

“Writing History, Writing Trauma”¹: The Rape of Igera in the Medieval Brut Narratives

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IN THE MEDIEVAL Brut tradition, King Arthur’s birth takes place under the marvelous circumstances of prophecy, supernatural intervention, and disguise. With only slight variations across the tradition, the plot sequence begins with a feast in London, where the British king Uther Pendragon becomes enamored of Igera, the wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. Considering tactical approaches to achieving his desire, Uther consults with his cherished household knight Ulfín of Ridcaradoc. He ultimately benefits from the eminent magician Merlin, who temporarily disguises Uther as Gorlois as a way to fool Igera into receiving him. Through the illusion of corporeal mimesis, Uther successfully enters Igera’s bedchamber at Tintagel Castle and has sexual intercourse with her. Popular Brut narratives, including Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, as well as versions by the French romancer Wace and the English historiographer Laȝamon, present this magic bedtrick as the spectacular prerequisite to the birth of Arthur, *rex quondam rexque futurus*. Combining Merlin’s wondrous devices and Uther’s theatrical performance, the scene, as these historical writings present it, features the Virgilian themes of genealogy, prophecy, and *eros*.²

1. “Writing History, Writing Trauma” is the title of Dominick LaCapra’s book, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

2. Frances Ingledew, “The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*,” *Speculum* 69, no. 3 (1994): 668, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3040847>.

Nevertheless, Geoffrey, Wace, and Lazamon neglect to acknowledge that the relations between Igera and Uther in his camouflaged state constitute rape. The authors' inattention to the question of rape might be explained by the idea that "rape could be a prelude to marriage," as several historical cases demonstrate, according to Barbara Hanawalt, and that, second, pregnancy implied a woman had consented to sex; "otherwise," as Caroline Dunn notes, "she would not have produced the necessary 'seed,'" according to the two-seed conception model inherited by medieval medicine.³ Ironically, both of these explanations only make the representation of Tintagel more perplexing, as Geoffrey, Wace, and Lazamon all appear to grapple with the problem of consent, indicating an understanding of Igera's victimhood as well as awareness of the seriousness of rape. Pursuing the questions of why and how these authors seek to cover up the rape, even as they demonstrate discomfort with the crime, this essay argues that the Brut narratives borrow particular techniques from romance to divert attention from the impression of unreciprocated sexual desire. In the Tintagel scene, elements such as the male courtly gaze, which idealizes the beloved lady, and the symptomology of lovesickness, which causes the male protagonist to appear vulnerable, foster sympathy for Uther. This romance interpolation into history-writing renders the rape both more bearable and less visible. The euphemistic presentation of Uther's advances minimizes concern for Igera and her desire, and instead forms an appropriate, courtly precursor to the physical and literary conception of Arthur. Indeed, although Fiona Tolhurst has rightly pointed out that Geoffrey of Monmouth offers multiple "feminist points of origin" in the *Historia*, Igera's story cannot be included within this category, as it instead shows how meshing a textual moment of rape with romance conventions helps advance narrative trajectories of male, not female, authority and achievement.⁴ The illicit truth of the events at Tintagel is that the union between

3. Barbara Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300–1348* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 106; Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 53.

4. Fiona Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Female Kingship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

Uther and Igera, while pivotal to a narrative of English nation-building, erases signs of the costs it inflicts upon the female subject and omits a response to sexual assault. Although the Tintagel affair concludes with the triumphant birth of Arthur, the aftermath reveals the elision of the mother's voice, thereby helping Geoffrey, Wace, and Lazamon better celebrate the supernatural underpinnings of Arthur's infancy. It is because of female silence that these authors also are able to commend the masculine camaraderie between Merlin and Uther.

In the study of historiography, medieval and beyond, the task of recovering the voice of marginalized figures or survivors, who do not, and often cannot, speak for themselves through a given narrative, entails the risk of misrepresenting their various points of view and thereby further diminishing their authentic stories. The attempt to rewrite an occurrence, even if it took place within an imaginary rather than historical world, has the potential to fictionalize it and compromise authenticity in just the same way that the primary documents do; the constructivist critic Hayden White might argue that such renarrativization would constitute refictionalization, creating the potential for readers to diminish the importance of the traumatic event.⁵ Nevertheless, as Colin Davis points out, "not to speak for those who have been silenced, not to recall, not to study what happened to them in the hope of learning something from their stories, would be an act of barbarity in itself, hideously complicit with the forces which sought to eliminate them."⁶ The "fidelity to trauma," as Dominick LaCapra calls it, "invalidates any form of conceptual or narrative closure," which helps to invest meaning in the traumatic event and to keep it "present."⁷ While LaCapra applies his ideas about the relationship between trauma and historical representation to Holocaust testimonies, his theory is not far from recent scholarship on trauma in the Middle Ages, which corrects the popular misconception that trauma did not exist in this early period because societies were deeply accustomed to horrific catastrophe. Resisting the tendency to flatten

5. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

6. Colin Davis, *Traces of War: Interpreting Ethics and Trauma in Twentieth-Century French Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 11.

7. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 22, 23.

the historical difference between medieval and modern experiences of trauma, Wendy Turner and Christina Lee's *Trauma in Medieval Society* explores how past records evince physical and psychological trauma, even if "a medieval author may have called it a wound" or "may not have named it at all."⁸ According to Turner and Lee, the distinction between medieval and modern documents that present such a scenario lies not in trauma itself but rather in the modes of communicating about trauma.

