

Teaching *de raptu meo*: Chaucer, Chaumpaigne, and Consent in the Classroom

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ON MAY 1, 1380 one Cecily Chaumpaigne released Geoffrey Chaucer from *omnimodas acciones tam de raptu meo tam de aliqua alia re vel causa*.¹ On May 4 she had it copied onto the Close Rolls.² The document cites Sir William Beauchamp (the chamberlain of the king's household), Sir John Clanvowe, Sir William Neville, Sir John Philipot (member of Parliament and, in 1378, lord mayor of London), and Richard Morel as witnesses; these were important friends of Chaucer. Three days after that, Chaumpaigne's statement was recopied as a memorandum in the Court of King's Bench—but with a key change. The phrase *de raptu meo* was removed, replaced with a release *omnimodas acciones tam de felonias transgressionibus compotis debitis quam aliis accionibus quibuscumque*.³

1. "all manner of actions related to my rape, or to whatever other situation or cause," in Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, eds., *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 343.

2. Close Roll 219, 3 Ric. II, m. 9d. F. J. Furnivall introduced this memorandum to Chaucerians in *The Athenæum* 2405 (29 November 1873): 698–99.

3. KB 27/477 m. 58d (*coram rege* roll, Easter term 3 Ric. II). "all manner of actions either related to felonies, trespasses, accounts, debts, or whatever other actions." Christopher Cannon discovered and transcribed in full this additional memorandum in "Raptus and the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 74–94, 89–90, doi:10.2307/2863835. The omission of *de raptu meo* is not the only change; the 7 May copy does not list Philippott and Morel by name. Richard Firth Green hypothesizes that the difference reflects two original quitclaims, each copied, rather than a single original copied (with differences) twice, in "Cecily Champain v. Geoffrey

The original release most likely remained in Chaucer's possession and is now lost to us. We have two subsequent legal entries from 20 June 1380. In one, Richard Goodchild and John Grove "remitted, released, and quitclaimed" Chaucer.⁴ In the other, following Goodchild and Grove's release of Chaucer, Chaumpaigne released Goodchild and Grove. A final entry, from 2 July 1380, records that Grove owed and paid by Michaelmas a £10 debt to Chaumpaigne.⁵

The most frequently drawn conclusions are as follows. First, although *raptus* could refer to a range of crimes including abduction, in this particular context and time and in reference to a grown woman it most likely meant sexual assault.⁶ Second, generally implicit rather than explicit is

Chaucer: A New Look at an Old Dispute," in *Law and Sovereignty in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Sturges (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 270, doi:10.1484/M.ASMAR-EB.1.100014.

4. City of London, Records, Pleas and Memoranda, A. 23 m. 5b. Copied in full in Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 344–45.

5. Reginald Sharpe, *The Athenæum* 3642 (14 August 1897): 226.

6. For some of the extensive discussion on whether *raptus* in this case would have meant rape or, potentially, abduction instead, cf. Christopher Cannon, "Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties," in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), 82, in which Cannon argues that medieval law's conflation of abduction and rape renders our hopes of excusing the latter through the possibility of the former is anachronistic and symptomatic of our own anxieties about rape and Chaucer.

Corinne Saunders urges caution in reading Chaumpaigne's case as rape, given "the blurred semantic field of *raptus*," in "The Medieval Law of Rape," *King's Law Journal* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 19–48, 19. Derek Pearsall finds the use of *raptus* alone as indicative of rape in *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 135–38. Cf. Richard Firth Green, "Cecily Champain v. Geoffrey Chaucer," 261–85; Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Meanings and Uses of *Raptus* in Chaucer's Time," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 101–65; Martha Powell Harley, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Cecilia Chaumpaigne, and Alice Perrers: A Closer Look," *Chaucer Review* 28, no. 1 (1993–94), 78–82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25095830>; Sheila Delany, "Strategies of Silence in the Wife of Bath's Recital," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 49–69, reprinted in *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology*

the assumption in our biographies of Chaucer that sexual intercourse (consensual or otherwise) occurred between Chaumpaigne and Chaucer. Third, that money changed hands from Goodchild and Grove to Chaumpaigne and then from Chaucer to Goodchild and Grove in repayment. Finally, as evident through the high status of his witnesses, Chaucer did not take the charge of *raptus* as a trivial matter.⁷ From these points, the documents, and his own works we have put Chaucer on an

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 128; Martin M. Crow and Virginia B. Leland, "Chaucer's Life," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), xxi–xxii; P. R. Watts, "The Strange Case of Geoffrey Chaucer and Cecilia Chaumpaigne," *Law Quarterly Review* 63 (1947): 491–515; T. F. T. Plunkett argues for *raptus* here meaning rape in "Chaucer's Escapade," *Law Quarterly Review* 64 (1948): 33–36. Crow and Olson note that in two other cases of *raptus* familiar to Chaucer, those of his father John Chaucer's childhood abduction and Isabella Hall's abduction in which Chaucer was a justice *ad inquirendum*, the phrase used is *rapuerunt et abduxerunt*. See *Chaucer Life-Records*, 345 for their commentary, 3 for John Chaucer, and 375–83 for the Isabella Hall case.

For more on the context surrounding *raptus*, see Caroline Dunn, "The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England," *Speculum* 86, no. 1 (2011): 79–116, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41105501>; Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Whose Story Was This? Rape Narratives in Medieval English Courts," in *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 124–41, and *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300–1348* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 104–10; and Corinne Saunders's coverage of the legal developments of *raptus* in England over the fourteenth century, "The Medieval Law of Rape," 37–38. She observes that there was, "an increasing legal concern over the crime of *raptus*," along with a shift in focus to the harm to the victim's family rather than the victim. She also notes if a woman without a guardian (like Chaumpaigne) wished to exercise her right of appeal, she was responsible for not only displaying physical evidence to a legal officer within forty days, but also the appeal, accusation, and proof. She would have small odds of success and even smaller odds of obtaining any sentence beyond a fine.

7. Joseph Allen Hornsby covers Chaucer's legal and literary usages of *raptus* and related terms in *Chaucer and the Law* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1988), 115–20.

unending posthumous trial. Chaumpaigne became an awkward footnote in teaching Chaucer, elusive but inescapable due to his constant literary return to nuances of consent.

