

Christine Scollen-Jimack

MAROT, DESCHAMPS AND THE 592 SQUIRRELS.

My intention in this paper is to look at the interface between poetry and reality in the works of Marot and Deschamps, and I feel it is singularly appropriate that I should be doing so in the context of this series of lectures in memory of Klaus Mayer. Not only was he above all a great Marot scholar, but, especially as a teacher, he was deeply conscious of the links between literature and life. In particular, I want to give you two examples which illustrate Klaus's preference for "littérature engagée", a belief that literature is about life and not just words. Which is not to say that he did not appreciate word-play, and Marot of course neatly combines the two. As some of you will know, there was a period when he regularly produced the London University French play. After Sartre, *Les Mouches*, and Anouilh, *L'Alouette*, his choice in 1963 was Ionesco, which you might think illustrates above all his love of word-play. But the choice of play, *Rhinocéros*, reflects a different interest. Ionesco was of course quite a cult in the 1960s, one of the foremost theatre of the absurd authors along with Beckett and Pinter. But whereas his short piece *La Cantatrice chauve*, which was particularly popular, was a dazzling display of fun and games, linguistic and scenic, *Rhinocéros* was rather different, since its import went way beyond the linguistic fireworks, and theatrical tricks. For Klaus was insistent that *Rhinocéros* was not just about conformism in general, but quite specifically about the rise of Fascism, and even more specifically about the Iron Guard in Romania.

My second example is an evocation of Klaus as master of the Socratic method in his dealings with students. In the course of a lecture to Bedford College undergraduates on Marot's long polemical poem "L'Enfer", Klaus remarked that Marot and Montaigne were the only 16th century French writers to protest against the use of torture (designated in French by the euphemism "la question"). Murmurs of approbation from the listeners. We need to remember that this was 1960, shortly after the publication of a book by Henri Alleg (a French journalist, pro FLN) entitled *La Question* (published in 1958 by the Editions de Minuit and subsequently banned). The book recounted the author's experiences at the hands of the "paras" and protested about the widespread use of torture by the French army in Algeria. It was a work, which many of us had heard of, and perhaps some of us had read. "Aha," says Klaus, "so you condemn torture outright?" Chorus of students "Of course." "And what if you had taken prisoner a high-ranking German officer, who was in possession of plans for the total destruction of London...? Do you just ask him nicely?" (Two wars, different problems? Klaus was evoking his own war. And incidentally Alleg, now in his 80s, has been recently speaking out about the Americans' use of torture in Iraq). For Klaus, literature was both a reflection of/on society and a potent vehicle for polemical discussion.

In this talk I am considering examples from two authors: the fourteenth century courtier-poet, Eustache Deschamps, sometimes known as Eustache Morel (1340?-1404, an almost exact contemporary of Chaucer), and Clément Marot (1496-1544). One of them was a poet who wrote satirical verse, some light, some of it very fierce, on topical subjects, in what I would call an anti-courtly vein. He also produced some love poetry, though this is perhaps not the most memorable part of his output. He was attached to the French court throughout his life. One of his most important patrons,

for whom he wrote numerous pieces, was the French monarch, but our poet was also associated with another French court, that of the King's sibling, for whom he also penned various pieces. This is poetry for, and shaped by these court connections, pieces on births, marriages and deaths, petitions for favours, implying the not inconsiderable difficulties of adhering to the poet-patron pact – a certain degree of familiarity, sometimes even criticism, masked by a light, jocular, ludic tone. Now most of you no doubt think that I am referring to Marot (at least that's what I want you to be thinking...). But this thumbnail sketch actually alludes to the life and works of Deschamps, though virtually all of it is also applicable to Marot.

A little background detail on Deschamps. He was active in the reigns of two French monarchs, Charles V and VI (father and son), and attached to the court as "huissier d'armes"; he was also "maître d'hôtel" at the court of Charles VI's younger brother, Louis d'Orléans. Many of Deschamps's works derive from the everyday matter of the life he led in this official milieu; but they also reflect wider and deeper issues, for his poetic voice can often be very morose, no doubt influenced by the sombre political and religious climate of France in the late 14th century. The kingdom was dominated by the Hundred Years' War against England, and by a series of military campaigns in Flanders. And further, from 1392 onwards Charles VI suffered from periods of madness, rendering him incapable of ruling, and this contributed to factional conflicts between branches of the royal family (the Armagnacs against the Burgundians). On the religious front, this is the period of the Papal schism, with rival Popes in Avignon and Rome.