In the case of the Brut tradition, this theoretical framework is an invitation to widen the scope of investigation and, specifically, to look for evidence of trauma not only in the record of the individual alone, but also in authorial choices and narrative form as well as reading communities. Exploring Igera's moments of presence and absence in the Brut tradition exposes the compositional techniques of history-writing that help to conceal the terrifying reality of assault, ostensibly intending to mitigate the readers' horror at the event and to justify abandoning her character in the aftermath of it. In addition, textual transmission, like genealogical transmission, reinforces the transgressive predicates to Arthur's birth. The practice of *translatio*, by which successive historical writings increasingly mask Uther's violation by amplifying the story of romantic longing and sensational magic, turns assault into a traumatic experience, not just for Igera in her single moment of victimhood, but also for the readers of history. The readers risk becoming desensitized by this narrative moment without a proper framework for reading. A study of Igera's place in the Tintagel scene also demonstrates more broadly how medieval historical writings deliberately construct instances of rape to meet ideological ends. To draw upon Sabine Sielke's study of the rhetoric of rape in American literature, when rape is "transposed into discourse," it also "turns into a rhetorical device, an insistent figure for other social, political, and economic concerns and conflicts."⁹ From the political perspective, the assault on Igera in the Tintagel scene becomes

8. Wendy Turner and Christina Lee, "Conceptualizing Trauma for the Middle Ages," in *Trauma in Medieval Society*, ed. Wendy Turner and Christina Lee (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 9.

9. Sabine Sielke, *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790–1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2.

a way for Geoffrey and Wace specifically to dramatize the political skirmishes of early Britain, as well as their reconciliation, highlighting the dialectic between violence and peace that defines the early history of the island. By framing Uther's intercourse with Gorlois's wife and seizure of his castle in this context, the Brut narratives examined in this article demonstrate how the transfer of power and genealogical continuity hinge on destruction and brutal force. Relying on a narratological distinction between story and narrative, one might say then that, in the Brut tradition, violence occurs on two levels.¹⁰ The first is the level of the story, regarding Uther's seduction of Igera without her knowledge, let alone agreement. The second level is the narrative, implicit in the historiographer's silencing of Igera and omission of attention to rape, as well as in the incorporation of the discourses of courtly love as a diversion from this elision, rendering the story of Igera entertaining and ideologically useful to the myth of Arthur.

Closer scrutiny of story and narrative helps to clarify what tends to be a blurry distinction between forced sex and willing participation in romance and historiography, and for that matter, to expose resonances between medieval and contemporary representations of sexual victimization. It may better habituate readers to identify moments of rape and violence, medieval or modern, literary or historical, when such moments are disguised as desirable or politically and socially imperative. Critical scholarship has begun to form a vital framework for interpreting rape in medieval texts, modeling what it means to be a "resistant reader of medieval romance."¹¹ According to Kathryn Gravdal, although "depicting, narrating, or representing rape certainly does not constitute an unambiguous gesture of endorsement," the trope recurs in medieval

10. For a discussion of the distinction between "story" and "narrative," see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980). Genette uses the word "story for the signified or narrative content" and "narrative for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself" (27). He also uses the word "narrating for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (27).

11. Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 15.

literature, constituting “a stock narrative device” that often takes place outside the central story line of the hero.¹² Gravdal’s thesis reveals how a medieval narrative might exploit female sexuality and sideline rape to advance the hero’s journey without ethical consequence. Amy N. Vines similarly examines a romance pattern in which aggression serves a heroic end. The hero’s reputation might depend on the event of rape, making physical violence toward women “constitutive of or even necessary to knightly development.”¹³ While Gravdal notes that this act occurs outside the story line of the hero, Vines more specifically points out that it tends to occur at “inceptive moments” within romance, “preceding stages of martial and social development for the knight.”¹⁴ For instance, in Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, the knight’s rape of a young maiden is the origin point for his journey to discover what women desire, which culminates successfully in the reward of a young, beautiful wife. In the frameworks these scholars have provided, Uther’s rape of Igera in the Brut narratives would escape serious focus and avoid triggering alarm because it is Arthur, not Uther, who ultimately occupies the role of romance hero; in fact, in many romances, including the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Arthur proves his chivalry and ethical uprightness by confronting rapists. Arthur is not the perpetrator in quest of reform, to be distinguished from a character like Chaucer’s knight, and yet his “inceptive” identity is predicated on rape, offering him the opportunity for heroic achievement. Furthermore, an analysis of Uther within the Brut tradition will show that even he, despite perpetrating rape, becomes exempt from criticism in the light of romance convention. Proceeding from Simon Gaunt’s notion that medieval romances demonstrate an ideologically driven interplay between gender and genre, the following pages will show how the Tintagel episode in successive versions shapes the masculine identity of Uther by underscoring his character’s

12. Gravdal, 1.

13. Amy N. Vines, “Invisible Woman: Rape as a Chivalric Necessity in Medieval Romance,” in *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse, and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 162.

14. Vines, 162.

semblance to a romance hero, which, in effect, helps gloss over the rape of the female subject.¹⁵

The ideological function of romance conventions becomes apparent in Geoffrey's *Historia* within a narrative sequence that develops the prestige of Uther Pendragon, not only establishing Uther as a king of Britain, a position of suitable prominence for the future father of Arthur, but also couching his regal authority in Merlin's prophetic powers. After all, in medieval England, prophecy was, according to Helen Fulton, a means of "conferring legitimacy on those who were prepared to acknowledge its truth value," espousing particular claims to power.¹⁶ Providing etymological justification for Uther's status, Geoffrey notes that Uther "received the name [dragon's head]" because Merlin had used the dragon to prophesy his succession as king" (*HRB* 8.399-400; hanc appellationem receperat quia Merlinus eum perdraconem in regem prophetauerat).¹⁷ Prophecy indeed interacts with the concepts of genealogy and *eros* to recall the prominent Virgilian categories, with Uther's first sight of Igera during an Easter feast gathering nobles from across the land. Inflamed with desire for her, Uther gains the appearance of an archetypal courtly lover whose vision wounds and debilitates him: "As soon as the king saw [Igera] among the rest, he suddenly burned with love for her and had eyes only for her, neglecting the others" (*HRB* 8.458-58; Cumque inter alias inspexisset eam rex, subito incaluit amore illius ita ut postpositis ceteris totam intentionem suam circa eam uerteret). By evoking the familiar romance experience of "exogenesis," in which, according to James A. Schultz, "the image of the beloved . . . takes the lover captive" and in which "agency rests not with the 'desire' of the lover, which seeks an object, but with the attributes of the beloved,

15. Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 16.

