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Lazamon's Four Helens: Female Figurations of Nation in the *Brut*¹

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Like its predecessor texts by writers like Wace, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Bede, the early thirteenth-century Lazamon's *Brut* is a medieval national history that tells the story of 'a people', in this case, the British (Celts) who preceded both Anglo-Saxon and Norman rule of the island now known as Great Britain.² In this national historiographical tradition, the 'British people' constitute the work's main character. Individual members of the people-group come and go in the text with varying degrees of memorability and narrative function. What I want to explore in this article is how Lazamon's representation of the various female members of this group is shaped by historiographic and other literary conventions, particularly to the extent that these conventions marked national shifts on the bodies of women, and whether Lazamon does any shaping of traditions in turn. Among the peaceweaving mothers, traitorous foreign lovers,³ and rape victims who comprise most of the women of Lazamon's *Brut*, it does seem that Lazamon's *Brut* has made one significant innovation: Penda's sister is given a name, Helene, which positions her to form closure to a large overarching figural pattern of the British national history. In this contribution to resolving the problem of what it meant to be British in an English land, Lazamon's *Brut*, it seems, creatively intervenes in the particular historical tradition of the 'Brut' narratives. Whether the text intervenes in more general historical traditions of representing women or the feminine, however, is another question entirely.

A complex set of issues surrounds the use of women to figure nationhood, and Stephanie Jed's⁴ narratological analysis of the rape of Lucretia provides a suitable starting point for this study of women in Lazamon's *Brut*. Jed deals with the classical Roman narrative of the rape of Lucretia as it was transmitted in the late-fourteenth-century text *Declamatio Lucretiae* by Florentian humanist Coluccio

Salutati. Jed's subject matter is obviously located in a much later period than Lazamon's *Brut*, a different culture (including that of book production),⁵ a different idea of nationhood, and a different kind of narrative. But like Lazamon's *Brut*, Salutati's *Declamatio Lucretiae* presents a cultural narrative about crucial shifts in the status of a 'nation'. Salutati tells a story of Rome's shift from monarchy to republic, with analogous implications to be drawn for the status of the governance of fourteenth-century Florence. Lazamon's *Brut* chronicles a *series* of national shifts from one monarchical ruler to the next, which collectively portray the rise and fall of the British nation from the migration of Trojan peoples led by (another) Brutus into the island of Brutland (Britain), through their Christianization and periods of military dominance especially under Arthur, to the displacement of the British by the Anglo-Saxon nation. Rather than a shift from monarchy to some other form of government, the ultimate super-national shift in Lazamon's *Brut* is dynastic, from monarchy by one people to monarchy by a different people. But like the narrative of the rape of Lucretia, Lazamon's *Brut* figures some of the turns of national fate with a rape topos. The fact that both of these texts draw on prior historical figural conventions should make this coincidence no surprise.

Jed's narratological insight that narrative representations of governmental transitions can *require* a rape, and her mandate that contemporary readers must make decisions about how to position themselves in their own transmission of this narratological formula, are key concepts that can transfer to inspection of the narratives that include women in Lazamon's *Brut*. Jed is concerned with the way the cultural narrative transmitted by Salutati depends on the act of violence against a woman, so that his story of the origin of republicanism constructs and glorifies a liberty that cannot exist without rape. (Rape is associated with tyranny of the Tarquins. The rape of Lucretia represents an act of violence – of tyranny – so horrific it cannot go unanswered, and the rape becomes the event that motivates the overthrow of the tyrant.) Lazamon's *Brut* also links sexual violence and the status of the nation, in characters like Ursele, who is raped along with her female shipmates by outlaws who then proceed to ravage Britain, and the old foster mother on Mont Saint Michel, whose violent sexual abuse by the Giant of Mont Saint Michel is described in the narrative three times until its horror requires Arthur to behead the Giant in glorious heroic vengeance.

Jed takes the position that she wishes to *disrupt* the narrative formula that predicates liberty on an act of violence toward a woman, rather than continue – or collude in – its transmission. In noticing the narrative functions of many of the

women characters in Lazamon's *Brut*, including but not restricted to rape victims, I too find myself in conflict with the narrative formulas I am seeing. It seems important to face them, understand how they work, and to question the consequences of 'transmitting' them uncritically. And it seems important also to ask whether this text, Lazamon's *Brut*, is itself being 'critical' in any way in its transmission of historiographical conventions concerning the iconic use of women in a 'national history'.

