

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

**Renaut de Bâgé, *Le Bel
Inconnu***

*(Li Biaus Descouneüs; The Fair
Unknown)*

Edited by
Karen Fresco



Renaut de Bâgé, *Le Bel Inconnu*

Originally published in 1992, *Le Bel Inconnu*, edited and with an introduction by Karen Fresco, presents on facing pages the original Old French text and the English translation of this significant medieval romance poem by Renaut de Bâgé.

The extensive introduction to the text includes an exploration into the life of the author, Renaut de Bâgé, as well as a detailed assessment of the poem, its sources and influences, and the broader genre of medieval romance. It is also equipped with close textual notes, an index of proper nouns, and an examination of Renaut's Song *Leals Amors Q'est Dedanz Fin Cuer Mise*, including the musical scores.



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Renaut de Bâgé, *Le Bel Inconnu*

(Li Biaus Descouneüs; The Fair Unknown)

Edited by Karen Fresco



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Renaut de Bâgé
Le Bel Inconnu
(*Li Biaus Descouneüs; The Fair Unknown*)

edited, with an introduction, by
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translated by
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To
Alain Fresco
and
Miles Cox



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Most volumes contain Introductions with the following features: (1) a biography of the author or a discussion of the problem of authorship, with any pertinent historical or legendary information; (2) an objective discussion of the literary style of the original, emphasizing any individual features; (3) a consideration of sources for the work and its influence; and (4) a statement of the editorial policy for each edition and translation. There is also a Select Bibliography, which emphasizes recent criticism on the works. Critical writings are often accompanied by brief descriptions of their importance. Selective glossaries, indices, and footnotes are included where appropriate.

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James J. Wilhelm
Rutgers University

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Contents

Introduction	ix
Acknowledgments	xxxiii
Select Bibliography	xxxv
<i>The Fair Unknown</i>	1
Textual Notes	375
Index of Proper Nouns	405
Appendix: Renaut's Song	415



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Introduction

Life of the Author

The Renals de Biauju who names himself at the end of *Le Bel Inconnu* or *Li Biaus Descouneüs* remains a shadowy figure whose identity can only be guessed at based on a very few clues.¹ There are two mentions of his name, in line 6249 of this romance and in lines 1451-2 of *Le Roman de la Rose, ou de Guillaume de Dole*, where Jean Renart attributes a chanson from which he quotes to "Renaut de Baujieu De Rencien le bon chevalier." In addition, *Li Biaus Descouneüs* contains two references to the heraldic device on Guinglain's shield, an ermine lion on an azure field (73-4 and 5921-2).

The forms Biauju and Baujieu have led scholars to assume that Renaut must have belonged to the house of Beaujeu, a powerful clan in the Mâcon region. However, the name Renaut does not appear in its genealogical records and the blazon described above does not belong to the Beaujeu family but to the rival house of Bâgé.² Guerreau shows that in the Franco-Provençal linguistic region encompassing Bresse, where the Bâgé family held most of its lands, the Latin etymon of Bâgé, Balgiacum, must have developed into Baugieu by the early thirteenth century.³

Renaut was a favorite name in the Bâgé family; from the eleventh century on, almost each generation has its Renaut. Two fall within the period under consideration: Renaut, Seigneur de Saint-Trivier (fl. 1165-1230), and Renaut IV, Seigneur de Bâgé et de Bresse (fl. 1180-1250), the former's nephew and the chief heir in the next generation.

An additional clue to the author's identity is provided by the reference to Rencien in the *Guillaume de Dole*. As Guerreau notes, very often *n*'s and *u*'s are confused by scribes and editors. If instead of Rencien we read Rencieu (from Latin Rantiacum), this may be the town

of Rancy, which lies near Saint-Trivier within the lands traditionally held by the family's younger son.⁴ It is thus plausible to identify Renaut as the Seigneur de Saint-Trivier who flourished between 1165 and 1230.⁵ Apparently he had no offspring since a nephew and then a grand-nephew subsequently held these lands. He may well have been a *bachelier*, the product of the genealogical strategy practiced during this period by noble families striving to consolidate their holdings rather than divide them up among numerous offspring.⁶

By the mid-twelfth century the Bâgé family was one of the half dozen most powerful in the Mâcon region. The houses of Bâgé, Berzé, Beaujeu, Brancion and those of the counts of Châlon and Mâcon were all closely related by feudal and family ties. Several of these nobles were educated. Renaut might possibly have known Hugues de Berzé, who composed lyric poetry.⁷ Technically châtelains of the Count of Mâcon, that is, the representatives of the count's interests in a given region, the lords of Bâgé gradually appropriated power and land until they vied with the count himself in wealth and influence.⁸ From about 1160 to 1230, a period that encompasses the life of the poet, their power and that of the other châtelains began to decline in the face of certain political and economic developments.

The conflict over the papal investiture, which pitted one pope, supported by the Capetian king Louis VII among others, against the candidate championed by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, occasioned Louis' intervention in regional disputes between the Counts of Châlon and Mâcon on the one hand, allies of the German emperor, and Cluny and the Bishop of Mâcon on the other. Thrice the clergy appealed for the king's protection and thrice he arrived with his army to reestablish order (in 1166, 1171 and 1180). In return he exacted concessions that strengthened his authority in the region at the expense of that of the local seigneurs.

The blazon of the young hero of *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, which is that of the house of Bâgé as noted above, has significance within the context of this conflict. While the eagle is associated with the Holy Roman Empire and its vassals, the lion is the emblem of their opponents.⁹ Now the lands held by the Bâgé family in Bresse, to the east of the Saône, fell under the sway of the Empire so we would expect

an eagle rather than a lion in their blazon. Everyone, the counts and the châtelains alike, immediately recognized the renewed political influence wielded by Louis, and Renaut III de Bâgé, the poet's father, was not alone in promptly seeking his favor. Furthermore, he was a cousin of the French king's, related through his grandmother. In a letter dated 1171, he appeals to Louis to come to his aid against the Count of Mâcon and Humbert of Beaujeu, who have put his lands to the sword and taken his eldest son, Oury (Ulrich), hostage. In another letter the same year, he promises to hold his lands in fief from Louis if only he will help him in this matter.¹⁰ But Louis, careful not to encroach on lands traditionally associated with the Empire, never supplied this aid.¹¹ Bâgé's protestations of loyalty and friendship should be seen as an attempt to use the politics of the moment as leverage in an on-going local struggle with the Count over power. In the long run, as a result of this episode the lords of Bâgé found in Louis and his vassals more formidable competitors for power than the count.

