Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval Romance: Thomas Chestre's *Lybeaus Desconus*[1]

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Critics such as M. Mills and Derek Pearsall marginalize English medieval popular romance in comparison to the idealized courtly romance. Pearsall writes that popular romances have "no inviolate identity" (93), a view which Mills shares in his study of Thomas Chestre's work when he writes that Chestre's *Southern Octavian*, *Sir Launfal* and *Lybeaus Desconus* are indistinguishable ("Composition" 90). Mills asserts that Chestre corrupts his sources and overuses formulaic phrases characteristic of tail-rhyme romance, and argues that these stylistic features are evidence of Chestre's authorial inadequacy (*Lybeaus* 64-65). While recent critics such as Carol Fewster and W. A. Davenport are more generous to Chestre, the unfavourable precedent of Mills still dominates criticism, and indeed, Davenport maintains that Chestre is a "second-rank" writer and that *Lybeaus Desconus* is his "least successful" work (4, 100). However, a re-examination of Chestre's *Lybeaus Desconus* reveals that Chestre is not an inept and inadequate "*disour*" (Mills, "Reviser" 20), but rather a writer who redefines the popular romance hero and thus the genre through his version of the story of the fair unknown. This paper focuses on two arguments presented by Mills as key evidence of Chestre's ineptness in order to demonstrate how Chestre successfully rewrites and therefore challenges the tradition of medieval popular romance: passages in *Lybeaus* that Mills consider corruptions of source material, and a formulaic expression that Mills classifies as an example of Chestre's limited and overused vocabulary.

Pearsall describes Chestre as a "hack" writer whose rendition of the story of the fair unknown is "a good example of the way in which passionate erotic romance in French is emasculated into innocent knockabout English" (113). Mills similarly asserts that Chestre corrupts his sources, particularly the French cognate by Renaud de Beaujeu, *Li Biaus Desconeüs* ("Composition" 89), and argues that these corruptions are the result of two particular things: Chestre rewrites his romances from memory, and he has an "uncertain grasp of French" ("Composition" 105, 95).[2] Two of the passages in *Lybeaus* criticized for their inept translation of French concern the tropes of romantic love and the marvelous castle. When Lybeaus meets la Dame d'Amore he is distracted from his quest. Line 1478 of the Lambeth Manuscript suggests that la Dame d'Amore beguiles Lybeaus in order to prevent his departure: "She dyde hym traye and tene."[3] Mills describes this line as a "laconic statement," an insufficient account of the parallel episode in de Beaujeu's text where la Dame d'Amore's bewitchment unfolds over several pages ("Composition" 95). However, the French text's exposition of la Dame d'Amore emphasizes the romantic love theme of medieval romance and Lybeaus's role as the helpless, enraptured lover. In the French, Lybeaus (Guinglain) is described as overcome by the madness of love:

Lors se relievent maintenant	At that moment they [servants] all awoke
Cierges ont espris li sergant:	Candles were lit by the servants
Guinglain ont trové come fol,	They found Guinglain as one mad,
Son orillier deseur son col,	His pillow under his neck,
Et si n'avoit autre besongne.	As if he had not a care in the world.
...	...
Amors le destraint et tormente;	Love restrained and tormented him.

(Desconeüs 4636-50)[4]

Chestre's choice to rewrite this episode with "traye and tene" renders la Dame d'Amore a more sinister figure, and thus an even greater threat to overcome. Moreover, Chestre's choice of words is also significant because while the combination of "traye and tene" frequently suggests trickery or deceit, it also suggests something much closer to the "destraint et tormente" of the French text. This expression similarly appears in the Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley edition of *The Towneley Plays* when it is used by Peter to describe the treatment of the Apostles and Christ at the hands of the Jews.[5] Thus, while Chestre implies a different meaning, his choice of

words still gestures to the French source. Far from being an insufficient account of the bewitchment, Chestre's purposeful reduction of la Dame's role results in greater emphasis on the hero and establishes a technique that Chestre uses throughout *Lybeaus* to draw attention to his reversions of the romance hero.