16. Helen Fulton, "Arthurian Prophecy and the Deposition of Richard II," *Arthurian Literature* 22 (2005): 64.

17. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. Michael A. Faletra (Toronto: Broadview, 2008). The Latin text is from Neil Wright's edition of the Bern manuscript, *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984). Cited in text by line numbers.

which overcome the viewer,” the *Historia* convinces readers to attribute sympathy to Uther, not to Gorlois.¹⁸ Uther bears resemblance to conventional romance characters like Chrétien de Troyes’s Yvain, whose sight of Laudine at the beginning of the romance causes a love wound so deep and penetrating that it prompts him to strategize ways of marrying her, and Chaucer’s Troilus, who falls into a condition of extreme helplessness, sleeplessness, and sickness after taking in the image of Criseyde from across the room of a Trojan temple. Exogenesis generally excuses the wooing lover from culpability in romance; distancing his theory from the Lacanian notion that within an individual lies a desire that can never be filled, Schultz distinguishes courtly love from other forms of desire by “locating its efficient cause not within the lover but rather with an external stimulus.”¹⁹ In Uther’s circumstances, this way of coming to love Igera suggests that he could not prevent himself from acting on his desire, despite possessing agency as a powerful political figure. The narrative in turn suspends the political plot as Uther’s vision incites him to abandon his monarchical concerns, developing a romance sequence in which Uther, now a dotting lover, offers Igera gestures of courtship, smiling flirtatiously at her and sending her gold cups filled with, or perhaps inscribed with, “friendly messages” (*HRB* 8.459; *familiaribus internuntiis*). The likeness Uther bears to the lovers of courtly romance urges readers to pass over the inscription of rape that soon follows and instead to sentimentalize the king in anticipation of the Tintagel episode. His political force is disassociated from his persuasions as a desperate lover, which give the impression, in the fashion of romantic hyperbole, that he will die if he does not take Gorlois’s place as Igera’s lover. Uther begs Ulfin, “Tell me how I can fulfill my desire before my inner turmoil kills me” (*HRB* 8.479–80; *Tu igitur adhibe consilium quo uoluntatem meam expleam, aut aliter internis anxietatibus interibo*). Like many suffering romance heroes, Uther appears vulnerable, positioning him as a victim rather than perpetrator when he eventually challenges Gorlois’s right to his land and wife and pursues a sexual relationship with Igera without her knowledge.

18. James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 71–72.

19. Schultz, 64.

The pity Geoffrey garners for Uther during his spell of lovesickness indeed exonerates the king, even as his courtship tactics are replaced by aggressive encroachments on Igera's physical space. This approach contrasts with Gorlois's attempts to safeguard his wife by sequestering her and retreating from the London court. Whereas Uther marches on Cornwall to plunder the cities and towns under his antagonist's control, rehearsing the prominent theme of civil war in the *Historia*, Gorlois places Igera at Tintagel, which represents, according to Susan Murray, "the protective enclosure that keeps the women safe in a rather womb-like fashion," akin to the medieval castles that "echo the womb's shape by way of the moats and curtain walls that surround them or by their situation high on a hill."²⁰ Such architectural symbolism would seem to underscore a nurturing dimension to Gorlois's motivation for securing his wife, and yet, the descriptions of Uther's militaristic force are never pejorative enough to create a sense of moral binary between Gorlois and Uther. The symbolic fusion of Tintagel and Igera, which Murray suggests occurs through the transference of the castle from Gorlois to his wife, implies a doubleness to Uther's deceit and assault, but because these descriptions are punctuated by references to Uther's memory of his romantic desire, they in fact foster sympathy with Uther.

Even at the scene of rape, Geoffrey is careful to diminish its appearance by silencing Igera's voice and dramatizing Uther's desires. Merlin makes Uther the double of Gorlois, with himself and Ulfin in disguise as his companions. Covert identities, Merlin reveals, facilitate their entrance into Tintagel and Uther's individual access to Igera's bedchamber. Here, in Gorlois's form, Uther "cure[s] himself through the love-making he had longed for" (*HRB* 8.506; *sese desiderata uenere refecit*), reinforcing the notion that the fulfillment of desire is the only effective medicine to treat his lovesickness. The paradox common to courtly romance in which being nearer to the beloved heightens the degree of woundedness is ultimately reconciled by consummation.²¹ Here, the

20. Susan E. Murray, "Women and Castles in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory," *Arthuriana* 13 (2003): 18, 24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27870505>.

21. For example, in *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Chrétien de Troyes describes Yvain's lovesickness as follows: "The effects of this blow are more enduring than those from lance or sword: a sword blow is healed and cured as soon as a doctor sees to it; but

sense of Uther's vulnerability becomes compounded with the unambiguous representation of his calculated deception and ensnarement of Igera: "Igera was deceived by his false appearance and also by the lies he wove so well" (*HRB* 8.507-8; *Deceperat namque illam falsa specie quam assumpserat, deceperat etiam ficticiis sermonibus quos ornate componebat*). Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on Uther's fraudulent appearance and language, indicated by the similar evocations of "falsa specie" and "ficticiis sermonibus," Geoffrey continues to aestheticize Uther's guilt through a final mention of his insatiable desire: "for he [Uther] said that he had stolen out of his castle to look after the thing he most loved and his refuge" (*HRB* 8.508-10; *dicebat enim se egressum esse furtim ab obsesso oppido ut sibi tam dilectae rei atque oppido suo disponderet*). This authorial intrusion is hardly concerned with the moral condemnation of Uther's act and, although it omits attention to Igera's feelings, eliminating the suggestion of her complicity in the bedchamber scene, the overwhelming focus on Uther's romantic impulses reflects Geoffrey's interest in male, rather than female, subjectivity.