At an increasingly rapid pace, cultural and political events in the United States from 2011 onwards have driven Chaumpaigne to the center of our classroom discussions of Chaucer, rendering her terse retraction an emotional and political minefield.⁸ We are faced with reconciling the uncomfortable echoes in sexual assault accusations against a president who boasts of grabbing women “by the pussy” with the account in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* of Hende of Nicholas catching Alisoun “by the queynte.”⁹ We are further faced with students whose discourse on consent, false rape accusations, rape culture, and believing sexual assault survivors is to an unprecedented degree already polarized and openly personalized. This setup cannot only direct the entirety of the class’s time away from the text, but can provoke conflicts perceived as personal attacks that dampen participation in subsequent classes. To add to these difficulties, existing resources are likely to exacerbate these dynamics. Despite articles by Christopher Cannon, Susan Signe Morrison and others, as well as the *Chaucer Life-Records*, the relevant Chaumpaigne documents are not collected and translated in their entirety in any single

8. I do not wish, with this piece, to write over Tison Pugh, “Chaucer’s Rape, Southern Racism, and the Pedagogical Ethics of Authorial Malfeasance,” *College English* 67, no. 6 (2005): 569–86, doi:10.2307/30044653; Karen Robertson, “Discussing Rape in the Classroom,” *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 9 (Summer 1990): 21–22; or Christine M. Rose, “Reading Chaucer Reading Rape,” in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), 21–60. On the contrary, I am heavily indebted to each of them. What I hope to do in large part is update their work to account for a cultural sea change between 2013 and 2017. Robertson addresses unexpected interjections from rape survivors in the classroom, while Rose considers how we simultaneously read both the metaphorical uses of rape in Chaucer’s works and the very real and gendered violence replicated therein.

9. I (A) 3272, 3276. All Chaucer quotations borrowed from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson.

resource appropriate for advanced high school students or introductory college courses.¹⁰ Moreover, much of the biographical speculation about Chaumpaigne's family, character, motives, and reproductive history with Chaucer anachronistically plasters modern rape culture narratives over this medieval case.

Nevertheless, in this web of voices and victims is an acute opportunity for medievalists to showcase the relevance of their literature and demand intensive mental engagement from students. Chaumpaigne's retraction offers a vantage point from which students can critically examine the gendered dynamics of not only the fourteenth century but also the twenty-first. It highlights the violence against women woven throughout the canon and provides neither side of the debate with easy answers, either about the case itself or about the implications for/within Chaucer's literary output. If presented as a case that cannot be tried *in absentia*, Chaumpaigne's retraction can push students to consider but side step the parallels with currently trending rape accusations in favor of a deeper look at underlying power structures, criteria for credibility and importance (or, conversely, systems through which voices are silenced or transmuted), and the literature itself. Recent events in educational and feminist policies, media coverage of sexual assault, and the current political situation are strongly influencing students' preconceptions and ideologies. These developments, the potential for discussions to turn vicious, and the gulf between students' lexicons and existing scholarly resources have led me to create for pedagogic purposes a digital primer on the Chaumpaigne documents.

On 4 April 2011 the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights published what is commonly termed the "Dear Colleague Letter."¹¹ It deemed sexual harassment and violence on campuses to be hindrances to students' rights to an education free from

10. The *Chaucer Life-Records* contains all but the 7 May release, but does not translate any of its documents. Nor does it give context for, e.g., the import of the Close Rolls or the value of the payments at stake.

11. US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, "Dear Colleague Letter," by Russlynn Ali, significant guidance document (Washington, DC, 4 April 2011), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>.

discrimination.¹² It therefore labeled them forms of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX, part of the United States Education Amendments Act of 1972, which states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”¹³ The “Dear Colleague Letter” cited the standard statistic that approximately one in five women experience attempted or successful sexual assault during college, along with about six percent of men.¹⁴ It addressed schools’ specific obligations in reducing sexual violence, including grievance procedures.¹⁵ For these, it prescribed a lower standard of evidence than that for criminal complaints, the “preponderance of evidence” standard applied by the Supreme Court in prior civil rights litigation, so as to make the grievance procedures equitable between the complainant and respondent.¹⁶

A rebuttal to the lower standard of evidence has been that false “convictions” from universities cause the defendant substantial harm. This is inarguable. However, such convictions are less consequential than convictions in criminal or civil courts. Criminal courts can strip defendants

12. *Ibid.*, 1.

13. *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, U.S. Code* 20 (1972), § § 1681 et seq. See also the implementing regulations, *Code of Federal Regulations*, 34 § 106.

14. “Dear Colleague Letter,” 2. The letter does not address rates of sexual assault among genderqueer students. For the study it cites, see Christopher P. Krebs et al., *The Campus Sexual Assault Study: Final Report* (Rockland, MD: National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2007), xiii and 5-5, <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf>.

15. “Dear Colleague Letter,” 4.

16. *Ibid.*, 10–11. As context, “preponderance of the evidence” may be roughly summarized as “more likely than not.” This differs from the common criminal court standard of “beyond a reasonable doubt” and that applied in some cases to either criminal court proceedings or civil courts in which financial damages may be sought, “clear and convincing,” which falls between “preponderance of the evidence” and “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Preponderance of the evidence is the usual standard in civil cases. See Ann Olivarius’s article in this collection.

of liberty or even life. Civil courts can impose money damages or forbid defendants from certain actions. Universities at most expel respondents, costing them their invested time and money and their access to that university. The remainder of the costs—job access, social media reputation, difficulties applying to future academic programs—is not an official part of a university sanction, and could and do happen after a criminal case, civil case, or no conviction or case at all.¹⁷ So in requiring schools to make available these grievance procedures as a non-exclusive alternative to the notorious difficulty of securing a rape conviction in criminal court, the Department of Education attempted to balance the lopsided nature of what are often “he-said, she-said” cases and to calibrate the standard of evidence to both precedent (other sections of the Civil Rights Act) and the possible sanctions for the accused (at most, expulsion from the institution). Instead, they initiated an ongoing national conversation on false accusations and the credibility of rape survivors.¹⁸

In 2013, Andrea L. Pino and Annie E. Clark jumpstarted an anti-rape feminist movement on campuses. They pored over the existing Title IX civil rights legislation and the “Dear Colleague Letter.” Along with other women, they used Title IX and the Clery Act to hold their university accountable for its handling of sexual assault allegations between students.¹⁹ Their activism, and the wave of similar activism following it,

17. In this way consequences are pegged to certainty. Depriving someone of life or liberty requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Depriving them of property—and, worse, freedom of action—requires a preponderance of evidence. Although this idea is not being argued for here or elsewhere, Nathaniel Mercer Stetson and I speculate that to be truly proportionate, depriving someone of their investment in a degree could require an even lower standard of proof. For example, businesses are known for firing employees “just in case.”