Lazamon's women are formed by convention. Most of the approximately thirty women characters in Lazamon's *Brut*, even those highly dramatized with voices and speeches and emotional presence, are obviously categorizable into several types, familiar from a range of texts including classical and medieval history, epic, hagiography, and Old English poetry. Lives of virgin martyrs provide for Lazamon's *Brut* one resonating source for representations of women threatened by sexual violence. Lazamon's story of Ursele (ll. 5945-6045) alluded to above is a secularization of the widely circulated legend of Saint Ursula and the 11,000 virgins, reemployed here to mark hostility between the British people and Norse and Danish 'outlaws'. Lazamon's episode of the Giant of Mont Saint Michel (ll. 12802-13049) positions Howel's daughter Eleine as another secularized virgin martyr, the narrative formula this time villainizing a lustful monstrous giant whose portent that Arthur's Britain will oppose both Roman greed abroad and Modred's fratricidal lust at home becomes clarified only in its fulfillment.

Another variation on the figure of woman/nation as rape victim had ancient precedent in Herodotus' histories, in which, as Ruth Morse⁶ describes the convention, abductions and counter-abductions of women were used to articulate 'patterns of enmity' between Persians and Greeks. One of Herodotus's abductions, the founding rape of Helen of Troy, had much medieval currency and is emphatically placed as the beginning of Lazamon's *Brut*. Lazamon's label for Helen of Troy is *alpeodisc wif*, a foreign woman, an Other-people woman, and by a formulaic repetition of that phrase for some subsequent female characters in his *Brut*, Lazamon's text habituates the reader to look out for the entry of these Other women into history and to regard them judgmentally. The reader is taught to recognize *alpeodisc* women and to view them with suspicion and a set of highly conventional choices: Will Ignogen, Æstrild, Delgan, Genuis, and Rouwenne fulfil the female type of (1) a motivating instrument of war or bad alliance, or, on the other hand, (2) a peaceweaving instrument of peace? The status of the British nation as militarily dominated or dominating rests on the answer.⁷ British relations, at

particular points in their history, with Greeks, Norse, Burgundians, Romans, and Saxons are figured through these *alpeodisc* women.

The convention of the peaceweaver also constitutes some of the female *British* (i.e., *peodisc* women) characters of Lazamon's *Brut*. In Old English poetry, a peaceweaver is a woman who is a bargaining chip in a political truce, whose value resides in her potential to give birth to progeny of dual ancestry who can carry on without national violence. The lamenting Hildeburh in the Finn episode of *Beowulf* is the most oft-cited example. As in her case, the phenomenon of peaceweaving a truce between nations is most visible when it fails. In Lazamon's *Brut*, native British women who marry leaders of other regions or peoples and therefore set up the possibility of fulfilling a peaceweaving role include Cordoille, Gornoille, Regau (ll. 1461-1886), Gloi's unnamed mother (Claudius's lover, ll. 4786-4816), Elene daughter of Coel (ll. 5493-5603), and Oriene (ll. 5688-5809). Each marriage or tryst raises the question of balance of power between Britain and the realm of the husband: Cordoille with France, Gornoille with Scotland, Regau with Cornwall, Gloi's mother with Rome, Elene with Rome, and Oriene with Brittany under the rule of Elene's British-Roman family. Some of these (Regau, Oriene) have the variation of raising the issue of peace between internal subgroups of the British people. The three daughters of the Leir story play out a narrative about two things, one being yet another variation on sibling rivalry as a threat to succession of a whole Britain, the other being a construction of female power as weak (the regional Scottish and Cornish powers do not prevail because of Leir's reunion with Cordoille and France, but Cordoille does not prevail either, even though she temporarily bolsters Britain through her bringing together French and British armies and even though she gains the succession for five years of rule, because, heirless, she is imprisoned by her nephews and dies by her own hand). The two British-mother/Roman-father matches (Gloi's mother and Elene) do produce glorious offspring, and Elene's role as a peaceweaver of Britain and Rome especially through her son Constantine, emperor of Rome, constitutes the British people as saviours to the totality of Christian nations. This precedent of peaceweaving among Christians is picked up later in Lazamon's *Brut* in the Scottish women at Loch Lomond who beg Arthur to make accord with their husbands. The Scottish women's variation on the peaceweaver tradition is to separate it entirely from marriage and reproduction, and the women speakers invoke instead shared Christian belief as the basis for truce between Scotland and Britain.