Mills also criticizes the description of the enchanted castle as "flat and unconvincing" in comparison to the French source ("Composition" 95). This argument, however, is misleading because Mills cites only the following lines as evidence of Chestre's ineptness: "Of mayne mor ne lasse / Ne sawe he body ne face / But menstrales y-cloþed yn palle" (C 1774-6).[6] Taken out of context, these lines reinforce the theory of Chestre's ineptness, but a closer look at the Cotton Manuscript reveals a far more elaborate description than Mills suggests. Chestre describes the walls and pillars "Of jasper and of fyn crystall," and the brass doors and glass windows "Florysseþ wyth jamgerye" of an "y-paynted" hall that "No rychere neuer þer nas / Þat he hadde seye wyth eye" (C 1792-1800).[7] The luxury of this hall is remarkably close to the description of the enchanted castle in *Li Biaus Desconeüs*. The original text introduces "Un palais molt grant et marbrin" [a palace very large and marbled] with "portels grans a l'entree" [large doors at the entrance] and ".m. fenestres" [a thousand windows] (*Desconeüs* 2801-2806). The richness and sense of ornamentation seen in the original is not lost in Chestre's translation, and he even draws further attention to the hall's luxuriousness by reinforcing the point that "No rychere be ne myȝte" and "No rychere neuer þer nas / Þat he hadde seye wyth eye" (C 1794, 1799-1800).

An earlier stanza describing the mirth of the hall also demonstrates Chestre's understanding of the French source:

> Wyth harpe fydele and rote,
> Orgenes and mery note,
> Well mery þey maden alle;
> Wyth sytole and sawtrye,
> So much melodye
> Was neuer with-jnne walle. (C 1777-82)

Here, Chestre explicitly aligns his text with the original, which describes richly dressed jesters, "Cascuns a divers estrument [...] De trestotes les armonies / I a molt doces melaudies" [Each with a different instrument [...]from all of them come har-

monies / there are many sweet melodies] (*Desconeüs* 2807-12). This passage is
hardly an inadequate translation of the original, and combined with Chestre's de-
scription of the hall, renders his text anything but flat or unconvincing. Chestre's
ability to emulate the basic descriptiveness of his source suggests a greater accuracy
and grasp of the French language than Mills or Pearsall give him credit for. Indeed,
if Chestre's grasp of French were inadequate, it would be impossible for him to
reproduce any detail from his source with such precision.

Chestre does not reproduce his source verbatim but instead rewrites his source,
re-ordering descriptive and condensing the elaborate French palace episode, which
unfolds over one hundred and fifty lines, into a few short stanzas. In the French tale,
the description of the castle is given to Lanpars, who advises Lybeaus that adventure
is waiting within the castle should he choose to enter. Chestre omits this passage
from his version, which drastically alters one's interpretation of the hero's venture.
In the French tale, Lybeaus is forewarned of certain dangers and given specific in-
structions on how to avoid them. Lanpars directs Lybeaus,

[...] en la sale en enterois;	[...] go into the hall;
Vostre aventure i. atendrois.	There you will await your adventure.
Et tant con vos amés vo vie,	To the degree that you love your life,
Si gardés que vos n'entrés mie	Make sure that you do not enter
En la canbre que vos verrois,	Into the chamber that you will see,
Quant vos en la sale serrois;	When you go into the hall;
Tres en milieu vos arrestees,	You will stop right in the middle,
Vostre aventure i. atendés.	You will await your adventure there.
Or montés en vostre destrier,	Now mount your war-horse,
Que n'i. avés que atargier.	If you desire not to linger here.