Deschamps was a very prolific, some would say verbose poet; the early 20th century edition of his works runs to 11 volumes.¹ They include the first *Art poétique* in French, the *Art de dictier*, in which he claims, somewhat perversely it seems to me, that poetry, the superior art, is "musique naturelle", and music, "musique artificielle". Indeed Deschamps marks a turning point, the separation of music and poetry; for unlike his poetic master, Guillaume de Machaut, he was *not* a poet-musician. His poetic works include a long (just over 12,000 lines!) polemical and misogynistic work, the *Miroir de Mariage*, but above all poems couched in the "formes fixes", *ballades* (over 1,000), and around two hundred *rondeaux* and *virelais*. Deschamps didn't invent these genres, but he widened their range and possibilities, and his ballads in particular are very diverse thematically. For example, fairly conventional love poetry, and many polemical pieces, which are frequently anti-English, and often anti-court, as Pauline Smith noted in her thesis on anti-courtier works². And he grumbles on many occasions about the discomforts of foreign travel: one *rondeau*, opens with a splendid alliterative line, impossible to imitate in English: "Poulz, puces, puour et pourceaulx/ Est de Behaingne la nature" ["Lice, fleas, foul smells, swine – these are the characteristics of Bohemia"] (vol 7, p. 90.). And – *plus ça change* – foreign food is awful and French food wonderful³. There are also wonderfully pertinent grouses about the woes of old age and infirmity⁴. What I am concerned with here, however, is the fact that he also pens a large number of "Supplications", requests for money, for favours or for precise objects.

¹ Deschamps, *Œuvres complètes*, ed A. Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, 11 vols, Paris, 1878-1904. All references to the works of Deschamps are to this edition.

² *The Anti-Courtier Trend in sixteenth-century French Literature*, Geneva, Droz, 1966).

³ On foreign food see vol. 7, pp.88-90, French food, vol. 5, pp.51-52.

⁴ See for example, vol 7, pp. 3-4; 8, pp. 34-5.

Why link Marot and Deschamps, as I did earlier? Deschamps is not usually indicated as one of Marot's sources; the group of 15th century writers, the "Grands Rhétoriciens", including Marot's own father Jean, are more usually cited. However, though Marot was undoubtedly a very original poet, he did not arise *ex nihilo*. He has, I believe, other possible poetic ancestors, though not necessarily direct sources. Having worked on both Deschamps and Marot, I was struck by considerable parallels, both in their relationship to their patrons and in their poetic "profiles", that is themes, tone, and poetic strategies, which give them a certain "air de famille". So much so that about 20 years ago, I produced an article entitled "Marot and Deschamps: the Rhetoric of Misfortune" (*French Studies*, 1988, XLII, 1). I concentrated particularly on poems that were petitions, "supplications", requests for money, etc. I was looking at the ways in which the poet sugars the pill: how does he make palatable a down-to-earth, almost sordid request to a patron?

My answer was that he does it by the use of comedy, the construction of a comic victim persona. Daniel Poirion had earlier remarked very relevantly of Deschamps: "Comme Colin Muset et Rutebeuf qui amusaient les autres en racontant leurs soucis d'argent et de ménage, Deschamps joue pour la cour la Comédie du *Moi*. Il propose au public la mise en scène parfois douloureuse, mais souvent comique de sa propre existence".⁵ And this formulation is of course equally applicable to Marot. My argument was that "supplications" should be considered above all as literary set-pieces, and following Poirion I cited a well-worn tradition of poetry of this type by authors such as (in chronological order starting in the 13th century) Colin Muset, Rutebeuf, Deschamps, Villon, Michault Taillevent,⁶ leading to Marot.