Lazamon's *Brut* features a different historiographical convention of

motherhood in the battle trope of the nurturing mother of the nation who suckles rival brothers. An obvious precedent is the wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus, and Lazamon's *Brut* specifically invokes the Romulus and Remus story on several occasions though without mentioning the wolf wetnurse. Lazamon's character Tonuene (ll. 2485-2550), a very human mother who movingly speaks to her warring sons Belin and Brenne to tell them to look upon her breasts that suckled them both, probably owes more to conventions in works like *The Song of Hastings*, composed c. 1067 by Guy Bishop of Amiens⁸ to praise William the Conqueror after the Battle of Hastings. In *The Song of Hastings*, which predates Lazamon's *Brut* as well as its ultimate source, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the mother of Harold Godwinson is imaged as having suckled the two brothers Harold and Tostig who have later warred against each other, with Harold being castigated by the poet for fighting against his brother Tostig at the battle at Stamford Bridge. Harold's speech to rouse his troops reminds them that they have helped kill 'him whom (our) mother's breast nourished with its own milk' [Nutriuit proprio matris quem lacte papilla].⁹ Lazamon's character Tonuene speaks of her own breasts to her son Brenne (l. 2504: 'Loka her þa tittes: þat þu suke mid þine lippes') and ensures the military might of Britain when she convinces Belin and Brenne to ally with each other rather than fight. The first British conquest of Rome is the result of their unity. Tonuene is the *Brut*'s optimistic inversion of an earlier mother character, Iudon (ll. 1992-2012), who also had rival sons, Fereus and Poreus. Iudon precipitated a major civil war crisis in the British history by murdering her son Poreus in vengeance for his killing his brother Fereus. There is no direct imagery of Iudon breast-feeding her sons, but otherwise the structural parallel of opposition between her and Tonuene is striking. The text leaves no ambiguity about judgments of these two women, and the images of the murdering mother versus the breast-revealing reconciling mother memorably imprint the alternatives of British disarray (weakness) or unity (strength). The bad murdering mother label gets grafted onto the already bad *alpeodisc* Rouwenne, who becomes Vortimer's 'steop modor' and subsequently poisons him to disrupt his resumption of Christian British rule.¹⁰ Then there is another invocation of the breast-feeding mother convention in Lazamon's *Brut* in the old foster mother on Mont Saint Michel, who is not a biological mother and does not have rival offspring, but who is the fosterer (presumably once wetnurse: 'wale þat ich þe uedde: þat ich þe uostredde' l. 12905) of young Eleine. Her inability to sustain Eleine's life in the wake of their abduction by the giant is another kind of reversal of the image of Tonuene fostering the

nation. The old foster mother and Eleine both figure an aspect of the future of Britain in this episode, and the abused old nurse among other things images the lack of strength for defense or protection of the coming generations.

From this brief survey of conventions that constitute the majority of Lazamon's women¹¹ as figurations of national status, it should be already apparent that this long history invites its readers to think in terms of large patterns of association. The text relies on conventions (including those just named) to set up readers' expectations, and as the history proceeds, it elucidates national problems and situations partly by teaching readers to notice variations and recombinations in these figural conventions. Readers are encouraged to think memorially and comparatively: Æstrild is like Helen of Troy, Tonuene is the inverse of Iudon, Rouwenne is like Æstrild *and* Iudon, Wenhaver is more like Rouwenne and Iudon than Tonuene. Such associative connections cue diagnoses of British fortunes: now Britain contends with the threat of enmity with other nations, now with threats of internal lack of unity, now with both coinciding.

Of course, Lazamon inherited most of this material from Wace and Geoffrey of Monmouth, including the narratological workings of large figural patterns. Within his own text, however, there is visible evidence that, in translating these women characters into English, Lazamon was quite deliberate with the rhetorical conventions that could attach to them. Besides adding nuances with Old English poetic formulas, he did one thing that none of his sources did, a small gesture that has created occasional puzzlement but that takes on meaning if seen in the context of overarching patterns of history. He gave a name to Penda's sister. And the name he gave her was, significantly, Helene.¹² Helene Penda's sister thus becomes the last named woman (ll. 15515-15541 and 15866) in a text that began with Elene 'Menelaus quene' (ll. 40-41). Between Elene of Troy at the beginning and Helene, sister of Penda and mother of the final British king at the end, come Elene the mother of Constantine, Queen of Jerusalem and finder of the true cross (ll. 5443-5582 plus later references), and Eleine the niece of Howel, who dies after being abducted by the Giant of Mont Saint Michel (ll. 12802-13049). By naming Penda's sister Helene, Lazamon's *Brut* gives prominence to a new large associative pattern, that of the four Helens, which relies not only on conventions of representing women, but on name repetition.

