

Classic Poetry Series

Eustache Deschamps

- poems -

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Ballade 1

The stag was very proud of his swiftness,
Of running ten miles in one breath,
And the wild boar was proud to be fierce,
And the sheep praised her woolly fleece,
And the horse its beauty, and the buck was proud
Of crossing the plain at a bound,
And the one proud of strength was the bull,
The ermine in having a furry skin;
And to them all he said from his shell:
'The snail will get to Easter just as soon.

What I see first are lions, leopards, bears,
Running the countryside, wolves and tigers
Under pursuit by greyhound and mastiff
And the shouts of men, so hated that if
They're caught each person will attack,
Because of the destruction of the flock;
They're thieves, treacherous and wicked,
And merciless, and for that detested.
Are they strong and fast? Good at a run?
The snail will get to Easter just as soon.
Many see him and the path he's on,
Enclosed in the shell he carries along,
They don't do him harm, they let him be,
And so he goes from week to week,
As many go in their own poor realm
Who live good lives in their simple gown,
And if the world gives them little at all,
They still go on with its good will.
And cow and calf have the meadow's run,
And the snail will get to Easter just as soon.

Prince, among the strong, the rich, the great
There's a lesson they rarely think about;
Their haste can't bring the future on:
The snail will get to Easter just as soon.

Eustache Deschamps

Ballade 2

In Antwerp, Bruges, Ostend and Ghent
I used to order food with flair,
But in every inn to which I went
They always brought me, with my fare,
With every roast and mutton dish,
With boar, with rabbit, pigeon, bustard,
With fresh and with salt-water fish,
Always, never asking, mustard.

I ordered herring, said I'd like
Carp for supper at the bar,
And called for simple boiled pike,
And two large sole, when I ate at Spa.
I ordered green sauce when in Brussels;
The waiter stared and looked disgusted;
The bus boy brought in with my mussels
As always, never asking, mustard.

I couldn't eat or drink without it.
They add it to the water they
Boil the fish in and-don't doubt it-
The drippings from the roast each day
Are tossed into a mustard vat
In which they're mixed, and then entrusted
To those who bring-they're trained at that-
Always, never asking, mustard.

Prince, it's clear a spice like clove
can drop its guard. It won't be busted.
There's just one thing these people serve:
Always, never asking, mustard.

Eustache Deschamps

Rondeau

Fleas, stink, pigs, mold,
The gist of the Bohemian soul,
Bread and salted fish and cold.

Leeks, and cabbage three days old,
Smoked meat, as hard and black as coal;
Fleas, stink, pigs, mold.

Twenty eating from one bowl,
A bitter drink -it's beer, I'm told-
Bad sleep on a straw in some filthy hole,
Fleas, stink, pigs, mold,
The gist of the Bohemian soul,
Bread and salted fish and cold.

Eustache Deschamps