(*Desconeüs* 2817-26)

Similar to la Dame d'Amore episode, Chestre's deviations from his source are de-
signed to draw attention to his portrayal of the romance hero. Chestre's removal of
Lanpars's speech creates greater suspense because Lybeaus is unaware of potential
dangers. Subsequently, Lybeaus's ability to overcome these unknown dangers em-
phasizes the magnitude of his ability. As Davenport points out, "the romances asso-
ciated with Thomas Chestre all center on the male hero," and in particular, they

focus on "demonstrations... of the hero's physical and moral strength" (116-17). Chestre's omission of Lanpars's warning not only draws attention to Lybeaus, but to his strength and morality. To prove his worthiness, Lybeaus must uphold his commitment to rescue the Lady of Sinadowne, and only his entrance into the castle and further martial success can achieve this. The removal of Lanpars's speech eradicates any outside aid to the hero found in the French text, and emphasizes Lybeaus's desire and ability to continue and succeed in his quest. By removing additional voices, lengthy descriptions of the ornate, enchanted castle, and the elaboration of la Dame d'Amore's enchantment, Chestre draws his audience's attention to the figure of Lybeaus; the hero's actions, not his surroundings or opponents, become the focal point of these passages.

This increased focus on the hero facilitates the audience's recognition of Chestre's unconventional use of formulaic phrases, particularly one that is directly linked to the identity of the hero and to the issue of his physical and moral strength.[8] In line five of *Lybeaus*, Chestre describes the hero as "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" (C 5). This particular phrase is common in medieval romance, appearing in other tales such as *Guy of Warwick*, "man most of mi3t / wise [and] wi3t" (Fewster 45), and *Ywain and Gawain,* "knygthes war and wyse" (21). In these texts, the phrase "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" not only recurs throughout the tale, contributing to the "distinctive tail-rhyme metre" of romance (Fewster 7), it also occurs within their opening stanzas, a position that Fewster describes as a point of "literary amplification" (12). While the phrase serves as a poetic device, its location emphasizes its importance and connection to the hero's identity. In *Guy of Warwick* and *Ywain and Gawain*, the phrase perpetuates the traditional identity associated with romance heroes – that of the mature and experienced knight. The "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" knight has the physical strength to succeed in combat as well as the moral strength to make the right decisions and uphold knightly values such as honour and courtesy. In *Lybeaus,* this traditional knight is precisely the hero that Eleyne seeks when she requests of Arthur a "wer wyse and wight" (L 164) to rescue her mistress. By opening his tale with this formulaic reference to the hero, and by later outlining a quest that only such a hero can achieve, Chestre appears to adhere to the traditional romance conventions of the formula. As we shall see, however, Chestre's overall use of these conventions deviates from his traditional introduction and challenges the reader to reassess the hero's identity throughout the tale.

In the glossary for his edition of *Lybeaus*, Mills defines *wytte* as "intelligence [and] senses," and *why3t* as "strong [or] valiant" (*Lybeaus* 268). Both of these definitions are based upon an understanding of the traditional heroic identity of maturity and experience alluded to by the conventional uses of the "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" formula. Subsequently, Mills's interpretation of this formula influences his critique of Chestre when he writes that Chestre has a "personal preference for certain words, phrases and phrasal narrative patterns" ("Composition" 99), and that this personal preference often takes precedence over the "semantic limits" of the phrase (*Lybeaus* 64). He argues that Chestre's use of the formula is not "wholly apt" (*Lybeaus* 206) because subsequent references to Lybeaus as "full savage" (L 19), "nys" (C 22, 51), and "wytles and wylde" (C 176) contradict the formula's conventional use; instead, they emphasize the hero's un-knightly "lack of breeding" or "uncouth behaviour" (*Lybeaus* 206). In addition, Mills cites Lybeaus's defense of his right to undertake Eleyne's request as an example of his lack of breeding:

> 3et was Y neuer aferde
> For doute of mannys awe.
> To fy3te wyth spere or swerd
> Somdell Y haue y-lerde,
> Þer many men were y-slawe.
> He þat fleþ for drede,
> J wolde be way or strete
> Hys body wer to drawe. (C 182-9)

According to Mills, Lybeaus boasts to Eleyne of false skills and previous military success in order to assert his suitability for her task. Furthermore, Mills argues that this negative depiction of Lybeaus's behaviour is used by Chestre solely to introduce "the uncouth side of the hero's character" (*Lybeaus* 210). However, Chestre's purpose in this passage cannot be to draw attention to Lybeaus's lack of breeding. First, the tale's opening readily informs the audience that "Be-yete he was of Syr Gaweyn" (C 8), establishing Lybeaus's lineage specifically as conforming to the heroic "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" romance tradition of Arthur's knights; and second, Arthur immediately recognizes Lybeaus's nobility and, despite his being "nys" and "wytless," readily knights him before he has proven himself.

