INTRODUCTION: READING OXFORD, BODLEIAN LIBRARY, MS LAUD MISC. 108 AS A “WHOLE BOOK”

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By 1633, William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury (1633–1645) and Chancellor of Oxford University (1629–1641), had acquired a late thirteenth-century manuscript (with fourteenth- and fifteenth-century additions) that came to be called Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Miscellaneous 108 (L). Laud donated it with a large collection of manuscripts to the Bodleian Library in 1635.¹ The greater part of Laud’s donations were cataloged as Laud Miscellaneous Manuscripts in contrast to sets classified as Laud Latin, Laud Greek, and Laud Oriental Manuscripts. As Thomas R. Liszka explains, those grouped into the Miscellaneous set landed there because of what they did not contain: texts in Latin, Greek, or Oriental languages.² This process of classification was thus determined by language, not content. Nevertheless, the name “Laud Misc.” has branded L as essentially miscellaneous in content. The shelf name has historically skewed criticism toward assumptions of a lack of artistry and organization within this particular “miscellany.”³ This erroneous name persists, without any persuasive evidence for its relevance, as a critical marker of its contents. But this vernacular manuscript, unique in assembling, perhaps as early as 1280, such a large number of Middle English texts without the inclusion of French and Latin texts, is likewise exceptional in its absence of miscellaneity.

¹ Laud donated a total of 1,242 manuscripts to the Bodleian in four installments in 1635, 1636, 1639, and 1640–41. At least twenty languages are represented in the collection. See William Dunn MacCray, Annals of the Bodleian Library Oxford with Notice of the Earlier Library of the University, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1984), 83–88. Also visit http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/medieval/laud/laud.html.

² See Thomas Liszka, Chapter Two in this volume.

L bears singular importance to the field of medieval studies, for it preserves and anthologizes unique versions of a number of seminal medieval English texts that span a range of religious and secular genres. This manuscript is well-known for containing the earliest surviving copy of the Middle English collection of saints’ lives known as the *South English Legendary* (*SEL*), one that differs significantly from the “standard” version in content and organization.1 L also contains copies of the two earliest extant Middle English romances, the only complete copy of *Havelok the Dane* and the earliest known version of *King Horn*. Finally, the manuscript contains the only extant witness of the alliterative Wheel of Fortune poem *Somer Soneday* and some significant religious texts, including unique versions of the lyric poem *Sayings of St. Bernard* and the dream narrative *Vision of St. Paul*, and the earliest known copy in English of the *Dispute Between the Body and the Soul*. In addition to preserving these singular works, the collation of the texts in L suggests a purposeful and deliberate arrangement, revealing a prioritizing, perhaps on the part of an owner or compiler, of certain spiritual and political themes and concerns.

L stands as a rare early example of a monolingual manuscript, all of its texts written in Middle English.5 In fact, the language of L turns out to be a defining component of its content and readership. In thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century England, English was still considered to be an essentially oral medium (in contrast to the perception of Anglo-Norman as a written vernacular), so that writing narratives in English was a deliberate and self-conscious choice.6 If writing in the English vernacular was not commonplace, assembling an anthology of narratives written entirely in English was especially unusual. As Anne B. Thompson explains, writing in English in the thirteenth century was

1 On the differences between the L and the standard *SEL* versions, see Manfred Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, esp. 6–90; see also Horstmann, *ESEL*, vii–xii.


6 Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, 22. In her examination of writing in English during the thirteenth century, to which this discussion is indebted, Thompson also refers to the “self-conscious” elements found in English writings during this time.
still considered a “new enterprise”; the majority of vernacular texts at this time were written in Anglo-Norman, the prestige vernacular during Henry the III’s reign (1216–1272). During this period, English could not boast of an unbroken written tradition in the same way that French or Latin could; though nearly everyone at all social levels spoke and heard English, English continued to be a language associated with peasants and illiteracy, “outside the tradition, political authority and social status which marked the community of French speakers and writers.” In a society where French was the language of power, writing in English was additionally a “political choice.” Thorlac Turville-Petre associates this political aspect specifically with a burgeoning sense of national identity in the late thirteenth century, an identity being consciously linked by barons and kings and writers to the use of English rather than French.

The fact of writing in English emerges as an explicit theme in L: the SEL narrator points out regularly that he is translating holy Latin verse into English (e.g. 133.943; 355.344–46); he emphasizes that St. Thomas Becket is an “englische tale” (106.1); in St. Kenelm, a heaven-sent message can remain hidden from even the Pope himself because he cannot comprehend English (352.252–54); in St. Edmund of Abingdon, the saint speaks his dying words “on Englichs” (448.586). The narrator of Horn describes an Irish court that speaks English as the power language although its subjects, apparently, do not (1027–28), and the narrator’s “extravagantly hyper-alliterative” language in Somer

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8 Thompson, Everyday Saints, 29.

