

Villon's Legacy from *Le Testament of Jean de Meun*: Misquotation, Memory, and the Wisdom of Fools

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Can a poet make a mistake? What is the meaning of Villon's poetic mistake, his misquotation in the *Testament* (T, 113-20)¹ from an important yet largely unexamined source, *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*?² This misquotation, we will see, is not just an error but a poetic secret that reveals one of the great paradoxes of the *Testament*: it is a poem about wisdom spoken by a fool. We will see that Villon uses misquotation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* to establish a context of high moral wisdom for his own *Testament*, a backdrop against which the poet's speaker stages a performance of alternative wisdom, grounded not in the high-minded authority of learned authors but in the low sphere of earthly existence, expressed in vulgar, joking language. The contrast between the two *Testaments*

¹ *Le Testament Villon* (T) and *Le Lais Villon et les poèmes variés* (L and PV), ed. Jean Rychner and Albert Henry (R/H), 4 vols., (Genève, 1974-1977).

² Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati, *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun: un caso letterario (Test JM)* (Alessandria, 1989); Aimee Celeste Bourneuf, "The 'Testament' of Jean de Meun: Vatican MS. 367" (Diss. Fordham University, 1965); summary and description by Paulin Paris, "Jean de Meun, traducteur et poète" (*Histoire littéraire de la France* [Paris, 1881], xxviii, pp. 391-439 at 416-29). To date I have found only one item touching specifically on this source in the Villon bibliography: André Lanly, "Villon, *Le Roman de la Rose*, et le *Testament de Jean de Meun*", *Hommage à Jean Séguy, Via Domitia* [Annales de l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail], Numéro spécial, 2 vols., Nouvelle Série, 14 (1978), i, pp. 237-251. Lanly offers a compendium of themes and expressions common to Villon and Jean de Meun that is less exhaustive than that by Louis Thuasne ("François Villon et Jean de Meun", *Revue des Bibliothèques*, 16/1 [1906], 93-104; 204-49; rpt. in *Villon et Rabelais* [Genève, 1969], pp. 1-101), but both Lanly and Thuasne mention *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* merely in passing.

– *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* and Villon's poem – sets up an opposition of high and low, of noble learning and coarse wit that links Villon's *Testament* to another medieval genre, the *altercatio* or dialogue between the wise man and the fool. In Villon's *Testament*, however, only the fool remains, groping towards truth.

The speaker in Villon's poems is a creature of both wisdom and folly, "Ne du tout fol ne du tout saige" (T, 3). *Fol*, however, weighs far heavier in the poet's lexicon, where it is closely associated with other key terms: *amour*, *povre*, *mort* and *vie*.³ "Povre de sens et de savoir" (T, 178), the poet's speaker is a scholar who ran away from school: "Je, François Villon, escollier" (L, 2; see T, 1886-87); "Mais quoy! je fuyoie l'escolle / Comme fait le mauvaiz enfant" (T, 205-06). His studies in books have profited him less than his hard life: "Travail mes lubres sentemens, / Esguisez comme une pelocte, / M'ouvrist plus que tous les commens / D'Averroÿs sur Aristote" (T, 93-96). Nonetheless, he speaks initially in the manner of a *clerc*, setting an array of fifteen authoritative citations into the first thirty-seven stanzas of his *Testament*, eleven from the Bible⁴ and four from prestigious ancient

³ *Fol* and related terms *foleur*, *folie*, *folastre* occur 34 times in Villon's works, the antonym *sage* only 13 (André Burger, *Lexique de la langue de Villon* [Genève/Paris, 1957] + PV, iii which R/H add to Villon's corpus). The preponderance of negative themes in *Testament* hh. xii-xli is rigorously analyzed by Paul Zumthor, who concludes: "Dans toutes ces oppositions [mort/vie, vieillesse/jeunesse, pauvreté/richeesse, douleur + péché/espérance], le terme positif (non-marqué) est le plus faible, numériquement et même syntaxiquement" (*Essai de poétique médiévale*, Poétique [Paris, 1972], pp. 420-28, at 423). Charles Brucker notes that the semantic field of *fol* is moralized far earlier than that of *sage* (*Sage et sagesse au moyen âge (XIIe et XIIIe siècles): Etude historique, sémantique et stylistique* [Genève, 1987], p. 156).

⁴ T, 29-30 from Luke 6:27-28 and Matthew 5:44, the injunction to love one's enemies, to which the speaker responds (T, 32) with a verse that recalls Romans 12:19, invoking divine vengeance on Thibaut d'Aussigny, cursed again (T, 45-48) by citation from Psalm 108:7 or 8; the speaker's gratitude to Louis XI (T, 65-66) calls forth blessings citing Genesis 35:23; his hope for divine pardon is strengthened by allusion to Gospel (T, 99-100 from Luke 24:13-35) and Ezekiel (T, 106-07 from Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11);

and medieval *auctores*, including the “le noble Roumant / *De la Rose*” (T, 113-14).⁵ These initial citations ground the speaker within the world of learning; they proclaim that his poem contains what Clément Marot called a “matiere pleine d’erudition & de bon scauoir”.⁶ Yet after citing Psalms 102:16 in h. xxxvii, Villon’s speaker abandons the discourse of clerical authority and citation of ancient texts, saying “Quant du seurplus, je m’en desmez: / Il n’appartient a moy, pecheur; / Aux theologiens le remectz, / Car c’est office de prescheur” (T, 293-96). In all the remaining 149 stanzas and nineteen inserted lyrics in Villon’s *Testament*, there are only four citations from the Bible, one from liturgy, and a handful of mentions of ancient and medieval *auctores*.⁷ The play of allusions to

five citations confirm the speaker’s regrets for his wasted youth and present poverty (T, 127-29 from Judith 16:18; T, 209-16 from Ecclesiastes 11:9-10; T, 217-24 from Job 7:6; T, 264 from John 19:22; and T, 291-92 from Psalms 102:16).

⁵ *Le Roman de la Rose* is cited T, 1 and 113-20; Averroes and Aristotle T, 95-96; Valerius Maximus T, 159-60.

⁶ *Les Œuvres de Francoys Villon de Paris, reveues & remises en leur entier par Clement Marot varlet de chambre du Roy*, printed by Galiot du Pré (Paris, 1533), gloss intercalated between hh. xi and xii (p. 16) cited also by David Mus [Kuhn] in his commentary on the allusions in hh. xii-xxxiii (*La Poétique de François Villon* [Paris, 1967], pp. 139-76).

⁷ From the Bible: T, 813-20 from Luke 16:19-31, the parable of Dives and Lazarus; T, 847-48 from Genesis 3:19, integrated into the initial prayer of the speaker’s will; T, 1238-44 from Genesis 9:20-21, 19:30-38, and John 2:1-10, examples of famous Biblical drinkers – Noah, Lot, and “Archedeclin”, host of the wedding at Cana; T, 1461-64 from Ecclesiasticus 8:1-2 and 9:3. Villon’s “Verset”, T, 1892-93, translates words from the Office of the Dead (see Evelyn Birge Vitz, “‘Bourdes jus mises’? Villon, the Liturgy, and Prayer” in this volume; I have benefited greatly from our discussions of hope and despair in the *Testament*). Finally, the speaker mentions Jean de Pouilli, Jean de Meun, and Matheolus (T, 1174-79), the Viandier Taillevent (T, 1414), Macrobius (T, 1547), and “le laiz maistre Alain Chartier” (T, 1805); he cites, without naming their authors, poems by Philippe de Vitry, “Soubz feuille vert, sur herbe delitable” and Pierre d’Ailly, “Ung chastel sçay, sur roche espoventable” (T, 1458-60), which he parodies in his “Contreditz Franc Gontier”.

myth, the Bible, and history are carried after h. xxxvii by proper names and bits of story rather than by learned citation.⁸

Even in the opening stanzas of the *Testament*, moreover, Villon’s speaker is portrayed as an unreliable scholar: he appears to have muddled the number of the Psalm verse he invokes to curse Thibaut d’Aussigny (T, 45-48); he attributes to Valerius Maximus the exemplum of Diomedes and Alexander, whose well-known and often cited ancient source is Augustine’s *City of God* (T, 159-60).⁹ Finally he misquotes Jean de Meun in h. xv:

Et comme le noble Roumant
De la Rose dit et confesse
En son premier commencement
C’on doit jeune cuer en jeunesse,
Quant on le voit viel en viellesse,
Excuser, hélas! il dit voir;
Ceulx donc qui me font telle presse
En meureté ne me voudroient veoir. (T, 113-20)

The verses Villon cites, however, are taken not from the *Roman de la Rose*, but from the work known as *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*:

iii Bien doit estre escusez jeune cuer en jeunesce
Quant Diex li donne grace d’estre viel en viellesce;
Mais moult est granz vertus et tres haute noblesce
Quant cuer en jeune aage a meürté s’adresce. (*Test JM* 9-12)

⁸ See Nancy Freeman Regalado, “La fonction poétique du nom propre dans le *Testament de François Villon*”, *Cahiers de l’Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises*, 32 (1980), 51-68.