Recurrence of the same name for different characters is a structural device Lazamon inherited from his sources for several male names, including Constance, Constantine, Maximian, Conan, and Luces,¹³ so there is precedent in this work for

large patterns of name repetition to register as meaningful. (And indeed, there was already a pattern of three Helens in Lazamon's sources. Lazamon's additional Helen elaborates rather than creates the pattern of this female name.) Like the repetitive female 'types', these repetitive names also invite comparison and, often, value judgment. Of the two characters named Maximian, for example, there is clearly an evil Maximian (persecutor of Christians) and a good Maximian (cousin of Elene mother of Constantine). The four Helens have the additional gender-specific characteristic that the state of the nation – and the reader's invited value judgment – is very much figured on their bodies, as sex objects and mothers.

The readerly act of judging is the key to explicating the pattern of the four Helens. The initial invocation of Helen of Troy carries insistent value judgment, as the first six lines of Lazamon's *Brut* after the end of the prologue name her, label her 'alðeodisc wif', and (conventionally) locate her as the cause of the Greek destruction of Troy, 'for hire weoren on ane daze: hund þousunt deade' (l. 43). Readers are positioned to sit in judgment of not only every *alðeodisc wif* who comes after, but also every Helen who comes after. In a sense, all three subsequent Helens are Christian revisions of the pagan Helen of Troy and as such are marked to be judged more favourably than she, but the text does not treat them all the same. Instead, increasing complication of the criteria for judgment of the successive Helens finally carries the reader into the space of confusion and suspension of judgment that attends the final displacement of the British nation by the Anglo-Saxon nation. That is the creative innovation in Lazamon's *Brut*, the effect of introducing the fourth Helen.

Lazamon's second Helen, Elene the daughter of Coel who becomes mother of Constantine, is a fairly simple inversion of Helen of Troy. If a reader had managed somehow not to know and be reassured by the recognition that Elene was none other than St Helena, finder of the true cross, there would be potential for suspense in this narrative: Coel, ruler of Britain, finds himself in an uncomfortable pact with a Roman ruler who persecutes Christians in Britain; Coel also has no male heir, 'only' a daughter Elene. If Elene marries a Roman (Custance), Britain risks anti-Christian Roman domination. The risk is taken, and the match not only produces peace rather than war but also produces the Romano-British male heir who will rule and restore Christianity to Rome. Elene is the ultimate good peaceweaving mother of multinational Christianity. Value judgment is unequivocal.

Lazamon's third Helen, Eleine the niece of Howel, is one of two female characters brought together in the episode of the Giant of Mont Saint Michel, and the

pairing destabilizes ease of readerly judgment. Both Eleine, a secularized virgin martyr, and the nurturing foster mother are made rape victims. The Mont Saint Michel episode appropriates hagiography into history in its treatment of Eleine – like St Margaret she is a fifteen-year-old unwilling object of male lust, and more ambiguously she dies in response to threat of sexual penetration – but the history denies this character the fulfillment of spiritual triumph she would have in a saint's life. Hagiography would treat the broken (tortured) body as a sign of a soul that is whole and unbroken, but Lazamon's *Brut* (like its sources) stops the martyr narrative in its tracks and leaves the image of lingering bodies. Eleine died in response to the Giant's sexual assault, according to the old foster mother, and we see only her grave. As an image of Britain's future, this is at best ambivalent: certain death, and no comment on potential spiritual afterlife.

The old foster mother also figures the British nation, as a brutalized, broken, helpless old mother nation, that can no longer foster its future successfully. The narrative structure of this episode, as mentioned earlier, literally makes this rape happen over and over, as we hear the old woman describe how the giant rapes her every night, then we hear Beduer describe it to Arthur, and then we readers are made voyeuristic observers while the giant comes back and rapes her between food courses. As in Jed's analysis of the rape of Lucretia, the repeated rape of the old woman is so horrific it cannot be ignored, and it becomes the motivating event for Arthur to sweep in and kill the giant. Readers are positioned to see this from an avenging perspective and to cheer for Arthur and vicariously behead that giant along with him. But this *text*, we should take note, is heavily invested in continuing to allow the rape to go on, as long as its narrative logic requires a female sacrifice to motivate and glorify the male king, Arthur, and a Britain of masculine military strength.¹⁴ Even while the text engages readers' outrage at the giant-rapist through the sexual victimization of the foster mother, it gives an explicit cross-signal about how to judge the foster mother, in Beduer's parting words to her:

Leofe moder ich æm mon: and cniht æm wel idon.
and ich þe wule suggesten: þurh soðe mine worden.
næs nan kempen i-boren: of nauer nare burden.
þat mon ne mæi mid strenðe: stupen hine to grunde.
7 hire þe ane alde wifmon: swiðe lutle beoð þine mæhten.
Ah hafuen nu swiðe godne dæi: and ich wulle faren minne wæi.
(12948-12953; italics mine)

The criterion for judgment is physical strength, and she has little. This judgment presumably doubles back to Eleine, too, who died as the giant assaulted her, because she also was unable to 'stupen hine to grunde'. According to Beduer and the narrative logic here, strength and national might are male. To be female is to be a potential rape victim is to be weak. The text signals the question, which of these choices, strength (male) or weakness (female), is Britain's future? Even as the action plot of this episode transfers enough power from potential female saints to avenging male Arthur to make him appear invincible, the symbolic potential of gendering twists around to threaten that Britain might become weak, constructed as 'feminized'.

Lazamon's innovative fourth Helen, Penda's sister and Cadwaðlan's queen Helene, is a new and complicated combination of *alpeodisc wif* and mother of the nation, the final and most overdetermined named woman character. She appears in only two passages (ll. 15515-15541 and 15866) but the entire denouement of the history plays with the question of whether she represents reinforcement of British 'strength' or ultimate British 'weakness'. She has the symbolic potential to do either. Lazamon's point is that she does both. She is introduced into the text as an extraneous bargaining chip during Penda's negotiations with Cadwaðlan, as Penda, Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia captured during his siege of Cadwaðlan's forces in Exeter, seeks to convince Cadwaðlan that he is sincere about wanting to change sides and become British Cadwaðlan's man rather than Anglo-Saxon Edwine's. Penda's negotiator offers, along with the usual hostages and wealth, 'þat mæiden Helene' (l. 15520) as Cadwaðlan's queen, urging that 'þurh hire þu miht biwinnen: lufe of hire cunnen. / and iwinnen al þi kinelond: to þire azere hond' (ll. 15523-15524). Cadwaðlan accepts and marries her in Winchester (l. 15534, C only), an alarming choice of location, most recently in this history the site of Anglo-Saxon Edwine's abduction and rape of high-born British maid Galarne, sister of Brien (ll. 15201-15217). The wedding is followed by a parallel ceremony in which Penda pledges his loyalty to Cadwaðlan. The Helene-Cadwaðlan match carries a heavy load of suspicion and doubt, the doubt about Penda's integrity and loyalty fueling the conventional doubt about making an *alpeodisc wif* type queen. Helene, an Anglo-Saxon woman, has all the potential for being a Germanic *Æstrild*-like, Rouwenne-like, reenactment of Helen of Troy, a ticking time bomb that could explode in renewed enmity between Anglo-Saxons and Bruts.

Lazamon's *Brut* reinforces that fear in several ways. Penda's reputation suffers further because he uses deception to kill St Oswald (ll. 15651-15698) and

because he apparently tells lies about Oswy (ll. 15734, 15749). Margadud argues in war counsel that they should remember the treachery of Rouwenne, whom he refers to not by name but as the 'heðene quene. / þa comen of Sexlonde' (15806) through whom 'ure cun aqualden here' (l. 15807). The operative British fear in both cases is the fear of being tricked; these passages usually at some point invoke the verb 'swican'. But especially in reaction to Margadud's speech, there is also a growing sense of readerly unease about what the proper judgment should be. Even while Margadud's raising the spectre of Rouwenne casts a further shadow of doubt on Helene, Cadwaðlan's queen and Penda's sister, it also registers as an inappropriate comparison. Helene is not, after all, heathen. High valuation has been placed on the possibility of multinational Christian coexistence in previous episodes, including the truce of Cadwan and Ælvric and, significantly, the Christian peaceweaving of Elene, the mother of Constantine. This lingering image of the Christian peaceweaving motherly Elene interrupts the image of the heathen traitoress. The second passage where Laȝamon's *Brut* overtly refers to Helene, Penda's sister, strategically reminds the reader that she also is the mother of the next British king, Cadwalader: 'Enne sune hafde Cadwaðlan: Cadwalader ihaten. / he wes Penda suster sune: al of kingen icume' (ll. 15865-15866, italics mine). In the end, the fear of Anglo-Saxon domination is fulfilled but with a completely unexpected wrinkle. Cadwalader is divinely instructed to desist from attempting military conquest of what has become England, now to be ruled by Aþelstan and a new dynasty of Christian Anglo-Saxons. The domination comes not through trickery but through God's will, and as such it is not fearful.

