord that in the Host is seen.
In this belief I will to live and die.

III

Villon's Ballade for his Mother

A poor old wife I am, and little worth:
Nothing I know, nor letter aye could spell:
Where in the church to worship I fare forth,
I see Heaven limned, with harps and lutes and Hell,
Where damned folks seethe in fire unquenchable.
One doth me fear, the other joy serene:
Grant I may have the joy, O Virgin clean,
To whom all sinners lift their hands on high,
Made whole in faith through Thee their go-between.
In this belief I will to live and die.

ENVOI

Thou didst conceive, Princess most bright of sheen,
Jesus the Lord, that hath nor end nor mean,
Almighty, that, departing Heaven's demesne
To succour us, put on our frailty,
Offering to death His sweet of youth and green:
Such as He is, our Lord He is, I ween!
In this belief I will to live and die.

I

TEll me where, in what land of shade,
Bides fair Flora of Rome, and where
Are Thais and Archipiade,
Cousins-german of beauty rare,
And Echo, more than mortal fair,
That, when one calls by river-flow
Or marish, answers out of the air?
But what is become of last year's snow?

II

Where did the learn'd Heloisa vade,
For whose sake Abelard might not spare
(Such dole for love on him was laid)
Manhood to lose and a cowl to wear?
And where is the queen who willed whilere
That Buridan, tied in a sack, should go
Floating down Seine from the Turret-stair?
But what is become of last year's snow?

III

Blanche, too, the lily-white queen, that made
Sweet music as if she a siren were;
Broad-foot Bertha; and Joan the maid,
The good Lorrainer, the English bare

Captive to Rouen and burned her there;
Beatrix, Eremburge, Alys,—lo!
Where are they, Virgin debonair?
But what is become of last year's snow?

ENVOI

Prince, you may question how they fare
This week, or liefer this year, I trow:
Still shall the answer this burden bear,
But what is become of last year's snow?

I

Where is Calixtus, third of the name, Ballade of
That died in the purple whiles ago, Old Time Lords
Four years since he to the tiar came?
And the King of Aragon, Alfonso?
The Duke of Bourbon, sweet of show,
And the Duke Arthur of Brittaine?
And Charles the Seventh, the Good? Heigho!
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

II

Likewise the King of Scots, whose shame
Was the half of his face (or folk say so),
Vermeil as amethyst held to the flame,
From chin to forehead all of a glow?
The King of Cyprus, of friend and foe
Renowned; and the gentle King of Spain,
Whose name God 'ield me, I do not know?
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

III

Of many more might I ask the same,
Who are but dust that the breezes blow;
But I desist, for none may claim
To stand against Death, that lays all low.

Ballade of Old Time Lords

Yet one more question before I go:
Where is Lancelot, King of Behaine?
And where are his valiant ancestors, trow?
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

ENVOI

Where is Du Guesclin, the Breton prow?
Where Auvergne's Dauphin and where again
The late good duke of Alençon? Lo!
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

Ballade of Things Known & Unknown

I

Flies in the milk I know full well:
I know men by the clothes they wear:
I know the walnut by the shell:
I know the foul sky from the fair:
I know the pear-tree by the pear:
I know the worker from the drone
And eke the good wheat from the tare:
I know all save myself alone.

II

I know the pourpoint by the fell
And by his gown I know the frere:
Master by varlet I can spell:
Nuns by the veils that hide their hair:
I know the sharper and his snare
And fools that fat on cates have grown:
Wines by the cask I can compare:
I know all save myself alone.

III

I know how horse from mule to tell:
I know the load that each can bear:
I know both Beatrice and Bell:
I know the hazards, odd and pair:

Ballade of Things Known & Unknown

I know of visions in the air:
I know the power of Peter's throne
And how misled Bohemians were:
I know all save myself alone.

ENVOI

Prince, I know all things: fat and spare,
Ruddy and pale, to me are known
And Death that endeth all our care:
I know all save myself alone.