⁹ The medieval Latin and French sources cited by Louis Thuasne in his edition of Villon show that Augustine’s illustrious name was firmly attached to the exemplum of Diomedes (*Œuvres*, 3 vols. [Paris, 1923], iii, pp. 613-22); although critics (cited in R/H, *Testament*, ii, pp. 32-33) have focused on the attribution to Valerius, the absence of allusion to Augustine may contribute significantly to characterization of Villon’s speaker as a foolish scholar.

Villon's critics and editors have all called attention to this misquotation: "Villon is mistaken",¹⁰ "Villon se trompe";¹¹ "erreur (volontaire?)".¹² But instead of inquiring into the significance of the way the citation misstates its source, they have sought to explain it away as a failure of memory or as a confusion with similar themes in the *Roman de la Rose*.¹³

If we step back to look at all the citations and allusions in Villon's *Testament*, however, we can see a significant pattern of similar "mistakes" that deflect many citations away from the original by rewriting and misquotation. The poet substitutes age thirty for twenty in the initial quotation from the *Roman de la Rose* (T, 1; *Rose* 21);¹⁴ to curse Thibaut d'Aussigny, he invokes Psalm 108 verse 7 instead of 8, which was often cited to condemn bishops in estates satire;¹⁵ he gives the dog Cerberus four heads instead of the

¹⁰ François Villon, *Complete Poems*, ed. and trans. by Barbara N. Sargent-Baur (Toronto, 1994), p. 197.

¹¹ Lanly, "Villon", p. 238, note 1.

¹² Marcel Desportes, ed., *François Villon, Poésies choisies*, Nouveaux Classiques Larousse (Paris, 1973), p. 56.

¹³ Gaston Paris: "Il connaissait aussi le *Testament* de Jean de Meun, qu'il embrouille, au début de son propre *Testament*, avec l'œuvre plus célèbre du même poète" (*François Villon* [Paris, 1901], p. 100); Thuasne: "Villon... cite de mémoire, à l'appui de son dire, un passage du *Testament* de Jean de Meun, passage qu'il croyait être au début du *Roman de la Rose*" (*Œuvres*, ii, p. 107); Italo Siciliano: "Villon connaissait Jean de Meung, mais plus vaguement qu'on ne le croit. Il s'en inspire pour l'épisode de la vieille entremetteuse, il le cite même deux fois, mais de mémoire et d'une façon assez imprécise" (*François Villon et les thèmes poétiques du Moyen Age* [Paris, 1934; rpt. 1967], p. 435); R/H: "La confusion avec le *Roman de la Rose* tient sans doute à ce que V. pensait aussi aux vers où Jehan de Meun, assez près encore du début de la partie du roman dont il est l'auteur, oppose Jeunesse... à Vieillesse", *Testament*, ii, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴ See Nancy Freeman Regalado, "En l'an de mon trentiesme aage: Date, Deixis and Moral Vision in Villon's *Testament*", in *Le Nombre du temps. En hommage à Paul Zumthor*, ed. Emmanuèle Baumgartner et al. (Paris, 1988), pp. 237-46, at 238.

¹⁵ "Le verselet escript septiesme / Du psëaulme *Deus laudem*" (T, 47-48); Vulgate Psalm 108, v. 7, "Cum iudicatur, exeat condemnatus, et oratio eius

canonical three. Some of Villon's misquotations are greatly admired, such as his famous rewriting of Job 7:6 in li. xx of his *Testament*:

Mes jours s'en sont alez errant,
Comme, dit Job, d'une touaille
Font les filletz, quant tixerant
En son poing tient ardente paille:
Lors s'il y a nul bout qui saille,
Soudainement il le ravit. (T, 217-22)

"Tresbelle comparaison", Marot notes appreciatively in the margin of his 1533 edition.¹⁶ But is this too a misreading, as has been suggested, or is it a striking new image that the poet brings to singe Scripture?¹⁷

Villon's "mistakes" should not be attributed (as they often are) to the poet's faulty recall; indeed, four undistorted Latin citations ornamenting his panegyric "Louange à Marie" (PV, I 42-43, 51-52, 108, 118-20) show the fluent accuracy of the poet's memory in another context. Instead, these "mistakes" in the *Testament* should be seen as misquotations of texts which Villon could count on many readers recognizing. Psalm verses, memorized in numerical order, laid the very foundation for memory training.¹⁸ The *Roman de la*

fiat in peccatum" (When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin); v. 8, "Fiant dies eius pauci et episcopatum eius accipiat alter" (Let his days become few; and let another take his office). Citing references to v. 8 in estates satire, R/H affirm that "il est certain, cependant, que V. pensait au verset 8"; they suggest that either Villon's memory failed him or that v. 8 was numbered 7 in some psalters (*Testament*, ii, p. 21).

¹⁶ *Les Œuvres*, p. 21.

¹⁷ R/H ask if Villon misremembered or misread *succiditur* (cuts) as *succenditur* (set on fire) (*Testament*, ii, 39). Barbara N. Sargent-Baur speaks more admiringly: "The poet's creative imagination is active here, spinning out four words of the Vulgate text ('a texente tela succiditur') into five octosyllabic verses" (*Brothers of Dragons: "Job Dolens" and François Villon* [New York, 1990], p. 87).

¹⁸ Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 82-84. Misquotation may be seen as one aspect of habitual adaptation of citations: "such adaptive freedom is enabled

Rose is a living presence in the fifteenth century; read, cited, attacked, imitated, it is a flowing source from which late-medieval French poets continue to draw direct inspiration. Errors in citation of such well-known texts compel readers to respond, to correct, and thus to join the movement of the poem first by delving into their own memory and then by returning to seek the meaning of the misquotation in the poem.¹⁹ Misquotation, indeed, counts on memory. We will show how Villon misquotes to order to establish the meaning of his poem and to deepen the significance of each citation, by awakening and playing on the memory of his readers.

Misquotation has one specific function in medieval literature: it is an unmistakable sign of foolery. The swerving citations in Villon's *Testament* are – first and foremost – a key element characterizing the speaker as a wise fool. Misquotation of the Bible or wisdom literature is used regularly in medieval works to portray a fool in a clerical costume – an *écumeur de latin*, a *Maistre Aliborum*, or boobies in the school farces.²⁰ It is a prominent feature of the farcical wisdom preached in *sermons joyeux* such as *Des maux de mariage* or *Des faits de Nemo* where real citations are taken as obscene or comic themes and where pseudo-citations abound,

by complete familiarity with the text, the shared memory of it on the part of both audience and author, and hence a delight both in recognizing the familiar words and the skill with which they have been adapted to a new context" (*ibid.*, p. 91). I am indebted to Mary Carruthers for discussion of the use of misquotation to refresh memory.

¹⁹ Misquotation may be seen as one of the "textual ungrammaticalities", those overdetermined indices of which Michael Riffaterre often speaks, which control readers' response by pointing to an intertext; see his "L'intertexte inconnu", *Littérature*, 41 (1981), 4-7 and, recently, his "Compulsory Reader Response: the Intertextual Drive", in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester, 1990), pp. 56-78.