9 Ibid., 39. Thompson argues further that the anonymity of early Middle English texts speaks to perceptions of the inappropriateness of English as a medium for written spiritual and historical communication, the anonymity lending an impression of orality to the written text as well as serving as a form of protection for the writers (39).

10 Thorlac Turville-Petre, England the Nation, esp. 8–18. Turville-Petre discusses the Norman Yoke trope that characterizes early English writings, including the SEL. The “colonized” viewpoint that arises in English texts ties the medium—the English language—to a particular point-of-view that casts Norman lords against the English people.

11 All references to the L SEL are taken from Horstmann, ESEL, and are given parenthetically by page and line numbers.

12 This and subsequent parenthetical references to line numbers in Horn are from George McKnight, ed., King Horn, Floriz and Blauncheflur, The Assumption of our Lady, EETS, o.s., 14 (1901; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1998).
Soneday reveals a self-conscious awareness of crafting his text in English. This ongoing commentary—explicit and implicit—on speaking, writing, and translating into (or out of) English participates in a wide-ranging, insistent validation of the language that persists in this English-only manuscript. Writing in English and declaring the efficacy of writing in English authorizes the language as a medium worthy of written communication, worthy even of imparting critical political and potent spiritual meaning. And communicating in English finally appears to be central to being English; what that identity entails is a theme that echoes through the entire manuscript.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, editors of the romances and the SEL were the first to take an interest in L. In 1826, Sir Frederic Madden re-discovered Havelok (thought to have been lost) in L and published an edition of it two years later for the Roxburghe Society; in 1868, W. W. Skeat re-edited Madden’s edition and published The Lay of Havelok the Dane: Composed in the Reign of Edward I, about A.D. 1280. In 1887, Carl Horstmann published the L SEL. In 1901, Joseph Hall published the L Horn in a parallel text edition with the other two versions found in Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. IV 27 (2) and London, British Library, MS Harley 2253; that same year, George McKnight re-edited J. Rawson Lumby’s 1866 edition of Horn and added a transcription of the L version. Editions of the other texts in L also appeared in collections or in journals. In nearly all of these editions, preliminary descriptions of the physical

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14 Horstmann also published editions of Infancy of Jesus Christ, Vision of St. Paul, Sayings of Bernard, and a number of the SEL lives in several journal articles. See 37 n.15 for full citations.
16 Somer Soneday was first edited by Frederic Madden, who titled it “Alliterative Poem on Fortune.” It appeared with no notes or appendices in Reliquiae Antiquae, ed. Thomas Wright and James O. Halliwell (London: W. Pickering, 1843), 2:7–9. Frederick Furnivall included a full transcription of the L Sayings in Minor Poems of the Vernon MS, EETS, o.s., 117 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1901), 511–22. The Dispute was edited several times in the nineteenth century, the most authoritative being Wilhelm Linow’s Be Desputisoun Bitwen Be Bodi and Be Soule, Erlanger Beiträge zur englischen Philologie 1, pt. 1 (Erlangen: Bhôme, 1889).
features of the L manuscript, such as hand, layout, collation, and dating, were included. The philological work carried out by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars laid the groundwork necessary for the future study of the L manuscript and the texts in it.

However, for all of their pioneering work, these editors inadvertently established the guiding philological inquiry into the manuscript along generic lines; that is, descriptions of the manuscript were in service to the editors’ larger projects on either the SEL or the romances. Their division of texts into hagiography or romance in these early editions resulted in incomplete assessments of the manuscript context.¹⁷ Later generations of scholars have followed suit, yielding disparate romance and hagiographic strands of scholarship on L. Thus, for example, Gisela Guddat-Figge itemized and described L in her Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances, and Rosamund Allen and G. V. Smithers published editions on King Horn and Havelok respectively, with each including detailed manuscript descriptions. Meanwhile, Manfred Görlach included manuscript classification and description in his comprehensive and authoritative book on The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary. In Chapter Two, Liszka outlines this generic divide in L scholarship: Since “SEL scholars have tended to cite only scholars from their own SEL camp and… scholars of… Havelok the Dane and King Horn have tended to cite only other scholars of the romances,” each camp has overlooked critical manuscript evidence uncovered by the other, maintaining the production of criticism along textual rather than codicological lines. Much romance- and SEL-centered scholarship initially left behind altogether the manuscript context in which these texts were read and listened to by a medieval audience. For instance, Havelok and Horn were classified early as “Matter of England” romances, with treatments of the poems typically beginning with acknowledgement of this classification rather than with their (hagiographical) manuscript context.¹⁸