The place of Igera in this narrative scheme is obscured through, first, the inattention to her response and, second, the language of adulation attributed to the birth of Arthur. Rather than provide Igera's reaction to Uther, Geoffrey eclipses her voice, remarking simply that Igera "trustingly denied nothing that he asked" when Uther-as-Gorlois pursues her in the bedchamber (*HRB* 8.510; *Unde ipsa credula nichil quod poscebatur abnegavit*). The double negative created by the inclusion of "nichil" and "abnegavit" calls attention to Igera's perspective, but simultaneously prevents the thought that she might be suspicious of Uther's requests. Geoffrey conceals Uther's crime of rape by underlining Igera's passivity. By relegating Igera to the quiet role of a vessel for the creation of Arthur, Geoffrey then strategically endows her with maternal agency as if to refigure her from credulous, passive wife to willing mother: she "conceived the renowned Arthur, whose prowess afterwards secured his fame" (*HRB* 8.510-12; *Concepit . . . celeberrimum uirum illum Arthurum, qui postmodum ut celebris foret mira probitate*

the wound of Love grows worse when it is nearest to its doctor." Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin, 1991), 311.

promuerit). Not only does the certainty with which Geoffrey anticipates Arthur's achievement preclude any lingering scruples in the minds of readers concerning Uther's deceit; in addition, Gorlois's death soon after the rape of Igera legitimizes Uther's return to his true appearance, resumption of kingship, and marriage to Igera. To return to Hanawalt's point that, historically, rape could sometimes precede marriage, Geoffrey implies in a sense that the legal union between Uther and Igera would eradicate the need for moral redress, let alone formal prosecution.

Uther's newfound possession of Tintagel Castle through this marriage suggests the importance of the rape to the feudal ideology of Geoffrey's *Historia*. As Marilyn Desmond writes, in courtly romances in the twelfth century, the woman is often the "conduit" in relationships between noble men, forced to "circulate among men as the [gift] whose exchange insures the social order."²² In the *Historia*, Geoffrey depicts the transfer of Igera from the duke of Cornwall to the British king not only to uphold order but also to render Uther's conquest of land socially acceptable, allowing him to eschew the violence of military battle that otherwise would be necessary to territorial acquisition; furthermore, Geoffrey describes Uther's pity for Gorlois, who is killed in his absence, as if to protect Uther from accusations of violence and to associate the theme of force with his men, rather than Uther himself. Geoffrey invites readers to find surprise and delight in Uther's marriage to Igera by portraying Uther's reaction: "he regretted Gorlois' death, but rejoiced that Igera was now free from the bond of marriage; so he returned to the castle of Tintagel, took it and Igera and fulfilled his desire" (*HRB* 8.532-34; *ob caedem Gorlois doluit sed ob Igernam a maritali copula solutam gausus est. Reuersus itaque ad oppidum Tintagol, cepit illud cepitque Igernam et uoto suo potitus est*). By focusing on Uther's wishes and joys, Geoffrey creates doubt as to Igera's nonconsent. Rape appears to be a matter of narrative expediency, initiating a tradition in which Uther preserves his untarnished status as a noble king and Arthur inherits legitimate political and land-based control.

While Geoffrey does not overtly invoke historical attitudes toward

22. Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 100.

rape, his exculpatory strategies might be better understood in the legal context of the high and late Middle Ages, given that Uther's rape of Igera might have signaled the recollection of both civil law, which, according to Stephen P. Pistono, tended to treat rape as a "property crime against the male under whose authority the victim lived," and canon law, which, beginning in the late eleventh century, claimed that rape was a crime specifically against the victim of assault.²³ Geoffrey does not acknowledge Uther's act as rape, avoiding variants on *raptus* or *contra voluntatem*, meaning "against her will," underscoring Gravidal's view that medieval literature often avoids "a clear and unambiguous signifier of sexual assault."²⁴ Still, as historians have pointed out, the rolls of itinerant justices, who would visit various counties to inquire about legal complaints, highlight the increasingly severe and complex prosecution of rape, and especially the rape of another man's wife.²⁵ As Dunn remarks, "medieval English authorities took sexual violence committed against women seriously," even if "convictions were rare," due to the inferior legal status of women.²⁶ The context of legal documentary culture regarding the rape of women in the Middle Ages would explain why Geoffrey, as well as subsequent historiographers, would rely on diversion methods to turn readers from reticence regarding the rape to enthusiasm about the birth of Arthur. Contravening historical standards of ethical behavior, the violation of Tintagel and Igera alike would require the pretense of a hidden rape or a very good reason for Uther to pursue the satisfaction of his needs. Indeed, Geoffrey's representation of Uther's assault on both person and place indicate the idea of *raptus* as both the confiscation of physical property and the abduction of the woman, the *raptus mulieris*.²⁷ Uther after all perceives "a distinct union

23. Stephen P. Pistono, "Rape in Medieval Europe," *Atlantis* 14 (1989): 41, <https://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/4287/3531>.

24. Gravidal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 2.

25. Many of these documents nevertheless specifically record rapes perpetrated in non-noble contexts, as crimes involving the nobility were tried in private. See John Marshall Carter, *Rape in Medieval England: An Historical and Sociological Study* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

26. Dunn, *Stolen Women*, 52.

27. Corinne J. Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 67. In her thorough review of the

between woman and castle . . . as property and as symbols of the power he has seized from Gorlois,” ultimately blurring the senses of *raptus*.²⁸

As Christine Chism discusses, the discourses of courtly love, which amount to “an impossible cultural fantasy that revolves around an ideal form of aristocratic love, . . . parlay their very impossibility into narrative fecundity.”²⁹ The generative potential of courtly love discourse explains why Wace, the author of the *Roman de Brut*, chose not only to reproduce Galfridian historiography but also to replicate and significantly expand the romance scenes of the *Historia*. Written in Norman French in 1155, the *Roman de Brut* is a vernacular verse adaptation of Geoffrey’s Latin prose *Historia*, and, in fact, the first known vernacular chronicle of the British past. Wace’s treatment of the *Historia* calls attention to the medieval concept of *translatio*, in which historical writers took tremendous leeway to recast received stories into fuller versions; because of such amplification, the medieval historiographer might even be compared to a fiction writer or *trouvère*.³⁰ This latitude in translation is particularly pointed in Wace’s treatment of the Tintagel scene, as he adds details that further aestheticize Geoffrey’s account of Uther’s assault on Igera, thereby making readers even more habituated to the violence looming over Arthur’s birth story. Wace begins this process by developing the

medieval uses of *raptus*, Saunders points out the occasional “link between theft and ravishment.” Also see Caroline Dunn, who argues, “the use of the Latin *rapius* changed over the course of the Middle Ages. . . . the term largely denoted sexual rape in the thirteenth century.” “The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England,” *Speculum* 86, no. 1 (2011): 87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41105501>.