²⁰ See *Les Ditz de Maistre Aliborum, qui de tout se mesle*, ed. by Anatole de Montaiglon, *Recueil de poésies françaises*, 13 vols. (Paris, 1855-78), i, pp. 33-41; *Maître Mimin étudiant*, ed. by André Tissier, *La Farce en France de 1450 à 1550* (Paris, 1976), pp. 199-231; *De Pernet qui va à l'escolle and D'un qui se fait examiner pour être prebtre*, ed. Viollet le Duc, *Ancien théâtre français*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1854-57), ii, pp. 360-72, 373-87.

accompanied by real or facetious references.²¹ The remarkable staging of Villon's "Ballade de l'appel" (PV, XV) in the *Sermon de saint Belin*, described by Jelle Koopmans and Paul Verhuyck, marks the close relation between Villon's poetic persona and the foolish learning typical of the *sermon joyeux*.²²

In Villon, however, misquotation also plays on the reader's memory in order to augment the resonance of each allusion in the poem. When Villon cites Vulgate Psalm 108 by number-coordinate rather than by direct quotation (T, 47-48), he brings the text into play from its "place" in his readers' memory. Such readers could easily recall not only "le verselet escript septiesme" but also verse 8, which was usually applied to bishops.²³ Villon thus silently doubles his curse on Thibaut d'Aussigny: his "mistake" gives him two verses for one – the second supplied by his reader!²⁴ In like manner, reflecting

²¹ See Jelle Koopmans and Paul Verhuyck, *Sermon joyeux et truanderie (Villon – Nemo – Ulespiègle)* (Amsterdam, 1987), p. 15. The *Sermon joyeux des maux de mariage* multiplies false and real citations: it takes for its theme a false citation attributed to *Les XV Joyes de Mariage* (ll. 1-5), quotes the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins in a parodic context (l. 20), adds pseudo-citations from Psalms and Saint Paul, and ends with allusions to Matheolus (ll. 310-14), Jean de Meun (l. 315) and a real citation from *Le Roman de la Rose* (ll. 319-20 from *Rose* 8685-86) (ed. Jelle Koopmans, *Recueil de sermons joyeux*, TLF 362 [Genève, 1988], pp. 345-64). The *Sermon joyeux des faits de Nemo* is a venerable joke concocted around citations from the Bible that reveal the extraordinary powers of Nemo, "Nobody": "Si destruxerit Deus, Nemo est qui edificet" (l. 110 from Job 12:14); ed. Koopmans, *Recueil*, pp. 379-408, with full historical commentary by Koopmans and Verhuyck in *Sermon joyeux*, pp. 87-142.

²² *Sermon joyeux*, pp. 19-85.

²³ A fifteenth-century reader of MS A (Paris, Arsenal MS 3523) copied the text of v. 8, "Fiant dies" in the space following T, 48 which ends h. vi (R/H, *Testament*, i, p. 26, note); in the margin next to h. vii, Marot notes: "Au verset dont il parle y a, Fiant dies eius pauci: & episcopatum eius accipiat alter" (*Œuvres*, p. 14).

²⁴ Robert Guiette notes that Ps. 108 belonged to the religious ceremony of degradation, and concludes: "Tout le psaume, on le voit, pouvait convenir au propos de Villon, et non seulement le verset 8 de la Vulgate, même précédé du verset 7" ("François Villon et Thibaut d'Aussigny", *Mélanges Maurice Delbouille* [Gembloux, 1964], pp. 251-57 at 253; rpt. in *Forme et*

on youth's folly, Villon's readers might well bring to mind the words the poet omits from his contradictory quotations of Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 in h. xxvii (cited below): "Et scito quod pro omnibus his adducet te Deus in iudicium (Remember that for all these things God will call you to account) [v. 9]". Misquotation thus breaks through the boundaries of specific citation, unleashing the full blast of invective in Ps. 108 and awakening ominous anticipation of divine judgment through recollection of Ecclesiastes 11:9.

Similarly, the extraordinary fourth head Villon gives the dog Cerberus in the "Double Ballade" – "Chien Cerberuz a quatre testes" (T, 636) – wakes up all the three-headed dogs sleeping in literary memory. A fifteenth-century reader might recall the three-headed doorkeeper of Hell stupefied by Orpheus' strange song in Boethius' *Consolation*, translated by Jean de Meun: "Cerberus, li portiers d'enfer ou toutez ses tres testes, fu touz esbahiz pour la nouvelle chançon".²⁵ Prompted by ongoing allusions to the *Roman de la Rose* in Villon's *Testament*, his readers might well also remember the hellish image Jean de Meun painted of three-headed Cerberus as a mastiff hanging from the triple breasts of Atropos, thrusting his three snouts into her bosom, gnawing, drawing, sucking:

[Atropos] norrist Cerberus le ribaut,...
 cist mastins li pant aus mammelles,
 qu'ele a tribles, non pas gemeles;
 ses.iii. groins en son sain li muce,
 et les groignoie et tire et suce,
 n'onc ne fu ne ja n'iert sevez,...
 et el li giete homes et fames
 a monceaus en sa triple gueule.
 (*Rose* 19778, 19787-91, 19796-97)²⁶

Recollection of this image, in turn, gives menacing overtones to all the mastiffs in the *Testament*: "groz matins de bouchiers" (T, 1130);

senefiance, ed. J. Dufournet et al., Publications Romanes et Françaises, 148 [Genève, 1978]).

²⁵ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Lib. III, Met. xii: 29-20; ed. and trans. by V. L. Dedeck-Héry, *Mediaeval Studies*, 14 (1952), p. 232.

²⁶ Ed. by Félix Lecoy, CFMA 92, 95, 98 (Paris, 1965-70), iii, pp. 94-95.

"Que ces matins ne seussent courre" (T, 1139); "un viel matin... / Tout enraigé en sa bave et sallive" (T, 1434-35); "Synon aux traitres chiens matins / Qui m'ont fait ronger dures crostes" (T, 1984-85). Misquotation thus stirs up memory, releasing images, overtones, and associations even more freely than direct citation.

To what extent and how might Villon and his readers have remembered *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, so provocatively inscribed through misquotation into his poem? It is a poem, dated 1291-92, of 2120 lines (almost exactly the same length as Villon's *Testament*), but composed in monorhyme alexandrine quatrains, the chunky but capacious stanza of many thirteenth-century *dits* and moral poems. Although it has much to say about making wills, *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* itself is not a mock testament like Villon's, but a sermon-like poem of practical and moral advice addressed to prelates and men and women of substance.

Until the fine edition brought out by Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati in 1989, *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* had fallen into oblivion, for it had not been reedited since the venerable four-volume *Roman de la Rose* published by Dominique Méon in 1813.²⁷ Today's readers may be struck, even startled, as I was, by conspicuous correspondences between Villon's *Testament* and those of the opening stanzas of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*. These analogies are cued by Villon's direct citation in h. xv which points to a location within his source: "en son premier commencement" (T, 115). Adjacent stanzas develop common themes of wasted youth and the inevitability of death: "J'ai fait en ma jeunesse maint dit par vanité" (*Test JM* 5); "Mort est a touz commune, mort est a touz banier" (*Test JM* 21). Likeness is further marked by a distinctive pattern of *disputatio* in which a theme is developed as a dialectical argument with an imaginary interlocutor. It appears early on in both poems: in st. x of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*: "Et s'aucun vouloit dire: Dieu comment sera ce?" (l. 37)²⁸; in Villon's h. iii, the

²⁷ *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, in *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Dominique Méon, 4 vols. (Paris, 1813), iv, pp. 1-116; reprinted at intervals during the nineteenth century and revised by Francisque Michel (Paris, 1864).

²⁸ Similar turns of phrase occur three more times in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*: "Or me puet aucuns dire: 'Sire, se Diex m'amen'" (349); "Et s'il me

first of several anonymous figures springs up to argue with the speaker:

- iii Et s'aucun me vouloit reprendre (T, 17)
- lviii Et qui me voudroit laidanger
De ce mot, en disant: "Escoute!" (T, 571-72))
- lx Je prens qu'aucun dye cecy (T, 585)
- lxxi Et s'aucun m'interroque ou tente (T, 725)
- lxxxii Qui me diroit: "Qui vous fait mectre
Si tres avant ceste parolle" (T, 809-10)

In her edition Buzzetti Gallarati demonstrates that the moral themes of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* are elaborated in some ten sequences of *disputatio*, the formalized ritual of scholastic disputation in which a master systematically resolves the questions and objections of interlocutors.²⁹ Villon, too, develops dialectical arguments in his *Testament* with themes, objections, and responses about questions such as whether love is dangerous,³⁰ or whether the

dient: 'Sire, nostre devotion' /... / Certes, je m'i accort, maiz pour voir je suppose" (985, 989); "Et s'aucun voloit dire que si pressé se sentent" (2005).

²⁹ Ed. *Test JM*, pp. 21-39; Buzzetti Gallarati adds analysis of the scholastic lexicon (pp. 41-75), which expands her "Lessico et cultura scolastica nel 'Testament'", (*Studi testuali*, Scrittura e scrittori, Serie miscellanea, 2 [Alessandria, 1988], i, pp. 77-121). In contrast with the conditional mood used in the hypothetical disputes of the *Test JM* and Villon, *reportatio* of actual disputations uses the imperfect or simple past to indicate shifts of speaker: "sed dicebat" or "dixit respondens" (examples cited in Bernardo C. Bazàn, "Les Questions disputées, principalement dans les facultés de théologie", in Bernardo C. Bazàn, et al., *Les Questions disputées et les questions quodlibétiques dans les Facultés de Théologie, de Droit et de Médecine*, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental, 44-45 [Turnhout, 1985], p. 139).

