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... years about the sources of the poem
and how these supposed sources were knit together in the surviving
version of the poem. Early in this century, L. L. Schücking averred
that the repetition signaled composite composition, an argument
refuted by R. W. Chambers in his *Beowulf: An Introduction to the*

Rape and Marriage in Richars li biaus

Linda Marie Rouillard

In the thirteenth-century romance *Richars li biaus* by mestre Requis, the King of Frisia encloses his beautiful young daughter Clarissa in a garden to protect her virginity. One night, Clarissa is given spiced wine as treatment for illness and falls into a deep sleep. A young knight, Louis le Preux, climbs the wall and has intercourse with the sleeping woman who awakens only when the knight has satisfied himself and is on his way out of the garden. Curiously enough, she does not wake up frightened. Instead, she wakes up knowing she is pregnant and requests that the knight identify himself:

"Connoistre weil ton estre et toi,
car je sai bien qu'enchaïnte m'as." (404-05)¹

"I wish to know who you are,
For I know very well that I am pregnant by you."

However, Louis is in too much of a hurry to indicate his name. Richars, the son conceived of this shameful union, is condemned to death by the King of Frisia, and, like Oedipus, will be saved and raised by strangers. However, unlike his tragic predecessor, Richars will recognize his father before the fatal blow in their confrontation, and he will subsequently save his mother from over-eager suitors, but not by marrying her himself. Instead, Richars will unite his mother and father in marriage, a curious ending to a relationship that begins with what we would call rape. But would this episode have been considered rape in the thirteenth century?

Kathryn Gravdal has surveyed the lexicon used to signify rape in medieval French. The Old French verb *ravir*, deriving from **rapire* (which derives from *rapere*), generally means "to abduct, to carry off" and does not designate rape until about mid-twelfth century in the form of *rap* and later *rat*.² James Brundage points out that by the end of the twelfth century, Ivo of Chartres considered *raptus*

to be both abduction *and* rape.³ The more common expression is *esforcer* (deriving from *fortiare or *fortia) with its dual meaning of "to strive" and "to rape."⁴ Philippe de Beaumanoir defined the term in the following manner:

"Femme *efforcier* si est quant aucuns prent a force carnele compaignie a feme contre le volenté de le feme, et sor ce qu'ele fet tout son pooir du deffendre soi."⁵

Only in the seventeenth century does *viol* come to mean "rape."⁶

In *Richars li biaus*, the word *ravir* is indeed used, referring to the father's fear of losing his daughter to an abductor. He encloses her in the garden because:

pour sa biauté redouta
que par engien ne fust ravie,
u fust par terre u par navie.

(186-88)

on account of her beauty he feared
that by some ruse she would be abducted,
whether it be by land or by ship.

This enclosure makes Clarissa only that much more appealing and more symbolic, for, as other critics have pointed out, both virgins and lands are assaulted and raped.⁷ In this conflation of lady and land, Clarissa will attract the attention of Louis and then the barbaric sultan of Carsidone, who hopes to establish himself in Frisia by attacking the castle and then abducting the king's daughter, "par forche avoir" (2797). Clarissa will be protected from this second potential rape by Richars, who kills the sultan in battle.

The narrator alludes to Helen of Troy, using the same vocabulary when describing the father's anxiety that Clarissa:

ne fust par aucune guille
aussi ravie con Helainne.

(210-11)

not by any ruse be
abducted as Helen was.

Since the physical carrying off of Helen launched the disastrous and prolonged war of Troy, the allusion to Helen reminds us here that possession of a woman often underlies political conflicts. In contrast, the resolution of this romance in which the female protagonist wants to marry her rapist is presented as a much more economical and humane dénouement than a grand-scale, decade-long war.

Clarissa is portrayed as consenting, albeit, after the fact; she is the lascivious and garrulous female who can never have enough sex or talk, as evidenced by this appeal to Louis:

"Chevalier, frere, par ta vie!
 Esta un poi, ne t'en va mie,
 mais vien parler un poi a moi.
 Connoistre weil ton estre et toi,
 car je sai bien qu'enchainte m'as.
 A moi parole, n'en va pas,
 car je te jur que tu n'as garde."

(401-07)

"Sir Knight, my brother, on your life!
 Stay a while, do not go,
 but come and talk with me for a while.
 I want to know who you are,
 for I know you have impregnated me.
 Talk to me, don't go,
 for I swear you have no need to fear."