A word about the relatively unknown Taillevent: his poem *La Destrousse* is about a robbery in a wood; the author/persona loses horse, sword, and clothes to brigands, all recounted in a tone which mixes pathos with humour. He ends by appealing to his patron Philippe le Bon for money to get him back on a horse again (Deschaux, pp.49-53). This episode and its treatment have many echoes in Marot's works. I produced a formula I was rather proud of, the "pathetico-comic begging letter", the classic hard-luck story. And here I want to focus on certain elements in what is perhaps the finest example of Marot's hard-luck tale, and a brilliant bit of comic writing, the "[Epître] au roy, pour avoir esté desrobé" (Epître XXV, which I refer to subsequently as the robbery letter).⁷ I found in this letter several parallels with a piece by an earlier poet, Rutebeuf, entitled "La complainte Rutebeuf".⁸ This is a request for money from his patron, the comte de Poitiers, and is as the title suggests, a catalogue of the poet's woes. Rutebeuf remarks that misfortunes never come singly (l.107), and Marot uses this idea as his opening strategy:

On dit bien vray, la mauvaïse Fortune
Ne vient jamais, qu'elle n'en apporte une
Ou deux ou trois avecques elle (Sire).

⁵ *Le Poète et le Prince. L'Evolution du lyrisme courtois de Guillaume de Machaut à Charles d'Orléans*, Paris, 1965, p.232.

⁶ On Taillevent see the combined edition and study by R. Deschaux, *Un Poète bourguignon du XVe siècle: Michault Taillevent*, Geneva, 1975.

⁷ Quotations from Marot are from C.A. Mayer's edition, *Les Epîtres de Clément Marot*, London, Athlone Press, 1958.

⁸ Rutebeuf, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. E.Faral and J.Bastin, Paris, 1959-60, 2 vols; vol.1, p.556.

Vostre cueur noble en sçauroit bien que dire.(Epître XXV, ll. 1-4.)
Rutebeuf notes that he has been ill for three months, and in Marot's Epistle we find the following:

C'est une lourde & longue maladie
De troyz bons moys, qui m'a toute eslourdie
La pauvre teste, & ne veult terminer (ll. 55-57).

Above all, in both pieces we find the creation of a victim persona, and the use of the literary form to appeal for money. In Marot in particular, we note the use of a jokey tone in the narration of misfortune. Nearly two centuries earlier, Deschamps had used a similar strategy. For instance, he transforms lack of money into an illness, and complains he can't find a doctor to cure him.

J'ay par cinq ans esté en maladie,
Dont mire nul ne m'a voulu guerir,
De pou d'argent, ou maint homme mendie.(vol,5, p.93.)

Elsewhere he compares the retention of his wages to the state of his bowels - he needs a laxative (vol.4, p.308). In Marot's request poetry, we find elaborate word-play: for instance Epître XIII, *Au Chancelier du Prat, nouvellement Cardinal*, is a poem about the necessity of the Chancellor's seal for the payment of his wages. The final 20 lines of the poem are constructed on a series of puns on s(c)eller. Another of Marot's specialities is comic reformulation. In the robbery letter (Epître XXV) Marot changes his plea - if the King won't give him money what about a loan?

Advisez donc si vous avez desir
De rien prester: vous me ferez plaisir,
Car puis ung peu j'ay basti à Clement,
Là où j'ai faict un grand desboursement,
Et à Marot, qui est ung peu plus loing:
Tout tumbera, qui n'en aura soing (ll.113-118).

My conclusion was that although there were no doubt real circumstances behind these "supplications", we should beware of taking them too literally, and treating them as documents with a *necessary* grounding in reality. They entail rather the creation of an author-persona that is both pathetic and comic and they are above all literary set-pieces with a recognisable typology and a considerable tradition, intended to amuse a well-defined social group. Today I want to go back on that thesis (and here I am recanting like Marot!). After further consideration, and influenced by some recent work on Deschamps, I want to look again at the relationship of the "supplications" to a verifiable reality, in particular in the case of Deschamps, but my conclusions are equally applicable to Marot. Perhaps this is partly a change of emphasis; in any case my view now is that the "supplication" is not above all a literary set-piece, but is very firmly grounded in the "vécu", hence a real petition, relating to specific, often verifiable, events .