During the same period inflation begins to erode their financial situation, this at a time when their status requires the considerable expense of maintaining a court.¹² The lords of Bâgé begin to break up the patrimony so carefully husbanded until now, offering to hold certain properties from others in return for a fee. The romance belongs, then, to a period when the Bâgé family's power has perhaps just passed its apogee, when its position is just beginning to slip away.¹³ The pride of clan expressed in the wish to locate the founding ancestor in a mythical time, to relate it through Guinglain to the incomparable Gauvain, is best understood in this context.¹⁴

The date of composition of *Li Biaus Descouneüs* can be only loosely indicated.¹⁵ Because of allusions to Chrétien de Troyes' oeuvre, it must have been composed some time after 1191, when Chrétien's patron, Philip of Alsace, died and it is thought Chrétien broke off his work. The *Guillaume de Dole*, probably composed by 1212-1213, sets the *terminus ad quem* for the chanson by Renaut from which it quotes.¹⁶ However, this does not date the romance. We cannot even conclude that this chanson must have antedated the romance since Renaut might have composed more than the single chanson that has survived. (See the note to line 3 of the romance.) The meager evidence available does not permit one to be any more specific than to indicate a

span of time, from 1191 into the first quarter of the thirteenth century, during which the romance could have been composed.

Two other narrative works, each mentioning an unspecified Renaut as its author, have been attributed to Renaut de Beaujeu (Bâgé). One is the *Lai d'Ignaure ou lai du prisonnier*, a 664-line narrative poem in octosyllabic rhymed couplets. Lejeune (1938) identifies its composer, Renaut (line 621), as the author of *Li Biaus Descouneüs* based on similarities in language, versification, tone, and narrative procedures such as interventions by the narrator and the dedication to a beloved lady. However, the mix of dialectal traits in *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and *Ignaure* is scarcely distinctive.¹⁷ In most texts from this period Central French forms coexisted with Northern and, to a lesser extent, Eastern ones as poets freely appropriated forms from one dialect or another in order to facilitate the rhyme or meter. As regards versification, the features that Lejeune mentions are not unusual. Simple rhyme, the presence of imperfect rhymes, frequent hiatus—none of these traits are uncommon in texts from this period.¹⁸ Lejeune discerns in both texts a tendency toward the off-color ("ce penchant vers une certaine forme de pornographie," p. 36). But surely the seductiveness of the Maiden of the White Hands when she comes to the hero's bedside (2393-2446) is a typical demeanor in such an encounter, as Lanval's tryst with the fairy, Lancelot's evening with the Amorous Maiden and Blanchefleur's visit to Perceval lead one to conclude. The breach of style in the use of a vulgar term, *foutre* (line 714), is not peculiar to *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, either; the term occurs twice in *Ipomedon*.¹⁹ In sum, Lejeune's attribution of *Ignaure* to Renaut de Bâgé is not convincing because the characteristics which she finds in both texts are not peculiar to them.

Without giving any arguments, Guerreau raises the possibility, p. 35, that *Galeran de Bretagne* may also be ascribed to the author of *Li Biaus Descouneüs*.²⁰ Although scholars have dated this work to the late twelfth to early thirteenth century, partly in connection with efforts to attribute it to Jean Renart, the romance bears the stamp of a literary sensibility and taste quite different from that evident in *Li Biaus Descouneüs*. In *Galeran* there is none of the witty manipulation of literary convention or the teasing play with audience expectation that one finds in *Li Biaus Descouneüs*. Furthermore, the frequency of rich

rhyme, grammatical rhyme, and rhetorical figures (various figures of repetition, alliteration, word play, metaphor) in *Galeran* distinguish it from *Li Biaus Descouneüs*.²¹

Artistic Achievement

Even though medieval romance is marked, in general, by its attention to the process of composition, *Li Biaus Descouneüs* stands out by virtue of the delight Renaut has taken in playing with romance conventions. The matter of portraits is a clear example. *Romanciers* use lengthy descriptions to signal the importance of a female character. Renaut multiplies these descriptions, applying them to one character after another: Helie (135 ff.), Margerie (1525 ff.), the fay (2217 ff.), Blonde Esmeree (3261 ff.), the fay again (3943 ff.), Blonde Esmeree again (5143 ff.). Which of these, we are left to wonder, is the prima donna? Renaut is teasing an audience familiar with romance conventions (Colby-Hall 1984) as well as parodying the convention itself.

In romance the adventures undergone by the hero seem random and yet are destined for the hero. In this romance the adventures are repeatedly revealed to have been arranged. Helie helps the hero escape from the fay and then it turns out that it was the fay who had her sent to Arthur's court to request a champion. Helie warns him against Lampart's evil custom but later we discover that Lampart is her mistress's steward. The plot abounds in machinations operated by the characters to manipulate each other. Robert thinks up a plan to put off Blonde Esmeree and permit his master to return to the fay. Arthur and his barons lure Guinglain back to court by having a tournament called. The serpent stays the hero's hand by cowering each time he reaches for his sword.