¹⁷ Horstmann’s 1887 edition of the SEL remains the only one to date, but several editions of the romances have been published in the twentieth century.

scholarship, the L SEL is viewed as idiosyncratic, acknowledged only in its relation to the later, “standard” version of the SEL.19

In recent scholarship, there has been a more focused investigation of the manuscript context of the L texts with critical attention being paid to the collation of these saintly and romance narratives. In this way, this particular history of scholarship is representative of medieval scholarship in general: whereas medieval manuscripts were initially viewed as inconvenient repositories of texts that needed to be extracted and edited, the manuscripts eventually became the objects of study themselves.20 In this critical moment that has been shaped variously by new historicism, reader-response theory, cultural studies, and “materialist philology,” an emphasis on manuscript context and on the possible writers and readers of manuscripts moves to the foreground.21 This companion book to L continues this trend. In the tradition of Susanna Fein’s Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253, Andrew Taylor’s Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers, Sylvia Huot’s The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers, and Keith Busby’s two volume Codex and Context: Reading Old French Narrative in Manuscript, we re-evaluate the texts contained in L in light of the other texts collated with them.22 This book rests on the premise that L manifests evidence of a degree of intention in its compilation and readership.

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19 For instance, in the introduction to their edition of the SEL (based on London, British Library, MS Harley 2277; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 145; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 43; and London, British Library, MS Cotton Julius D. ix), D’Evelyn and Mill acknowledge the importance of the L version only insofar as it anticipates the later versions: “In spite of its incompleteness and disorder it foreshadows the pattern and content of the later SEL,” (SEL, 3:15). Görlich views the L version as a hindrance to SEL scholarship: “The fact that a conflated and much corrupted manuscript like L is at the very beginning of the SEL tradition is the greatest problem for the reconstruction of the genesis of the collection” (Textual Tradition, 90).


21 Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel use the term “materialist philology” (The Whole Book, 1–2).

Shifting our critical attention to the manuscript as “the central object of study,” we begin with the assertion that this early vernacular manuscript can and should be considered as a “whole book.” The notion of the manuscript as a “whole book” argues against the assumption of miscellaneity in a codex that contains diverse texts, assuming instead that an “organizing principle” informs the order and context of the book and points to a writerly or readerly agenda. Of course, with the addition of later poems, for example the fourteenth-century inclusion of three saints’ lives and Somer Soneday, the earlier organizing principle and its concomitant agenda may shift. As the “performative context” of the manuscript changes, so too does its range of possible meanings. Keith Busby explains that while many reasons may determine the choice of texts for inclusion in a manuscript and their order of presentation, the contents are usually not random. It is consequently illogical to suppose that texts appear in each other’s company as a result of hazard and happenstance.

The manuscript, in other words, does not function as a “neutral vehicle.” As Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel explain, “the individual manuscript contextualizes the texts it contains in specific ways.” In the case of L, the saints’ lives should not be read only in modern, edited isolation from the romances, the centrally-positioned eschatological poems nor the final rhetorical vision of Fortune’s Wheel in Somer Soneday, for together the poems reflect a textual experience of anthology by early readers of L. Forgoing modern generic boundaries to read the manuscript as it was compiled can lead us to gain a more complex understanding of the texts in the manuscript and to conjecture the manuscript readers’ and listeners’ potential “horizon of expectations.”

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25 Ibid., 3.
26 Ibid., 2. Nichols and Wenzel marshal these definitions in their interrogation of the concept of the medieval miscellany. They promote the idea of studying the individual manuscript as a “historical artifact” for which one can draw conclusions about its agenda, context, and readership from its codicological features. See their introduction, 1–6.
29 Ibid.
This companion book acknowledges and elaborates upon the concept of L as a whole book by offering inter-connected essays that focus on the physical, contextual, and critical intersections of L in a comprehensive examination of the manuscript. It is a collaborative effort by scholars who work on the physical features of the manuscript or on the texts contained within it. Part One, “The Manuscript and Its Provenance,” concentrates on the codicological and historical aspects of L. Part Two, “The Manuscript and Its Texts” brings such features as well as other literary considerations to bear on contextualized interpretation of the texts contained in the manuscript. Conceived as a whole book, these chapters engage in a critical conversation about the intertextual relationships among the L texts and address the manner in which the physical features of the manuscript reinforce and support such dialectic exchanges. Many agree, others do not, and of course, these investigations leave room for further study. We hope the questions and unresolved issues which punctuate the collection will lend themselves to continued productive study of L.