As mother of the last king of the British, Helene paradoxically fulfills the expectations of *all* the conventions that converge in her: she is a foreign woman, she is a Christian peaceweaver, she is the mother of the British nation that does not die but rather awaits a resurrection, she is the mother of the British nation that loses its power to 'her' Anglo-Saxon people. She is a Christian revision of all the Helens who have gone before.

Helene sister of Penda and mother of Cadwalader is a character who figures the liminal space of transference at the end of the history, the space where military strength transfers from the British to the Anglo-Saxons, attended by uncertainty about how to regard such a major breach. The post-Arthurian section of Laȝamon's *Brut* faces the narrative problem of how to shape the loss of power by its main character, the British people, and particularly how to handle the ways readers, as well as God, will define and judge this British nation. Its structural solution, in this

section, is to habituate the reader to make judgments and then suspend them, or to invite judgments and then confound their basis, until the only judgment that really matters, God's, comes in a dream and settles everything. The history ends with deferral to God's instructions, definitions, and judgments, which construct the British as a nation with an identity not formulated by military strength but by something else. The British people await in Wales the promised future day when Cadwalader's bones will be recovered in Rome and they will return to power – but the nature of that power, and the basis for their nationhood, is apocalyptically vague. Just as readerly judgments of Helene Penda's sister shifted and even contradicted each other as the narrative played out, readerly judgments of the British people have been invited to do the same. If Helene is the guide to the status of the nation she has been structured to be, then readers need look to some reconfiguration of identity, one that draws from narratives of the past but recombines their expectations. Just as Helene is both nurturer of the yet-living nation *and* sign of its military subjugation, the British nation is a paradoxical combination of lack of military strength and presence of living hope of renewal, a Christian holding area, awaiting God's will.

Lazamon does achieve, it seems to me, some measure of innovation in manipulating conventions of female figures that represent the status of the nation, and particularly interesting is his application of recombined conventions to explore how the basis or measure of national identity might shift away from military dominance to something else.¹⁵ However, it is important not to lose sight of Lazamon's continuing reliance on categorical images that reduce women to mothers (good and bad), peaceweaving wives (good and bad), and objects of rape and abduction (good and bad). Lazamon's text is heavily invested in having the reader choose among women as a way of thinking about the status of the nation. Although Lazamon's recombinations of conventions in a figure like Helene do sometimes destabilize his own earlier gender formulas (like the male/strength vs. female/weakness binary), his tactic of taking the conventions to extremes cannot escape the frame of reference he is operating within.

Following Stephanie Jed's example, we would do well to ask what this narrative has at stake, when it relies on a fixed set of types and acts of judgment concerning women (and men). She concludes that very specific but unacknowledged local political agendas were served in fifteenth-century Florence by Salutati's narrative of the rape of Lucretia, and she de-universalizes the glory of 'liberty' by localizing the political agendas in play. Unfortunately, students of Lazamon's *Brut* do not have the luxury of being able to pinpoint Lazamon's political

situation, and the absence of such knowledge exterior to the poem dictates a methodological problem for commentators who seek institutional or ideological explanations. Even while that avenue of disruption is precluded, though, I think it is still something to *name* what *Lazamon* is doing in this narrative. My own transmission of the literary formation of *Lazamon's* women seeks to be critical in calling attention to the need to deromanticize the 'good' women, because they cannot exist without the 'bad' women in this text, and in pointing out the problematics of predicating group identity formation on simplistic typing of women. In a genre of history that ultimately defers everything to God's judgment and definition of the nation, we are positioned not infrequently as quasi-male readers engaging in blaming or sympathizing with, but almost always categorizing and judging, *Lazamon's* women.