18. For a starkly different take on the application of Title IX to universities during the Obama administration, cf. Robert David Johnson and Stuart Taylor, Jr., *The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America's Universities* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2017).

19. Their account is recorded in a documentary on campus sexual assault: *The Hunting Ground*, directed by Kirby Dick (Los Angeles, CA: Chain Camera Pictures, 2015), film.

draws its energy from first-person representations, which they use to reclaim voices, destigmatize the experience of sexual assault, and draw attention to the unfortunate prevalence of rape. As a result, a surge of sexual assault survivors has spoken out for the first time. Pop artist Lady Gaga related her own experience in 2014, then brought a cohort of fellow rape survivors to perform “‘Til It Happens to You” with her at the 2016 Oscars, where they were introduced by Vice President Joe Biden. Cementing “survivor” as an identity, several of the cohort obtained matching tattoos. Pino and Clark published a collection of survivors’ stories in 2016, titled *We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out*.²⁰

This anthology encapsulated three burgeoning trends: activist first-person accounts of sexual assault, survivorship as an emotionally laden personal and academic identity, and the emerging radical “believe the victim” heuristic. It is with the first two of these three phenomena uncomfortably in mind, as well as my position bridging student and instructor, that I connect the following points. In 2014, *The Nib* published the anonymous comic “Trigger Warning: Breakfast.”²¹ The comic addressed the narrator’s guilt at not fighting off her rapist and her frustration with being a “confident and arrogant and unsympathetic . . . protagonist”: a bad victim. It centered on her attempt to change the story of the previous night by making her rapist breakfast. In her longest burst of text, the narrator wrote, “The next morning, I make him breakfast. If I didn’t say no, it’s just a romance. I made him breakfast because if I could make him breakfast—eggs, bacon, golden brown toast—I could pretend that it never happened. Women do not make their rapists breakfast, and I made breakfast.” She painted the agony of being complicit in her own invalidation through her survival strategy of invalidating the rape itself.

In Chaucer’s *Reeve’s Tale*, the miller’s daughter Malyne was set upon in her sleep, unaware of the student Aleyn approaching her bed until

20. Annie E. Clark and Andrea L. Pino, eds., *We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out* (New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks, 2016).

21. *The Nib*, “Trigger Warning: Breakfast,” New York: First Look Media, 8 July 2014, <https://thenib.com/trigger-warning-breakfast-c6cdeeco70e6>.

it was “to late for to crien.”²² The next morning she sent Aleyn off with sweet words and a cake. As she ended her farewell to him, “almost she gan to wepe.”²³ Reading through, it is easy enough to ascribe this to the emotion of lovers parting. The story is not from her point of view; told by Chaucer through the figure of the Reeve, it follows Aleyn and his fellow clerk. Yet the actions Chaucer only just foreclosed, the cry and the weeping, warp this part of the tale into a brief glimpse at a more complex and dark experience.²⁴

I place “Trigger Warning: Breakfast” next to the *Reeve’s Tale* because I find it hard to read them as separate works. This is perhaps a damning confession for a Chaucerian, but a relevant one as a feminist pedagogue. Our academic analyses can be detached, but our instruction must acknowledge students’ personal challenges in accessing the material. And, I would even argue, our academic analyses can be informed by experiences. In 2013 I was writing my MA thesis on the *Reeve’s Tale*. I was in my own bed. I couldn’t cry out. I think I made him breakfast, to keep things smoother. Like many survivors’ memories, mine are fuzzy. I know I sounded choked up as I shoed him out with gentle, non-provoking words. And when I returned to Chaucer and Malyne, I froze. When I read “Trigger Warning: Breakfast,” I froze again. For a year following, when my professors and classmates would unexpectedly

22. I (A) 4196.

23. I (A) 4248.

24. Heidi Breuer observes how in the *Reeve’s Tale*, “Chaucer’s construction of this scene forecloses any possibility except rape . . . [he] takes care to inform us why the hue and cry was not raised.” She goes much farther than I would in her critique of both the Reeve narrator and Chaucer’s (unaware?) complicity in reinforcing rape culture. I would push back that Malyne’s depiction evinces awareness of the complex responses of survivors, even as the Reeve narrator may show obliviousness. See Breuer, “Being Intolerant: Rape is Not Seduction (in ‘The Reeve’s Tale’ or Anywhere Else),” in *The Canterbury Tales Revisited—21st Century Interpretations*, ed. Kathleen A. Bishop (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 8. Cf. W.W. Allman and Dorrel Thomas Hanks, “Rough Love: Notes Towards an Erotics of the *Canterbury Tales*,” *Chaucer Review* 38, no. 1 (2003): 44–48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094234>.

discuss issues of sexual assault in literature, I could not engage with the work. My breath shortened, my attention shattered and then hyper-focused only on the woman's perspective of the sexual assault, and the stakes of any discussion—if I were even able to still participate in the discussion—felt life-or-death.

This textbook experience of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a mental health disorder particularly prevalent among rape survivors, is at the core of trigger or content warnings. A content warning, as I use the term here, does not encourage evading engagement with a work but rather allows the student to prepare for the reading and the discussion. Advance notice lets one schedule difficult readings when best able to interact with them (e.g., our anonymous comic artist might not choose to read the *Reeve's Tale* at breakfast) and come to class mentally ready. For those of us with PTSD, this means that the aftermath of the violence inflicted upon us does not prevent us from obtaining our education. For those without, the content warning still serves as a cautionary alert about challenging information and discussions, the equivalent of the roadside yellow warning sign.

Just as relevant as content warnings to teaching Cecily Chaumpaigne's documents is the way in which the post-2013 campus framework around sexual assault has posited rape survivor as a (marginalized) identity. Students are increasingly identifying themselves as such, both internally, with implications for their reading of texts, and externally, raising the likelihood of their sharing personal accounts in the classroom.²⁵ Students in the position I occupied may well concurrently experience a PTSD

25. Robertson, "Discussing Rape," relates an experience teaching women's studies majors in which a cascading group of rape survivors, ultimately totaling a fifth of her class, spoke up about the ways in which a literary rape triggered them and the ways in which their experiences changed their readings of the text (21). She notices that the voices of those survivors silenced their peers, but also writes, "I had not imagined that I could have so many rape survivors in the class" (22). One fifth of the classroom happens to be exactly in line with the 1 in 5 statistic on college women experiencing sexual assault. Where volunteering that information may have required a smaller, feminist class in 1990, I would suggest that current rape survivor students receive more impetus to speak up.

trigger, identify strongly with the historical or fictional rape victim/accuser, augment this identification by sharing some elements of their sexual assault in the classroom discussion, and read, in that fight-or-flight state, a classmate's dismissal of the possible rape as an attack on and denial of their own identity. Moreover, not every element of this equation must be present for that outcome to result.