Part One: The Manuscript and Its Provenance

This book thus proceeds on the assumption that the medieval reading and listening audiences of L were more likely to have been influenced by juxtaposed texts rather than by strict definitions of genre. Hence, the physical make-up of the manuscript offers clues to understanding a medieval reception of the texts. Paleographical and codicological evidence indicates that the texts contained within the manuscript were intentionally ordered, as Liszka has suggested.31 The manuscript now contains five or six individual “booklets,” divided into two parts, with texts copied by four main scribes.32 Part A contains the first four or five booklets and includes the SEL, Vision of St. Paul, and the Sayings of St. Bernard, all copied in one hand (that of Scribe A), followed by the Dispute Between the Body and the Soul, copied in a contemporary but different hand (that of Scribe B). The last booklet, Part B, contains

32 Pamela Robinson defines the booklet as a “self-contained unit” that is a “small but structurally independent production containing a single work or a number of short works” (“The Booklet,” 46). On the number of extant booklets in L, see Liszka, “MS Laud Misc. 108,” 76–79 and 89–91; Robinson, “Oxford: Bodleian Library MS. Laud misc 108,” 225–26; and Allen, King Horn, 8.
the two romances, both copied by Scribe C in a hand contemporary with those that transcribed the other booklets (Part A). The booklets were collated early in the manuscript’s history, as evidenced by the consecutive numbering of all of the texts in red crayon in a fourteenth-century hand.33 This compiler added abbreviated Latin running titles to nearly all the saints’ lives in red crayon.34 Another rubricator also added *incipits* and *explicit* s to several of the saints’ lives and to *Havelok* in red ink. In the late fourteenth century, Scribe D copied three more saints’ lives and *Somer Soneday* in a cursive hand on the remaining blank leaves of the romance booklet and an added gathering. Scribe D also renumbered the texts in the entire manuscript.35 The numbering of texts—twice—over an extended period of time signals the anthologizing impulse of at least two scribes. The successive numbering of religious and secular texts in the manuscript invites readers and listeners to read the texts consecutively and thus understand the romances and *Somer Soneday* as part of a continuum of saints’ lives and religious matter. Indeed, the rubricator who titled many of the lives in red ink titled *Havelok* as a *vita*: [*Incipit*] *Vita Hauelok quondam Rex Anglie· Et Denmarchie* (fig. 1), thereby indicating that at least one scribal reader understood *Havelok* as a continuation of the SEL.36 Moreover, the decoration of the manuscript, discussed in several chapters, indicates an overall desire for visual uniformity of the two sections.37 The collation of the texts in the manuscript and the additions of the late fourteenth-century scribe reflect a readerly engagement with, to quote Susanna Fein from Chapter Thirteen, “the book’s design as anthology.”


33 This numbering is evident when examining the manuscript directly. See fig. 6 where the number is legible below the running title, and fig. 7 where the number can be seen in the right margin, thirty-one lines down.
34 See figs. 6, 7, the top and lower-right margins, and fig. 8, top margin.
35 See figs. 1, 7, top-right margins, figs. 3, 4, 8, and 10, top center margins, and fig. 9, left margin, next to opening of *Horn*.
37 See A. S. G. Edwards, Chapter One, Murray J. Evans, Chapter Three, Taylor, Chapter Four, and Susanna Fein, Chapter Thirteen in this volume.
into consideration paleographic and codicological evidence. Thomas Liszka, in Chapter Two, “Talk in the Camps: On the Dating of the South English Legendary, Havelok the Dane, and King Horn in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108,” surveys the scholarship on the dating of the SEL and the romances; his survey revisits and contextualizes important early work on these texts while it reveals the high level of subjectivity often involved in the dating of the manuscript. In Chapter Three, “‘Very Like a Whale’?: Physical Features and the ‘Whole Book’ in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108,” Murray J. Evans examines the layout and decoration of titles, *incipits*, initials, display scripts, and numbering at the beginnings and endings of texts to argue that, taken together, these physical features allow us to register a cohesiveness of texts in the manuscript, while acknowledging their “‘unity in multeity.’” With Chapters Four and Five we move to considerations of provenance. In Chapter Four “‘Her Y spelle’: The Evocation of Minstrel Performance in a Hagiographical Context,” Andrew Taylor reconsiders the function of the minstrel evocations in *Havelok* and *Horn* and reaffirms that the manuscript is not a minstrel’s script. He finds instead that the manuscript evidence points to a “prosperous, sophisticated, and highly literate patron” who commissioned L from a bookshop in Oxford and who had a strong affiliation with East Anglia, where the story of Havelok was well-known. Christina M. Fitzgerald, in Chapter Five, “Miscellaneous Masculinities and a Possible Fifteenth-Century Owner of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108,” investigates the later fifteenth-century reception of L. She identifies the person named in the attestation of ownership found on the last folio of L as being one Henry Perveys, a fifteenth-century London draper. Fitzgerald argues that the evidence of Perveys’s ownership of the manuscript points to a community of men who were, to one extent or another, concerned with constructing an “appropriative” masculine, mercantile identity.