Here, upon awaking, Clarissa expresses no pain, fear or outrage, only curiosity and concern about the social status of the perpetrator and a desire to chat. In fact, she is the one to offer reassurance to the trembling Louis. Only later when she recounts the episode to her nurse does she express, briefly, a sense of having been assaulted or at least of having been wronged:

"Uns chevaliers fu or cheens,
 dist la puchille, qui m'a morte;
 mon puchelage o soi en porte,
 et si sai bien qu'enchainte sui
 ne ne sai nulle riens de lui,
 s'il est vilains u gentieus hon;
 tost en avrai pierdu mon non."

(432-38)

"There was a knight inside [the garden],
 said the maiden, who 'killed' me.
 he took my maidenhood with him,
 and thus I know very well I am pregnant
 and I know nothing about him,
 whether he is a commoner or a gentleman;
 I will have soon lost my reputation."

These two seemingly incongruent moments from *Richars* are a very good example of what E. Jane Burns calls "resistant double discourse": a discourse in which "female voices, fashioned by a male author to represent misogynous fantasies of female corporeality, can also be heard to rewrite the tales in which they appear."⁸ The first passage (lines 401-07) reflects the traditional misogynist view of woman, but in the second passage, line 433 allows us to hear, momentarily, in the use of the word "morte," the woman's voice speak of the assault and her pain.

Curiously enough, Clarissa's father does not hold her responsible for her pregnancy and never resorts to blaming her for "seducing" the knight. Consigned to a new Eden, she is remitted to the protection of God:

"Fille, dist il, de diviers fruis
 te pués en ce vregiet deduire,
 n'est nus qui laiens te puist nuire.
 A Dieu te commanch je, Clarisse,
 qui toi deffenge de tous visse."

(236-40)

"Daughter, he says, of many fruits
 in this orchard you may take pleasure,
 for there is not one here which could harm you.
 I commend you to God, Clarissa,
 that he may defend you from all evil."

As with the first Eden, this enclosure leads only to desire and disaster. But the King of Frisia does not condemn the new Eve for this illegitimate birth; rather, he reserves his anger for the father and the child:

"Se puis connoistre
 qui engenrra ichel enfant,
 g'i vengerai mon mautalent,
 car j'ochirai et fil et pere
 pour ce que ma fille ont fait mere."

(486-90)

"If I can just find out
 who fathered this child,
 I will visit my anger upon him,
 for I will kill son and father
 because they have made a mother of my daughter."

In a brief moment, Clarissa does seem to waiver and doubt her own innocence when Richards asks her for the name of his father and she must respond that she does not know. Clarissa prefaces the story of her deep sleep, while Louis took advantage of her, by saying:

"Si fait, biaux filz," ce dist la bielle,
 "nus n'est si fiers qui ne canchielle;
 cancheler me fist meskeanche,
 mais teus mesceanche est ceanche;
 se ne fust celle mesceanche
 tu ne portaissez mie lanche."

(2951-56)

"It is such, dear son," says the lovely woman,
 "that no one is so perfect that he does not falter;
 misfortune made me falter,
 but such misfortune is good luck;
 if not for this misfortune
 you would not be carrying a lance today."

Thus, even if this first part of the romance does not use the more precise locution (*femme efforcer*), it is clear that Louis le Preux is indeed perceived at various narrative moments as having wronged Clarissa and her father, but is he perceived as having committed a crime in the legal sense? There is no indication of violence and no evidence of resistance or protest or refusal on Clarissa's part. Does this absence of rejection automatically indicate consent? When Louis comes upon the sleeping girl, he considers this very question:

"Hé, Dieus! dist il, con buer fu nés
 quant en tel lieu sui assenés
 et quant j'averai sans esconde
 la plus bielle ki soit ou monde;
 mais se nus i vient de sa gieste,
 pierdre i porai mout bien la tiest."

(353-58)

"My God, he says, I was born under a lucky star
 to have happened upon such a place
 and to have without refusal
 the most beautiful girl in the world:
 but if anyone from her household comes,
 I shall indeed lose my head."

For Louis, it is the lack of dissent that determines the "legality" of his actions, just as in a recent Brown University case, despite evidence that the woman was intoxicated, the young man felt that the absence of "no" automatically meant "yes."⁹ Instead of acting as a chivalrous protector, Louis has become a predator-knight.

