

Villon's Epitaph

Martin Robertson

Brothers, men who breathe the air,
who pass counting us where we swing,
do not hate us for what we were,
pity us. Come your reckoning,
God more readily then, judging,
shall pity you. We stuffed our skin
—it hangs in rags, and the bones within
(we, the bones) fritter away.
Never laugh at our suffering.
We all need mercy, so go pray.

We died by law, but do not sneer
at the name of brother from us. Think
that not all men have an equal share
of sound good sense and reasoning.
We who are sped crave your praying
of Mary's Son, by His good willing,
that we may share in His blessing,
thunder of Hell fall another way.
We're dead. Spare us more harrying.
We all need mercy, so go pray.

Laundered by rain we are pegged here
for the sun's drying and blackening.
Crows, pies have picked our eye-holes clear,
plucked beards and brows for their nests' lining.
We can't sit down for a brief breathing,
ceaselessly pushed by the varying
this way, that way, of the wind,
thimble-pocked by the beaks' sharp play.
Our brotherhood is not welcoming.
We all need mercy, so go pray.

Prince Jesus, Master of everything,
do not deliver us to Hell's king
—not his our work, not ours his pay.
Brother men, mockery here's nothing.
We all need mercy, so go pray.