In addition, the "believe the victim" heuristic frames discussion of rape accusations as an ideological matter. This heuristic has reached the pages of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, though it has not yet (to my knowledge) been applied in literary criticism.²⁶ It is the radical act of believing the survivor. I choose this phrasing of radical and survivor to reflect how its proponents have styled it: a subversive and unusual move in a rape culture that routinely works to discredit victims. It is based in the disproportionate fears of false rape accusations and the claim that "[t]here is no privilege to being a survivor; there is nothing to gain from being raped."²⁷ It acknowledges both the real occurrence of false accusations and the accuracy problems endemic in the testimony of traumatized (and thus neurologically altered) survivors, emphasizing that "This is not a legal argument about what standards we should use in the courts; it's a moral one, about what happens outside the legal system."²⁸

It is tempting to apply that heuristic in cases such as Champaigne's, where we do not and never will have enough information to try the case by legal standards. "Believe the victim" counters our current default of saying that although we may believe sexual intercourse occurred between

26. Wagatwe Wanjuki, "Believing Victims Is the First Step to Stopping Rape," *Room for Debate* in *New York Times*, 12 December 2014, accessed 26 November 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/12/12/justice-and-fairness-in-campus-rape-cases/believing-victims-is-the-first-step-to-stopping-rape>; Zerlina Maxwell, "No Matter What Jackie Said, We Should Generally Believe Rape Claims," *Washington Post*, 6 December 2014, accessed 26 November 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/06/no-matter-what-jackie-said-we-should-automatically-believe-rape-claims>. Cf. Roxanne Gay, "Nate Parker and the Limits of Empathy," *New York Times*, 19 August 2016, accessed 19 May 2017.

27. Wanjuki, "Believing Victims."

28. Maxwell, "No Matter What Jackie Said."

Chaucer and Chaumpaigne, and that Chaucer regarded her subsequent charge of *raptus* as threatening enough to call in political favors, have the wording specifying rape removed from the more accessible record, and indirectly pay Chaumpaigne a substantial sum, we will never know what happened. This assessment is true; we *will* never know. It can also be accusatory or fatalistic in an environment where students' own stories might have been dismissed as, ultimately, unknowable.

Yet Cecily nixed this approach. She was, in her own way, as slippery as Chaucer.²⁹ We cannot blindly credit Chaumpaigne, because we do not have her accusation, only her retraction. We can point to the clear pressure being brought to bear on her through the social status of the witnesses against her and we can note the exchange of money, but we cannot escape the fact that whatever happened, she accepted certain terms, retracted the charge, and then went further and removed even the language of *raptus*.

Meanwhile, if campus concerns and feminist movements have found themselves mired in the issue of survivors' credibility weighed against the harms of false accusations, so too have the media. In the wake of a publicized rape trial in Steubenville we began dissecting the media's response in lamenting the "promising futures" of the defendants—teen-aged football players—despite video footage of the assault.³⁰ Social media and less prominent publications lambasted CNN, ABC News, NBC News, and the Associated Press for their sympathy for the defendants. A year later in November 2014, *Rolling Stone* published the immensely popular, provocative exposé "A Rape on Campus," focusing on the way the University of Virginia mishandled a specific case involving

29. I do feel obliged to point out the strangeness of biographies automatically leaping to Chaucer's defense when we are trained to read *slydyng* Chaucer skeptically, particularly in his "self"-representations. This is an author valued for his cagey and elusive portraits, read by default through a hermeneutics of suspicion that pries at the space between Chaucer-the-author and Chaucer-the-narrator and even—especially!—Chaucer-the-pilgrim.

30. "Guilty Verdict in Steubenville Rape Trial; Matt Lauer Faults NBC; Iraq War Anniversary," *CNN*, 11:00 ET 17 March 2013, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/130317/rs.01.html>, accessed 9 December 2015.

fraternities and alleged gang rape.³¹ Shortly after publication, the particulars of the accuser's story began to fall apart, to the point where an embarrassed *Rolling Stone* commissioned the Columbia School of Journalism for an independent investigation into their self-described "failure of journalism."³²

Despite this, outlets including the *Guardian* and *Buzzfeed* continue to shine a spotlight on sexual assault in higher education.³³ A recent tipping point was a published letter from the anonymous victim of Brock Allen Turner, a Stanford student and athlete.³⁴ It sparked outrage after media highlighted Turner's derailed prospects and the judge, Aaron Persky, granted the convicted rapist a lenient sentence. Frustrated, thorough, and pained, it details the consequences for the survivor despite a successful conviction and reasonably perfect victimhood—multiple witnesses, no prior acquaintanceship, and clear incapacitation. News media now balances awareness of a flawed system of justice, concerns about unreliable accounts, and the countervailing worries of enabling and amplifying rape culture.

This media introspection on how we discuss a crime that is frequently presented as one person's word against another's has been fueling and

31. Sabrina Erdely, "A Rape on Campus," *Rolling Stone*, 19 November 2014. [Retracted 5 April 2015.]

32. Will Dana, "Note from the Editor"; and Sheila Coronel, Steve Coll, and Derek Kravitz, "Rolling Stone and UVA: The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Report: An Anatomy of a Journalistic Failure," *Rolling Stone*, 5 April 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/a-rape-on-campus-what-went-wrong-20150405>, accessed 6 November 2015.

33. While these may appear idiosyncratic choices, the *Guardian* and *Buzzfeed* have been consistently at the forefront of covering campus sexual assault.

34. Katie J. M. Baker, "Here Is The Powerful Letter The Stanford Victim Read Aloud To Her Attacker," *Buzzfeed*, 3 June 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/katiejmbaker/heres-the-powerful-letter-the-stanford-victim-read-to-her-ra>, accessed 20 January 2017. For the sake of clarity, Baker is not Turner's victim but rather a reporter who has frequently worked on issues of sexual assault; the anonymous victim provided her statement to Baker and *Buzzfeed*.

is being augmented by our renewed scrutiny of Hollywood. Both Bill Cosby and Woody Allen are on trial in the court of public opinion, with their accusers given prominent platforms. Dylan Farrow, Allen's accuser, openly challenged our enjoyment of Allen's art, beginning and ending an unsparing letter with "What's your favorite Woody Allen movie?"³⁵ We have paid near-instantaneous critical attention to the narrative spins and purposes of a sudden glut of sexual assault in television, including in popular shows like *Game of Thrones*, *Downton Abbey*, *Outlander*, *Mad Men*, *House of Cards*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and *Scandal*. *Jessica Jones* and *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* each made "rape survivor" a core identity of their titular protagonists.