However, in spite of the problematic beginning of their relationship, Clarissa longs to marry Louis, which presents something of a puzzle to the modern reader. Why would a woman, and an aristocratic woman at that, want to marry a man who had sex with her in her sleep, when she never had the opportunity to express her consent? In essence, she has been treated in a manner similar to the way knights treat shepherdesses in the *pastourelle*¹⁰ and in the manner advocated by Andreas Capellanus when discussing peasant women:

And if you should, by some chance, fall in love with some of their [peasant] women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force.¹¹

Does this incongruency, that is, Clarissa's desire to marry Louis versus her earlier reference to an assault by him, simply reflect the belief that all women secretly want to be raped, to be taken? For in Ovid's words:

First: be a confident soul, and spread your nets with assurance.
Women can always be caught; that's the first rule of the game.
Sooner would birds in the spring be silent, or locusts in August,
Sooner would hounds run away when the fierce rabbits pursue,
Than would a woman, well-wooed, refuse to succumb to a lover;
She'll make you think she means No! while she is planning her Yes!¹²

It is understandable that Clarissa fears the sultan of Carsidone who has been plotting to kill her father and abduct her. But why does she long instead to marry Louis?

Et la puchielle, ki ce voit,
en a juré son sauvement
c'ains i morra a grant tourment
qu'elle prenge a mari nullui,
s'elle n'a a baron chelui
qui ou vregiet jut awec lui
le jour que si fort i dormi,
car de lui demora enchainte;
et de ce est elle mout plainte
qu'elle nul autre homme ne wet.

(1876-85)

And the maiden, who sees this,
swore on her honor
that she will die a terrible death
before she takes any husband,
unless she takes as a husband the one
who lay with her
that day she slept so soundly,
for she was left pregnant by him;
and for this reason she is to be pitied
for she wants no other man.

Clarissa does express shame over her defilement, which in the Middle Ages could be mitigated by marriage, hence one possible explanation for her desire to be married to Louis.¹³ In response to Richards' question about the identity of his father, Clarissa suggests that she failed in some way or "faltered," (see above, line 2953). After all, St. Augustine, defending the innocence of Christian women raped by pagan tormentors, ultimately undermines his argument on the supremacy of the will over any bodily sensations with his discussion of Lucretia:

What if—only she could know—notwithstanding the young villain's violent advances, she was lured by her own lust to acquiesce and, stung with self-reproach, chose death as the way of atonement?¹⁴

But another way of understanding Clarissa's desire to marry her rapist may be related to the then contemporary medical views. Given that conception was medically held to be possible only if the woman also "ejaculated"¹⁵ or experienced pleasure, perhaps Clarissa's desire to marry Louis is simply consistent with contemporary understanding of the reproductive process. In the late twelfth century, William of Conches struggled to explain why prostitutes did not conceive in the course of their encounters while rape victims sometimes did: prostitutes had no pleasure and thus emitted no seed, while the rape victim might just experience pleasure, emit seed or semen and thus become pregnant.¹⁶ Joan Cadden cites the following passage from the *Prose Salernitan Questions* on the issue of rape and conception:

If in the beginning the act displeases the women raped, yet in the end it pleases [them] because of the weakness of the flesh. For there are two wills in humans, namely the rational and the natural, which we often see fighting within us. [What] is displeasing to reason is pleasing to the flesh. And if, therefore, there is not the rational will in the raped women, there is nevertheless [the will] of carnal pleasure.¹⁷

John Baldwin also summarizes some of the medieval medical views of conception, particularly in the context of rape: while

there may be no rational intellectual consent, the physical sensation of pleasure can still be elicited by rape and thus, in the medieval view, the woman can emit a seed and become pregnant.¹⁶ When Clarissa wakes up knowing that she is pregnant, the medieval reader would have understood the implication: Clarissa's certainty that she is pregnant might indicate her understanding that even if her will or conscious intellect did not consent, her body did. It is also significant that the word used to describe the sexual act in line 1881 (see above) is no longer *ravir* or even *tolir*, but *jut*, the past participle of *gesir*, defined by Godefroy as "coucher avec une personne d'un autre sexe, avoir un commerce charnel." The term *jut* is thus for the modern reader a decisive white-washing of the act, implying a bit more active participation on Clarissa's part. But to the medieval reader, such a shift in vocabulary would have simply reflected the facts of the natural world.

In a parodic style recalling the inversions of *Aucaussin et Nicolette*, trauma for the female protagonist (at least according to the narrator) seems to be reduced to a question of identity, social class and reputation while the male perpetrator focuses on his ordeal. When the knight later recounts his version of the story to Richars, he does acknowledge that he wronged Clarissa:

"et tant li fis je de damage
que li toli son puchelage" (3723-24)

"and I so wronged her
that I took her maidenhood,"

using the lexicon for theft. While Clarissa does not describe any fear she might have experienced upon waking up and discovering that a knight has had sex with her during her sleep, Louis gives a clear description of *his* own fear – fear of being caught:

"mais grant paour, ains qu'en ississe,
oy que la tieste ne pierdisse." (3731-32)

"but while leaving, I had great fear
that I might lose my life."

