

Karin Becker. *Le lyrisme d'Eustache Deschamps: Entre poésie et pragmatisme*. Recherches littéraires médiévales 12. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012. 264 pp. €29. ISBN: 978-2-8124-0609-6.

Karin Becker's excellent study of the poetry of Eustache Deschamps offers a unified vision of the poet's massive corpus as well as a comprehensive review of existing criticism that will be of great interest to Deschamps scholars and anyone interested in late fourteenth-century intellectual and literary history. It is rich, careful, and readable.

Not so long ago, it would have been necessary to explain that Eustache Deschamps was a fourteenth-century courtier poet whose work attracted the attention of literary and cultural critics if only because in his surviving 1500 works, one might glimpse the quotidian life of a period of tremendous social and intellectual upheaval. Although medieval reception of his work remains obscure, Deschamps is no longer condemned. Becker's own 1996 *Eustache Deschamps: L'état*

*actuel de la recherche* attested the interest of the scholarly community. It is the poet's privileged proximity to historical events that first sparked nineteenth-century critics' interest. It is the breadth of his experience, the diversity of his ideas, and his rhetorical dexterity that draw Becker's attention. Deschamps' contemporary audience must have been courtly, but practical experience as a bailiff in royal service coupled with his rhetorical knowledge and urge to personalize while being didactic have left a fascinating corpus.

Becker's point of departure is Deschamps' seminal treatise *L'Art de dictier*. She deftly summarizes his ideas on the *formes fixes*, gently reproaching critics who found fault with the poet's proffering opposing views in different poems. The poet's courtly experience coupled with his encyclopedic knowledge anchors Becker's interest. His audience was elite and literate, and his poems' disparate topics held contemporary appeal. Rather like Deschamps, Becker has read widely: European history (cultural, literary, and civil), literary criticism, and primary texts.

The volume is divided into three main sections: "Le Poète expert," "Chez soi et en route," and "La Question du mariage et le corps du poète." Part 1, "The Expert Poet," examines poems displaying the poet's erudition in matters legal, medical, and culinary. Deschamps used judicial language for ludic and didactic purposes. Similarly, his discourses on illness display wide-ranging medical knowledge via a serio-comic persona. Portraits of disease and age (cf. part 3) are really useful rhetorical devices, and the poet's persona disappears in increasingly serious health advice. Deschamps offers practical information in a format appealing to his courtly audience. Long catalogues such as appear in his culinary and travel poems are rhetorical displays that reveal other truths, e.g., how the poet transcended his own limitations in experience and in culture.

In part 2, "At Home and on the Road," Becker observes Deschamps contrasting idealized domestic arrangements with the trying circumstances of travel. Domestic and marital order yield bliss as had been noted in works such as *Le Menagier de Paris* (cf. part 3). Similarly, travel offers astounding opportunities and difficulties — as well as fertile subject matter.

In part 3, "The Question of Marriage and the Poet's Body," Becker notes that Deschamps discourses on war through the lens of his own discomfort rather than French nationalism or anachronistic pacifism. Marriage and the physical body are filtered by the same pragmatism as Deschamps exhibits in other areas. Becker ably surveys the state of scholarship of *Le Miroir de mariage*, a marriage debate poem and compendium of misogynist-misogynist literature filtered by Deschamps's juridical and ludic lens before the advent of the nascent feminism of the *Querelle des femmes*. Finally, in the section on the body, Becker again observes that Deschamps's use of his own experience, beyond personalizing for rhetorical effectiveness, offers a highly individual voice of exceptional intensity especially when speaking of physical experiences, mostly suffering.

The bibliographies (twenty-seven pages) have usefully been broken out into eleven sections mapping to the major divisions of Becker's study; however, throughout the footnotes, there are additional works which might have also

appeared in these bibliographies. There is an index of works, authors, and genres, but not place names. It is a quibble to observe that European footnotes are of the old style, which may frustrate some North American readers.

Studying Deschamps decades ago was lonely work. Karin Becker's lucid book lets us hear her voice responding to the poet's as well as the many colleagues' who now engage this poet's massive body of work.

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