Two instances of ruse are particularly startling because they put the entire preceding narrative in a new light. When the fay tells Guinglain that it is she who sent Helie to Arthur's court, thereby initiating the adventures that led him to her, she appropriates the plot up to that point (Haidu 1972). In the epilogue the poet-lover offers to reunite Guinglain and the fay if his lady will show him favor. The many instances of ruse present the plot as an illusion that we are

repeatedly invited to see through. By violating the boundaries between diegetic and extradiegetic—the fay appropriates the role of plot-constructor, the poet invites his lady to determine the fate of the characters, Guinglain bears the shield of the house of Bâgé—Renaut accentuates what Perret (1988) aptly terms an "effet de fiction."²²

The romance brings together three courtly genres. It is a lay (a knight is drawn away from the court by the love of a fay) within a romance (a knight achieves a series of exploits and is rewarded with a wife and fief) within a lyric frame (Haidu 1972, Guthrie 1984, de Looze 1986, Perret 1990). The narrative reveals Renaut's affinity for doubling; there are two heroines, two love stories, two endings. The lyric element is comprised of the parts of the text relating to the poet-lover and his lady. The opening lines develop a topic of exordium common in courtly lyric; the epilogue, which addresses the text to the poet's lady, resembles the envoy of a song. In addition the poet-lover interrupts the narrative with four lyric monologues (1967-82, 1237-71, 4198-4209, 4828-61) (Guthrie 1984, Grigsby 1968). These three generic elements do not relate harmoniously; instead they work against each other and on more than one level (see de Looze). The fay competes with Blonde Esmeree for the hero. Furthermore, she claims to have used Blonde Esmeree's plight to attract Guinglain, thus in fact subsuming the romance plot to the lay plot. In the epilogue the poet invites his lady to inspire a sequel. The envoy-like epilogue undercuts the romance's ending, invoking the state of suspended desire that distinguishes courtly love-song.

The romance narrative subverts the lyric element in turn. For if the closing lines present the text as an effort to woo the poet's lady and she is invited to view the couple in the romance as a transposition of herself and the poet, what is there in Guinglain's character that would encourage her to grant her love? He makes promises to the fay and subsequently breaks them. It is not that he is fickle like his father, Gauvain. Rather, absorbed by one project at a time, he refuses to be deflected from his goal of the moment. We are aware of him as a construct closely tied to the plot. The love affair with the fay is not an "*éducation sentimentale*" because Guinglain does not learn anything about love and is not changed by the experience (but see Perret [1990], pp. 10-12). When he leaves the fay for the tournament and realizes that

he has lost her, his grief lasts one day. Thereafter he is engrossed in the tournament and then agrees to marry Blonde Esmeree without a thought for the fay or any hesitation (6191-4).

The flat, caricatural style in which Guinglain is drawn is set off by the depth given the character of the fay (Sturm 1971a and b, 1972). Renaut presents her in many lights: now transported by sensuous passion, now furious at having been slighted, now lucid about Guinglain's ignorance of love and yet loving him nonetheless.

Another aspect of the self-conscious literariness of this romance is its frequent reference to the works of Chrétien de Troyes. Scholars have long recognized the especially close relationship between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and Chrétien's oeuvre but this has led some to dismiss Renaut as a mere epigone or even plagiarist (see, for example, Tyssens 1970). The references to Chrétien are so numerous, one might say insistent, that it is clear they are a deliberate attempt to situate the text with respect to this literary forbear, a parallel to the genealogical theme in the romance's plot.

These allusions run the gamut from blatant to subtle. The sparrowhawk joust (1579 ff.) follows the analogous episode in *Erec et Enide* closely. It is the first of a series of sustained references to the *Erec* and thus serves to alert the reader to the intertext (Bruckner 1987).²³ When Helie recognizes as her cousin the young woman whom the hero has championed—an element that Renaut has transposed from the Joie de la Cort episode in *Erec*—the effect is to underscore the kinship of Renaut's text with Chrétien's.

Various patterns of allusion can be discerned. References to a single episode in *Erec*, the Joie de la Cort, span the two sojourns at the Isle d'Or. The circle of poles topped with the armed heads of the knights defeated by Malgiers is a signal evoking this episode from Chrétien's romance. In both texts a woman with magic powers tries to retain her lover in her realm (the garden). Guinglain's role shifts during the extended comparison. The first time he comes to the Isle d'Or, he is an outsider, a stranger who penetrates an enchanted space, like *Erec*, to break a repressive custom by defeating a knight. When he returns, however, the part that he plays is that of Maboagrain, the lover kept by

the lady in the enchanted garden. The Joie de la Cort is Erec's crowning feat; he succeeds in integrating the lovers into the world of the court. In contrast, Guinglain is drawn back under love's spell into the realm of the fay and cut off from the court. The overall effect of the extended reference to this single episode from *Erec* is to undermine the hero.²⁴ There is an interesting tension between Renaut's text and Chrétien's just as there is disjunction between the three generic aspects of the romance.²⁵

A quite different pattern of intertextual allusion is found in the Fier Baiser adventure. Here a single episode groups references to several of Chrétien's romances, to all of them except *Erec* (and *Cligès*, to which Renaut does not refer at all). Guinglain fights two demon knights as Yvain does in *Pesme Aventure*. The mesmerizing polyphony of the jongleurs, a prelude to combat, may recall Calogrenant riveted by the song of the birds massed in the pine above the magic fountain. The many windows framing the jongleurs are reminiscent of the many-windowed hall in Ygerne's castle in *Perceval*. The falling battle-axes that almost kill the hero as he tries to pursue his opponent into a side room evoke the sword strokes that Lancelot dodges as he rushes to rescue his hostess from the staged rape. This clustering in a single episode of references to an array of texts serves to distinguish this adventure from the surrounding series (the first visit to Isle d'Or, Lampart, Fier Baiser, the return to Isle d'Or), where a sharply contrasting pattern of intertextual allusion prevails. It also lends dazzle to the Fier Baiser exploit, implying that it is as difficult as *Pesme Aventure* in *Yvain*, the Lit de la Mervoille test in *Perceval* and the staged rape in *Lancelot* all in one.

A third pattern of allusion produces a complex nested effect; Renaut rewrites a text that itself recasts a previous text. The joust with Lampart revisits Yvain's experience at *Pesme Aventure*, which looks back to the Joie de la Cort in *Erec* (Bruckner 1987, p. 235). In all three instances a host offers hospitality that involves a test of his guest's valor by combat. In all three texts a crowd of townspeople calls out to discourage the hero from fighting. Of course, Guinglain's situation differs from both of the others; the operation of comparison and contrast is precisely what the evocation of the intertexts calls into play. The effect is particularly complex in this instance because, due to the nested

pattern of the allusions, Lampart recalls simultaneously the devious host of Pesme Aventure and magnanimous King Evrain of the Joie de la Cort; the burghers at Galigan evoke the apparently hostile crowd in *Yvain* and also the sympathetic one in *Erec*. The ambiguity is a ploy to throw the reader off.²⁶

Li Biaus Descouneüs also contains verbal echoes from Chrétien's romances.²⁷ Some of these are easily recognizable. In bed with the fay, Guinglain remembers the hallucinations to which he was subjected: "*Quant il l'enprist a souvenir, de rire ne se puet tenir*" (4871-2), and the fay insists that he explain why he has laughed out loud. The audience will immediately think of the famous scene in which Enide remembers the criticisms she has overheard: "*Quant il l'an prist a sovenir, de plorer ne se pot tenir . . .*" (2445-6). (It is not coincidental that recollection and recapitulation are important themes in the two scenes associated here.) When Arthur urges Guinglain to marry Blonde Esmeree (6186-7), his words echo Erec's as he presents Enide to Guenevere (1553-5).