NOTES

¹ All quotations are taken from *Lazamon: Brut*, ed. G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie, 2 vols to date, EETS os 250, 277 (London, 1963 and 1978). When I use the term 'nation' in my title, I do not mean to invoke post-eighteenth-century models of nation-state nationalism, nor to locate its origins. The word 'nacion' is never used in the early-thirteenth-century Lazamon's *Brut* although it does appear in later Brut histories such as Robert Mannyng of Brunne's fourteenth-century *Historia*. We do not really have a word that does justice to the kind of group of people Lazamon's *Brut* (and other so-called medieval national histories nor universal histories) is about. I could as easily have used the word 'tribe' or 'race' as nation in my title. Each of these words carries political connotations and/or embeds value judgments in their current usage that would distort even more egregiously the kind of people-group Lazamon constructs. The words Lazamon's *Brut* uses are the Old English and Early Middle English 'leod' or 'þeode' – people. In this text they imply an ancestral and kin relationship that unifies a large group, and the text explores associations of such a group with specific geographical territory and/or language. When I use the word 'nation' in this article, then, I mean that kind of people-group. See Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, trans. Susan Ross Huston (Berkeley, 1991) for a survey of various historical concepts of national collectivity.

² See Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966) for a study of the national historical traditions.

³ Françoise H. M. Le Saux analyses some of these gendered narrative functions in 'Paradigms of Evil: Gender and Crime in Lazamon's *Brut*', *The Text and Tradition of Lazamon's Brut*, ed. Françoise Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 193-206. In her extremely useful survey, Le Saux recognizes, as do I, Lazamon's idealisation of nurturing women and condemnation of the lack of female nurturing, among other constructions. Whereas her discussion investigates Lazamon's judgments of women characters in the context of morality of individual behaviour, my approach foregrounds overarching typological patterns of characterisation that inform interpretation of the female characters of the *Brut*.

⁴ Stephanie H. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington, 1989).

⁵ Jed goes on to construct a humanistic model of textuality in which purification is twinned with violence, correction and accuracy are twinned with castigation or cutting. That model does not transfer to the textual culture of Lazamon readily, and I am not interested here in pursuing those kinds of textual implications.

⁶ Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁷ The answers: Greek *Ignogen* (ll. 466-551) as Trojan Brutus's bride becomes the mother of the British people; no problem arises because Albion is geographically remote from Greece. *Æstrild* (ll. 1105-1261), the Germanic '*alpeodisc meiden*' (l. 1151, C only) brought to Brutland by invader Humber, rivals British (Cornish) Gwendolein for the position of Locrin's queen, with the consequence of a civil war that is resolved in favour of Gwendolein's progeny continuing the British line of rule, as the narrative violently eliminates the *alpeodisc* woman *Æstrild* and plants the initial suspicion of Germanic influence. *Delgan* (ll. 2235-2396), the daughter of the king of Norway, is reluctantly wed to Brenne, younger brother of British ruler Belin, as part of Brenne's ruse to usurp the British kingship himself through foreign military alliance. *Delgan* is prevented from being an instrument of Britain's subjugation only by the intervention of her prior lover, Godlac king of Denmark. Brenne, thwarted, later tries the same tactic of *alpeodisc* alliance through marriage with the Duke of Burgundy's unnamed daughter. The potential for enmity between Britain and Burgundy, as between Britain and Norway, is interrupted before it can come to fruition. *Genuis* (ll. 4737-4932), daughter of Roman emperor Claudius and wife of British king Arviragus, is the first *alpeodisc* woman who is a successful peaceweaver. She reconciles the poised armies of Britain and Rome by riding between them and pleading that her married kin (British) and her biological kin (Romans) not destroy each other. The Roman-British accord that she restores continues with her Roman-educated British son Maurus. *Rouwenne* (ll. 7110-7499) 'of þan hæðene cunne' (l. 7432), daughter of heathen Saxon Hengest, marries foolish British ruler Vortiger and emphatically promotes Saxon takeover of Britain. She is the Eve-like evil extreme of the Germanic *alpeodisc* threat first suggested by *Æstrild*. The enmity between Christian British and pagan Saxons hardens into several generations of struggle and is not ended until King Arthur's reign.

⁸ *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens*, ed. Catherine Morton and Hope Muntz (Oxford, 1972).

⁹ Morton and Muntz, pp. 12-13; reference cited by Morse, p. 267 note 66.

¹⁰ Le Saux gives a detailed discussion of *Lazamon's Rouwenne* enacting 'a grim inversion of breast-feeding' in 'Paradigms of Evil', pp. 203-04.