Two scholars' work on Deschamps have led me to this. The first, Susanna Bliggenstorfer, whose article, "Les poèmes de supplication d'Eustache Deschamps"⁹, establishes a corpus and a typology of supplications, and argues precisely from the point of view that we must consider many of them as genuine requests. James Laidlaw goes even further and has shown, very conclusively I think, the relationship

⁹ *Les Niveaux de vie au moyen âge. Mesures, perceptions et représentations, Actes du Colloque international de Spa 21-25 octobre 1998*, ed. J-P. Sosson et al., Louvain-la Neuve, 1999, pp.49-75.

between verifiable reality and Deschamps's "supplications".¹⁰ Using archival material he confirms both the circumstances of the requests, and in many cases the response of the royal or ducal finances in granting them.

In the light of this new information, it of course becomes appropriate to look rather differently at the corpus of "supplications" in the works not only of Deschamps but also of Marot. Laidlaw points out usefully that Deschamps is frequently reminding his patrons of their unfulfilled promises:

Les supplications de Deschamps s'inspirent des difficultés auxquelles il doit faire face au cours de sa vie professionnelle et personnelle. C'est ainsi qu'il rappelle à seigneurs et amis leurs *promesses généreuses mais vaines* – épée, camail, cheval, houppelande, pourpoint. "Où sont ils?" demande le poète d'un ton réprobateur. *Bien plus souvent il s'agit d'embarras pécuniaires. Deschamps réclame ses gages d'huissier d'armes à maintes reprises.*" ("Les Supplications de Deschamps", p.73, my italics.)

As far as Deschamps is concerned, as Laidlaw notes, the poet is often requesting precise objects, some of them possibly related to the military campaigns he participated in. But most frequently, the requests are for money, and particularly for the payment of his wages as "huissier d'armes". Similarly, we find a whole sequence of Marot's poems about being "couché sur l'état du roi", put on the King's payroll, but not being paid. It was one thing to have been accepted in principle, quite a different affair to receive payment (see *Épîtres* XII, XIII, XIV, XV). In general, Marot makes fewer requests for objects, though in the case of the robbery letter his request for money would seem to be in part to replace the horse and clothes his valet has made off with. Perhaps this was traditional valet behaviour, for Deschamps too produced a poem about a valet who has made off with his horses, and his clothes (vol. 5, p.72). Though no doubt Marot's request for funds for the upkeep of his houses "à Clement (...) et à Marot" (*Épître* XXV, ll. 115-118) was not intended to be taken seriously.

But Marot's requests were by no means all for remuneration. We could add to his list of "supplications" requests to get him out of prison, one to the King (*Épître* XI), and another addressed to his friend, Lyon Jamet, this one in the form of the fable of the lion (lyon) and the rat (*Épître* X). There are too letters asking the King and his sister Marguerite de Navarre to facilitate his return to France from exile in Italy (*Épître* XLIV, *Au Roy, de Venise: Épître* XLVI, *A la Royne de Navarre*). A more precise request to the King's son, jocular in tone but serious in intent, asks him to intercede with the King to grant a "sauf-conduit" for his return to his home country (*Épître* XLV, *Au tresvertueux prince, François, Daulphin de France*). This contains a couple of good examples of Marot's comic technique: word play/neologism (his children are "les petis maroteaux") and comic reformulation (asking for a safe conduct for a half year, or if not, six months):

Ce que je quiers, et que de vous j'espere,
C'est qu'il vous plaise au Roy, vostre cher pere,
Parler pour moy, si bien qu'il soit induict
A me donner le petit saufconduit
De demy an, qui la bride me lasche,
Ou de six moys si demy an luy fasche.

¹⁰ James Laidlaw, "Les Supplications de Deschamps. Le pouvoir de persuasion", in *Les "dictez vertueulx" d'Eustache Deschamps: Forme poétique et discours engagé à la fin du Moyen Âge*, éd. M. Lacassagne et T. Lassabatère, Paris, 2003, pp.73-83.

Non pour aller visiter mes chasteaulx,
Mais bien pour voir les petis maroteaux,
Et donner ordre à ung faiz qui me poise. (ll.18-26.)