Scattered throughout the romance there are also other examples less easy to catch. Blonde Esmeree's ambassador to Guinglain appropriates lines from Guivret's speech to Erec (see the line note). The description of the castle at Isle d'Or echoes that of Brandigan in *Erec*. These allusions are interesting because they imply an audience with a detailed knowledge of Chrétien's oeuvre.

The romance contains some fifty instances of lines or line sequences repeated almost verbatim. Many are related to combat and arming scenes and thus evoke an epic style: "*Lances orent roides et fors*" (2137, 5719) and "*La lance fu et roide et fors*" (2689) or "*Molt i fu grans li capleüs!*" (5710), variants of which punctuate the account of the tournament. Other instances occur in certain portraits and can be explained by the stereotyped nature of these descriptions (see 137-8, 1527-8 and 2218; 1538 and 2241; 1536, 1876, 1932 and 2258). In this romance they also highlight what Colby-Hall calls (1984, p. 129) "the battle of the portraits" (see above, p. xiii).

In other cases we can truly speak of autocitation. Each time the three avengers of Bliobliëris appear, the narrator rehearses their

names. When Robert spots them ("*Si vit venir trois chevaliers, armés sor lor corans destriers*" [965-6]), he reports to his master using almost these very words (989-990), conveying at once the urgency of the moment and his accuracy. The technique may be used to humorous effect, as when Guinglain tells his squire that he is passionately in love with the fay. Robert asks in disbelief, "*Gabés me vos?*" (3756) and his master replies emphatically "*Je ne gab [mie]*" (3759). Later, invited by the fay to stay in the castle, Guinglain asks humbly, "*Gabés me vos?*" (4447) Her ironic answer, "*O, je, sire, je ne gap mie!*" (4457) suggests that she must have overheard the earlier exchange.

The hallmark of Renaut's art is its ludic quality, its sophisticated play with literary conventions. He brings these together not in order to combine them harmoniously but to permit them to undercut each other, provoking ambiguity and disjunction. His romance grows out of the work of Chrétien, which serves as a foil; it looks forward in that it problematizes romance conventions.

Sources and Influences

In his prologue Renaut announces that he intends to extract a romance from a tale of adventure that he has heard: "*veul un roumant estraire! d'un molt biel conte d'aventure*" (4-5). With this statement he embraces a poetic grounded in transmitting the literary heritage of the past by recasting this heritage and thus giving it new life. In these lines Renaut affirms *translatio* in a double sense, for not only does he invoke a theme traditionally developed in a prologue, he echoes the words of the great romance master, Chrétien de Troyes, in the opening of *Erec et Enide* ("*et tret d'un conte d'aventure! une molt bele conjointure . . .*" [13-4]), signaling from the outset the intertext that will be repeatedly evoked throughout the romance, particularly in the episodes at the Isle d'Or.

Li Biaus Descouneils is connected by shared motifs, themes, characters, episodes and even episode sequences to a whole network of texts. There are first of all three cognate romances: the Middle High German *Wigalois* by Wirnt von Gravenberg (1204-1210), the Middle English *Lybeaus Desconus* by Thomas Chestre (ca. 1350) and the Italian *Cantare di Carduino* (ca. 1375).²⁸ *Partonopeu de Blois* (1182-5),

an Old French romance roughly twice the length of *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, presents many parallels: a fay who has acquired her magic powers through education, a hero who falls in love with her but twice leaves her, a narrator-lover who repeatedly compares his lot to that of the hero. Two later prose romances are also related, *Le Chevalier du Papegau* (fifteenth century) and *L'Hystoire de Giglan* (1530) by Claude Platin, a prose compilation that intertwines *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and the Provençal romance of *Jaufre*. Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet* (1194-1203) and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* have both been associated to the group of Fair Unknown narratives through the loathly lady motif, and Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth* has elements in common with the adventures at the Golden Isle and Snowdon. The Welsh *Peredur* and the *Perceval* story as told by Chrétien have also been related to the Fair Unknown story and to *Li Biaus Descouneüs* in particular.²⁹

A word should be said about the relation between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and the *First* and *Second Continuations* since the possibility of a connection has been raised but not addressed in any detail since Wrede's discussion in his unpublished dissertation. The *Continuations* are two long verse sequels to Chrétien's unfinished *Conte du Graal* (or *Perceval*). The *First* (or *Gauvain*) *Continuation* features Gauvain's adventures and its shorter redaction is dated before 1200. The *Second* (or *Perceval*) *Continuation* follows *Perceval*'s adventures although a short series of episodes (numbers 29-32) relate to Gauvain; it is dated 1190-1200.³⁰ It has been suggested that these works were "sources" for *Li Biaus Descouneüs*.³¹ Surprisingly, it is the *Second* (or *Perceval*) *Continuation* rather than the *First* (*Gauvain*) *Continuation* that shares the clearest and greatest number of similarities with *Li Biaus Descouneüs*. At one point (Episode 5) *Perceval* borrows a brachet hound and, while he is hunting a stag with it, a maiden steals the brachet, refusing to return it despite *Perceval*'s entreaties. There are clear echoes here with *Helie*'s theft of the huntsman's brachet (1278 ff.). Later on (Episode 16) *Perceval* meets a knight riding along with his ugly *amie*. He offends the knight by smiling and after they joust the knight tells him that he considers this lady, whose name is *Rosete*, the most beautiful woman in the world. The parallels with *Giflet*'s blind love for *Rose Espanie* (1709 ff.) are evident. Both *Continuations* relate scenes in which Gauvain and *Perceval*, respectively, awaken out in the open, their arms and horses at hand, the castle where they lodged the

Episode 6) Gauvain failed to meet the Grail test the previous evening. The *Second Continuation* (Episode 20), however, presents more striking resemblances to Guinglain's predicament (5397 ff.). The previous evening Perceval was entertained at the Castle of the Maidens, where he was waited on by beautiful women. When he awakens the next morning, he finds himself beneath a tree and gives vent to his bewilderment. In none of these cases are there verbal echoes between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and the *Continuations*.

