**Villon’s Straight Tip To All Cross Coves**

By *William Ernest Henry* 1887

15th Century Poem written by French Poet François Villon

Translated in the Canting Language used by the Criminal Class of Victorian England by William Ernest Henley.

Recited by Ricky Jay, Card Expert in *Ricky Jay and his 52 Assistants*.

‘*Tout aux tavernes et aux filles*’

‘Everything to taverns and girls’

I  
  
Suppose you screeve, or go cheap-jack?  
  Or fake the broads? or fig a nag?  
Or thimble-rig? or knap a yack?  
  Or pitch a snide? or smash a rag?  
  Suppose you duff? or nose and lag?  
Or get the straight, and land your pot?  
  How do you melt the multy swag?  
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

II  
  
Fiddle, or fence, or mace, or mack;  
  Or moskeneer, or flash the drag;  
Dead-lurk a crib, or do a crack;  
  Pad with a slang, or chuck a fag;  
  Bonnet, or tout, or mump and gag;  
Rattle the tats, or mark the spot  
  You cannot bank a single stag:  
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

III  
  
Suppose you try a different tack,  
  And on the square you flash your flag?  
At penny-a-lining make your whack,  
  Or with the mummers mug and gag?  
  For nix, for nix the dibbs you bag  
At any graft, no matter what!  
  Your merry goblins soon stravag:  
Booze and the blowens cop the lot.  
  
*The Moral.*  
  
It’s up-the-spout and Charley-Wag  
  With wipes and tickers and what not!  
Until the squeezer nips your scrag,  
  Booze and the blowens cop the lot.

## **Canting Language Translated**

Stanza I,

* Line 1
  + *Screeve* = provide (or work with) begging-letters.
* Line 2
  + *Fake the broads* = pack the cards.
  + *Fig a nag* = play the coper with an old horse and a fig of ginger.
* Line 3
  + *Knap a yack* = steal a watch.
* Line 4
  + *Pitch a snide* = pass a false coin.
  + *Smash a rag* = change a false note.
* Line 5
  + *Duff* = sell sham smugglings.
  + *Nose and lag* = collect evidence for the police
* Line 6
  + *Get the straight* = get the office, and back a winner
* Line 7.
  + *Multy* (expletive) = “bloody”
* Line 8
  + *Booze and the blowens cop the lot:* “’Tis all to taverns and to lasses.” (A. Lang).

Stanza II,

* Line 1
  + *Fiddle* = swindle.
  + *Fence* = deal in stolen goods.
  + *Mace* = welsh.
  + *Mack* = pimp.
* Line 2
  + *Moskeneer* = to pawn for more than the pledge is worth
  + *Flash the drag* = wear women’s clothes for an improper purpose
* Line 3
  + *Dead-lurk a crib* = house-break in church time.
  + *Do a crack*—burgle with violence.
* Line 4
  + *Pad with a slang* = tramp with a show.
* Line 5
  + *Mump and gag* = beg and talk.
* Line 6
  + *Tats* = dice.
  + *Spot*, (at billiards).
* Line 7
  + *Stag* = shilling.

Stanza III,

* Line 2
  + *Flash your flag* = sport your apron.
* Line 4
  + *Mug* = make faces.
* Line 5
  + *Nix* = nothing. Line 6.
  + *Graft* = trade.
* Line 7
  + *Goblins* = sovereigns.
  + *Stravag* = go astray.

The *Moral*

* Line 1
  + *Up the spout* and *Charley Wag* = expressions of dispersal.
* Line 2
  + *Wipes* = handkerchiefs.
  + *Tickers* = watches.
* Line 3
  + *Squeezer* = halter.
  + *Scrag* = neck.