28. Murray, “Women and Castles in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory,” 25. There are two relevant important distinctions to be made: first, between *raptus* as the seizure of an object and *raptus* as a seizure of a person, and second, between *raptus* as a sexual assault and *raptus* as abduction. According to Dunn, in the period from 1066 to 1275, the legal commentators Glanvill and Bracton used *raptus* to define criminal sexual assault, whereas after the thirteenth century, the verb *rapuit* could also refer to the abductions of women. *Stolen Women in Medieval England*, 26–27.

29. Christine Chism, “Courtly Love and its Impossible Implementation: The Narrative Pragmatics of an Ideal,” in *A Companion to British Literature*: vol. 1: *Medieval Literature 700–1450*, ed. Robert DeMaria, Jr., Heesok Chang, and Samantha Zacher (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 130.

30. See Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 206.

courtly image of Igerne, envisioning her as the conventional superlatively beautiful woman: “There was no fairer in all the land: she was courteous, beautiful and wise, and of very high rank” (*RB* 8574-76; Nen ot plus bele en tut le regne; / Curteise esteit e bele e sage / E mult esteit de grant parage).³¹ The *sine qua non* description of Igerne as a model of courtesy, evoking the manners praised by Wace’s Anglo-Norman courtly audience, precedes Wace’s cultivation of the *topos* of love-induced suffering through subsequent portrayals of Uther’s affliction. Because Uther ardently desires Igerne, he cannot conduct his routine activities without the constant thought of her, making him, according to Hans-Erich Keller, “l’image du parfait amant courtois.”³² In a passage on Uther’s wooing strategies, Wace emphasizes Uther’s unifocal gaze:

Mult l’ad al mangier esgardee,
 S’entente i ad tute turnee.
 Se il mangout, se il beveit,
 Se il parlout, se il taiseit,
 Tutes eures de li pensot
 E en travers la regardot.
 En regardant, li surrieit,
 E d’amur signe li faiseit.
 (*RB* 8589-90)

During the meal he kept watching her and gave her all his attention. Whether he ate or drank, spoke or kept silent, he always thought of her, and watched her out of the corner of his eye. As he looked at her, he would smile and make her loving signals.

Uther’s gestures of “amur signe” become connected to his “semblant . . . d’amistied” (*RB* 8594; signs of love), but the mentions of signals

31. All citations and translations of Wace’s *Roman de Brut* derive from Wace’s *Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, ed. Judith Weiss, rev. ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2010).

32. Hans-Erich Keller, “De l’amour dans le *Roman de Brut*,” in *Continuations: Essays on Medieval French Literature and Language in Honor of John L. Grigsby*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Gloria Torrini-Roblin (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1989), 75.

and signs suggest that Uther makes a “semblance” of friendship and that he is himself a false image, a portent of his disguise in Tintagel Castle.

Whereas Geoffrey omits attention to Igerne’s subjectivity, implying her ignorance of Uther’s desire, Wace subtly inscribes in his version of history a hint of Igerne’s receptiveness to the king’s advances. As Keller notes, with this inclusion, Wace displays discomfort with the king’s one-sided longing.³³ He indeed uses the following negation in his portrayal of Igerne’s reaction to Uther, generating ambiguity: “Ygerne issi se conteneit / Qu’el n’otriout ne desdiseit” (*RB* 8595-96; Igerne behaved in such a way as neither to consent nor refuse). Here, he diminishes the sense that she is a victim of selfish wiles by raising the specter of possible consent; the “ne . . . ne” construction creates the possibility that she may in fact reciprocate Uther’s sexual desire. This turn of phrase, similar to litotes, alleviates the pressure to censure Uther for what he does next; if Igerne does not refuse him, as the line indicates, she at once remains passive and becomes responsible for inviting further attention.

The discourses of commodification and possession in Wace’s version nevertheless foreshadow *raptus* again in the sense of rape, abduction, and the seizure of the castle space. Igerne’s consent also becomes irrelevant to the mission of Uther and the male figures surrounding him, reiterating how the trope of rape both fosters and resolves conflicts of a personal and political nature. When Uther calls upon Ulfin to assist him, he complains about his inability to have her in his custody: “Mais jo ne sai cum jo la tinge” (*RB* 8666; But I don’t know how to possess her). While his helplessness and distress are predicated on the absence of Igerne’s consent, Wace elicits sympathy for him, creating the opportunity for readers to support his pursuit of Igerne and even to see his potential “possession” of her as the single hope for alleviating his inner turmoil. When Uther recruits Merlin and promises to compensate the magician for his help, the allusion to physical payment when Wace writes, “Del suen li durra se il vult” (*RB* 8689; He would reward him, if that was his wish), introduces an element of historical realism that clashes with the

33. Keller, 71. “On comprendra que Wace se trouve mal à l’aise confronté à l’amour d’Uther Pendragon pour Igerne.”

hyperbolic and highly formalized expressions of lovesickness and calls attention to the seriousness of Uther's exchange. Rather than accept the form of payment, Merlin obeys Uther's request without any concession: "Tut t'en ferai avoir tun buen, / Ja mar m'en durras rien del tuen" (*RB* 8693-94; I shall make you have all your desire and never shall you give me anything of yours). Repeating the verb *devoir* to highlight both Uther's generosity and Merlin's refusal of payment, conceivably out of loyalty to Uther, Wace gives the impression that Uther is a virtuous ruler worthy of the magician's guidance. Furthermore, because Merlin is an outsider up until this point, his immediate support of Uther, without requiring anything in return, invites readers to sympathize with the king. Merlin describes the new potion he will use to give Uther access to Tintagel, sketching a plan more elaborate than that of Geoffrey's magician in the *Historia*. He emphasizes the high security of the castle to rationalize the deceptive, rather than forceful, measures that must be deployed to procure the duchess. Merlin assumes authority in the hatching of disguise:

Figure d'ume sai muer
 E l'un en l'autre tresturner,
 L'un faz bien a l'autre sembler
 E l'un faiz bien a l'autre per.
 Le cors, le vis, la cuntenance
 E la parole e la semblance
 Que li cuens ad de Cornoaille
 Te ferai tut avoir senz faille.
 (*RB* 8703-10)

I know how to change a man's face and turn one into another;
 I can certainly make one resemble another and be similar to
 him. I will make you assume, without fail, the body, face, bear-
 ing, speech and appearance of the count of Cornwall.