I want now to get back to Deschamps and his requests – and at last a little nearer to the squirrels of my title. Among the objects requested by Deschamps are items of clothing. *Camail*, a piece of headgear probably made of chainmail, something like a balaclava helmet in shape but also covering the shoulders; *pourpoint* (doublet); and what interests us here, *houppelande*, a warm overcoat. Did Deschamps feel the cold particularly acutely? or was he just posturing? In any case he certainly excels at producing poetry about the cold. We might note at this juncture that he petitions the duke Louis d'Orléans for the right to keep his hat on his (bald) head at court in winter. Louis's generous reply (possibly penned by Deschamps himself) permits the supplicant to keep his hat on both in summer and winter. And cold winters are not surprisingly quite a preoccupation of the poet. One of his very best, most evocative poems, complains about the problems of being on duty at the court in winter and creates a memorable scene. We are witnessing those unfortunate souls who are, as it were, waiting in the wings in the course of a royal boar hunt. Those on foot attempt to keep warm, blowing on their fingers and beating their sides; the attendant pages shiver with cold and can hardly hold the bridles of their horses.

Lors aux sengliers s'en va chassier li roys,
[Et] officiers qui sont sur la despence
Soufflent leurs mains. Chascun garre sa pence;
Batent leurs corps pour eulx du froit vengier;
Page a cheval font nice contenance.
En ce froit temps s'en fait bon estrangier.

Petiz pages pleurent de froit aux boys,
Qui de tenir leur bride n'ont puissance.
Quant au logis, Dieu scet comme il est froys.
("Sur les quatre mois d'hiver", Vol. 4, 301-2.)

What, you may be thinking, has all this go to do with squirrels? Well here we get back to the "houppelande". What was it? You may well know what it is, I have only discovered quite recently: a long loose coat, with wide sleeves, padded or lined, often with fur. It also existed in a shorter, knee-length version, and I am guessing here that it was the shorter version that Charles VI gave to 350 courtiers for the first of May 1400.¹¹ Deschamps, rather strangely, does not figure on this list and we can only speculate why, since he was still alive, and, as we know from other documents, not out of favour at court. Some years earlier, he had in fact penned two poems requesting a *houppelande*. The first request is specifically for a coat to be used during a military campaign in Flanders – you could apparently wear the *houppelande* over armour. This is not initially addressed to anyone in particular, just a general wish that he had one, though there is an oblique but revealing reference in the *envoi* to "vostre armée", presumably the King's army:

Je muir de froit et n'ay chose qui vaille
Pour moy couvrir au guet de vostre armée;
J'aray toudiz assez pain et vitaille:

¹¹ *Livraison de houppelandes du 1er mai aux seigneurs de la cour, pour l'an 1400*. "Ce sont les nons des seigneurs, chevaliers, escuyers et autres officiers du Roy nostre sire [...] jusqu'au nombre de IIIc L houppellandes". (In L. C. Douet-d'Arcq, *Choix de pièces inédites relatives au règne de Charles VI*, publiées pour la Société de l'histoire de France, vol. 119, 1, p.163.)

Pour Dieu me soit houppelande donnée.
("Demande d'une houppelande pour la guerre de Flandres", vol. 4, pp.313-14).

Another *ballade* is more precise, and seems to come into the category of reminders I mentioned a moment ago. Deschamps is reminding the duc de Bourbon, one of the princes of the royal blood, Charles VI's maternal uncle, of his promise to give him a *houppelande* for the coming winter, lined with squirrel fur (the "panne" is the hide or skin, and the "gris", the grey squirrels):

A mon seigneur le duc de Bourbonnois
Supplie Eustaces, li baillis de Senlis,
Comme le temps li deviengne trop frois,
Et lui aiez hoppelande promis
Pour cest yver - et la panne de gris -
Qu'il vous plaise de vo benigne grace
Que de vo don soit paieez a Paris,
Si prira Dieu pour vous ledit Eustace.

("Supplicacion: Eustache réclame une houppelande promise par le duc de Bourbon", vol. 5, pp.94-95).