On the other side of the polarized media, the issue of campus rape and academia's responses has sparked rallying cries of feminist overreach. One prominent voice on this front, provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos, wrote tendentiously, "Moral panic about 'rape culture' has led to gross violations of due process against male students on campus, who can now be hauled before campus kangaroo courts to answer charges of sexual assault with no adequate legal representation and very low burdens of proof."³⁶ The fear of false rape accusations and the perceived ability of women to relabel sex they regret as rape became a politicized point of the alt-right.

This narrative of a regretful or vengeful woman manipulating a legal system with a false charge for her own ends is an enduring one, even enshrined in law at times.³⁷ But a summary of studies examining trends in recognized false rape reports highlights that, "[d]espite the stereotype,

35. Dylan Farrow, "An Open Letter From Dylan Farrow," *On the Ground* in *New York Times*, 1 February 2014, <https://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/01/an-open-letter-from-dylan-farrow>, accessed 5 November 2015.

36. Milo Yiannopoulos, "Feminists and Progressives Attack College Football with More Dodgy Rape Statistics," *Breitbart*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.breitbart.com/sports/2016/01/06/feminists-and-progressives-attack-college-football-with-more-dodgy-rape-statistics/>, accessed 15 January 2017.

37. David Lisak, Lori Gardinier, Sara C. Nicksa and Ashley M. Cote, "False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases," *Violence Against Women* 16, no. 12 (2010): 1319.

false reports of sexual assault are not typically filed by women trying to ‘get back at a boyfriend’ or cover up a pregnancy, affair, or other misbehavior. While there are examples of this kind of false report, the vast majority are actually filed by people with serious psychological and emotional problems.”³⁸

One motive behind this misperception seems to be our insistence on viewing rapists as Other, as the stranger lurking in the dark parking lot, presenting cognitive dissonance when someone central to our cultural self-image is accused—such as a football player, or the father of English literature. This ignores the fact that the accusation of a stranger or unknown assailant rather than an acquaintance or friend is considered a red flag of a potentially false rape accusation. Meanwhile, the overall percentage of false rape accusations is routinely estimated at between two and ten percent, in line with false accusations of other violent crimes.³⁹ We cannot, of course, responsibly extrapolate the low rates of false accusation from the twenty-first century to the fourteenth. We can, however, bear in mind this dynamic from our current rape culture.⁴⁰

The combination of The Department of Education’s work on campus rape under the Obama administration, the feminist “believe the victim” creed and first-person narratives, and the conservative pushback against these movements came to a head during the 2016 presidential race. Women publicized high-profile accusations of sexual assault on both sides. Donald Trump brought three women accusing his opponent’s husband of sexual assault—Paula Jones, Juanita Broaddrick, and Kathleen Willey—to a press conference before the second presidential election

38. Kimberly A. Lonsway, Joanne Archambault, and David Lisak, “False Reports: Moving Beyond the Issue to Successfully Investigate and Prosecute Non-Stranger Sexual Assault,” *The Voice* 3, no. 1 (2009): 9.

39. See Wanjuki, “Believing Victims”; Lonsway et al., “False Reports,” 2; and Lisak et al., “False Allegations,” 1318.

40. We might also keep in mind Heidi Breuer’s finding that “as late as 1321, about 49% of rape victims who reported the crime were themselves arrested for false accusations (usually on a legal technicality).” She also remarks on the not dissimilar punishment rates for rape cases brought to modern and medieval courts: 21.5 percent and 17 percent respectively. See Breuer, “Being Intolerant,” 11–12.

debate on October 9, 2016. Trump himself faced an ever-growing cadre of women accusing him of similar assaults.⁴¹

Given Trump's victory, it is worth noting parallels that may be perceived between Cecily Chaumpaigne's retracted case and two retracted cases of Trump's known at the time of the election. Ivana Trump stated under oath in a divorce deposition that Donald Trump raped her in 1989, about which reporter Harry Hurt III published an account in his 1993 book *Lost Tycoon: The Many Lives of Donald J. Trump*. But (with the divorce and, incidentally, the money at stake settled) Hurt was obliged by Donald Trump's lawyers to append a disclaimer they obtained from Ivana: "I referred to this as 'rape,' but I do not want my words to be interpreted in a literal or criminal sense."⁴²

Subsequently, in the lead-up to the election, Jane Doe/Katie Johnson sued Donald Trump and another for forcibly raping her at age thirteen.⁴³ Doe/Johnson's complaint alleged that Trump and his co-defendant

41. The first two women to come forward during the highly charged discussions in October 2016 were Jessica Leeds and Rachel Crooks, followed by a surge that included *People* magazine reporter Natasha Stoyhoff's first-hand account. See Meghan Twohey and Michael Barbaro, "Two Women Say Donald Trump Touched Them Inappropriately," *New York Times*, 12 October 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/us/politics/donald-trump-women.html?_r=0; and Natasha Stoyhoff, "Physically Attacked by Donald Trump – a PEOPLE Writer's Own Harrowing Story," *People*, 12 October 2016, <http://people.com/politics/donald-trump-attacked-people-writer/>. Stoyhoff writes entirely in the activist-survivor genre, framing her account as taking her voice back. She moves from just after the assault ("I was still in shock and remained speechless") to a final interaction where Trump tells her she's great ("*Yeah*, I thought. *I'm great because I kept my mouth shut*,") to regret at not publicizing the incident soon after and a sharp statement on both Trump's prior comments on women and her own experience: "Talk is talk. But it wasn't just talk in my case, it was very much action. And, just for the record, Mr. Trump, I did not consent."

42. Harry Hurt III, *Lost Tycoon: The Many Lives of Donald J. Trump* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1993; repr., Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books and Media, 2016), flyleaf. Disclaimer 6 April 1993.