The combination of Merlin's apparent conviction and Uther's lovelorn uncertainty develops a moment of homosocial bonding, but the focus on the effectiveness of Merlin's craft and whether it can fulfill his oath of loyalty to the king only deflects attention toward Igera's naivete. The men's dissembling, "senz faille," is transformed from a potential

crime into a legitimate legal play, a marvel, and a way to win regal favor.

Merlin's administration of the Tintagel plan continues to minimize the responsibility Uther bears. Wace does not mention the king's agency until Merlin has wielded his supernatural influence and the guards of Tintagel have welcomed Uther in Gorlois's form. Only after establishing Uther in a scene of civility and hospitality does Wace narrate succinctly:

Li reis od Ygerne se jut
E Ygerne la nuit cunçut
Le bon rei, le fort, le seür,
Que vus oëz numer Artur.
(*RB* 8733-36)

The king lay with Ygerne, and that night Ygerne conceived that king—the good, strong and resolute—whose name you will know as Arthur.

Quickly shifting the subject from “li reis” to “Ygerne” in these lines, Wace—in a way similar to Geoffrey—redirects attention from the sexual act to the mother's conception of the hero, indicated by the tricolon of praiseworthy adjectives. Uther's departure from the castle corresponds precisely to his erotic satisfaction: “A tant est del chastel eissuz, / Ses desirriers out tuz eüz” (*RB* 8785-86; Thereupon he left the castle, having gained all his desires). Wace's poetic phrasing here substantiates the notion of Tintagel as the womb: just as he enters, conquers, and leaves Tintagel in a territorial victory, he penetrates Igerne's body and abandons it after fulfilling his desire. Achieving his double *raptus*, Uther abandons his disguise and resumes his own form, a reiteration of the trick first found in the *Historia*.

When Wace returns to the subject of Uther and Igerne after narrating the death of Gorlois, he further exculpates Uther from his status as perpetrator. Before the rape scene, Uther's displays of masculine power and prowess depend on his occupation of public and private spaces; whereas he reveals his military might, an important distinction of medieval masculinity, in the open battle against Gorlois, his proof of sexual might resides in the enclosure of the bedchamber. Wace essentially revises the scene of Uther's public aggression and deceptive incursion

into Tintagel by narrating the welcoming of the king into the intimate space of Gorlois's seaside castle. This time, he enters without any barrier from the protectors of the castle: "Les portes del chastel ovrent, / La fortelesce li rendirent" (*RB* 8811-12; They opened the gates of the castle and yielded the fortress up to him). Not only does this opening of architectural structures symbolize the political affirmation of Uther, having now usurped Gorlois's dukedom; Wace also corrects any sense of his wrongdoing by stressing his love for Igerne and their marriage, eschewing mention of Igerne's consent and mutual affection. The final mention of Igerne emphasizes her role as mother, her sentiments rendered irrelevant to the narrative of male success. Wace's conclusion of the scene reflects his discomfort with the sexual act. Keller describes Wace as "notre moraliste" and the bedroom scene as representing for Wace "le plus grand embarras."³⁴ His moralism indeed explains his awkwardly abrupt diversion to the prophetic glance at Arthur's heroism and to the sanctifying act of marriage. He forces readers to overlook the sacrifice Igerne makes and locates her in a category of queens who weave peace and bear children. According to Katherine Olson, such queens, one of two types in medieval historiography, are distinct from "those who incite war and invasion by manipulating their feminine sexuality."³⁵ That Wace removes Igerne from the narrative in spite of the fact that she belongs to the innocuous, rather than transgressive, category of queens thus on the surface seems incongruous with historiographical portraits of women. Nevertheless, Wace eliminates her character probably because, while she does not pose the threat of war, she is nevertheless a reminder of the illicit circumstances of the hero's origins. The narrative eclipses Igerne almost immediately after Uther satisfies his romantic desire. Uther meanwhile remains, nevertheless, because of his pivotal political desire: anticipating male progeny, the king invites readers to look forward to the birth of Arthur, a mechanism of forgetting Igerne. In his final mention of Igerne, Wace stresses the temporality of the event of birth as if to emphasize Igerne's short-lived appearance, writing, "La nuit ot un

34. Keller, 72.

35. Katherine Olson, "Gwendolyn and Estrildis: Invading Queen in British Historiography," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 44, no. 1 (2008): 45, <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.1708>.

fiz cunceü / E al terme ad un fiz eü” (RB 8815-16; She had conceived a son that night and in due course bore him). The abruptness with which Igera is lost from narrative time and Arthur is permanently embedded within it emerges next in the description of the future king: “Artur ot nun; de sa bunté / Ad grant parole puis esté” (RB 8817-18; His name was Arthur: his greatness has been celebrated ever since). The juxtaposition of “la nuit” to characterize Igera’s temporal moment and “puis esté” to describe Arthur’s eternal impression symbolizes Wace’s persuasive relegation of the mother to the margins of historiography and myth-making.

Igera becomes noticeably more complicit in Uther’s lovesickness in Lazamon’s thirteenth-century *Brut*, primarily derived from Wace’s *Brut* yet once more a *translatio* of prior materials. Whereas Wace raises the possibility of Igera’s reciprocal flirtation in the scene of the London feast in the *Historia*, Lazamon magnifies her agency by describing how she meets Uther’s courtly gaze: “heo hine leofliche biheold” (*Brut* 9254; she looked kindly upon him).³⁶ Although the semantic range of Middle English *leofliche*, derived from Old English, ambiguates the insinuation of Igera’s feeling, the potential for the word to signify “lovingly” or “affectionately,” and “with kindly attention or favorable will,” nonetheless proposes the idea that Igera actively invites his attention.³⁷ Subsequently, Lazamon is careful to excuse himself from potential blame by qualifying the a-verse with the b-verse: “an inæt whær he hine luuede” (*Brut* 9254; but I know not whether she loved him!). Lazamon is thus able to suggest that a relationship forms between Uther and Igera with Igera’s consent and even willingness, immediately altering the narrative to accommodate a more developed account of the bedroom scene, while protecting himself through the *topos* of authorial uncertainty.