As a connection between the hero's identity and this phrase has already been

established, and as Mills's explanation for its use is questionable, Chestre's purpose, and therefore this passage, must be reconsidered. Mill's edition of *Lybeaus*, which is accepted as the authoritative and scholarly edition, transcribes manuscripts C and L with conventional tail-rhyme punctuation, a full stop after the tail rhyme word.[9] However, we have established that Chestre does not adhere to other romance conventions in his version of the fair unknown, and Pearsall points out that Chestre's *Lybeaus* already deviates from the tail-rhyme tradition because its stanza form is "based on 3 instead of 4 stresses" (114). Pearsall also points out that the manipulation of punctuation by medieval poets was not unheard of, particularly in the fourteenth century: "Later poets, such as the author of *Athelston*, often set their material in quite subtle tension against this formal structure, running on from tail to couplet, for instance" (108). Given Chestre's existing manipulation of the genre and the precedent of other poets who manipulate the formal structure of tail-rhyme through punctuation, we should question Mills's imposition of traditional punctuation upon the *Lybeaus* text, and in doing so, we can offer a new reading of the above passage:

> ȝet was Y neuer aferde
> For doute of mannys awe
> To fyȝte wyth spere or **swerd.**
> Somdell Y haue y-lerde
> Þer many men were **y-slawe;**
> He þat fleþ for drede
> J wolde be way or strete
> Hys body wer to-drawe. (C 182-9) [emphasis mine]

Relocation of the first full stop from "awe" to "swerd" and replacement of the second full stop by a semi-colon drastically alters the meaning of the passage. Lybeaus no longer falsely boasts, but instead, powerfully articulates his heroic resolve not to flee mortal combat despite the possible strength of his opponents and his own minimal training. Furthermore, Lybeaus reveals his awareness that while such courage may lead to death, cowardice is not a favourable alternative. Indeed, he feels that those who display cowardice should be drawn and quartered.

This new punctuation and resulting interpretation provides insight into Chestre's use of the "wys of wytte and whyȝt werrour" formula. Fewster argues that while formulaic phrases function as poetic devices, writers also use them to reinforce a

given topos or "presented idea" of a poem" (7).[10] Chestre uses the "wytte" and "why3t" formula in the latter sense, to reinforce an idea within his text, but Mills's limited definitions of *wytte* and *why3t*, hinder an exploration of Chestre's purpose. The *Middle English Dictionary*, however, recognizes less common uses, one of which allows either word to be defined as "to be of an age to possess mature discretion" (*MED* W-6 690).[11] Yet although wit (*wytte* or *why3t*) is directly linked to an individual's maturity, the age or level of experience at which one possesses mature discretion is ambiguous. Chestre plays upon the semantic openendedness of these words,[12] juxtaposing Lybeaus's youth and inexperience to his martial success by having the formulaic phrase used both against and in favour of the hero. Eleyne rebukes Arthur for selecting Lybeaus to rescue her mistress, insisting that the task be bestowed upon a more able knight, one who has already proven his ability in tournament (C 180, L 189). She emphasizes Lybeaus's unsuitability by calling him a "chyld / þat ys wytles and wylde" (C 175-6), a sentiment echoed by her companion Teondelayn: "This childe to be weroure / And to do suche labour / Js not worthe a fferthinge" (L 193-5). Despite his previous arming and knighting of Lybeaus, Arthur also upholds the view that the youth lacks maturity and experience. When Lybeaus asks the king for the boon of the next adventure, Arthur replies that "me þyngep þou art to 3yng / For-to done a good fy3tynge" (C 94-5). However, while this repetition of doubt suggests that Lybeaus is indeed an inappropriate choice as the romance hero, Chestre has already identified him as "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" (C 5) in the tale's opening stanza, and when Lybeaus meets his first opponent William Selebraunch, Chestre describes him with the very traits that he is accused of lacking. Against Selebraunch, Lybeaus is "wys and wyh3t... a noble kny3t" (C 349-50), and in his later match against Gyffroun, from which he emerges victorious, he is described as a "why3t werrour" (C 934). Lybeaus may be young and inexperienced in comparison to his generic counterparts such as Guy, Ywain, or Gawain, but ultimately, he is no less capable of "wytte" and "why3t," and his victories over Selebraunch and Gyffroun demonstrate that contrary to tradition, youth and inexperience cannot exclude him from martial success or his status as a romance hero.