That Louis fears the loss of life following his act is indeed realistic, for in the civil court of the thirteenth century, the rapist, in theory, risked the sentence of hanging.¹⁹ The depiction of his terror stands in marked contrast to the absence of fear in the woman's statement, which centers on her shame and potential loss of reputation.

In contrast to the "garden conception" and the unconscious mother-to-be, reminiscent of many a conception in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Requis's second rape narrative now focuses on the terror of the victim, a second young noble woman held down, about to be raped by two men. Here, the narrator carefully describes her fear and her cries for help which win her the aid of two of Richars' companions:²⁰

Tant chevauchent li compaignon
 qu'il s'arriestent en un royon,
 s'oÿrent la puchielle braire;
 chil le vorrent a forche faire,
 li uns par force le tenoit
 et li autres s'appareilloit,
 et celle a haute vois s'escrie:
 "Secourés moy, Sainte Marie!" (3089-96)

His companions rode such a distance
 that they stopped on a hill,
 and heard the cries of the maiden;
 they saw the one trying to rape her,
 one held her by force
 and the other was preparing [to rape her],
 and the maiden cries out in a loud voice:
 "Holy Mary, save me!"

Here, there is much less ambiguity with the expression *forche faire* and *force* repeated. And in this passage, the narrator echoes concern for the young woman, in fact more than her companion knight who was assaulted a few lines earlier by the same men:

"si sai bien qu'elle ert hui honnie;
 honnie ert par lor outrage,
 mais il m'est plus de son damage
 qu'il ne me soit de ma douleur." (3070-73)

"I know now that she will be dishonored;
 she will be dishonored by their crime,
 but I am more distressed by the offenses [that will be]
 done to her
 than I am by my own pain."²¹

The knight returns the reader to the vocabulary of honor and property. The narrator's description, however, provides a stark contrast to the medieval narratives of woman's tendency to make false accusations of rape: la Dame Amoureuse in *Le Chevalier de la Charette* forces Lancelot to rescue her from a contrived sexual assault.²² Queen Eufemie in *Le Roman de Silence* avenges the refusal of her advances to the apparently male Silence by accusing him/her of rape.²³ Lanval must defend himself against the false accusations of a rejected and thoroughly disgruntled queen.²⁴ Here, Requis has unequivocally depicted the violence of rape and the innocence of the victim. And indeed the key here is the victim's clear resistance and screams for help, as well as the context: a forest, rather than an enclosed garden or identifiable property and witnesses.

By recognizing his father, Richars validates Louis' "claim" to the King of Frisia's kingdom. In a sense, legitimacy here flows from the bottom up, as Richars imposes/proposes the marriage between his father and mother:

"wege c'on fache un mariage
 de ma mere qui mout est sage
 et de mon pere c'ay trouvé..."
 Richars prent par le poing sa mere
 si le donna Loÿs son pere;
 un archevesque a on mandé,
 se li a Richars commandé
 que les noches fache; si fist.

(4109-21)

"I wish a marriage be made
 between my mother who is worthy
 and my father whom I have just found..."
 Richars takes his mother by the hand
 and gave her to Louis his father;
 an archbishop was summoned,

and Richars asked him
to perform the wedding ceremony; and so it was done.

Richars' desire/need to give his mother to his father in marriage is an effort to establish, finally, his legitimacy, to relieve his anxiety of paternity as experienced in an earlier encounter with the sultan.²⁵ The latter presses a traditionally sensitive button:

"Riens ne te prise,
car t'ies bastars; se jel seüsse,
ja a toy combatus ne fusse,
car je m'en sui trop avilliés;
tu meïsmes ne sés qui t'ies,
que tu ne sés qui est tes pere,
aussi ne fait mie ta mere."

(2802-08)

"In no way do I respect you,
for you are a bastard; had I known this,
I never would have undertaken combat with you,
for I have debased myself in so doing;
you yourself do not know who you are,
you do not know who your father is,
nor does your mother."

Both men then continue by insulting each other's god. But this accusation of "bastardy" is a significant one. The sultan also hurls about "fil a putain" (2432), although it is difficult to know exactly whom he is calling to arms: his own men or the enemy. The latter insult is used by Richars against murderers who ambushed him with false hospitality (3405). And finally, after the death of his grandfather, King of Frisia, Richars seizes the crown from a hopeful contender:

"Fil a putain, fait il, revois!
Qui doit dont avoir la couronne,
fors que je seus en ma piersonne?
Car Richars sui, le niés le roy,
cui il en poist, il ert a moy."