43. The unknown woman filed as Jane Doe in New York but Katie Johnson in California in a series of lawsuits.

threatened her life and the lives of her family members, and furthermore that “[b]oth Defendants let Plaintiff know that each was a very wealthy, powerful man and indicated that they had the power, ability and means to carry out their threats.”⁴⁴ Her attorney announced a press conference but then canceled it due to threats to Doe/Johnson. Two days later, on November 4, 2016, Doe/Johnson dropped the lawsuit.⁴⁵ This combination of a formal, legal claim of rape, pressure from influential men or payment to the accuser, and the legal retraction of the claim is thus associated twice with the highest office in the United States.⁴⁶

Returning to Chaucer, then, any classroom discussion of Chaumpaigne needs to balance the ultimately unresolvable nature of the Cecily case with sensitivity to students’ individual experiences, neither reinforcing survivors’ fears of being disbelieved nor buttressing concerns that accusations now equate to guilty verdicts. Trying the case *in absentia* can fail to facilitate engagement with Chaucer’s literary output, shades into either unwarranted speculation or equally unwarranted certainty, and treads close to implying that students may themselves be unbelievable—or guilty without benefit of trial. In addition, since 2016, the details of the Chaumpaigne case play directly into current partisanship. Omitting the Chaumpaigne release from classroom discussions erases deep complexities behind Chaucer’s writing.

The theme of consent pervades Chaucer’s *oeuvre*.⁴⁷ Most obvious, in

44. Complaint at 6, *Doe v. Trump*, No. 1:16-cv-04642-RA (S.D.N.Y. dismissed 16 September 2016).

45. Alan Yuhas, “Woman Who Accused Donald Trump of Raping Her at 13 Drops Lawsuit,” *Guardian*, 5 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/donald-trump-teenage-rape-accusations-law-suit-dropped>, accessed 10 January 2017.

46. I note here that neither of these two cases against Trump sought a criminal conviction. Further, out of an excess of caution, I note that at the time of writing this he has not been convicted of sexual assault. Neither, to the best of our knowledge and surviving records, was Chaucer.

47. See William A. Quinn, “The Rapes of Chaucer,” *Chaucer Yearbook* 5 (1996): 117. Quinn holds that in the translations of *Roman de la Rose* and *De consolatione Philosophiae*, Chaucer’s “persistent deliteralizing of rape” suggests

light of the Champaigne release, are glib readings of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* or the *Second Nun's Tale*. Portraying Chaucer as the rapist seeking redemption or the story of the adamantly virgin Saint Cecelia as an apology is uncharacteristically straightforward. Christine M. Rose deems Chaucer's use of attempted or completed sexual violence "astonishingly prevalent and varied," citing a slew of tales: Emelye in the *Knight's Tale*, Custance in the *Man of Law's Tale*, Malyne and her mother in the *Reeve's Tale*, May's dubious consent in the *Merchant's Tale*, Virginia in the *Physician's Tale*, the wife and daughter in *The Tale of Melibee* (whose beating she reads as legally *raptus*), Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale*, misogynistic murder in the *Manciple's Tale*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and of course Lucrece and Philomel in *The Legend of Good Women*. She cites a further list of those women whose agency is limited: the Wife of Bath herself, the wife in the *Shipman's Tale*, St. Cecelia, Criseyde, and the formel eagle in *The Parlement of Foules*.⁴⁸

I wish to draw further attention to the recurring ambiguities and complexities of consent. Criseyde's wishes and agency are opaque, constrained by the suicidal threats and manipulations of Pandarus and Troilus (and, later, by her vulnerable position in the Greek camp).⁴⁹ But

that "prior to 1380 the literal implications of *raptus* remained an abstractly bookish trope, personally irrelevant and, as such, unreal for Chaucer," followed by a shift in his use of the trope after the Champaigne case. Quinn, "The Rapes of Chaucer," 6. Cf. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 11; Allman and Hanks, "Rough Love," 36-65.

48. Rose, "Reading Chaucer," 49. Rose asks "what it might mean heuristically for us to teach rape when we teach Chaucer" in "Reading Chaucer," 25. She calls for us to read rape as actual rape, in addition to reading the roles it serves within the text. But at this point the impetus for recognizing sexual assault in texts now tends to be pushed by students, on their terms, rather than guided by instructors; I am concerned less with making sure that students read rape as actual rape than with anticipating their doing so, responding, and guiding the subsequent discussion.

49. Juhani Rudanko notes that, in fact, Pandarus's suicide threat is Chaucer's addition to the story in her article "'I wol sterve': Negotiating the Issue of a Lady's Consent in Chaucer's Poetry," *Journal of Historical*

Criseyde acts without evident coercion at key moments and speaks of her heart. While none of the men in the *Franklin's Tale* view exchanging Dorigen as a possible rape, Rose's reading suggests Dorigen does: "Dorigen . . . aligns herself with a cast of chaste characters/predecessors who are victims of real or attempted rape."⁵⁰ The *Miller's Tale* riffs off coercion and play. Nicholas initially grabs Alisoun by her parts and threatens to die, but Alisoun shows herself to be an active, even gleeful participant over the course of the tale. Rape is literary metaphor in "Adam Scriveyn." The *Merchant's Tale* has not only May but also her patron, the *ravysshed* yet affectionate wife Proserpina.⁵¹ Chaucer returns again and again to these scenarios he has so carefully constructed, playing out countless nuances of force and consent.

And so how, faced with Chaucer's literary fixation on the permutations of sexual violence, do we present Chaumpaigne? Perhaps the most revolutionary strategy proposed is Susan Signe Morrison's anti-biography, a reading of the charges that rejects our Chaucerian focus and returns Chaumpaigne's voice to her.⁵² She covers how past criticism, by reflexively or defensively casting doubts on Chaumpaigne's family, character, and motives, problematically reproduces our present responses to accusers.⁵³ As an activist of the movement I have described earlier, I am

Pragmatics 5, no. 1 (2004): 152. And Christopher Cannon argues that in *Troilus and Criseyde*, "we can see Chaucer acutely aware of the definitional requirements for rape that preoccupy us . . . on the conditions of the consent, on the constraints and qualifications that interact with agreement" and that later, with the language used around Diomedes, we are given enough context through Helen to recognize rape even when it is not cited as rape. See Cannon, "Chaucer and Rape," 269 and 270.

50. Rose, "Reading Chaucer," 48.

51. IV (E) 2230.

52. Susan Signe Morrison, "The Use of Biography in Medieval Literary Criticism: The Case of Geoffrey Chaucer and Cecily Chaumpaigne," *Chaucer Review* 34, no. 1 (1999): 82–83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096076>.