More notable than the prolific use of the "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" formula, however, is its conspicuous absence during Lybeaus's encounter with Sir Otes de Lile. In this encounter, Lybeaus is especially discourteous to his opponent; he refuses to return Sir Otes's hound, speaks condescendingly to him, ignores his threat, and calls him "Cherll" (C 1062). When Sir Otes warns Lybeaus to return the

hound or risk martial retaliation, Lybeaus refuses and provokes Sir Otes with his aggressive countenance: "Þo seyde Lybeauus, also prest, / 'þer-of þo þy best!'" (C 1075-76). In return for such impudence, Sir Otes and an army of twelve men attack Lybeaus, almost overcoming him, and lines C 1163-5 describe the hero's brush with death: "As water doþ of clyue, / of hym ran þe blode." This passage evokes Sir Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight, who spares Sir Gawain a mortal blow: "The scharp schrank to the flesche thurgh the schyre grece, / That the schene blod over his shulderes shot to the erthe" (*SGGK* 2313-14). Gawain is humiliated by his fear of the Green Knight and subsequent near defeat, and he returns to Arthur's court in shame.[13] Similar to Gawain, who receives a blow as a reminder of his un-knightly behaviour, Lybeaus's discourtesy and aggression bring him wounds and almost defeat. Yet, despite his unknightly behaviour and apparent lack of "why3t," Lybeaus is not humiliated or shamed like Gawain. Instead, he is ultimately victorious in combat, suggesting that "why3t" and "wytte" may not be indicative of physical and moral strength after all.

Varied uses of the "wys of wytte and why3t werrour" formula create a tension between the text's dialogically opposed heroic images.[14] While Lybeaus embodies the romance hero identity traditionally associated with this formula, he simultaneously exists outside of it by being young and inexperienced and by revealing his capacity to behave in an un-knightly manner. Chestre's interpretation of Lybeaus allows the romance hero to exist outside of the traditional romance hero identity while remaining successful. Thus, Chestre's Lybeaus upholds generic convention through his success while he simultaneously usurps the convention by existing outside of it, and the resulting tension effectively challenges fixed, traditional representations of the romance hero.

Such rewriting of the romance hero is ultimately synonymous with a rewriting of the romance genre. James Weldon argues that Chestre engages this process in his version of *Sir Launfal*, writing that "Both the text and the hero share the same name and are thus subject to the process of rewriting" ("Jousting" 119). Similarly, as Chestre rewrites Lybeaus the hero, he rewrites *Lybeaus* the romance through the dual identification of the text and hero with the name. However, to fully comprehend Chestre's rewriting of the hero and romance, one must also understand his motivations. Evelyn Vitz argues that only by identifying "why the story is being told," or for the purpose of this paper, why the story is being changed, can one "properly make sense of the