Part One thus builds upon, expands, and re-evaluates long-standing (and often unresolved) critical and philological inquiries into L, while it offers new ways of interpreting the physical features of the manuscript, particularly in relation to manuscript planning and execution. It also emphasizes the need to recognize scholarly biases that often cloud important issues, and it explores historical clues left in the manuscript that might shed light on both early and later reception of the texts contained in L.
Part Two: The Manuscript and Its Texts

In addition to the historical and physical evidence of the manuscript, rhetorical evidence suggests further possibilities for reading across texts and genres. The “overlap between the textual lives of the ostensibly religious and the ostensibly chivalrous”—as exemplified in L—prompts us “to acknowledge what Jocelyn Wogan-Browne deems the ‘limited meaningfulness’ of generic distinctions that do not take into account the narrative structures, ‘social functions,’ and readers shared by romance and hagiography.”38 The chapters in Part Two demonstrate this intertextuality: the non-hagiographical religious poems, including the initial temporale poems, such as *Infancy of Jesus Christ*, and the interim eschatological poems engage, foreground, and develop particular themes found in the saints’ lives, romances, and *Sommer Soneday*; the spiritual allusions found in *Havelok* and *Horn* come to the fore within the context of the manuscript, and certain narrative features in the saints’ lives tie them to reading expectations associated with romance.39 When, for example, *Havelok* is read within the framework of the L SEL’s royal lives of SS. Oswald, Edmund the King, Edward the Martyr, and Kenelm, the character King Athelwold of England emerges as a holy ruler, much like the four saint-kings, and prefigures the sanctity of the protagonist, while Havelok himself functions as a hero who shares more affinities with Christ and the saints than he does with chivalric heroes.40 Resituating *Havelok* in its hagiographical manuscript context also helps to explain the poem’s effusive, emotional narrator. When examined alongside the personal, prayerful narrator of the L SEL, the narrator of *Havelok* emerges as an instigator of affective, meditative response and thus aligns the poem with the manuscript’s devotional concerns and practices.41 These

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39 In “The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance,” Diane Speed comments on the possible influence of each genre on the other in L, noting that the SEL “remind[s] us of the piety of [Havelok and Horn]” while the two romances enhance the “romance qualities of the [saints’ lives]” (in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, Meale, 135–58 [143]).

40 Bell develops this contextualized reading of *Havelok* in “Resituating Romance.”

41 Couch elaborates this argument in “Defiant Devotion.”
readings demonstrate how crucial it is to account for the manuscript context of these “Matter of England” romances which, although the narratives are surrounded by the spiritual agenda of hagiography in L, have been more often read as historical narrative (Havelok) or courtly romance (Horn).  

In Chapter Six, “A Text for Its Time: The Sanctorale of the Early South English Legendary,” Diane Speed illustrates the dominance of the SEL sanctorale within L, demonstrating how the other texts that are collated with the saints’ lives “read the sanctorale.” In each case Speed finds shared priorities concerning Christian history and the Church’s predominant role in that history and in the lives of the manuscript audience. The result is a cohesive “literary mythology.” Daniel T. Kline, in Chapter Seven, “The Audience and Function of the Apocryphal Infancy of Jesus Christ in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108,” finds that the theme of childhood explored in this temporale poem appears throughout the SEL and the romances: childhood serves to figure a particular historical sensibility wherein narratives of individual development enfold into and inflect universal and national versions of history. The importance of childhood links past to present and history to eternity. In Chapter Eight, “The Eschatological Cluster—Sayings of St. Bernard, Vision of St. Paul, and Dispute Between the Body and the Soul—in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108,” J. Justin Brent addresses the poems following the SEL, showing how the three poems that originally closed the SEL narratives serve as transitional pieces from the hagiographical materials to the romances and Somer Soneday; the intervening poems highlight the themes of death and the afterlife found throughout the texts in the manuscript. Andrew Lynch, in Chapter Nine, “Genre, Bodies, and Power in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108: King Horn, Havelok, and The South English Legendary,” opens the discussion of textual interactions