In many cases we cannot date Deschamps's poems with any accuracy, and this is often true of his requests. However, the request he made for a *houppelande* for use in the Flanders campaign mentioned earlier opens with a reference to the "Gantoys", "Puisqu'il me faut aler au guet de nuit/Et des Gantoys atendre la bataille" and is presumably referring to the campaign against the inhabitants of Ghent in 1382, culminating in the Battle of Roosebeke, a decisive French victory. As for the second request, with the precise reference to squirrel fur, we cannot date it precisely. We can only conclude that it is much later: the plea to the duc de Bourbon must be after Deschamps's appointment as "bailli de Senlis" (1388/89) and before 1404, the year of his death (he predeceased the duke who died in 1410).

However, if we cannot be very precise about the dates of the actual requests, we often have exact information about their results. What we have is of course the records for the royal or ducal courts, in this case the accounts of the household of Louis d'Orléans, the King's younger brother. This was my moment of truth, the verifiable reality behind poetic requests.

Squirrels, jolly little furry creatures, now so numerous in Britain's back gardens, amusing to watch as they steal food put out for birds (slightly less amusing if they take up residence in your attic!), are strangely absent in literature, and I include folk tales, fables, and emblems. Two reliable informants, Michael Bath for emblems and Kenneth Varty for the *Roman de Renart*¹², report negatively on sightings of squirrels – perhaps not exactly never, but certainly hardly ever. Æsop? I haven't found any. There is one fable in La Fontaine, and that not published in his lifetime, "Le Renard et l'écureuil".¹³ This is perhaps rather surprising, given the appearance in fables and emblems of so many other animals, presumably no more common than squirrels. Is the explanation perhaps in uncertainty about what they might represent? Are they perceived as a force for good or evil? On the positive side, Guy de Tervarent¹⁴ notes

¹² Personal communication in both cases.

¹³ La Fontaine, *Fables*, ed G.Couton, Paris, Garnier, 1962, pp.399-400.

¹⁴ *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane: dictionnaire d'un langage perdu*, Geneva, Droz, 1952, 2 vols., vol.1, p. 154.

simply that they are a symbol of diligence. The *Encyclopédie des Symboles* is more forthcoming, but gives a strongly negative spin on squirrel behaviour. It cites a fascinating north Germanic myth. The squirrel (called Ratatösker, rat teeth), is a force for evil. It runs up and down the tree of the world creating discord between the eagle at the top and the dragon at the bottom by telling each of them what the other had said about it. The work further notes that in the Christian era this creature, referred to as “red”, which could flee very rapidly without ever being caught, was considered as an incarnation of the devil, who was usually depicted as red.¹⁵

However, in the accounts of Louis d’Orléans, squirrels crop up in a positive multitude – but only of course as a source of the kind of fur Deschamps was requesting. Happily the entries in royal or ducal accounts are very precise, and we are given not only the date, the objects in question and their price, but even the name of the person they were intended for. My first piece of evidence is the payment of 25 francs 3 sous 9 deniers, on 7th January 1397/98 to one Thevenin, furrier:

“pour 592 dos d’écureuil, achetés de luy pour fourrer une longue houppelande d’yraingne de Bruxelles donnée [par le duc d’Orléans] à Eustache Morel son maître d’hôtel” (BnF, f.fr. 10431, p.430, pièce 2445).¹⁶

Thus Louis paid (or authorised a payment) for the 592 squirrel backs, bought to line a long cloth coat given by the duke to his maître d’hôtel, Eustache Morel (otherwise known as Eustache Deschamps). And though squirrels were dear, tailors were much cheaper; for the following entry, a fortnight later, is for the making up of the coat (“pour façon”), and cost only “12 sous paris”:

23 jan 1397/98: “une longue houppelande d’yraingne vermeille, fourrée d’escureux noirs d’achat, laquelle mon dit seigneur [d’Orléans] a donnée à Eustace Morel, son maistre d’ostel, pour façon xij s.p.” (Paris, PO 2154/48873, pièce 234).

So here we seem to be able to establish a precise correlation between the “fiction” of request poetry and the fact of the ducal account books.