text" (8). The changes that Chestre makes to *Lybeaus* are ultimately informed by why he desires to make those changes. John Finlayson argues that English medieval romances often imitate the French tales because of a desire "to assimilate to English... the prestige of a superior civilization through the imitation of its culture" (436). For Finlayson, like Pearsall and Mills, the French medieval romance is the ultimate representation of superior French medieval culture. As Chestre deliberately deviates from the French source, such a process of assimilation cannot be assumed. In fact, Chestre's changes constitute a process that can be described as the political "Englishing" of a French source. As Nicholas Watson points out, the fourteenth century was a period characterized by a "growing consciousness of the distinctiveness and coherence of English language and culture," and English writers increasingly strove to create for the language "a status closer to that of French or Latin" (333). English medieval poets such as Chestre thus looked for ways to restate an existing French or Latin story in English that was interesting and profitable for them and the English language (Davenport 8). For Chestre, the process of rewriting the hero, and thus the genre, asserts that the idealized French culture epitomized by the courtly medieval romance is not superior, especially to English literary language or culture. Chestre's *Lybeaus Desconus*, as it is retold, becomes a new story but one that resonates with elements of its source and with elements of the romance genre. Similar to the dialogue created between different heroic identities through the semantic variants of "wytte" and "why3t," a dialogue exists between the English and French romance genres. Chestre's *Lybeaus* interacts with its source because it retains basic features and story lines, yet its deviation simultaneously contradicts and challenges the authority of the French source. The rewritten tale seeks to establish its own place within the romance genre rather than be subordinate to generic ideals. Thus, contrary to the opinion of Chestre's critics, *Lybeaus* is not a substandard reproduction of the French tale, nor is it, as Finlayson suggests, an attempt to assimilate the "superior" French culture. Instead, it is a skillful redefining of the romance hero and genre and an establishment of English popular romance's generic authority.

Ultimately, Chestre rewrites his hero, establishing a new standard for knightly success: youth and inexperience become as acceptable as the romance conventions of maturity and experience. Indeed, youth and inexperience do not exclude the hero from being "wys of wytte and why3t werrour." Chestre's *Lybeaus Desconus* is not, as previous critics argue, an inept reproduction of a French source by a hack writer but is instead an example of authorial sophistication. Chestre deliberately deviates

from his source in order to draw attention to his rewritten hero and thus to his rewriting of the popular romance. Furthermore, his success in both cases demonstrates the validity of his desire to create a new literary authority through the "Englishing" of the genre. Finally, the revelation of Chestre's talent is also an opening through which further studies of his work, and indeed of other marginalized popular medieval romances, can continue.

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Notes

1   A shorter version of this paper was presented on 28 May 2002 at the Canadian Society of Medievalist's annual conference at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, Ontario.

2   This negative view extends to many Middle English romances and was perpetuated for most of the mid to late twentieth century. Nancy Mason Bradbury outlines the inception of this attitude, highlighting the rise of New Criticism and the work Laura Hibbard Loomis as crucial factors in the reception and evaluation of English romance writers and their work. Bradbury also discusses the oral quality of romance, its association with minstrelsy, and the subsequent negative associations attributed to the genre. These points are also taken up by Ad Putter, who argues that Chestre is neither an ineffective "*disour*" or a "hack writer," but rather is someone who cannot be "confined to a world that is either literate or oral, for the simple reason that [his] world was both" (15). Like Bradbury, Putter feels that the oral quality of English romances is not, necessarily, a negative quality. See Nancy Mason Bradbury, "Literacy, Orality, and the Poetics of Middle English Romance," *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, ed. Mark C. Amodio (New York and London: Garland, 1994) 39-69, and Ad Putter, "Introduction," *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (London: Longman, 2000) 1-38 (1-15).

3   In his article *"Southern Octavian,"* Mills cites this example as *Lybeaus* line
     1506. However, Mills is working with an earlier edition of *Lybeaus* by Kaluza.
     The line cited in this essay corresponds to the line presented by Mills in his
     later edition of *Lybeaus* manuscript L. See Mills, "The Composition and Style
     of the 'Southern' *Octavian, Sir Launfal,* and *Libeaus Desconus,"* *Medium
     Aevum* 31 (1962): 88-109.

4   All French citations are taken from Renaud de Beaujeu, *Li Biaus Desconeüs,*
     ed. G. Perrie Williams (Oxford: Fox, Jones & Co., 1915) and are cited by line.
     All translations are my own. I am greatly indebted to E. D. Blodgett for his
     review and correction of my translations, and to Stephen Reimer, for
     introducing us.