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between the SEL saints’ lives and the romances. Lynch tracks the formal and thematic similarities and differences of these two primary L genres as he offers a survey of shared incident and characterization centered on “the heroic disposition of a special body” in the sanctorale and Havelok and Horn. In Chapter Ten, “The Early South English Legendary and Difference: Race, Place, Language, and Belief,” Robert Mills continues the comparison of the saints’ lives and romances by considering the “racial matrix” that emerges in the fantastical construction of difference. Manifestations of “linguistic, geographical, and religious alterity” link the sanctorale to the romances and conjure a (fragile) illusion of a uniform, “unified Christian body.” Julie Nelson Couch, in Chapter Eleven, “The Magic of Englishness in St. Kenelm and Havelok the Dane,” also attends to the fantastical aspect of narrative in her specific comparison of the SEL St. Kenelm to the romance Havelok. She analyses their similar figuration of a national entity, “Engelond,” as a vulnerable child heir who is fantastically redeemed. Both narratives typify a desire for an empowered Englishness found throughout the manuscript. In Chapter Twelve, “‘holie mannes liues’: England and its Saints in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108’s King Horn and South English Legendary,” Kimberly K. Bell brings Horn into the discussion of intertextuality as she explores how Horn and the SEL English saints’ lives rework hagiographic and romance conventions to appeal specifically to an English audience. As a result, the vitae encourage a reading of Horn as a saintly hero, while Horn develops and expands the SEL’s construct of England the nation by incorporating Ireland into its vision of Englishness. Susanna Fein investigates the manuscript’s final poem in Chapter Thirteen, “Somer Soneday: Kingship, Sainthood, and Fortune in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108.” Fein argues that the activities of the four L scribes prove that the poem’s placement at the end of the manuscript is intentional and that it, in fact, echoes, parallels, and develops themes found in all of the L texts. Ultimately, she maintains, Somer Soneday invites listening and reading audiences to contemplate how Fortune influences the lives of people from all social stations. While all the chapters in Part Two acknowledge, to a degree, the dominant influence of the sanctorale over the other L texts, each chapter brings distinct prevalences—history, piety, body, race, fantasy, England, Englishness—to bear on the literary and cultural meanings of L. In the “Epilogue: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108 and other English Manuscripts,” A. S. G. Edwards closes the collection by placing this dynamic
manuscript within the cultural and manuscript context of twelfth- and thirteenth-century England. He concludes that L “provides the most substantial early indication of the emergent status of the vernacular.”

The attention to all social classes noted by Fein in Somer Soneday is characteristic of the texts throughout the manuscript. Not only are the noble invoked and dramatized in the L SEL, but also “þe children and þe wummen,” (477.529), “selie bonde-men” (444.477), the poor, the widowed. Likewise, the Havelok narrator includes all as he accounts for the whole kingdom of England:

Erl and barun, dreng and þayn,
Knict, bondeman, and swain,
Wydues, maydnes, prestes, and clerkes.43

Unlike a manuscript that courts an elite audience, this vernacular manuscript evidences an attention to a broader spectrum of readers and listeners. The most obvious factor determining the audience of L is its use of English. Writing in this “spoken” vernacular suggests a lay audience for the manuscript.44 At the same time, the spiritual themes and forms that thread through the manuscript suggest a devout one. In fact, all of the L narrators urge prayer for the reader or writer’s personal salvation, positioning a prayerful stance as the natural response to reading or hearing each narrative. At the end of each narrated saint’s life and death, the addressee is enjoined to deploy the reading/hearing of each saint as a prayer for his or her soul: “Nou god graunti þat we mote with him [St. Wulfstan] : in þe Ioye of heouene beo” (77.232). In like manner, the narrators of Havelok and Horn also request God to lead the souls of the dead protagonists (Horn 1643–44) or the soul of the writer himself who has “þe rym maked” (Havelok 2999) to “heuene” (Horn 1644). Since these prayers shape reading or hearing the L narratives into a mode of spiritual practice, the devotional aspect of L supports O. S. Pickering’s hypothesis of a group of unlearned religious folk, such as novices or nuns or devout laywomen, for the early

43 Smithers, Havelok, lines 31–33. Subsequent parenthetical references will be to line numbers in this edition. The narrator repeats this type of list at least five times in the poem as he depicts an England (and Denmark) made up of all classes, ages, and genders. The similar line “Eorl, baron, knyȝht, and swein” is found in the SEL’s St. Mary Magdalene (477.512).