Both *Continuations* relate encounters between Perceval and Gauvain, in turn, and Biaus Descouneüs. In the *First Continuation* (Section V, Episode 8) Gauvain does battle with his son, who is defending a ford. In the *Second Continuation* (Episode 14) Perceval comes upon the Fair Unknown and they joust. When the youth learns who his opponent is, he surrenders and identifies himself as Biaus Descouneüs, Gauvain's son. Later in the narrative (Episode 32) Gauvain himself meets his son. The handsome youth asks who the stranger is and, when he learns that this is Gauvain, he announces that he is Guinglain, his son, whom Arthur had named Biaus Descouneüs.

According to Wrede, the *First Continuation* includes a series of events constituting the childhood of Gauvain's son: the circumstances of his birth, his interruption of a combat between his father and uncle, his upbringing by a fay and his meeting with his father. Gallais, p. 212, comments that all the manuscripts punctuate this narrative with allusions to other adventures that are being omitted. This raises the possibility that a fuller story of the Fair Unknown (not necessarily *Li Biaus Descouneüs*) was drawn upon for the *First Continuation*, a hypothesis at least as likely as that the *First Continuation* served as a source for *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, particularly as the two works are roughly contemporaneous. It also suggests that, since an account of the youth of Gauvain's son was known, it was a deliberate artistic choice for *Li Biaus Descouneüs* not to begin with the hero's birth and childhood but instead to allude to them later in the narrative (3235-42 and 4964-78).³²

Fascinated by the echoes and resemblances among this great mass of Fair Unknown texts, a generation of scholars has tried to establish filiations among them.³³ The speculative nature of these

constructs as well as their conflicting theses have led to skepticism regarding their conclusions. Furthermore, where many of the elements repeated in a group of romances are highly conventional in nature, it is extremely difficult to account for a similarity by positing a direct link between two works. We must be content to note similarities between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and other works and conclude some sort of relationship among them without specifying it. Of another order is the exceptionally close relation between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and Chrétien's romances, especially *Erec*. The allusions and echoes are so dense that they constitute an important trait of Renaut's style (see above, p. xv-xvii).

To determine a work's posterity is quite as delicate a matter as establishing its sources. *Lybeaus Desconus* refers to a "Frensshe tale" (Lambeth MS, l. 245) but was this *Li Biaus Descouneüs*? Chestre's work is different from Renaut's in important ways. The hero does not return to the fay at the Golden Isle and his experience of love is not developed. *Wigalois* is contemporaneous to *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and it is impossible to determine whether Wirnt knew Renaut's poem (or vice versa). Platin's *Hystoire de Giglan* appears to be a prose paraphrase of *Li Biaus Descouneüs* but there are some differences in detail. Are these Platin's doing or was he simply not working from the version preserved in the Chantilly codex? Did Malory know Renaut's romance or Claude Platin's version or is it more likely that he drew on another story about a young unknown knight, *La Cotte Mal Tailliee*, which he would have found in the *Prose Tristan*?³⁴

Another context for *Li Biaus Descouneüs* is of interest. This is the mention of a romance, "*del Bel Desconogut*," recited by minstrels during a court festival that is described in the Provençal romance *Flamenca* (late thirteenth century). The long list of works that are sung or recited on this occasion is really a catalogue which distinguishes rough groups: stories derived from Greek and Roman legend, Biblical tales, Arthurian romances, epic songs about Charlemagne and others. The Fair Unknown story (mentioned in line 679) falls within the Arthurian category, following a list of Chrétien's romances: *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, *Perceval*, *Erec*, *Ugonet de Peride* (a lost romance), *Gouvernail and Tristan* (Chrétien's lost Tristan romance?), *Cligès*, *Le Bel Inconnu*, etc. This reference to a Fair Unknown romance indicates that it was a

well known part of the Arthurian canon. Although it is impossible, of course, to determine whether the romance in question is Renaut's, the place of the reference in the list makes one wonder whether this is not in recognition of its close association to Chrétien's oeuvre.

Editorial Policy for this Text and Translation

The Manuscript

Li Biaus Descouneüs is contained in only one codex, Chantilly 472, in the collection of the Duc d'Aumale at the Musée Condé. It is dated to the end of the thirteenth century (Micha 38-39; descriptions of the manuscript may also be found in Winter's edition of *Hunbaut* and Frescoln's edition of *Fergus*). The manuscript has been bound in red calfskin with the Bourbon-Condé coat of arms on the cover; the spine bears the title *Connoiss. de Toutes Choses 1250*. When the bookbinder trimmed the codex, the title in large ornamental letters at the head of Renaut's romance was cut off but just enough of the lettering remains to suggest that it might have read "De Guinglain." The title that we use derives from the explicit.

Judging from the hand, one scribe appears to have copied the series of romances *Fergus*, *Hunbaut* and *Li Biaus Descouneüs*. (The scribal titles are symmetrical: "De Fergvs," "De Gunbaut," "De Guinglain.") Most of the works in the codex begin a new signature and the gatherings vary in size as extra pages were tipped in to accommodate the lengths of the romances. Frescoln has determined that *Fergus* originally started a new gathering. This and the fact that the scribal title for *Hunbaut* does not appear at the head of the folio but near the top of the right-most column supports the hypothesis that these three romances constitute a unit within the codex.

Chantilly 472 is an anthology made up for the most part of Arthurian romances which feature Gauvain: *Les Merveilles de Rigomer*, *L'Atre Perilleus*, *Erec et Enide*, *Fergus*, *Hunbaut*, *Guinglain* (*Li Biaus Descouneüs*), *La Vengeance Raguidel*, *Yvain*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, *Perlesvaus* (a fragment relating Gauvain's quest), and several branches of the *Roman de Renart* (this final unit headed by the scribal rubric "De Renart").³⁵ *Li Biaus Descouneüs* falls squarely at the

midpoint, the sixth of eleven units. It is significant that in a collection focussing on the work of Chrétien's successors, in which three of Chrétien's romances are surrounded by works by later writers so as to suggest a dialogue, the compiler has chosen Renaut's romance for this pivotal place, in recognition perhaps of the effects that it draws from recasting, rewriting and quoting Chrétien's works.