³⁰ The formal pattern of *disputatio* is as easy to follow in Villon's *Testament* T, 569-729 as it is in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*: *Theme*: Men who love incur dangers (T, 569-70); *Objection*: Dangers come from "femmes diffames" (T, 571-84); *Response*: These women were once "femmes

prophets' arses burned in Hell.³¹ Debate breaks off abruptly in st. xvii of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* – "Je me tairai a tant d'endroit ceste matiere / Et parlerai d'une autre ou li cuers plus me tire" (*Test JM* 65-66)³²; a similar pattern recurs in Villon: "Laissons le moustier ou il est, / Parlons de chose plus plaisante" (T, 265-66); "De ce me taiz doresnavant" (T, 723); "Je me tais, et ainsi commence" (T, 832). Neither Villon's *Testament* nor *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* are real dialogues, however: they are monologues cast partly in the formal patterns of disputation. Where such imagined disputation is prominent in Villon's *Testament*, it may serve to enhance the resonance of his initial citation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* in *Testament* h. xv.

Unlike us, many of Villon's contemporaries would have easily recognized his carefully cued citation, for *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* was well known to medieval readers. Although the attribution to Jean de Meun is questionable,³³ the poem was

honnestes" (T, 585-594), illustrated by examples (T, 594-608); *Solution*: men are endangered by "nature femeninne" (T, 609-616) and the laws of love, "C'est pure verté devollee, / Pour une joye cent doulours" (T, 623-24), an argument confirmed *cum exemplis* from mythology, the Bible, and the speaker's experience in the "Double Ballade" (T, 625-72), and by an extensive autobiographical example (T, 673-712); *Conclusion*: the speaker renounces love (T, 713-24). This sequence ends with a fresh objection to the speaker's authority: "Et s'aucun m'interroque ou tente / Comment d'Amours j'ose mesdire" (T, 725-26); the speaker responds with an otherwise unattested maxim ("Qui meurt a ses loix de tout dire" [T, 728]), then offers proof of his imminent death: "je congnois approucher ma seuf" (T, 729).

³¹ *Disputatio* in *Testament* hh. lxxxi-lxxxiii: *Theme*: the prophets did not burn in Hell (T, 805-08); *Objection*: the speaker's opinion is presumptuous since he is not a master of theology (T, 809-12); *Response* "cum exemplo", the parable of Luke 16:22-24: if the rich man had seen fire, he would not have begged refreshment from the burning fingertip of Lazarus (T, 813-20).

³² See also "Je me tairay a tant d'endroit ceste matiere, / Car les femmes espoir ne l'ont mie trop chiere" (*Test JM* 1303-04).

³³ See Langlois (ed. *Rose* i, pp. 21-22), Bourneuf (pp. v-vi), and Buzzetti Gallarati (ed. *Test JM*, pp. 7-14). Similarities to themes and expressions in the *Rose* pointed out by Buzzetti Gallarati are too general to be convincing (*ibid.*, pp. 111-16 + notes to ll. 5-8, 246, 253, 437, 485-86, 629-31, 789,

received under the prestigious name of the author of the *Roman de la Rose* and translator of Boethius. At least 116 manuscripts survive – the tip of an iceberg, says Buzzetti Gallarati, who shows that *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* was copied eagerly for two centuries:

1043-44, 1085-88, 1095, 1115, 1948, 2081-84, and 2112) and the methodology of her search for intratextual anagrams of Jean de Meun appears unsound (*eadem*, “Mots sous les mots”: una firma per il *Testament*”, *Medioevo Romanzo*, 15/2 [1990], 259-76). Two specific stylistic reflexes seem to distinguish the author of the *Test JM* from Jean de Meun. First, the *Test JM* contains an unusual, recurrent metrical pattern where verses ending with a monosyllabic *ce*, *le*, or *je* rhyme with verses ending with a feminine rhyme, that is, a post-tonic mute e:

Puis estent son mantel tout aussi com un voile.(12+e)
 Tu qui n'as ce veü, va a Paris voir le.(12)
 (*Test JM* 1191-92)

See also *Test JM* 37 (cited above), 736, 762, 1444, 1788, 1857, and Bourneuf (pp. lxxxiv-lxxxvii) and Buzzetti Gallarati (ed. *Test JM*, pp. 109-10). I am indebted to Roger Pensom and Peter Dembowski for their letters to me describing this metrical pattern and providing additional examples (eg. Rutebeuf's *Sainte Elysabel* [l. 244]). To my knowledge, this metrical pattern does not occur in Jean de Meun's *Rose*. Second, the *Test JM* is almost utterly devoid of classical allusions: only two names of *auctores* are cited, those of Virgil and Aristotle, who appear (with David and Solomon), as degraded figures inebriated by lust despite their wit and books: “Virgile et Aristote en furent ja si yvre, / Que point ne les retrait leur engin ne leur livre” (*Test JM* 1771-72). It is difficult to believe its author could be Jean de Meun, whose *Rose* is so well watered with allusions to the ancients (see Nancy Freeman Regalado, “Des contraires choses: La fonction poétique de la citation et des exempla dans le *Roman de la Rose* de Jean de Meun”, *Littérature: Intertextualités Médiévales*, 41 [1981], 62-81). I thank Eric Hicks for sending me his article, “De l'individuel et du collectif dans les manuscrits”, *La Naissance du texte*, ed. by Louis Hay (Paris, 1989), 121-31, together with further reflections on the difference between Jean de Meun's use of conjunctions to elaborate long, logical sentences and the *Test JM* author's taste for brief, symmetrical statements. On attributions to Jean de Meun, see also *idem*, ed., *La Vie et les epistres Pierres Abaelart et Heloys sa fame*, Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Age 16 (Paris-Genève, 1991), i, pp. xx-xxxiii.

half the known manuscripts are from the 15th century.³⁴ It is a work that hardly ever appears alone. Often it was copied with companion pieces: a prayer called *Le Codicille* and a work of pious instruction called *Le Tresor ou les sept articles de la foy*.³⁵ In manuscripts, a legal fiction grouped these pieces as testament and codicil; it has long been thought that this arrangement inspired Pierre Levet's edition of Villon in 1489, whose title page reads: “Le grant testament Villon / et le petit. son codicille. le iargon & ses balades” and where the *Testament* is rubricated: “Cy comence le grant codicille & testament maistre francois Villon”.³⁶ In over half the manuscripts, *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* is copied with the *Roman de la Rose*, often accompanied by its satellites, the *Codicille* and the *Tresor*. However, even if Villon read the poem with the *Roman de la Rose*, compilational arrangement would surely not have led him to see it as its “premier commencement”, as has been suggested,³⁷ for although *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* often opens didactic compilations, it is invariably placed after the romance when it is copied with the *Rose*, where it provides a morally uplifting conclusion to the scandalous plucking of the rose.

Citations elsewhere from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* show that the poem remained a canonical text in the fifteenth century. It is cited – and st. xv quoted – as an example of the monorhyme alexandrine quatrain in two fifteenth-century treatises on versification.³⁸ It was an item in evidence much debated in the

³⁴ Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati, “Nota bibliografica sulla tradizione manoscritta del *Testament* di Jean de Meun”, *Revue Romane*, 13 (1978), 2-35.

³⁵ *Le Codicille maistre Jehan de Meun* [incipit: “Dieux ait l'ame des trespassés”], ed. Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati, in *Medioevo Romanzo*, 17 (1992), pp. 339-89; *Les sept articles de la foy* [incipit: “O glorieuse Trinite”], ed. Méon, *Rose*, iv.

³⁶ Gaston Paris, “Villoniana”, *Romania*, 30 (1901), p. 355, note 1.

³⁷ Mus [Kuhn], *Poétique*, p. 150.