Lazamon also departs from earlier material by elaborating on Wace’s

36. All subsequent in-text citations of Lazamon’s *Brut* derive from Lazamon, *Layamon’s Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon’s Brut*, ed. and trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (London: University of Exeter Press, 2001).

37. *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001), online edition in *Middle English Compendium*, ed. Frances McSparran, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000–2018), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED24983>, accessed 9 August 2020.

description of Merlin's discussion of strategy with Uther and Ulfin. In the moments preceding the bedtrick, the author validates Uther's later need for disguise by remarking that Uther was unable to hide the evidence of his lovesickness and introduces a novel dimension to Ulfin's counsel that offers further justification for the Tintagel plot. Ulfin tells Uther that he cannot seek to win Igera's heart through the seizure of Gorlois's land and the destruction of his kin, as such a mode of retaliation would upset Igera. After all, Igera thinks more about the stability of the public realm than herself, as she demonstrates when she observes the feud between Uther and Gorlois: "Ygerne wes særi and sorhful an heorte / þat swa moni mon for hire sculden habben þer lure" (*Brut* 9290-91; Ygerne was sorrowful and sad at heart that so many men for her sake should lose their lives there). A crucial addition to the speech Ulfin gives in Laȝamon's *Brut* is indeed the praise of Igera. Preserving the image of a virtuous female love prospect for Uther, Ulfin says, "Ygærne is wel idon, a swiðe treowe wimmon; / swa wes hire moder and ma of þa kunne" (*Brut* 9359-60; Ygerne is a good and very faithful woman, as her mother was and others of that family). Ironically, while Ulfin warns against the violent repossession of Gorlois's territory and the overt destruction of Gorlois's kin, his inscription of Igera into a pure and moral matriarchal genealogy renders her an appropriate target for Uther and a fitting mother for the future British king. Ulfin's approach to Igera's feelings is strictly tactical, urging Uther to conform to socially acceptable appearances in his pursuit of Igera while also deflecting attention from Uther's own duplicity: Uther's method will be at once less violent but nevertheless involve deception and rape. So, when Ulfin presents pillaging the land and the castle as a poor strategic option, he justifies the alternative of disguise as a less forceful and therefore superior method. Finally, Laȝamon legitimizes Merlin's magic bedtrick through not only Ulfin, but also the hermit, unique to Laȝamon's *Brut*, who finds Merlin and announces Uther's promising future: "on hir he scal streonen þat scal wide sturien; / he scal streonien hire on ænne swiðe sellichne mon" (*Brut* 9404-5; on her he shall beget one who shall rule far and wide; he shall beget on her a most wonderful man). The prophecy of Arthur demands Merlin's manipulation and moreover vindicates Uther's act of physical aggression.

In one of the most substantial adaptations of his source, Lazamon alters the bedroom episode to condone Uther's deception. The voyeurism of this private scene at Tintagel is enhanced by the dialogue between Uther and Igerne and the details of their interaction: readers look in on the bedroom as Igerne prepares a bed "fit for a king," and actively lies down next to Uther-as-Gorlois once he is already in bed:

Ygærne beh to bure	and lætte bed him makien;
wes þat kinewurðe bed	al mid palle ouerbræde.
Þe king hit wel bihedde	and eode to his bedde;
and Ygærne læi adun	bi Uðere Pendragun.
Nu wende Ygerne ful iwis	þat hit weoren Gorlois;
þurh neuere nænes cunnes þing	no icneou heo Vðere þene king.

(*Brut* 9502-7)

Ygerne went to the bedroom and had his bed made; the bed, fit for a king, was all spread with rich coverings. The king looked at it with pleasure and went to his bed; and Ygerne lay down beside Uther Pendragon. Now Ygerne truly believed that it was Gorlois; in no way whatsoever did she recognize Uther the king.

Lazamon's account makes the issue of Igerne's knowledge deeply ambiguous. By describing the bed as "kinewurþ," or "worthy of a king, royal, noble,"³⁸ Lazamon hints at the possibility of Igerne's awareness that the man in her bedchamber is Uther, not her non-royal husband, despite the fact that the final sentence underscores Igerne's sense that it is her husband. The ambiguity also diminishes the sense of violence attached to the event of rape by creating the possibility that Igerne chooses to lie with him.

Lazamon thus makes Uther the subject in a series of clauses that suggest a degree of aggressiveness absent from prior accounts, emphasizing not a pardon for the deceit, but instead a recognition of his masculinity:

þe king hire wende to	swa wapmon sculde to wimmon do.
and hæfde him to done	wið leofuest wimmonne,

38. *Middle English Compendium*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED24296>, accessed 7 August 2020.

and he streonede hire on ænne selcuðne mon,
kingen alre kenest þæ æuere com to monnen;
and he wes on ærde ærður ihaten.
(*Brut* 9508-12)

The king went unto her as a man should to a woman, and had his way with the woman most dear to him, and he begot on her a marvellous man, the boldest king who ever was born; and in this land he was called Arthur.

Like Geoffrey and Wace, *Lazamon* combines the allusion to Arthur's wondrous kingship with the narration of assault, as if to extenuate Uther's offense. The verb "streonen," which means both "to acquire gain" and "to copulate" or "to father," celebrates both his success in seizing territory and a wife, as well as his generative capacity.³⁹ Whereas Geoffrey and Wace assign childbearing agency to Igera, *Lazamon* locates the power to procreate solely with Uther through the use of the phrase "he streonen" and further accentuates his virility by linking the act to the creation of "ænne selcuðne mon." The naming of Arthur as king in this inceptive instance emphasizes filiation between father and son, eliminating Igera from the genealogical formula.