Previous editions

Li Biaus Descouneüs has been edited three times. C. Hippeau's 1860 edition is riddled with errors—misreadings of individual words, lines out of order, some ninety lines omitted. He also added ten lines of his own devising, in most cases to fill out a couplet.

The two other editions are the work of G. Perrie Williams. The first of these, published in 1915, is a conservative edition but includes quite a few misreadings. In the 1929 edition, based on a new collation of the manuscript, Williams wished to withdraw certain superfluous corrections made to the manuscript in her first edition and reproduce the text with greater accuracy. Line notes provide only rejected readings, indications of deficiencies in the manuscript (lacunae, repeated lines, mutilations), and additional corrections to the text. Emendations are not explained or justified. Some errors in reading persist but, on the whole, this is a careful edition which has been a valuable aid in the preparation of the present project.

The Present Edition

New readings distinguish this text from Williams' second edition. In a number of instances I have corrected misreadings of the manuscript text, among them 1808, 3060, 3125, 3500, and 3726. Sometimes I have retained readings changed by Williams (1981 and 4158). I have also emended where she did not (3419, 3784-5, 3923, 4381-2, 5303, 5591-2, 5699 ff.) or where she incorporated a different interpretation (3327). In several of these cases changes were either suggested (3419, 3923, 4381-2) or corroborated (1793-4, 3076) by intertexts. I discuss the changes that I have made and cite the relevant intertexts in the Textual Notes.

The transcription was done from a film copy with the entire text checked against the manuscript itself. I have been generally conservative in editing the text. The corrections that I have made were guided by two considerations. The first was to make the text clear wherever necessary. For example, now and then the scribe writes *i* for *il*; I restore the *l* in order to avoid confusion with *i* meaning 'y, there'. Where the scribe writes *dont* for *donc* I replace *-t* with *-c* for the convenience of readers familiar with modern French. Sometimes the scribe's tendency to drop the final consonant leads to confusion about the subject of a verb; in these cases I restore the final consonant: *pris*, for example, is corrected to *prist* (892; see the note to line 66). The mistake in flexion in line 4200 is of thematic significance and I call it to the attention of the reader in a note to this line.

I was also guided in correcting the text by a wish to be attentive to pronunciation, sound, voice, and music, which is so important in this text. Spellings like *tieg*, *puic*, and *besoig* are replaced by *tieng*, *puinc*, and *besoing* as better reflecting pronunciation. I have restored final consonants where liaison requires them to be pronounced. For example, I changed *le iouls* to *les iouls* (141) but I retained *l'avoien cil* (883). Now and then the scribe hesitates between *c* and *g*. Because the facing translation helps to make the meaning of the text clear for the reader, I have kept these spellings (*vicor* for *vigor*, *gongié* for *congié*; see the note to line 1534). The hesitation between *a* and *ai* is much more frequent. I have retained these spellings too, not just as an index to pronunciation but in the interest of providing a context for passages in which the confusion between the first and third person of verbs raises interesting ambiguities (for example, *a* for *ai*, *donnai* for *donna*, etc.; see the notes to lines 242 and 3238).

I have also intervened to clarify the sound of a rhyme obscured by the spelling in the manuscript. Thus *pujosse* is changed to *pujoisse:voisse* (671-2). Similarly, I restore the final consonant to a rhyme word: *lor* > *lors:lors* (4923-4). On the other hand, I retain rhymes that match *-en-* with *-an-* since these would pose no problem of pronunciation. Where the order of the elements in a description has produced an irregular rhyme (4309-10), I change the order so as to remedy this. The Textual Notes contain explanations of all emendations not immediately comprehensible, and the rejected readings immediately

below the Old French text present, without exception, all the manuscript readings that I have replaced.

In punctuating the text I have been attentive to the often vivid, expressive rhythms in the Old French verse and to the scribal punctuation that underscores this aspect of the style. The scribe uses a single raised dot and two raised dots resembling a colon, apparently interchangeably, most often to mark a *rejet* following an enjambment of some force. Each instance is noted in the Textual Notes.

I have indicated two instances of possible lacunae in the text beyond the sixteen noted by Williams. In order to maintain her line numbering, I have designated these 3178.1 and 3183.1. Some of these lacunae are evident in the codex. The two longest (6066-80 and 6118-32) are due to a corner torn from folio 153. In two cases empty lines are left in the text (741 and 762-6). Sometimes incomplete syntax and an orphan rhyme indicate that material is missing (2359, 2739, 4752, 4922, 4952, 5598, 5938, and 6007). In other instances just the lack of a rhyme to complete a couplet signals the possibility of a lacuna (719, 3178.1, 33183.1, 1584, 1736, 2094, 2942, and 4736). All but two of this last group involve a series of three (once of five) lines with the same rhyme. Williams (1929), p. iv, suggests that such frequent irregularity may reflect the practice of the poet rather than the laxity of the scribe. In two instances, however, 719 and 1736, Claude Platin's prose romance contains material that might be missing. For the sake of consistency, then, and preferring to alert the reader each time that there may be a lacuna, I have made an indication in the critical text and provided comments in the Textual Notes.

Quite often Claude Platin's *mise en prose* has been useful in suggesting just what may be missing in the text presented in Chantilly 472. In these cases I cite the relevant passage in a line note. In one instance, his text provides the correction for a passage that remains problematic even in Williams' 1929 edition (see the note to lines 4381-2).

In general, I followed conventional editorial practices in preparing the text. Square brackets set off corrections. The manuscript

characters *i* and *j* are distinguished from each other, as are *u* and *v*, in order to conform to modern spelling norms. Final *-x* is resolved to *-us*. Roman numerals are spelled out for the convenience of the reader. Cases of non-modern enclisis are made clear through the use of an internal period, as in *ne.s* for the contraction of *ne* and *les*. In the use of diacritical marks, I have followed the guidelines set out in Foulet-Speer, pp. 67-73.