53. I will join Morrison in finding what we might most mildly dub a lack of sensitivity in several pieces of scholarship. She castigates Paul F. Baum for not anticipating that readers may be themselves survivors of sexual assault (72) and John Gardner for situating his narrator within what is almost a

also deeply invested in the project of recuperating women's and survivors' voices. But while Morrison's endeavor is a valuable intellectual exercise, I cannot see what we can do for non-specialized students with the scant few paragraphs she is able to produce. If we are seeking such medieval survivor narratives, we can find other and better sources in legal records alone. If we are curious about Chaucer and his writing, then—rapist or not—we can continue to keep our narrative centered on him while encountering only those issues already inherent in the existence of the canon, so long as we do not valorize him without cause.⁵⁴

Yet the bulk of biographies and analyses do valorize Chaucer. We absolve him of guilt by framing the unknown event(s) as an escapade or indiscretion. In one of the more benign examples, Derek Pearsall's reasoning leads him to an internally inconsistent charge. He writes, "That Chaucer was guilty of something is clear from the care he took to secure immunity from prosecution, but"—and here his biography begins to contort itself—"it need not have been rape."⁵⁵ He then exonerates Chaucer by conjecturing a scorned Chaumpaigne motivated by compensation, perhaps in revenge for "neglect and the betrayal of promises by the man or some unilateral decision on his part to terminate an affair that he regarded as over but which the woman, in retrospect, regarded as a physical violation."⁵⁶ Pearsall's language does not merely play into the harmful cliché of false rape accusations from slighted or regretful women: he actively cites this cliché through his sudden and atypical shift from Chaucer and Cecily into "the man" and "the woman." His unsubstantiated narrative exists within and is reinforced by the context of its frequent modern application in discrediting victims. It is, in fact, a thoroughly contemporary rape culture narrative, one that fits neatly within the fears delineated by Milo Yiannopoulos and his ilk. The difference between when Pearsall wrote his speculation and now is that a

parody of the male gaze (73).

54. Earlier, I cited Bill Cosby and Woody Allen as contemporary artists whose works are being reassessed in light of allegations against them. One immediate and important contrast with these contemporary artists is that Chaucer no longer financially profits through the distribution of his work.

55. Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 137.

56. *Ibid.*

significant population of our students has been equipped to recognize and label such narratives.

Pearsall's hypotheses are mild compared to the wilder speculations about Chaumpaigne. W. W. Skeat cites Lewis, the child dedicatee of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, as a possible by-blow of Chaucer and Chaumpaigne solely on the basis of his age.⁵⁷ If Lewis's conception was indeed rape, then Chaumpaigne may have retracted her legally invalidated accusation, as it was thought that rape could not result in conception.⁵⁸ Haldeen Braddy, though condemning Chaucer by agreeing that "the most likely construction to place on all the related documents is that the act of 'raptus' by Chaucer actually represented physical rape," figures Cecily as seductive apprentice and stepdaughter of a royal mistress, Alice Perrers.⁵⁹ Donald Howard follows up on this to cast doubts on Chaumpaigne's relatives and motives. He concedes that *raptus* seems to mean rape, but cavils that at times, "false charges of rape—a very serious crime—were brought against a legal adversary to put him at a disadvantage by getting him thrown in prison."⁶⁰ He adds that if indeed Chaumpaigne's stepmother were Alice Perrers, then Chaumpaigne spent time around a

57. W. W. Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), i.xxxiii, 3.352. Cf. Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, 345; Donald R. Howard, *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1987), 320; Gardner, *The Life and Times of Chaucer* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 252–53; and Delany, "Strategies of Silence," 128.

58. Cf. Hiram Kümper, "Learned Men and Skillful Matrons: Medical Expertise and the Forensics of Rape in the Middle Ages," in *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages*, ed. Wendy J. Turner and Sara M. Butler (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 101–5; James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 450; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93–100; and Saunders, "The Medieval Law," 46–47.

59. Haldeen Braddy, "Chaucer, Alice Perrers, and Cecily Chaumpaigne," *Speculum* 52, no. 4 (1977): 909, doi:10.2307/2855381. Cf. Harley, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Cecilia Chaumpaigne, and Alice Perrers," 78–82.

60. Howard, *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World*, 318.

“famous courtesan with few scruples and an excellent head for business; if they were on good terms, Cecily may have learned a trick or two from her stepmother.”⁶¹ Finally, he joins Pearsall and the rest of the crowd wondering if Chaumpaigne were merely a woman scorned.

T. F. T. Plucknett, one of the founding members of the club represented by Pearsall, Braddy, Howard et al., worries with astonishingly contemporary language about how “[r]ape is a brutal crime and implies a degree of depravity which should make us cautious in fixing such a charge. There is really no evidence for it. That he seduced Cecilia we may well believe; that she was angry with him, and still more with herself, is extremely probable. She may have honestly thought that because it all happened against her better judgment, that therefore it was without her consent.”⁶² Thus, in short order, and with charged language, Plucknett concludes that the rape accusation harms Chaucer, not just on legal grounds but in terms of his moral reputation. He dismisses the case on the grounds of “really” no evidence. Chaumpaigne becomes the foolish, seduced, regretful, and vengeful woman who, in Plucknett’s narrative, has twisted the facts around in her own head to absolve herself of sex she feels guilt over, the alt-right caricature of the contemporary campus woman.

Less accusatory but equally uncomfortable is John Gardner’s writing. The thought of giving his description of Chaumpaigne to a contemporary class makes one cringe: “It seems possible, if not downright likely, that into his busy schedule of 1379 or ’80 Chaucer managed to fit at least one pretty wench.”⁶³ Gardner’s language as he delves into the matter foreshadows the current fears of misandry and overzealous judgments. When he notes the “general principle that a man is innocent until proven guilty,”—a principle, again, for courtrooms—he then adds with relief that “in this case we will probably never get proof,” and so may mentally leave Chaucer innocent.⁶⁴ He juxtaposes these statements with notes

61. *Ibid.*, 319. It is worth noting among these citations that Chaumpaigne frequently figures in scholarship as Cecily, though Chaucer does not appear as Geoffrey. This renders her accessible yet diminutive.

62. Plucknett, “Chaucer’s Escapade,” 3.

63. Gardner, *The Life and Times of Chaucer*, 251.

64. *Ibid.*, 252.

on Chaucer's powerful friends, the possibility of actual rape, and the chance Chaumpaigne might have been impregnated, and observes that the "baker's daughter, it seems, had no real chance," before concluding on a cheerful note imagining her "pretty and soft" body.⁶⁵ Whether or not Chaumpaigne consented to sex with Chaucer, this writing strips her bare centuries later.

If the instructor were to eliminate these biographical excerpts from prefatory lectures on the *Canterbury Tales*, it would be nearly impossible to teach about the case, particularly to students in introductory courses or outside the humanities. The only thorough collection of documents is the *Chaucer Life-Records*, but it omits the reworded release discovered by Cannon and remains untranslated from Latin.