44 On the connection of English to a lay audience, see Thompson, Everyday Saints, 56, 193.
SEL. Daniel Kline’s idea of an educational venue for children, Annie Samson’s notion of an early SEL readership of “regional gentry and perhaps secular clergy” and Andrew Taylor’s suggested East Anglian patron would also apply to the vernacular, non-liturgical, yet instructive and spiritual character of L.

Samson’s supposition of a provincial gentry audience for the SEL accords with Susan Crane’s hypothesis of a baronial readership for early vernacular romances including Havelok and Horn; such localized audiences would also explain the political focus on illegitimate or oppressive rulers of England, especially evident in the Anti-Norman St. Wulfstan, but present throughout L. As Turville-Petre explains, writing in English at this time deliberately precludes a larger international audience that would be courted by the use of French or Latin. He considers the choice of English to be a nationalistic one, a choice to communicate directly and exclusively to those who identify themselves as English. What underlies the choice of English, according to Turville-Petre, is “the conviction that national sentiment is most properly expressed in English.” English speakers may know French and Latin as well, but only true Englishmen and women understand and use English. This idea takes on narratorial force in the revelatory scene in St. Kenelm, where only the English understand the holy writ sent from heaven (352.257–58). Such emphasis on English in L speaks to the interests of a localized audience, whether that be a group of nuns or the household of a rural gentry. As many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the L narratives are localized physically, spiritually, and politically, elaborating English settings, customs, landmarks, shrines, political events, and the English language itself.

Of course, all of these suggestive possibilities of manuscript audience must remain only possibilities since we lack clear-cut evidence

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46 Samson, “The South English Legendary,” 187–94. See Daniel Kline, Chapter Seven, and Taylor, Chapter Four in this volume.
47 Crane, Insular Romance. See also Thompson, Everyday Saints, esp. 48–49, 56, 122, and 174–81 for the political bias of the SEL and further exploration of possible audiences of the anthology. On St. Wulfstan, see Robert Mills, Chapter Ten in this volume. Other lives, including those of SS. Thomas Becket, Dunstan, and Edmund of Abingdon, as well as the romance Havelok, also treat the theme of wrongful rulership.
48 Turville-Petre, England the Nation, 22.
49 Ibid., 20–21.
50 Couch analyzes this scene in Chapter Eleven in this volume.
of the manuscript’s earliest listeners and readers. Nevertheless, these suggested audiences appear credible because of the consistent narratorial tone sustained through the codex. L offers a collection of stories “told” by a host of intimate, emotional, even at times folksy, narrators, indicating a lay and local reception. As Pickering notes, the predominance of narrative and “emotionalism” not only suggests such audiences as novices or laypersons but also argues specifically for a small group context. Both the religious and the secular narrators assume an audience who becomes directly involved with the narrative, interacting with it through their own prayers and other requested responses to the narratives, such as cursing in Havelok or agreement about the current state of affairs in a saint’s life. Thus what Joyce Coleman identifies as an “aural” context for the majority of medieval vernacular reading, that is, poems being read aloud to a small group of listeners, resonates with the manuscript’s consistent representation of reading as a collective experience.

The eschatological poems and the final poem, Somer Soneday, also participate in and even heighten an audience obligation to respond to the texts in L, specifically with a penitential stance. The Dispute poem plants, in the middle of L between the lives and the romances, the stark image of the body of a dead knight, which “on a bere lay,” as its speakers, the body and its soul, debate the reason for its damnation. A similar dead body appears in the appended Somer Soneday, as the poem closes L with the picture of a king without power, whose “bare body” also lies on a bier at the base of life’s Wheel of Fortune. As Fein elaborates in Chapter Thirteen, these graphic images stir the audience to reflect “upon the mutable world and one’s inevitable exit

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51 There is, however, substantial evidence for a possible fifteenth-century audience. See Christina M. Fitzgerald, Chapter Five in this volume.
52 On the tone of the narrators, see, for example, Klaus P. Jankofsky, “Personalized Didacticism: The Interplay of Narrator and Subject Matter in the South English Legendary,” Texas A&M University Studies 10 (1977): 69–77 and Thompson, Everyday Saints. Thompson analyzes the “folksy” narrator of St. Dunstan (120–21).
54 Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Couch, “Defiant Devotion,” for a reading of the interactive audience of L. The fact that the manuscript is relatively plain, with relatively minor flourishing, as Robert Adams noted in conversation, supports the idea of its being used as a text to be read aloud.
56 Turville-Petre, Alliterative Poetry, 140–47, line 142.
from it,” inflecting the value placed upon worldly concerns found in both the SEL and the romances with a remembrance of eternity.