³⁸ Buzzetti Gallarati, ed., *Test JM*, pp. 9-10. The *Test JM* is listed among the works of Jean in the anonymous *Règles de la seconde rhétorique* from Paris, BNF MS n. a. fr. 4237, where it is followed by a copy of the *Codicille* (Buzzetti Gallarati, *Codicille*, 351); *Test JM* st. xv, “Si tu es biax et riches...” (cited below, p.298), is given in this same work as an example of alexandrine quatrains commonly used for saints' lives and “traitiez

Quarrel of the Rose, the literary polemic over the moral influence of the *Rose*. In his *Traictié d'une vision faite contre le Rommant de la Rose* (18 mai 1402), Jean Gerson, the eminent chancellor of the University of Paris, applauds Jean de Meun's apparent regret for the poem of his foolish youth: "Des son vivant il s'en repenti: et depuis ditta livres de vraye foy et- de sainte doctrine. Je li en fais tesmoingnaige".³⁹ Gerson, moreover, portrays a crowd eager to defend Jean de Meun before the imaginary Court of Christianity: one voice rings out over the great throng, citing verse 5 from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*:

Lors veissiés, a une grant tourbe et une flote de gens sans nombre, josnes et vieulx de tous sexes et de tous ages, qui – sans garder ordre, a tort et a travers – vouloient, l'ung excuser, l'autre le deffendre, l'autre le loer; l'autre demandoit pardon a cause de jonesse et de folie, en aleguant que il s'en estoit repenti quant il escript depuis: "J'ay fait, dit il, en ma jonesse maint dit par vanité".⁴⁰

Pierre Col responds (citing the same verse 5):

Et ne cuide pas que ce qu'il dit en son *Testament*: "J'ay fait en ma jonesse maint dit par vanité", qu'il entende de ce livre de la *Rose*; car vraiment come je [ne] monstreray mais, il entendoit d'aucunes balades, rondiaux et virelais que nous n'avons pas par escript, – au moins moy.⁴¹

Christine de Pizan scoffs at Pierre Col's interpretation:

Je ne vueil mie passer oultre ce que tu dis que je ne doy mie cuidier ce que il dist en son *Testament*: "J'ay fait en ma

d'amours" (ed. Ernest Langlois, *Recueil d'arts de seconde rhétorique* [Paris, 1902; rpt. Genève, 1974], pp. 12, 28-29). Baudet Herenc describes the rhyme scheme of the *Test JM* in *Le Doctrinal de la seconde rhétorique* (*ibid.*, pp. 197-98).

³⁹ Ed. Eric Hicks, *Le Débat sur 'Le Roman de la Rose'*, Bibliothèque du XVe siècle 43 (Paris, 1977), p. 66.

⁴⁰ Ed. Hicks, *Débat*, p. 64.

⁴¹ "La responce maistre Pierre Col", ed. Hicks, *Débat*, p. 95.

jonesse maint dit par vanité", qu'il entende de ce livre de la *Rose*. Et come se tu le seusses, bien affermes que onques ne s'en repanty ne dist pour celle cause. Et touteffois ne l'excepta il de riens. Mais tu dis qu'il entendi de balades, rondiaux et virelais que nous n'avons mie. Ou sont donques ces autres dictiers que il fist vains et foulz? Merveilles est que de si souverain dicteur n'ont esté sollenneement gardés: car d'autres qui ne furent a lui a comparer est grant mencion faite, et des siens n'est persone en vie qui onques en oit parler. [...] Mais a nostre propos vraiment je croy et tiens qu'il dist ce qui est dit en son *Testament* purement pour celluy romant, car il nous appert par celle parolle et ne savons le contraire.⁴²

This lively debate points in three important directions: to the significance of direct citation, to readers' interest in the relationship between different works by a single author, and to their familiarity with *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*. It is the meaning of Jean's very words – exactly cited – that are disputed. His readers, moreover, are eager to compare the two poems, to note changes in spiritual attitude, signs of true repentance.

Villon's misquotation in h. xv, which assigns verses from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* to "le noble Rommant / de la Rose", condenses and accelerates this kind of movement of recollection and comparison. Elogious citation of the title in T, 113-14 affirms the looming presence of the *Roman de la Rose* in Villon's *Testament*. Coupled with a direct quotation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* in T, 116-18, the allusion to the *Rose* calls both texts forcibly to mind. The "mistake" compels the reader to locate and correct the citation, but also to recall and measure the difference between Jean's joyful life-affirming romance of youth and the admonitory moralizing of the later poem.

There will, of course, be further rewriting of the *Rose* in Villon's *Testament: la Vieille* is recostumed as *la Belle Heaulmière*; anti-Mendicant satire from the *Rose* flows into Villon through Matheolus' *Lamentations*: "Maistre Jehan de Meun s'en mocqua / De leur façon; si fist Mathieu" (T, 1178-79). Villon's misquotation in T, 113-17 pulls up from the *Roman de la Rose* a golden chain of

⁴² "A maistre Pierre Col", ed. Hicks, *Débat*, p. 121.

literary recollections around the theme of youth and age. It recalls the verses where Lady Reason cites Cicero's *De senectute* to warn the Lover against the follies of Youth (*Rose* 4400-4514); she paints *Viellece* remembering and regretting her wasted youth: "Adonc li vient en remembrance /... / que malemant l'a deceite / Jennece, qui tout a gité / son preterit an vanité" (*Rose* 4499, 4502-04). Recollecting verses adjacent to this passage in the *Rose*, readers may find in memory Reason's picture of Old Age chained, tortured, and flogged in a sombre and shadowy cellar by "Travaill et Douleur":

Travaill et Douleur la herbergent,
mes il la lient et l'enfergent
et tant la batent et tourmentent
que mort proichaine li presentent,
et talent de soi repentir. (*Rose* 4493-97)

This reminiscence in turn sets off further reverberations of allusion in Villon's *Testament*, h. xii: "Aprés tritresses et douleurs, / Labeurs et griefz cheminemens, / Travail mes lubres sentemens /..." (T, 91-93).

Memory thus refreshed and activated by misquotation, readers can note important changes in the verses Villon quotes from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*. He significantly alters its kindly pastoral tone: "Bien doit estre escusez jeune cuer en jeunesse / Quant Diex li donne grace d'estre viel en viellesce" (*Test JM* 9-10). Villon eliminates God from the citation and recasts it in a tone of bitter sorrow: "C'on doit jeune cuer en jeunesse, / Quant on le voit viel en vielesse / Excuser, hélas! il dit voir" (T, 116-18). Villon thus brings the quotation into conformity with the pessimistic outlook of his *Testament* which throughout paints a harsh world where the speaker, the Belle Heaulmière, and the "povre viellart" – "viel singe desplaisant" (T, 424, 431) – all come forward to tell us that there is no grace in reaching old age.⁴³

⁴³ R/H (*Testament*, ii, p. 193) find further reminiscence of Villon's citation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* in the legacy stanzas he addresses to other young "scholars" – "mes povres clergons" (T, 1306) – where tender sympathy is undercut by sharply sarcastic antiphrasis:

Indeed, although Villon begins h. xv with the word "et" – "Et, comme le noble Roumant / *De la Rose* dit et confesse" – , this is a conjunction which can signal opposition as well as continuation between the stanzas it links in the *Testament*.⁴⁴ H. xv cuts off the hopeful, upward movement of the preceding hh. xiii and xiv where Villon's speaker had turned to the forgiving, comforting God of the Gospels: "Pourtant ne veult pas Dieu ma mort, / Mais convertisse et vive en bien /... / Dieu vit, et sa misericorde" (T, 106-07, 110). In the interplay between hh. xiv and xv of Villon's *Testament*, it is possible that Villon set one additional citation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* to remind his readers of the full sweep of that poem: there is a coincidence between T, 106-07 and two verses of the version edited by Méon that appear twenty-one stanzas before the end of that poem:

Diex qui ne vuelt pas que muire peschierres, tant mefface,
Mès qu'il se convertisse et qu'il vive et bien face.
(*Test JM* 2093-94, ed. Méon, iv, p. 112).

It cannot be known whether Villon saw and cited a version of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* with this interpolation or if both are citing the same source; the verses from Ezekiel 18:23 and 30:11 which are recalled by many medieval poems of repentance.⁴⁵ Significantly, however, *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* offers Christian hope at the end of his poem after depicting the human condition while Villon dashes hope at the beginning of his.

"Auffort, triste est le sommeillier
Qui fait aise jeune en jeunesse
Tant qu'en fin lui faille veillier
Quant reposer deust en viellesse". (T, 1326-29)

⁴⁴ *Et* initiates eleven *Testament* huitains: it marks continuing prayer for Thibaut d'Aussigny in h. iii and iv (T, 17, 25) and additional blessings for Louis XI in h. ix (T, 65); it opposes the dead to the living in h. xxx (T, 233); it introduces examples in h. lx (T, 313); it prolongs the spectacle of skulls in h. clxiii (T, 1752) and the enumeration of testamentary instructions in h. clxxv and clxxxiv (T, 1860, 1944). Three times Villon uses "et" to link ballade stanzas (T, 541, 1394, 2004).

⁴⁵ Thuasne, *Œuvres*, ii, p. 104 and R/H, *Testament*, ii, p. 27.