(5430-35)

"Son of a whore," he says, "wait!
Who should now have the crown,
except for me alone?
For I am Richars, the grandson of the king,
regardless of whom it frustrates, [the crown] is mine."

Richars has the final word in the contest over honorable mothers. The romance ends twenty-four lines later after our hero has put the usurper in his place, and Louis and his mother in their place, on the throne of Frisia. As legitimacy flows from the bottom up, so does inheritance when the father is crowned king of Frisia by his son. Richars himself then retires to Montorgueil where he can rest on his laurels. He finally has a response to the sultan's earlier insult: he does know who he is and who his parents are.

Gravdal has written of Chrétien's treatments of rape in his romances:

...that their ultimate effect is to turn the audience away from the consequences of sexual violence, away from a reflection on the physical suffering of women, and to focus its attention on the chivalric dilemmas of male feudal culture.²⁶

Requis likewise uses issues of sexuality and consent as a background against which male bonding takes place. The sexual encounter resulting in Richars' conception may have occurred without his mother's conscious consent, but the plot of the romance focuses on his recovery of his absent father, on the trauma of his anonymous paternity, in contrast to narratives such as *La Fille du Comte de Pontieu* or *Florence de Rome* which do portray the female protagonist's shock and suffering following a sexual assault.²⁷ The narration of the so-called adventure in a sealed garden is the moment in which Louis unwittingly reveals to Richars his paternity. As an insignia, the *récit* becomes the means by which the son can identify his father, a perverted coat of arms. Rather than strike a blow upon the person who dishonored his mother, Richars throws his arms around Louis.

In this romance, rape becomes a dilemma for the offspring, and marriage resolves the identity crisis for the son. In contrast to the Arthurian romances where rape becomes a testing ground "so that

knights can prove their mettle,"²⁸ in this romance, rape is presented as grounds for marriage.

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NOTES

- 1 Richars Li Biaus, *Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Anthony J. Holden (Paris: Champion, 1983). All translations are mine.
- 2 *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991) 4.
- 3 *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 209.
- 4 Gravidal 3.
- 5 As cited by Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire le l'ancienne langue française du IXe au XVe siècles*, vol. 3 (Paris: Slatkine, 1982) 457.
- 6 Gravidal 4.
- 7 Leo C. Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*," *Arethusa*, vol. 11 (1978): 232; Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 10.
- 8 *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993) 7.
- 9 See Ben Gose, "Brown University Faces New Accusations that it Mishandles Sex-Offense Charges," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 9 May, 1997: A43.
- 10 Kathryn Gravidal, "The Poetics of Rape Law in Medieval France," *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 209.
- 11 *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Parry (New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 150.
- 12 Ovid, *The Art of Love*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1957) 113.
- 13 Gratian, *Causa 36*, describes a rape followed by marriage with parental consent, as cited by Anthony Melinkas, *The Corpus of Miniatures in the Manuscripts of the Decretum Gratiani* (Rome: Istitutum Gratianum, 1975) 1141.
- 14 St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1958) 54.
- 15 Vern L. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," *Viator* 4 (1973): 490, as well as his article "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994) 39-40. See also John Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994) 134-35.
- 16 Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 142.
- 17 Cadden 95, as cited from MS O. 2.5., fol. 76ra, Cambridge University, Trinity.
- 18 Baldwin 135.
- 19 Gravidal, "The Poetics of Rape Law" 213-16.

- 20 Thérèse Bouché, "De 'l'Enfant Trouvé' à 'l'Enfant Prouvé': Richars li biaux, une mise en roman du mythe d'Oedipe au XIIIe siècle," *Sénéfiance* 26 (1989): 153, convincingly suggests that because Richars is a witness rather than a participant in this rescue, it represents his "refus inconscient de 'tuer' le père, le désir de lui donner la possibilité de se racheter."
- 21 I have translated "ert" with the future rather than the imperfect since the damsel's knight witnessed only her abduction and assumes she will be raped as well. It is Richars' companions who offer to pursue the abductors and who witness and interrupt the attempted rape. See above, lines 3089-96.
- 22 Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1981), lines 1058-1191.
- 23 *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992) lines 4037-96.
- 24 "Lanval," *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke, trans. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990) lines 261-330.
- 25 In contrast, T. Bouché suggests that this episode is Richars' attempt to eclipse his father and even "devenir le père de son père" (154). See also 157-58.
- 26 Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens* 67.
- 27 *La Fille du Comte de Pontieu: Conte en Prose*, ed. Clovis Brunel (Paris: Champion, 1923) and *Florence de Rome: Chanson d'Aventure*, ed. A. Wallenshold (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907).
- 28 Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens* 44.