5   Peter says: Farlee may we fownde and fare / For myssyng of our master Iesus;
     / Oure hartys may sygh and be full sare, / This Iues with wreke thay waten vs.
     / Vs to tray and teyn / Ar thay abowte bi nyght and day; ("The Ascension"
     1.190-95). Stevens and Cawley recognize the expression's alternate meaning
     when they define it as "misery and suffering" in their glossary (2. 719). See
     Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, ed, *The Towneley Plays* 2 vols (Oxford:
     Oxford Univeristy Press, 1994).

6   Kaluza *Lybeaus* 1876-8. See note 3.

7   The following are the full passages, from both the English and French texts,
     discussed in this paragraph and the next: *Lybeaus Desconus,* Of jasper and of
     fyn crystall, / Swych was pylers and wall: / No rychere be ne myȝte. / Þe
     dores wer of bras, / Þe wyndowes wer of glas, / Florysseþ wyth jamgerye; / þe
     halle y-paynted was: / No rychere neuer þer nas / Þat he hadde seye wyth eye
     (C 1792-1800); and, Wyth harpe fydele and rote / Orgenes and mery note /
     Well mery þey maden alle / Wyth sytole and sawtrye / So much melodye /
     Was neuer with-jnne walle (C 1777-82). *Li Biaus Desconeüs,* Un palais molt
     grat et marbrin / Laiens irés tot le cemin / La sale est molt grans et molt lee /
     Et li portels grans a l'entree / Vos verrés asés bien les estres / El front devant
     a. m. fenestres / En cascune a. i. jogleor / Et tot sont de molt riche ator /
     Cascuns a divers estrumens / Et devant lui cierges ardens / De trestotes les
     amonies / I a molt doces melaudies (2801-12).

8   The connection between the hero's identity and physical or moral strength is not peculiar to Chestre's *Lybeaus*. Laurence Harf-Lancner makes a similar case for the hero in Renaud de Beaujeu's tale when he writes that displays of strength (through adventure) "affirment la valeur du Bel Inconnu et préparent sa victoire à la Gaste cité, l'aventure centrale du récit, qui vaut au vainqueur la consécration individuelle" (332). See *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine: La naissance des fées*. Genève: Editions Slaktine, 1984.

9   Pearsall points out that the tail-rhyme pattern of twelve lines is typically structured as "4aab3ccb3ddb3eeb3," a pattern thought to be derived from Anglo-Norman "ecclesiastical sequences and responses." Ruth Dean cites this pattern in Anglo-Norman ecclesiastical literature such as the tail-rhyme pattern of *The Psalter in Verse*, and W. R. J. Barron identifies tail-rhyme as one of the two major forms of romance in the fourteenth century. See Derek Pearsall, "The Development of Middle English Romance," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965): 108; Ruth J. Dean, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, ANTS 3 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999) 243; and W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London and New York: Longman, 1987) 53.

10   Bradbury makes a similar point, but on a larger scale. "Repeated language," she writes, "when skillfully used, can convey the social and cultural concerns that lie at the heart of a traditional society" (53).

11   The *MED* cites two examples of this use of "wytte" from *Roman de la Rose*, "It is... wisdome withoute sapience, Witte without discresioun, Havoire withoute possession" (4719), and "Feblenesse full of myght; Witte vnavised, sage folie" (4739).

12   Mikhail Bakhtin uses this expression to suggest the concept of language as a living object that changes in every utterance, as something with an "unfinished, still-evolving" meaning. See "Epic and the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 3-40 (7).

13   This is somewhat of a simplification of Gawain's humiliation, as his failure against the Green Knight is connected to Gawain's relationships and honesty

(or lack thereof) with his host and hostess. However, for the sake of the comparison to Lybeaus, it is fair to say that they both suffer martially because of their un-knightly behaviour.

14   Bakhtin explains the significance of the dialogic "Discourse in the Novel." See *The Dialogic Imagination* 259-422.

Abbreviations Used

Lybeaus	*Lybeaus Desconus*
Desconeüs	*Li Biaus Desconeüs*
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
SGGK	*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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