Moreover, Villon's h. xv reverses the rising, lofty movement of the last two verses of the citation which say: "Mais moult est granz vertus et tres haute noblesce / Quant cuer en jeune aage a meürté s'adresse" (*Test JM* 11-12). The key term *meürté* (mature wisdom) is emphasized again in the succeeding stanzas of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, where it appears at the rhyme: "Maiz li uns et maint autre sont de si grant durté / Qu'en nul estat ne veulent venir a meürté" and "Plus tost meurent li jeune que ne font li mœur" (*Test JM* 12-14, 19). Villon too shapes the last two lines of his own stanza around the word *meureté*. But instead of admiration for youth that aspires to wisdom, Villon's speaker conjures up a crowd of persecutors, "ceulx donc qui me font telle presse" (T, 119). The last verse of h. xv is richly ambiguous: "En meureté ne me voudroient voir" (T, 120). Are they bent on preventing the speaker's achieving maturity and wisdom? Or – as David Mus has suggested – do they not wish to see that the speaker has achieved "meureté", a wisdom of sorts?⁴⁶

Villon quotes *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* not to refute its orthodox wisdom but to dispute the value of that wisdom for a particular reader, "Un poyre petit escollier / Qui fut nommé François Villon" (T, 1886-87). He rewrites the quotation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* in the poetic mode of *contredit* that characterizes his speaker, who changes the sense, the thrust of the verses he cites.⁴⁷ *Contredit* is Villon's poetics of contradiction that ever argues with its models while imitating their themes – explicitly in the "Contreditz Franc Gontier" (T, 1473-506), but also in the *sote ballade* of "La grosse Margot" (T, 1591-627) and in "Il n'est soin que quant on a fain" (PV, VII), his parody of Alain Chartier's ballade "Il n'est dangier que de villain" (PV, VII).⁴⁸ Even verses from the Bible are set against each other: in *Testament* h. xxvii,

⁴⁶ *Poétique*, p. 151.

⁴⁷ Zumthor declares that the works of Villon are marked throughout by "l'ambivalence, le paradoxe universel, la contradiction au cœur des phrases. [...] Les contrastes projetés à la surface... agressent en la sollicitant l'attention du lecteur, la dispersent dans un *contre-sens* généralisé" (*Essai*, pp. 427-28).

⁴⁸ R/H, *Lais et poèmes variés*, ii, pp. 91-92.

Villon cites maxims from Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 so that their message appears not merely pessimistic but downright contradictory:

Le dit du Saige trop lui feiz
Favourable, bien en puis mais!
Qui dist: "Esjoïs toy, mon filz,
En ton adolescence", mes
Ailleurs sert bien d'un autre mes,
Car "Jeunesse et adolescence
– C'est son parler, ne moins ne mes –
Ne sont qu'abuz et ygnorance". (T, 209-16)

Misquotation too is a type of *contredit* that does not merely set Villon at odds with the texts he cites; it also serves to remind readers of these sources. The skewed citation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* thus cues readers to a prestigious ancestor and to the traditions that Villon overturns in his new *Testament*, the commonplaces of moral instruction and clerical satire which abound in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* and which Villon reworks. It is easy to find similarities, for both poems draw from stock themes of satirical and moral reflection such as the gluttony of monks and the frivolity of women. Both meditate on the ephemerality of life and the solitude of death:

Le Testament de Jean de Meun, st. lxxix:

Penssons que, quant li homs est ou travail de mort,
Ses biens ne ses richescs ne valent ne que mort;
Ne li pueent oster l'angoisse qui le mort
Ne ce dont conscience le reprent et remort. (*Test JM* 313-16)

Villon, *Testament*, h. xl:

Et meure Paris ou Elayne,
Quicunques meurt meurt a douleur. (T, 313-14)

Villon's portrait of the "povre viellart" (T, 424-44) could well have been inspired by a similar figure in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* (st. lxiv-xlvii).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See Lanly, "Villon", pp. 248-49.

Le Testament de Jean de Meun, st. xlvi:

Il devient froit et sec, baveus et roupiëus,
 Roingneus et grateleus et melencolieus;
 Ja tant n'aura esté par devant gracieus,
 Qu'il ne soit en ce point charchant et annuëus.
 (Test JM 181-84)

Villon, *Testament*, h. xlv

Car s'en jeunesse il fut plaisant,
 Ores plus riens ne dit qui plaise
 – Toujours viel singe est desplaisant,
 Moue ne fait qui ne desplaise – . (T, 429-32)

Villon's poetry owes much to the vivid style of medieval sermons and moral poems, which are encrusted with bright images and proverbs, and which speak directly to the reader – as does *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* – about how to live in this world and get to the next.

In Villon's *contredit*, however, the perspective on these common moral matters is utterly shifted – from high to low, from inside to outside – for Villon's speaker is not a preacher but a sinner. The speaker in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* is a cleric smugly content with God's endowing him with a perfect body, making him a Christian, giving him the opportunity to serve in court, and leading him from a blameless youth to temporal honor and wealth:

lxii Encor le doi je plus amer [sc. Dieu] quant il me membre
 Qu'il me fist quant au corps sanz deffaute de membre
 Qu'il me fist crestien, qu'il me daingna raiembre
 Je nel doi oublier n'en aoust n'en septembre.

lxiv Diex m'a donné servir les plus grans gens de France;
 Diex m'a trait sanz repreuche de jeunesse et d'enfance,
 Diex m'a par maint peril conduit sanz mescheanche
 Diex m'a rendu au miex honneur et grant chevance.
 (Test JM 245-48, 253-56)

What a contrast with Villon's speaker, a poor, ailing, prematurely aged *écolier*, who berates himself for his youthful folly! *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, moreover, counsels and comforts men of wealth and power; the speaker's vision of doing good is tailored to those who have done well. "How can I love my neighbor as myself?" the speaker is asked; he responds, "If you're handsome and rich, you have nothing to lose by wishing the same for me":

xv Se tu es biax et riches, de legier pués vouloir
 Que je le soie aussi, sanz riens de toi douloir:
 Se je vaus et tu vaus, il ne t'en puet chaloir.
 Puis que tu ne pués mains pour ma valeur valoir.
 (Test JM 57-60)

While *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* offers advice on the wise disposition of the rich man's estate, the speaker in Villon's *Testament* peers through a crack in the wall at the good life (T, 1480-82). He jeers at the powerful and lets us hear the smothered, resentful words of the poor as they think about the rich:

xxxiv Povreté, chagrine, doulente,
 Tousjours, despiteuse et rebelle,
 Dit quelque parolle cuisante;
 S'elle n'ose, si le pense elle. (T, 269-71)

Sermonizing in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* is fleshed out with picturesque denunciations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, with special condemnation of lust, while Villon's speaker regrets only his impotence.

xxv Bien est verté que j'é aymé
 Et aymeroye volentiers,
 Mais triste cueur, ventre affamé
 Qui n'est rassasié au tiers
 M'oste des amoureux sentiers. (T, 193-97)

Images of the raging storms of Hell are intended to inspire fear of damnation in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*:

cdlxxxiv Vent et foudre et tonnerre qui tout perce et enteste,
 Feu et gresle et orage, noif, glace et tempeste,
 Les tourmentent [les riches] adez des piez jusqu'a la teste,
 Car enfer est tous plains de tourments jusqu'au feste.
 (*Test JM* 1933-36)

In Villon's "Ballade des pendus", "l'infernale fouldre" still rumbles (PV, xi 18), but it seems a distant menace in the *Testament*, where Villon's speaker is snugly sheltered in the bordello of Grosse Margot:

Vent, gresle, gesle, j'ay mon pain cuyt
 Je suis paillart, la paillarde me suyt.
 Lequel vault mieulx? Chacun bien s'entressuyt,
 L'un vault l'autre, c'est a mau rat mau chat.
 Ordure aimons, ordure nous affuyt. (T, 1621-25)

Yet these images of creatural satisfaction are a source of tension for Villon's reader, for they are expressed in words that inspire a sense of revulsion for the human condition: "paillart", "mau rat", "ordure aimons, ordure nous affuyt", reemphasized in "De telz ordures te reculles" (T, 1708).

The shift in perspective from high to low undermines the authority of Villon's speaker, for the right to preach is founded on righteousness, as *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* tells us: "Qui autri veut blasmer, il doit estre sans blasme" (*Test JM* 693). Its themes are set out from on high, with a firm conviction of the right and without irony by an authoritative master.