As a whole, L evinces an interactive reader or listener who is urged to respond to the different narratives and outcomes with penitence, meditation, and prayer. In Chapter Eight, Brent explains how, in the eschatological poems, the emphasis falls on the “sanction of rest” and on penitential recollection of one’s sins rather than (as in other versions) on the torments of hell. The focus on a prescribed time of reflection for the already damned, the Sunday respite—on a time, in other words, of audience response—is further reinforced by the return to a summer Sunday in the last poem; thus, Somer Soneday, too, opens a space for serious reflection. Reading or hearing the entire manuscript as a coherent anthology, as was clearly done by Scribe B who brought closure to the SEL with the Dispute and Scribe D who added the final four texts at the end of the manuscript, serves a meditative function: reading, hearing and the penitence urged thereby becomes an exercise in spiritual preparation for death. Thus L as a whole may be seen as a Sunday moment, a Sunday book of life reflection.

The penitential values espoused throughout L do not preclude the manuscript’s equal emphasis upon the political and social injustices of this world, especially as they manifest in the Christian nation of England, a political entity in this manuscript in which God is directly invested and actively involved. Spiritual practice and political concerns often conflate in the L hagiographical and romance narratives. The narrator of St. Wulfstan sees the current state of England as a result of the death of Edward “pe holie kyng” (72.58) in 1066, for soon after “Vnkuynde Eyres” [unnatural heirs] (73.90), “men of oþere londe” (73.93) under “willam bastard” (73.95) came into England. As the man of God, St. Thomas Becket stands with the poor and oppressed of England against the encroaching power of the king and his men (e.g., 117–18.390–402). The Havelok narrator prays, invoking Christ’s resurrection of Lazarus, that Princess Goldeboru will see her oppressor hang for his abuse of her and usurpation of her throne. The spiritual conversation in the Dispute is just as concerned with lords who unjustly collect rents

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57 On this last point, see Fein, Chapter Thirteen.
58 The three poems added in a later hand on the last flyleaf, fol. 238, develop these themes of penitence, reflection, and fortune further. See Fitzgerald, Chapter Five, and Fein, Chapter Thirteen.
as it is with the damnation of the soul. And the four kings mounted on Fortune’s Wheel in Somer Soneday are equally symbolic of their own political and spiritual state and of the lands they govern.60 Such conflations of spiritual and political topics lend ideological value to a construct of England. Many of the chapters in this book address such political and spiritual concerns in ways that, taken as a whole, offer a nuanced, at times polemical, at times fantastical, image of England that emerges as an entity of spiritual and political centrality in L.

Because invested listeners and readers found much—spiritually and politically—upon which to ruminate and debate in L, this manuscript cannot be overlooked. In resituating the L texts in their manuscript context, we can recover—to a degree—a medieval understanding of genre and how it was perceived to be less rigid than we view it today; we can see what sorts of issues English medieval listeners and readers found pertinent to their lives, and we can appreciate, more fully, the artistry involved in the composition of texts long believed to be unworthy of scholarly attention.61 In short, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108 may be an unpretentious, vernacular volume, copied on vellum without illustrations, but it emerges as an eminently useful anthology for understanding early Middle English culture.

60 For this and other reasons Somer Soneday was long categorized as a historical poem. Carleton Brown, for example, argued that it was written in commemoration of Edward II (“Somer Soneday,” in Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber, ed. Kemp Malone and Martin Rudd [Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1929], 362–74). Rosell Hope Robbins tacitly agreed by including it in his Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 98–102. Madden proposed that it was written for Richard II (“Alliterative Poem,” 7), and William Matthews later argued this point in The Tragedy of Arthur: A Study of the Alliterative “Morte Arthure” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 206–207. For a different reading of the poem, see T. M. Smallwood, who argues that the poem does not commemorate any one particular figure but rather addresses the common universal theme of fortune (“The Interpretation of Somer Soneday,” Medium Ævum 42 [1973]: 238–43).

61 See, for example, Horstmann’s need to justify his edition of the SEL: “I know most Englishmen consider it not worth while to print all these Legends; I know they regard them as worthless stuff;” but, he continues, “If the present English public cannot see any merit in these Legends, it does not follow that there is no such merit” (ESEL, xi–xii). See also Derek Pearsall, who marvels at the popularity of Middle English romances: “From the point of view of literary and critical understanding, it is difficult to understand why poems that are so bad according to almost every criterion of literary value should have held such a central position in the literary culture of their period” (“Understanding Middle English Romance,” Review 2 [1980]: 105–25 [105]).