The key document on the Close Roll, with Chaumpaigne's release *de raptu meo*, is in the National Archives at Kew.⁶⁶ As the Close Roll consists of sheets of parchment stitched into a scroll, accessing Chaumpaigne's entry involves not only a physical visit or payment to the National Archives for a page check, but also fifteen minutes of unrolling the scroll. The available transcriptions of all the documents come primarily through either the *Chaucer Life-Records* project or Christopher Cannon. Thus, for students, engagement with Chaumpaigne's words tends to be mediated through both transcription and translation. The sensitive nature of the material and the difficulties with the word *raptus* make the student's distance from the original document particularly undesirable in this case. Not only is Chaumpaigne's release important as a physical, visual record, but editions of it inevitably carry speculation.

My growing frustration with available pedagogical tools for approaching Chaumpaigne coincided with an opportunity from the Cornell University Library to develop a digital humanities project.⁶⁷ I used this to begin chaumpaigne.org with the goal of providing minimally mediated student access to the primary documents and context.⁶⁸ The project

65. *Ibid.*, 252–53.

66. Specifically, C 54/219 (Close R. 219, 3 Ric. II, m. 9 d).

67. I need to recognize here Virginia Cole, Madeleine Casad, Susette Newberry, Chloe McLaren, Mia Tootill, Andy Galloway, and John Wyatt Greenlee for supporting the project and tutoring me on various components.

68. Anna Waymack, *De raptu meo*, Summer 2016, chaumpaigne.org.

publishes a timeline containing the documents, including a marker for the lost original release. Each existing document has both Latin transcription and English translation. Furthermore, the Close Roll release of May 4 includes a photographic reproduction of the original document courtesy of the National Archives. It is the first such reproduction publicly available.⁶⁹

In this way I have been able to present students with pared-down materials and the closest experience possible to the documents themselves. I cannot, of course, divorce this project from an ideological stance, but hope to preserve the case's ambiguities. This means, for example, removing an early image of St. Cecilia on Chaumpaigne's biography page, and then subsequently weighing the ethics of depicting Chaucer visually but not Chaumpaigne.

One rejoinder is that the import of maintaining ambiguity around the Chaumpaigne case has already been addressed. In a pedagogical meditation, Tison Pugh exposes his own and his students' wrestling with the discomforts of reading and appreciating a potential rapist's work. He recounts one student grateful for the unknowable verdict of Chaucer's case, allowing her to continue liking Chaucer in the absence of evidence of guilt.⁷⁰ Downplaying the scholarly role of the personal for himself, he nonetheless recognizes his students' "personal investment in literature" as a necessary albeit uncritical part of the classroom.⁷¹ But throughout his discussion of the ethics of teaching Chaucer, Pugh clings adamantly to the ambiguity of the case for both his students and himself, labeling it an "easy escape" that we have no certainty and thus "we need not face the uncomfortable ethical situation of enjoying the delightful literature of a

69. A future goal—with support, again, from the Cornell University Library—is to adapt existing tools such that I can overlay the Latin letters, expanded transcription, or English transliteration atop the image. This twins with my goal of obtaining photographs of the remaining documents, some of which have been unavailable. In this I agree with and further Green's insistence that we recognize and begin with the physicality of the quitclaim: "Cecily Champain v. Geoffrey Chaucer," 261.

70. Pugh, "Chaucer's Rape," 569.

71. *Ibid.*, 571.

sexually violent man.”⁷² This permits him to, in his teaching, “implicitly endorse Chaucer the man.”⁷³ He proposes his assignment of an optional research paper topic: personal responses to Chaucer through an ethical framework.⁷⁴ This assignment is meant to permit and encourage empathy with Chaucer, even Chaucer-the-potential-rapist.⁷⁵

What I challenge here is that the ambiguity we have offers an easy escape. Ambiguity has become (if it ever, indeed, were not) highly charged and uncomfortable. Our students are less inclined to accept this ambiguity than ever before. And yet, paradoxically, students have the vocabulary for the ambiguities and complexities of consent even as they take these more polarized stances. We all want resolution—just look to Pearsall’s comment that “the temptation to offer an explanation is too strong to resist”—but our students are to a new degree accustomed to—albeit unhappy with—uncertainty.⁷⁶ They have been positioned in the epicenter of our shifting definitions of consent (e.g., the movement from “no means no” to “yes means yes”), have led our increased use of trial by social media, and have been cast, on both sides, as the primary victims: the preyed-upon women on “the hunting ground” of college campuses or the slandered young men destroyed by false accusations.⁷⁷

And so we occupy a rich moment to truly acknowledge past and present ambiguity: that even with regards to its legal meaning, *raptus* is elusive; that our permanently incomplete record here carries the same absences and intangibilities as modern cases; and that for so many of these cases, Champaigne’s included, the very nature of the crime means

72. *Ibid.*, 570.

73. *Ibid.*, 571.

74. *Ibid.*, 580–81.

75. *Ibid.*, 583.

76. Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 137.

77. This article is, it seems, the rare Chaucerian work that risks becoming outdated even before publication. That said, the openly gendered and politicized tension regarding campus rape culture, privilege, narratives, and evidence will scarcely disappear overnight; these cultural and historical developments in America from 2011 to the beginning of 2017 have deeply imprinted our students’ attitudes towards and conceptualization of sexual assault.

we substitute discourse in place of witnesses and evidence.⁷⁸ All of these work together, rendering actual (as opposed to literary) rapes unreadable and offering instead these discourses of accusation, speculation, retaliation, testimony, hearsay, whisper networks, gossip, retelling, and reimagining. An option in teaching Chaumpaigne, then, is to set ground rules keeping the classroom discussion from turning to trial or verdict, and by so doing align the case with the current intricacies around sexual assault and accusations that students must already maneuver around constantly. In short, in classroom discussions, I urge us to resist that temptation to offer an explanation. Instead, let Chaumpaigne's case stand in parallel with the many unresolved accusations students have already read, seen, and experienced. The question for students, or even the question for us as scholars in the absence of further evidence, must not be whether Chaucer raped Chaumpaigne but rather what this inaccessible background means for reading Chaucer.

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78. We also substitute discourse regardless of witnesses. See, for example, Turner's victim's incisive account of what people advised her afterwards, despite her two eyewitnesses: "[Turner] can say whatever he wants and no one can contest it. I had no power, I had no voice, I was defenseless. My memory loss would be used against me. My testimony was weak, was incomplete...His attorney constantly reminded the jury, the only one we can believe is Brock, because she doesn't remember." Baker, "Here Is The Powerful Letter."