Villon's speaker, in contrast, acknowledges that his sins cancel out his right to pass judgment: he is "pecheur" not "prescheur" (T, 294, 296):

xxxiii Je ne suis juge ne commis
 Pour pugnir n'assouldre meffait:
 De tous suis le plus imparfait. (T, 259-61)

The interlocutors who speak up in Villon's *Testament* not only challenge the logic of the speaker's arguments (as in *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*); they also question his very authority:

lxxxii Qui me droit, "Qui vous fait mectre
 Si tres avant ceste parolle,
 Qui n'estes en theologie maistre?
 A vous est presumpcion folle". (T, 809-12)

Yet although Villon denies his speaker the authority to judge, he does not give up the impulse for moral instruction inherited from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, but places it under the problematic sign of the *contredit*. *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* instructed its readers to speak gratefully and respectfully of the ancient *auctores*:

xx Nul ne doit des acteurs parler senestrement
 Se leur dit ne contient erreur apertement,
 Car tant estudierent pour nostre enseingnement
 C'on doit leur mos gloser moult favorablement.
 (*Test JM* 77-80)

Villon's *Testament*, on the other hand, is an upside-down school where the *auctores* are misquoted, "Ou l'escolier le maistre enseigne" (T, 1631), where an old whore teaches a "leçon" (T, 561), where "beaux enseignements" of women gossiping at church doors surpass the judgments of Macrobius (T, 1547-50). Villon's speaker postures as a teacher throughout the poem: ironically in the curriculum he lays out for his "troys povres orphelins" (T, 1275) and his "povres clergons" (T, 1306), grimly in h. clv which precedes the piece Marot entitled "Ballade de bonne doctrine à ceulx de mauvaïse vie":

Une leçon de mon escolle
 Leur liray, qui ne dure guerre;
 Teste n'ayent dure ne folle,
 Escoutent! car c'est la demiere. (T, 1664-67)

In contrast with *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, however, Villon's speaker teaches not salvation but survival. His irrefutable authority lies in his very mortality: "Qui meurt a ses loix de tout dire" (T, 728). His lessons are ephemeral rather than eternal: his maxims are filled with coarse talk, vile and foolish matter, "vil ne sot" (T, 1592).

However, these teachings of Villon's speaker do not stand alone: we hear them spoken against high-minded orthodoxy, recalled by the speaker himself as well as by his interlocutors throughout the poem: "Et si aucun me disait..." In the overall order of the *Testament*, the misquotation from *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* in h. xv has thus a crucial function: located towards the beginning of Villon's poem, it helps establish from the first an opposition between high and low, setting it into motion as a movement that governs the whole. Recollection sets up reverberation: the reader keeps the allusion in mind, once it is established.

Villon summons *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* as an elevated discourse that seeks to constrain the world and the flesh in order to contradict it with a low wisdom that rises from below, from the world and the flesh, a wisdom expressed by a crude speaker whose naked arse is beaten by a paddle: "Et lui frappa au cul la pelle, / Non obstant qu'il dit: 'J'en appelle!' / Qui n'est pas terme trop subtil" (T, 1900-02). Citation of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun* – reinforced and redirected by misquotation – raises up this lofty model in the reader's mind and memory like a sounding board so that the speaker's words can resonate against it. It is at every point against this initial backdrop of high moral wisdom that Villon stages his performance of what we may call alternative wisdom, whose teachings are inseparable from representation of the sweat, dirt, danger, and pain of creatural existence in this world.

The contrast between the two *Testaments* – the sober counsel of the early work and the coarse wit of Villon's poem – links Villon's *Testament* to another medieval genre, the *altercatio* or dialogue between the wise man and the fool, where a higher truth is countered by a lower reality, wisdom by wisecracking. This *altercatio* tradition is best illustrated by the medieval dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul where the sage maxims of a high, learned authority named Solomon are contradicted by Marcoul, an impudent *vilain*, who responds insolently with maxims of a coarse or cynical realism or speaks obscenely of whores.

The dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul have ancient roots in the biblical dialogue of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10); the tenth-century monk Notker Labeo of St. Gall alludes to a vernacular version; they circulated widely in Latin and all the

languages of medieval Europe from the eleventh through the sixteenth century; they are quoted by Picrochole's advisors in Rabelais' *Gargantua*;⁵⁰ they are refigured in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.⁵¹ These dialogues in which Marcoul (or Marcon or Marcolf) responds with earthy truths to the sayings of Solomon belong to the tradition of popular wisdom favored in proverbs such as that opening Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, "Li vilains dit en son respit" (l. 1).⁵² Sayings attributed to peasants were often gathered in collections such as *Li proverbe au vilain*,⁵³ *Li proverbes au comte*

⁵⁰ "– O! (dist Spadassin)... Qui ne se adventure, n'a cheval ny mule, ce dist Salomon. – Qui trop (dist Echéphron) se aventure, pert cheval et mule, respondit Malcon" (Ch. 33).

⁵¹ For complete historical accounts of the dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul, see: Jan Ziolkowski, *Jezebel: A Norman Latin Poem of the Early Eleventh Century*, *Humana Civilitas* 10 (New York, 1989); John M. Kemble, *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus*, The Aelfric Society (London, 1848; rpt. New York, 1974); E. Cosquin, "Le conte du chat et de la chandelle", *Romania*, 40 (1911): 371-430, 481-531 at 373-96, and R.J. Menner, "Introduction", in *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, Modern Languages Association of America Monograph Series, 13 (New York, 1941), pp. 1-70. See also Maria Corti's semiotic analysis of these dialogues in "Models and Antimodels in Medieval Culture", *New Literary History*, 10 (1979), 339-66 (357-64). I appreciated Jan Ziolkowski's response to my inquiries about Solomon and Marcoul. I thank Michael Camille for sending me Malcolm Jones' "Marcolf the Trickster in Late Mediaeval Art and Literature or: The Mystery of the Bum in the Oven", *Spoken in Jest*, ed., G. Bennett, The Folklore Society Mistletoe Series 21 (Sheffield, 1991), 139-74.

⁵² See Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, "Le poète et le proverbe", *Poétiques du quinzième siècle: Situation de François Villon et Michault Taillevent* (Paris, 1983), pp. 65-66, and R. N. B. Goddard, "Marcabru, *Li proverbe au vilain*, and the Tradition of Rustic Proverbs", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 88 (1987), 55-70.

⁵³ Ed. by A. Tobler (Leipzig, 1895) and by E. Lommatzsch (Limburg am Lahn, 1935). Eckhard Rattundes mark the relation with Salomon and Marcoul in *Li Proverbes au vilain: Untersuchungen zur romanischen Spruchdichtung des Mittelalters*, *Studia Romanica*, 11 (Heidelberg, 1966), pp. 133-36.

de Bretagne,⁵⁴ and *Li respit del curteis et del vilain*.⁵⁵ All but forgotten now (for many have not been republished since the nineteenth century⁵⁶), the dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul put an amusingly rude and ugly face on the familiar idea of rustic wisdom.

For all their broad diffusion, however, the dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul are not a canonical text but rather a type well-known in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, an available pattern which could be either briefly recalled or amply filled in by any author. There are two distinct subgroups in the ten extant French versions which are identical in form but which diverge widely in content. One early fourteenth-century version opposes a sprightly courtly ethos to the harsh realism of Marcoul.

I Seur tote l'autre hennor
Est proesce la flor,
 Ce dit Salemons.
Ge n'aim pas la valour
Dont l'en muert a doulor,
 Marcoul li respont.

III Por largement doner
Peut l'en enpres monter
 Ce dit Salemons.
De povreté user,
Se fait l'en fol clamer,
 Marcol li respont.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ed. Michele G. Diaferia, *Li proverbes au conte de Bretagne* (New York, 1990) and by Georges Adrien Crapelet, *Proverbes et dictons populaires aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris, 1831), pp. 169-85.

⁵⁵ Ed. E. Stengel in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, 14 (1892), pp. 154-58.

⁵⁶ See the bibliography in Ziolkowski, *Jezebel*, p. 195.

⁵⁷ Paris, BNF MS fr. 19152, fols. 116b-117c (early 14th century), ed. Mary-Ann Stadler, *Salemon et Marcoul: Edition critique et étude littéraire* (Diss. Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1979); also published by Crapelet, *Proverbes et dictons populaires*, pp. 189-200. Stadler's excellent study and edition of four versions from the 10 extant manuscripts is unfortunately not yet

The other nine French manuscripts (which date from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) develop a second type in which Marcoul parodies whatever Solomon says with obscene talk about whores:

I Mortalitez, guerre
Est escil de terre
Et destruiemenz
 Ce dist Salemons.
De putain sourt maus
Et guerre mortaus,
Et peril de gent
 Marcoul li respont.

XII Tels chace le dain
Par bois et par plain
Qui puis le pert tout,
 Ce dist Salemons.
Tels vest la putain
Et pest de son pain
C'un autres la fout,
 Marcoul li respont.⁵⁸

Each version is freely recomposed from the model: of the total seventy-six known stanzas, only one is found in all in nine versions and twenty-four appear in only one version. All, however, hew closely to the common type.

We know that Villon himself was familiar with the dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul, for an allusion to Solomon in his "Débat de Villon et son Coeur" hooks up the pattern from memory:

published; it is available only in typescript at the Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne.