Together with the rejected readings below the Old French text, the reader will find the following information. When a correction has been adopted from an earlier editor or commentator, this person's name appears in brackets next to the reading rejected. A plus or minus sign and a number indicates by how many syllables a line is hyper- or hypometric. Abbreviations and ligatures are written out; the letters *i*, *j*, *u*, *v*, and *x* are treated as in the critical text, words are separated and capitalized, and diacritics are added but punctuation is not.

The facing English translation is intended as a guide to understanding the Old French text. We have tried to strike a balance between a readable, flowing rendition and one that follows the Old French closely.

Notes

¹ I am heavily indebted to the thorough, cogent analysis of the biographical information presented by Guerreau, pp. 29-36.

² Guichenon (1660), 1:1161 (the family tree of the house of Beaujeu). 1:347 has an engraving of this blazon. There is a family tree of the house of Bâgé on pp. 1209-10. Williams (1929), p. viii, and Brault, p. 23, mistakenly identify the Bâgé arms as "de gueules au lion d'hermine." Bâgé-le-Chastel still exists; it is the capital of the canton of Ain in the Bresse region, about 4 miles to the east of Mâcon.

³ See Hafner, pp. 67-8, cited by Guerreau. Among Hafner's examples of this development is Baugies (Bâgé-le-Chastel).

⁴ Dauzat lists the etymon Rantiaco but it is for the village of Rancé in the southernmost corner of the Ain region, 10 miles north of Lyon. There are two villages named Saint-Trivier, Saint-Trivier-sur-Moignans in the Dombes area and Saint-Trivier de Courtes, 12 miles northeast of Bâgé-le-Chastel. It is the latter that was part of the Bâgé holdings, as Guichenon indicates: ". . . vn puisné de cette glorieuse famille l'eust en partage" (1650, 2:104).

⁵ This Renaut is named in a legal document of 1180 in which he and his brother agree to a gift made by his father to the Chartreuse of Montmerle in Bresse: "Noscant praesentes, & posteri quod ego Raynaldus de Baugiaco, laudant uxore mea; & filiis meis Vlrico videlicet atque Raynaudo, laudantibus pro salute animae meae, & antecessorum nostrorum domui sanctae Mariae Montismerulae quiddid in Francisca continetur, quod ad ius meum pertinet, concedo, & in perpetuum dono." (Guichenon [1650], 4:8). Guerreau quotes, p. 33, n. 1, from a second document in which Renaut approves another gift made after his father's death to the Church of St. Vincent in Mâcon. Guerreau speculates that the church of St. Bénigne, where this procedure took place, might be a church of that name in Dijon and that this might link Renaut with the Burgundian court. Guichenon (1650), 1:52, indicates, however, that this is St. Bénigne in Bresse.

⁶ The house of Bâgé forms a thread that runs through Duby's study (1971) of the shifting patterns of power in the Mâcon region; see especially pp. 349-53. Duby describes the status of the younger sons of noble families in his influential article (1964), where he suggests that courtly romance and lyric are keyed to the point of view of *bacheliers*.

⁷ Guerreau, noting the many allusions to Chrétien de Troyes in the romance, suggests that Renaut may have known him personally. While it is within the realm of possibility, nothing associates Renaut with the courts of Champagne or Flanders. Guerreau also states, p. 35, that Jean Renart must have had a personal acquaintance with Renaut because of the "allusion précise" in the *Guillaume de Dole*, presumably the identification of Renaut as the chevalier from Rencieu (or Rencien). But Jean Renart introduces other characters in his romance, real people drawn from the contemporary scene, with just such details. Lejeune (1935), p. 134, links Jean with the entourage

of Renaut de Dammartin, who frequented Paris, Flanders, and London. Consequently this association must remain far from certain.

⁸ Although most of their holdings were concentrated by this time in Bresse between the Reyssouze to the east and the Saône to the west, between the towns of Pont-de-Vaux to the north and Pont-de-Veyle to the south, the family still retained lands to the west of the Saône.

⁹ Pastoureau (1976), pp. 74-5, cited by Guerreau.

¹⁰ The letters are contained in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, 16:155-6. *The Cambridge Medieval History* quotes from the second of these letters, 5:616: "Raynald of Bâgé, lord of La Bresse, cried urgently for his help: 'Come into this country, where your presence is as necessary to the churches as it is to me. Do not fear the expense; I will repay you all that you spend; I will do homage to you for all my castles, which are subject to no suzerain; in a word, all that I possess shall be at your disposal.'"

¹¹ Duby (1971), p. 415. The peace arranged by Louis in 1173 did not include the house of Bâgé. A letter from Renaut III to Louis does reveal that Louis went so far as to write on Renaut's behalf (Guichenon [1650], 1:50).

¹² Duby (1971), 439-40.

¹³ By the end of the thirteenth century, there is no male heir and the Bâgé lands pass to the house of Savoy with the marriage in 1272 of Sybille, Lady of Bâgé and Bresse, to Amédée, the future Count of Savoy.

¹⁴ Several aristocratic families sought to shed glory on their dynasties by commissioning romances that traced their origins to mythic heroes. Often a woman with magic powers, who leads a double existence as human and serpent or dragon, brings wealth and power to the family. A notable instance is that of the house of Lusignan, which commissioned Jean d'Arras to write the tale of *Mélusine*. See Le Goff (1971) and Lecouteux (1978) and (1982), especially pp. 88-90 on *Li Biaus Descouneüs*.

15 Williams (1915) first dates the romance 1185-90 based on phonological criteria and on Servois' dating of the *Guillaume de Dole*; in her 1929 edition, she implies a later possible date, noting Foulet's dating of the *Guillaume de Dole* at 1210-14; the *GRLMA* gives "ca. 1200?"; Schmolke-Hasselmann includes *Li Biaus Descouneüs* among the romances in the 1204-1220 generation.

16 Lejeune (1935); she suggests 1208-10 in her 1974 article.

17 For a detailed critique of Lejeune's characterization of the linguistic traits in *Ignare* and her comparison of these to the language of *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, see Henry's review of her edition of the lay.

18 For the frequency of simple rhyme in poems of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Lote 2:139; imperfect rhyme, 1:100; hiatus, 3:80-81.

