

Classic Poetry Series

Eustache Deschamps

- poems -

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Eustache Deschamps (1338 - 1406)

Eustache Deschamps was a medieval French poet, also known as Eustache Morel

Biography

Born at Vertus, in Champagne, he received lessons in versification from Guillaume de Machaut. After having finished his classical studies at the episcopal school of Reims, under the poet Guillaume de Marchault, who was a canon of Reims, he studied law at the University of Orléans. He then travelled for some time as the king's messenger in various parts of Europe, in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt; in the last country, it is said, he was made a slave.

On his return to France he was appointed gentleman-usher by Charles V, and was confirmed in his position by Charles VI, whom he accompanied in that capacity on various campaigns in Flanders.

In 1381 King Charles VI made him governor of the town of Fismes, and in 1388 bailiff of Senlis; at a later date he lost the position of bailiff, together with his pension and his office at court.

Deschamps was a poet of no little merit. His numerous poems, ballads, rondels, lays, and virelays are full of valuable information concerning the political and moral history of his time. He was an honest, religious man, and although a courtier was also a moralist who did not hesitate to condemn the injustice and wrongs that he had seen and experienced. His style is somewhat heavy, but it is vigorous and not lacking in grace.

Deschamps wrote as many as 1,175 ballades, and he is sometimes credited with inventing the form. All but one of his poems are short, and they are mostly satirical, attacking the English, whom he regards as the plunderers of his country, and against the wealthy oppressors of the poor.

His one long poetic work, *Le Miroir de Mariage*, is a 13,000 line satirical poem on the subject of women. This work influenced Geoffrey Chaucer who used themes from the poem in his own work. Chaucer seems to be one of the few Englishmen Deschamps liked, as he composed a ballade in his honor praising Chaucer as a great philosopher, translator, ethicist, and poet.

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

Ballade adresse a Geoffrey Chaucer

O Socratès plains de philosophie,
Seneque en meurs, Auglius en pratique,
Ovides grans en ta poëtrie,
Briés en parler, saiges en rethorique . . .
Grant translateur, noble Geoffrey Chaucier.

O Socrates, filled with philosophy,
Seneca in morals, Aulus Gellius in practice,
Great Ovid of your poetry,
Brief in speech, wise in rhetoric,
Most high eagle, who by your science
Enlumined the realm of Æneas.
The Isle of giants, of Brut, who has
Sown the flowers and planted the rose bower
For those ignorant of French,
Great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer.

You are the god of earthly love in Albion,
And of the Rose - in the Angelic land,
Which, from the Saxoness Angelica, has flourished
Into Angle-land, from her whose name is applied
As the last in this etymology -
You have translated in good English;
And a garden for which you ask for plants
From those who compose in order to be authorities,
You have long since created,
Great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer.

From you therefore, from the fountain of Helicon,
I have asked to have an authentic drink,
From the stream that is entirely in your power,
In order to quench my fevered thirst,
I who shall be shall be paralyzed in Gaul
Until you send to give me drink.
I am Eustaces; you shall have some of my plants;
Take in good grace these works of a schoolboy
Which you will receive from me by Clifford,
Great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer.
L'envoy

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

You who live

You who live now in this world
And which live sovereign in virtue,
It is to you death remembered?
Your fathers are in the deep pit
Eaten worms, without lance and ecu,
You who live now in this world
And which reign sovereign in virtue.

Warn there and carry out round life,
Because while living will be cold and chanu,
Because in the end will die pare and naked.
You who live now in this world
And which reign sovereign in virtue
It is to you death remembered?

Eustache Deschamps