I

PEddle indulgences, as you may:
Cog the dice for your cheating throws:
Try if counterfeit coin will pay,
At risk of roasting at last, like those
That deal in treason. Lie and glose,
Rob and ravish: what profits it?
Who gets the purchase, do you suppose?
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

Ballade to Those of Ill Life

II

Rhyme, rail, wrestle and cymbals play:
Flute and fool it in mummers' shows:
Along with the strolling players stray
From town to city, without repose;
Act mysteries, farces, imbroglios:
Win money at gleek or a lucky hit
At the pins: like water, away it flows;
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

III

Turn from your evil courses I pray,
That smell so foul in a decent nose:
Earn your bread in some honest way.
If you have no letters, nor verse nor prose,

Ballade to Those of Ill Life

Plough or groom horses, beat hemp or toze.
Enough shall you have if you think but fit:
But cast not your wage to each wind that blows;
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

ENVOI

Doublets, pourpoints and silken hose,
Gowns and linen, woven or knit,
Ere your wede's worn, away it goes;
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

Ballade of the Women of Paris

I

THough folk deem women young and old
Of Venice and Genoa well enough
Favoured with speech, both glib and bold,
To carry messages to and fro;
Savoyards, Florentines less or mo,
Romans and Lombards though folk renown,
I, at my peril, I say no;
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

II

The Naples women (so we are told)
Can school all comers in speech and show;
Prussians and Germans were still extolled
For pleasant prattle of friend and foe;
But hail they from Athens or Grand Cairo,
Castille or Hungary, black or brown,
Greeks or Egyptians, high or low,
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

III

Switzers nor Bretons know how to scold,
Nor Provence nor Gascony women: lo!
Two fishfags in Paris the bridge that hold
Would slang them dumb in a minute or so.

Ballade of the Women of Paris

Picardy, England, Lorraine, (heigho!
Enough of places have I set down?)
Valenciennes, Calais, wherever you go,
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

ENVOI

Prince, to the Paris ladies, I trow,
For pleasant parlance I yield the crown.
They may talk of Italians; but this I know,
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

I

MEn talk of those the fields that till;
Of those that sift out chaff from corn;
Of him that has, will he or nill,
A wife that scoldeth night and morn,—
As folk hard driven and forlorn:
Of men that often use the sea;
Of monks that of poor convents be;
Of those behind the ass that go;
But, when all things consider we,
Poor chimneysweeps have toil eno'.

Ballade of Poor Chimneysweeps

II

To govern boys and girls with skill,
God wot, 's no labour lightly borne:
Nor to serve ladies at Love's will;
Or do knight suit at sound of horn,
Helmet and harness always worn,
And follow arms courageously:
To joust and tilt with spears, perdie,
And quintain play, is hard, I know;
But, when all things consider we,
Poor chimneysweeps have toil eno'.

Ballade of Poor Chimneysweeps

God wot, they suffer little ill
  By whom wheat's reaped and meadows shorn;
Or those that thresh grain for the mill
  Or plead the Parliament beforne;
  To borrow money's little scorn;
Tinkers and carters have to dree
But little hardship, seemeth me;
  Nor does Lent irk us much, I trow;
But, when all things consider we,
  Poor chimneysweeps have toil eno'.

(ANTOI deest)

I

Goats scratch until they spoil their bed;
Pitcher to well too oft we send;
The iron's heated till it's red
And hammered till in twain it rend:
The tree grows as the twig we bend·
Men journey till they disappear
Even from the memory of a friend:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

Ballade of Proverbs

II

Some mock until their hearts do bleed:
Some are so frank that they offend:
Some waste until they come to need:
A promised gift is ill to spend:
Some love God till from church they trend:
Wind shifts until to North it veer:
Till forced to borrow do we lend:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

III

Dogs fawn on us till them we feed:
Song's sung until by heart it's kenned:
Fruit's kept until it rot to seed:
The leagured place falls in the end;

Ballade of Proverbs

Folk linger till the occasion wend:
Haste oft throws all things out of gear:
One clips until the grasp's o'erstrained:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

ENVOI

Prince, fools live so long that they mend:
They go so far that they draw near:
They're cozened till they apprehend:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

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