

10-1-1969

## Deschamps and Dunbar: Two Elegies

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### Recommended Citation

Brookhouse, Christopher (1969) "Deschamps and Dunbar: Two Elegies," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, 123–.  
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol7/iss1/12>

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## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### Deschamps and Dunbar: *Two Elegies*

Many scholars have noted the general influence of French poetry on Dunbar in matters of poetic form and diction. Beyond the area of general influence, Janet Smith<sup>1</sup> suggested the influence of Deschamps on Dunbar, but still it is an influence observed generally—similarities in their use of ballade forms and subject matters.

I should like to point out particular likenesses in Deschamps "Balade, sur la mort de Bertrand du Guesclin" and Dunbar's "Elegy on the Death of Bernard Stewart." Both poems are broadly alike—each opens with praise for the honor and military virtues of du Guesclin and Stewart; after that Deschamps calls on various provinces to lament their loss while Dunbar continues to stress Stewart's honor; then both poems conclude with an invitation to pray for the noble men.

Each stanza in both poems has a similar half line of refrain—"flour de chevalerie," "the flour of chevelrie." The epithet is conventional, but may in this case be conventional praise suggested to Dunbar by Deschamps' poem. The last two lines of the first stanza of each poem also show remarkable similarities:

Chascun pour vous *doit noir vestir* et querre:  
Plourez, plourez flour de chevalerie.<sup>2</sup>

Fortun, allace! now may thow *weir the sabill*,  
Sen he is gone, the flour of chevelrie.<sup>3</sup>

Again the language is conventional, but considering the place of the language in each poem, and the overall similarities in both poems, and the refrains of both poems, it is reasonable to think that Deschamps' elegy influenced Dunbar.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Smith, *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 1934), pp. 49-62.

<sup>2</sup> *Oeuvres Complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, SATF, II (Paris, 1880), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. John Small, STS, II (Edinburgh, 1903), p. 63.