⁵⁸ Paris, BNF MS fr. 837, fol. 161v (end of the 13th century), ed. Stadler, *Salemon et Marcoul*, who shows the distribution of stanzas among the nine, widely diverging "putain" manuscripts. Stadler also identifies the manuscript sources of the anthology of 69 "putain" stanzas published by Dominique Méon, *Nouveau Recueil de fabliaux et contes inédits des poètes français des XIIIeXIIIe, XIVe et XVe siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1923; rpt. Genève, 1976), i, pp. 416-36.

– Dont vient ce mal? – Il vient de mon mal eur:
 Quant Saturne me fist mon fardelet,
 Ses motz y mist, je le croy. – C'est foleur:
 Son seigneur es et te tiens son varlet!
 Voy que Salmon escript en son rolet:
 "Homme sage, ce dit il, a puissance
 Sur planetes et sur leur influence".
 Je n'en croy riens: tel qu'il m'ont fait seray.
 (PV, xiii, 31-38)

Citing Villon's other "mistakes", Rychner and Henry suggest that here in ll. 36-37 Villon may have erred again by quoting the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon (7:17-19), which speaks of the cycles of the years and the constellations but not of the influence of planets on man.⁵⁹ Recalled in this debate between a wise heart and a foolish speaker, however, the allusion to the dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul is unmistakable: this Solomon is not the glorious king of T, 58 nor the idolater of T, 630, but the eternal partner of a fool who responds "Je n'en croy riens" to every maxim. Pointing out the link to the dialogues, Thuasne notes, moreover, that Villon's foolish speaker bears the melancholy burden of Saturn, and that Saturnus is the name for Marcoul in Anglo-Saxon versions.⁶⁰ Thuasne, moreover, rightly associates Solomon's words with Jean de Meun's verses on free will, one of the great themes of the discourse of Nature, who refuses to yield human destiny to the influence of stars, planets, and comets.

It is Villon's "mistakes" that weave the familiar pattern of Solomon and Marcoul into the tapestry of the *Testament*; his

misquotations both summon and contradict higher authority. Reading the *Testament* within the tradition of *altercatio* and alternative wisdom, we can see that Villon's speaker incarnates and particularizes the type of Marcoul, setting him in the world of contemporary Paris and lending him a poet's name, "le povre Villon". He draws from the pessimistic outlook of this character and exploits his tendency to shift all phenomena towards the literal and the low – "cœur" to "foye" (T, 911), "paix" to "pet" (T, 1611) – and his wisdom wrung from bitter experience.

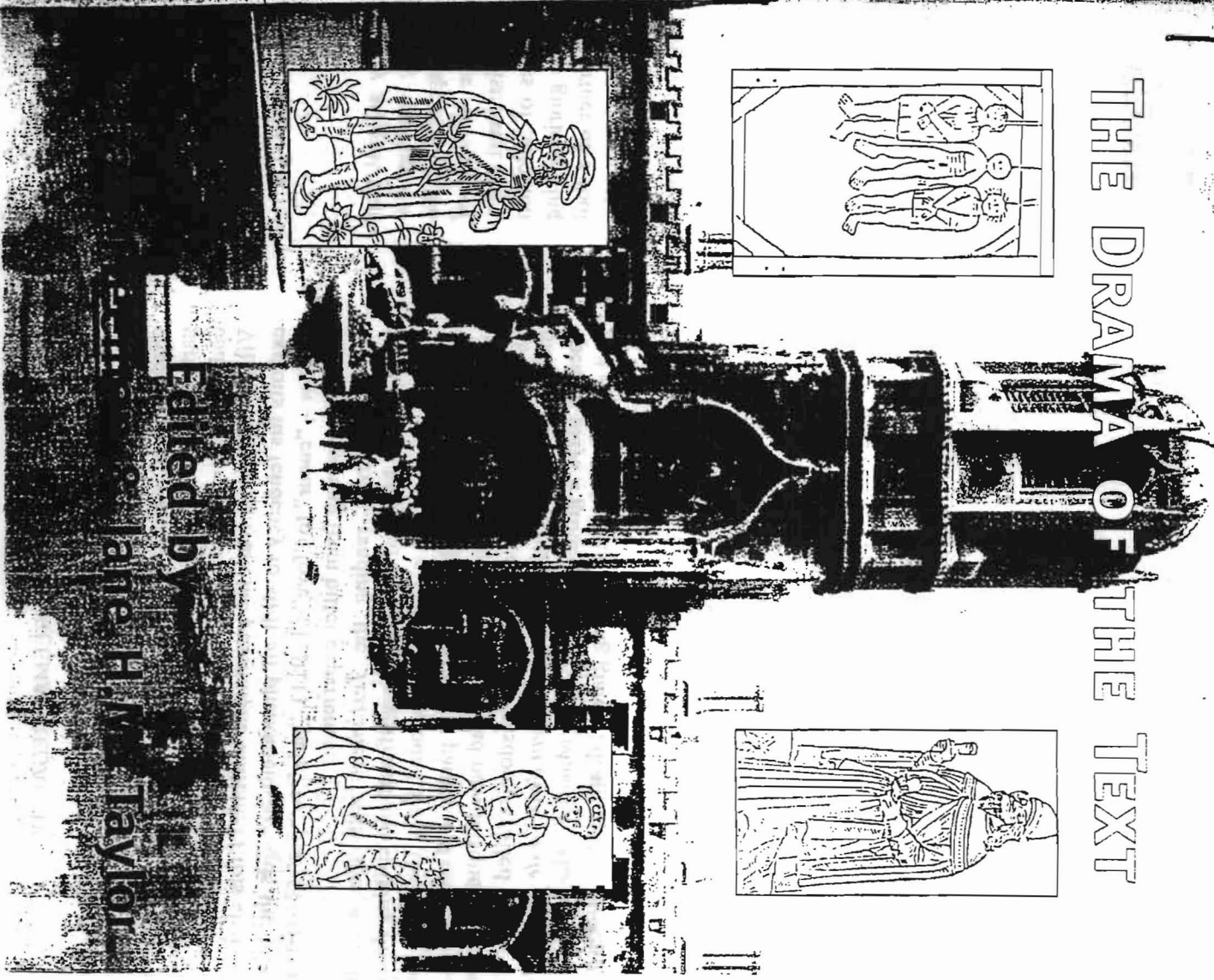
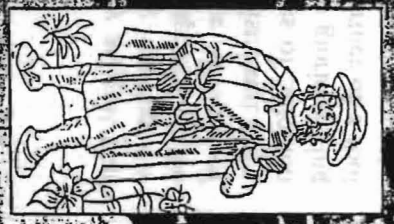
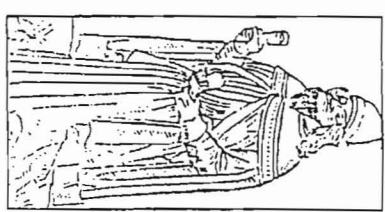
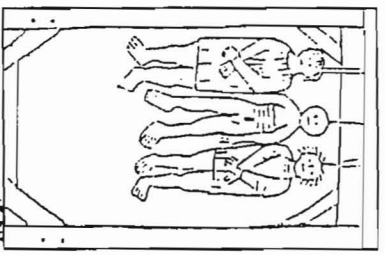
However, reading the *Testament* with the dialogues of Solomon and Marcoul reveals one significant and striking difference: Villon's poem is not a dialogue. Unbound from the tight frame of *altercatio*, his *bon follastre* has no wise partner but only an imperfect recollection of wisdom once learned and now misquoted. Grimacing against the backdrop of Solomonic wisdom recalled in the reader's memory by misquotation of *Le Testament de Jean de Meun*, Villon's speaker plays a grotesque and solitary Marcoul, who leers and jeers and rants alone in the terrifying glare of death in the *Testament*.

⁵⁹ "Il est vraisemblable que V. exploite (en se trompant d'adresse, comme pour Valère Maxime, cf. T, 159-160 n., pour le *Roman de la Rose*, cf. T, 113-118 n., pour Caton, PV I, 108 n., ou pour Aristote, L 296 n.) un souvenir d'école, l'adage *Vir bonus ou sapiens dominabitur astris*, attribuée à Ptolémée et citée, p. ex., par saint Thomas d'Aquin à l'appui de l'affirmation du libre arbitre de l'homme" (R/H, *Lais et poèmes variés*, ii, p. 122).

⁶⁰ Thuasne, "François Villon et Jean de Meun", pp. 93-94, n. 1 and *Œuvres*, iii, pp. 590-92. On the connection between Saturn and folly, see Mühlethaler, *Poétiques*, p. 51; on Marcoul-Saturn as a Teutonic god, see Kemble, *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus*, pp. 113-31.

VILLON AT OXFORD

THE DRAMA OF THE TEXT



Edited by

John H. Taylor

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