19 Holden details the irreverent obscenities in *Ipomedon*, p. 53. Ménard (1969) discusses sexual humor in courtly romance, pp. 693-695.

20 The author is given as Renaus in line 7798 although editors have corrected this to Renars, believing the romance to be Jean Renart's.

21 Lejeune (1935) details the arguments advanced to attribute *Galeran* to Jean Renart and refutes them, pp. 25-34. In comparing this description of this romance to *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, certain traits that may be pertinent in setting *Galeran* apart from the other works ascribed to Jean Renart are too widespread to justify attributing the romance to Renaud de Bâgé. This is the case for the use of elaborate portraits and descriptions of towns, or the inclusion of lengthy monologues and dialogues. Other traits—the presence of certain dialectal forms, the use of a compound subject with a verb in the singular—are rejected by Lejeune as valid bases for determining the attribution of a text.

22 This smudging of diegetic boundaries is reflected in the confusion between third person references to the hero and the first person voice of the poet-lover; see the note to lines 4199-4203.

23 Louveau and others have found that earlier episodes in *Li Biaus Descouneüs* resemble passages in Chrétien but their observations are not convincing. A knight defends a ford against Lancelot, for instance, but no similarities in the action or wording suggest that Renaut is alluding to this episode. The adventure is a conventional one in Arthurian romance. The same can be said for the combat with two giants or the battle against the three avengers, which some have tried to show recasts Erec's confrontations with robbers. Fair Unknown's arrival at Arthur's court, his disclosure that his mother called him *Biel Fils*, are of course a plain reference to Chrétien's *Perceval*.

24 Bruckner suggests, 1987, p. 235, that the evocation of the Joie de la Cort is meant to place Guinglain at the apex of Erec's achievements.

25 Another example of this pattern is the cluster of references to the Pesme Aventure from *Yvain*, which occur in both the joust with Lampart and the following Fier Baiser adventure.

26 The same pattern of nested allusions occurs when Guinglain's tryst with the fay evokes Maboagrain and his lady in the enchanted garden, for this couple is itself a reference to Erec and Enide, self-absorbed newlyweds, at the start of their romance.

27 Schofield and Louveau detail these. Many instances that they cite must be dismissed, however, because they can be explained as set formulas pertaining to the description of combat between individuals or in a tournament, of arming, of castles or women. There are exceptions. The description of the castle at Isle d'Or can be said to echo that of Brandigan in *Erec* because two series of lines are quoted and the description is surrounded by other references to the Joie de la Cort adventure.

28 The chief similarities and differences between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and its cognates are as follows. *Wigalois* presents clear parallels: the arrival of the maiden and dwarf seeking a champion to free their princess; the combats with a host who jousts with would-be guests; fights with two giants and with a huntsman; the joust for a bird and another with the princess's steward. *Wirnt* begins with the hero's childhood and includes much other material not

in the Old French romance, while omitting the fay and the spell cast over the princess. There are narratorial interventions but of a didactic nature in keeping with the focus on the story as the education of a prince. *Lybeaus Desconus* includes all the episodes up through the rescue of the lady of Synadoun. The hero does not return to the fay but marries the queen immediately. An account of the hero's childhood and upbringing opens the romance. There are no narratorial interventions or development of the love interest in a treatment that focusses on action. *Carduino* provides the shortest text (856 lines). The maiden and dwarf arrive at the court requesting a champion; they stay with a seductive enchantress who visits the hero with hallucinations; he rescues a girl from two giants; then he undergoes the kiss of the serpent, thus freeing the lady from enchantment. He marries her and returns to court. This narrative also starts with the hero's childhood. Gauvain (Calvan) is not the hero's father but his father's murderer, forgiven by Carduino at the end of the tale.

²⁹ For detailed treatments of the relations among these works, see D. Adams 1975 and Mennung; more concise discussions may be found in Mills' edition of *Lybeaus Desconus* and Thomas' *Wigalois* 1977.

³⁰ Because the various redactions make it problematic to refer to line numbers, I shall refer to the sections and episodes noted by Roach.

³¹ Wrede, 120-7; *GRLMA* IV,2:111,112; *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, 381.

³² Tyssens (1970), 1051, notes that translators of French romances often reveal early in the narrative details that the French *romanciers* carefully defer.

³³ A summary of the principal theories will show the bewildering variety of these stemmae. Paris and Mennung hypothesize a lost source of *Carduino* and for another work, also lost, from which *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Li Biaus Descouneüs* derived. For Philipot, who was interested in the relationship between *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and Chrétien's *Erec*, Renaut's and Chestre's works were drawn from a lost source, which went back to another lost source that also influenced *Erec*. Schofield's study is the most detailed and

influential. He posited a Celtic source, on the one hand of the Perceval story (Chrétien's *Conte du Graal* and the Welsh *Peredur*), on the other, a hypothetical French source which had two branches of influence, *Carduino* and a second hypothetical French work that was the source of the other three Fair Unknown texts (*Lybeaus Desconus*, *Wigalois* and *Li Biaus Descouneüs*). Owen posited a lost version of a Celtic legend, the source of both the Welsh *Dream of Macsen Wledig* and a lost prototype of the Fair Unknown story, the latter the source of the four Fair Unknown cognates plus Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*. Luttrell, the most recent proponent of this approach, instead of a Celtic source posits a lost "tale of Erec," source (1) of the *conte d'aventure* mentioned by Chrétien in his prologue, (2) a lost Fair Unknown story that was the source of *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Li Biaus Descouneüs* and (3) *Carduino*.

³⁴ It has also been suggested that *Fergus* (early thirteenth century) imitates *Li Biaus Descouneüs* but the similarities alleged between the two works may be dismissed. The stag hunt is more likely an allusion to Chrétien's *Perceval* (Schmolke-Hasselmann, p. 130). Galiene, like Guinglain, thinks of her beloved in a moment of deadly peril but it is to reproach him for being too late to save her. Arthur proposes the hero's marriage and offers him a kingdom in both texts but this is a thoroughly conventional conclusion. One element that Frescoln does not mention and that may be an echo of *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, though, is the calling of a tournament to draw the hero back to court.

³⁵ Micha, p. 39.

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