One may choose to read the aftermath of the Tintagel scene in *Lazamon's Brut* as a moment of divine justice: Uther falls ill after Arthur's birth, ostensibly the consequence of his duplicity and rape of Igera. By inviting readers to moralize this eventuality, *Lazamon* might have sought to pledge his own condemnation of fraud, in the tradition of Christian authoritative writers, including Augustine, as well as ancient epic authors.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there is little evidence in *Lazamon's* text that Uther's deceit causes his sickness, and in fact, the *Brut* records just the opposite by ensuring a fortuitous extension of the king's life: "Longe luede Vðer mid muchelere blisse her, / mid gode griðe, mid gode friðe, freo on kinedome" (*Brut* 9620-21; Uther lived long here in great content, in good peace and quiet, at ease in his kingdom). Only when Uther

39. *Middle English Compendium*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED43281>, accessed 7 August 2020.

40. See Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stuck, 2004), 25-40.

becomes an “ald mon” (*Brut* 9622; an old man) does he fall sick, and even then, he lives for another seven years, so that he may see his son rise to a position of fame and glory. By contrast, Lazamon’s focus precludes a story of Igerna’s motherhood, deemed unimportant to the narrative of male political continuity; magical creatures instead nurture Arthur immediately after his birth, usurping her role. Lazamon writes, “þe time com þe wes icoren; þa wes Arður iboren. / Sone swa he com on eorðe, aluen hine iuengen” (*Brut* 9607-8; The time predestined came; then Arthur was born. As soon as he came upon earth, fairies took charge of him). Igerna, but not Uther, is forgotten at the inceptive moment of Arthurian magic; the fairies, rather than the mother, endow Arthur with the gifts that grant him knightly and kingly success. If, according to Kim M. Phillips, medieval English common law emphasized the connection between rape and the “assaulted body,” not just the “unconsenting will,” then Lazamon’s total erasure of Igerna’s body rids the beginning of the text—the foundation of Arthur’s line—of rape.⁴¹

The *translationes* of the Tintagel episode seem to make Uther’s deception increasingly tolerable, a function of Merlin’s portentous sorcery, and the rape itself important to ensuring political hegemony. The scene thus evokes scholarly understandings of the fundamental function of rape in Arthurian romance. For instance, Laura Finke and Martin Schictman, in their interpretation of the rape sequence of Lazamon’s Mont St. Michel Giant, argue that “the narrative of sexual violence—male on female violence—is constitutive of historical writing as a whole . . . [but] pivotal in the economy of the Arthurian legend.”⁴² Similarly, Gravdal writes, “rape (either attempted rape or the defeat of a rapist) constitutes one of the episodic units used in the construction of a romance,” and specifically “Arthurian romance.”⁴³ Unlike the giant of St. Michel, however, Uther

41. Kim M. Phillips, “Written on the Body: Reading Rape from the Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. Noël James Menuge (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 125.

42. Laura Finke and Martin Schictman, “The Mont St. Michael Giant: Sexual Violence and Imperialism in the Chronicles of Wace and Layamon,” in *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

43. Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 43.

embodies nobility and civility, and his disguise produces the illusion that it is not really he who enacts violence; nevertheless, the Tintagel episode reinforces the idea that romance often hinges on sexual violence. That Igera disappears after this incident does not prevent her, as the rape survivor, from surviving in the text to live with the trauma, a subject Suzanne M. Edwards explores thoroughly, offering up readings of multiple iterations of narratives of the survival of the victim.⁴⁴ Furthermore, readers of the Brut narratives live with the trauma, reading and rereading the sequence in euphemistic terms. Whereas Edwards analyzes medieval textual instances that “urge both men and women to identify with scenes of survival,” in the Brut tradition, authors do not permit time or space for readers to contemplate the pain and immorality of the treacherous act.⁴⁵ The repetition of the scene—and moreover, what appears to be the increasing condonation of the sexual act—does not provide the Freudian “talking cure” to help readers work through and thus heal from Igera’s experience of victimization, but instead accustoms readers to the political and social justifications for rape.

Centuries after Lazamon’s *Brut*, John Milton rewrites the dynamics of disguise and sexual power at Tintagel when he chooses to credit Igera, rather than Uther, with the conception of Arthur. Drastically departing from the plotline and tenor of the medieval Brut narratives, Milton highlights Uther’s duplicity and Igera’s resilience, no longer presenting the rape euphemistically nor neglecting the mother’s victimhood. Milton’s revision appears in “Damon’s Epitaph,” a Latin pastoral elegy he composed in response to the death of his friend Charles Diodati; in contrast to the original Galfridian treatment of the myth, he describes Igraine as “heavy with Arthur by fatal fraud, / The lying countenance and Gorlois’s arms assumed, Merlin’s device.”⁴⁶ Milton imagines Igera’s pregnant womb as a weight manufactured by deception, and attributes the synecdochal “lying countenance” to Uther, whose name he never

44. See Suzanne M. Edwards, *The Afterlives of Rape in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

45. Edwards, 12.

46. John Milton, “Damon’s Epitaph,” trans. William Shullenberger, in *Milton’s Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jason Rosenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 166–68.

mentions. This more tragic interpretation represents a poetic counterpoint to the compulsive recursion of the traumatic bedchamber scene found in medieval historiography, a subtle yet seminal attempt to recognize Uther's crime.

The distinction between Milton's account of Tintagel and the prior narratives of Geoffrey, Wace, and *Lazamon* underscores the extent to which the conventional themes of romance, including courtliness and dynastic foundation, help veil instances of male aggression and sometimes legitimize such instances to serve narratives of male heroic success within their historiography. While Milton presents the circumstances of Arthur's birth as a tragic and traumatic precursor to the reign of a legendary king, the medieval Brut narratives applaud Uther's triumph even as they demonstrate discomfort with his duplicity through narrative tactics of evasion. The blurring of genres, and more specifically the interpolation of romance into history, reveals how the audience might have been susceptible to the impulse to neglect Igera, as well, reminding readers today of the value of reading against the grain. Such a reading might better illuminate what medieval romance can often obscure: the difference between a romance heroine's candid consent and her victimhood. Recognizing this disparity is consequential when it comes to recovering from the trauma of literary transmission and to understanding resonances between medieval and modern subjects, as well as readers. After all, to quote LaCapra, "there is an important sense in which the after effects—the hauntingly possessive ghosts—of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways, affect everyone."⁴⁷

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47. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xi.