What kind of squirrels are we talking about? Our squirrels are definitely grey ones – Deschamps knew exactly what he was asking for, “avec panne de gris”. I haven’t been able to find out whether there were any actual grey squirrels in France at that time. The modern narrative certainly has it that grey squirrels, at least in Great Britain, are a recent American import. However, in the case of squirrel fur, it is clear that we are concerned obviously not with a pre-Columbian American import, but with skins from Russia. Even modern French dictionaries give “petit-gris”, or simply “gris” as “écureuil de Russie ou de Sibérie, au pelage d’hiver gris, fournissant une fourrure recherchée”. How did these squirrel skins get to France? Thanks to Marie Schiller’s article on the squirrel fur-trade,¹⁷ I now have some idea. Novgorod (then a whole province, not as now just a town) was the centre of the Russian fur trade. High prices were paid for squirrel pelts from northern Russia, collected and distributed in Novgorod, then shipped by the Hansa merchants through the Baltic, and south to Western Europe, England, Flanders, France.

¹⁵ *Encyclopédie des Symboles*, translated from the German, ed. Michel Cazenave, Pochothèque, Livre de Poche, 1996, p.216.

¹⁶ I owe a debt to James Laidlaw who found this and the following precious entry.

¹⁷ Marie Schiller, “The Squirrel Fur Trade in 14th century Novgorod”, consulted at <http://bell.lib.umn.edu/Products/squirrel.html> accessed 01.11.2008.

There was of course a hierarchy of fur. Joan Evans notes in her excellent work on Medieval French costume: “Cloth garments were often lined with fur: on state occasions, ermine for the royal house and their representatives, squirrel for the noble, and lamb for the gentlemen, though the King might wear squirrel on ordinary occasions” (*Dress in Mediaeval France*, Oxford, 1952, p. 10). She further notes that “Philippe le Long [Philippe V of France, reigned 1316-22], who was anything but extravagant, in three months used 6,364 skins of grey squirrel to fur his robes” (p. 26)¹⁸. If we come across references to “menu vair” (English “miniver”), this means squirrel *bellies*; the account book tells us that Deschamps has the more prestigious squirrel *backs*. There is another problem raised by the tailor’s bill, which specifies *black* squirrels. Is this for dark grey, or are these even European reds, whose winter coats are practically black? I leave you to ponder!

And there are further questions. Does the item in the royal accounts relate precisely to either of the two “houppelande” poems? It would seem to be too late for the Flanders campaigns of 1382. But then, had Deschamps petitioned the duc de Bourbon some time in the 1390s in vain, and then turned to Louis d’Orléans as another possibility? Louis seems to have been a helpful patron towards the end of Deschamps’s life, possibly precisely at times when it was less efficacious to channel requests to the mad king. Whatever the truth of this may be, we can at least conclude that Deschamps penned a poem asking for a winter coat with a squirrel lining, and that he eventually got it.

And what about Marot? Well, it was the squirrels that caused me to recant, and reconsider my former position. It is only too clear that there is very often a precise correlation between request poetry and verifiable reality. Klaus had of course indicated this in his abundant and excellent footnotes to his Marot edition, with references to, for instance, the accounts of François 1er¹⁹, which throw light on many of Marot’s poetic requests. While it is true on the one hand that there are certain set-pieces in request poetry, and there are plenty of examples in the works of a whole lineage of authors, on the other hand these requests surely correspond to the realities of Medieval and Renaissance life, and real-life relationships with patrons. Even poets needed money. A horse was essential, and so obviously were certain rather costly (and often luxurious) articles of clothing. In my earlier work I stressed a typology of request literature, the “pathetico-comic begging letter”, which Marot sums up so wonderfully in the robbery letter with the tag “Et en pleurant tasche à vous faire rire” (*Épître XXV*, 1.68). In so doing I was to some extent adopting a provocative, revisionist approach to the work of Marot, playing the part of a “fille rebelle” contesting the views of my *Doktorvater*. But Klaus was of course right: Marot, like Deschamps before him, is a veritable master of creating poetry out of the “vécu”, the stuff of everyday life. However, Marot, unlike Deschamps, is prepared to speak urgently with his own voice about such matters as religion: he is, like Rabelais and Montaigne, the consummate “auteur engagé”. And here of course Klaus was right too: literature is not the icing on the sponge-cake, but a rich fruit cake, into which we are invited to sink our teeth and chew.

¹⁸ Evans is quoting from Quicherat, *Histoire du Costume en France*, 1877.

¹⁹ P. Marichal, *Catalogue des Actes de François 1er*, Paris, 1887, 10 vols.