¹¹ Five do not fall into any of the categories I have named: Diana, the Sibyl, and Argante are all three 'outside' women who function in supernatural systems other than Christianity; Marcie is the eponymous founder of the laws Alfred later 'appropriated'; and the women who dress in men's wargear to help defeat Melga's outlaws, and who search out every last outlaw in order to draw and quarter him, are unusually active female avengers: their violence enacts vengeance on those who raped five shiploads of their sister British women. The rest of the female characters not mentioned so far here can all be seen as some recombination of chaste holy woman, national mother figure, potential peaceweaver, abductee or rape victim: Brutus's mother, Anna sister of Arthur, Igerne, Merlin's mother, Wenhaver, Galame, Elene sister of Penda.

¹² Sir Frederic Madden, ed. *Lazamon's 'Brut', or Chronicle of Britain*, 3 vols (London, 1847), vol. 3, p. 428, note to vv. 31018-31147, first observed that this section of text 'is an addition by Lazamon'. He pointed out that Wace introduced the detail that Cadwalan and a sister of Penda married 'to ensure a firmer alliance' and remarked that outside of Lazamon's *Brut* 'No mention, I believe, occurs elsewhere of a sister of Penda named Helen'.

¹³ Two characters have the name Constance: the Roman husband of Elene and father of Constantine, the ruler of Rome (C, Custance; O, Constance), and the monk-turned-British-king who was brother to Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther, all sons of Constantine, son of Conan; this Constance had Vortiger as his steward (C, Costanz; O, Constance). There are three characters named Constantine: the British king who became 'kaiser' of Rome (son of Elene and Custance); the British king who was son of Conan and father of Costanz, Aurelius Ambrosius, and Uther; and Cadwr's son, the British king who succeeded Arthur and killed Modred's sons. The names Maximian, Conan, and Lucus are applied to two characters each: Maximian the brother of Roman Emperor Diocletian, persecutor of Christians, and Maximian the cousin of Elene, the husband of Oriene, and sometime ruler of Rome; Conan, the heroic son of Aldolf earl of Kent and ruler of Brittany who was thwarted in his plans to marry first Oriene and then Ursula, and Conan the British king who was nephew and betrayer of the post-Arthurian Constantine; Lucus the exemplary British king in whose reign Christianity came to Britain, and Lucus the Roman emperor defeated and killed by King Arthur.

¹⁴ Ruth Morse has observed about medieval historiographical conventions that they help us understand what were considered the *ultimate violations* in the societies that produced the histories. What I think we see here is a representation of the ultimate violation being the rape of a good mother, and the allegorical transference of that to the nation of Britain. This episode is of a literal 'mother-fucking'.

¹⁵ In the associative web of images that promote memorial reading and interpretation in this *Brut* history, the image of Arthur as a nurturing breast cannot go unremarked or unconnected to the nurturing mothers of Lazamon's *Brut*. In this rather startling extension of the 'good mother' category, Lazamon's *Brut* uses a feminized male body to figure a shift in the basis for British identity. In two Merlinian prophecies in the Arthurian section (ll. 9410-9412 and 11492-11499), long before the denouement, the text supplies the reader with this replacement image for the future of Britain. See Elizabeth J. Bryan, 'Truth and the Round Table in Lawman's *Brut*', *Arthuriana* (formerly *Quondam et Fuurus: A Journal of Arthurian Interpretations*), 2 (1992), 27-35, for my argument that these passages, selectively restored to his text by Lazamon, forge thematic links between the Round Table as a model for narrative history and the image of Arthur as a breast. The common element in the C and O versions of these prophecies is the prediction that scops, singers of tales, [once in O: men] will make a table out of Arthur's breast and sit and feed at it until the end

of the world. There may be hints of an implicit analogy between Arthur and Jesus as mother, an image which Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), has traced in Cistercian and earlier Christian writings, in which a breast-feeding Jesus gives spiritual nourishment. In these passages in Laȝamon's *Brut*, the nurture and life of the British nation come from *narratives* (with those fed in the first instance the tale tellers, and through them the people), not from military dominance, in this transfer of (Tonuenne-like) breasts – or at least breast-feeding function – onto the male body of Arthur. One effect of merging the male heroic subject with this female body part is to disconcert, if not disrupt, the binary formula that twins strength with weakness, male with female. Laȝamon plays with an aesthetic of overdetermination, bringing together things which would not be brought together, in order to imagine national identity not based on military dominance.