A child protagonist and specific plot details in *St. Kenelm* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108’s (L) *South English Legendary* (SEL) strike a remarkable parallel to the L romance, *Havelok the Dane*. In both poems, the young protagonists are the rightful kings of countries, Kenelm of Mercia in England and Havelok of Denmark and England (by his marriage to Goldeboru, daughter of the late English king), and both are ousted by internal enemies, Kenelm’s own sister and Havelok’s and Goldeboru’s entrusted guardians. Though the similarities in plot and characterization are evident, the different endings of the two narratives—martyrdom for one prince and a long reign for the other—cause them to be read in terms of different generic parameters: the *vita* elevates the *death* of Kenelm as God’s victory over Kenelm’s assassins while Havelok’s *life*, his happy romance ever-after, re-establishes the rightful, God-sanctioned kingship of England and Denmark. Nevertheless, though the ends diverge, the means converge: both poems set the most vulnerable protagonist, a child, against the worst kind of enemy, a treacherous caregiver; and both exact vengeance upon the traitors while exalting the young hero who is, by the grace of God, triumphant.

The similarities described above would not necessarily be worth noting apart from a particularly distinctive complex of pathos and political fantasy which drives both narratives. Not only do both *Havelok* and *St. Kenelm* center on a vulnerable protagonist, but both poems also situate that character within a consciously-constructed and foregrounded England. In these parallel tales, a vulnerable child-king figures England as an imperiled spiritual, political, and linguistic entity. In other words, vulnerable childhood and a notion of *Englishness*...
become aligned. And, ultimately, in both tales, a vulnerable England, which encompasses a notion of English language, is fantastically vindicated and empowered. The glorified martyr Kenelm and the restored King Havelok sanctify English language and England by making English / England indispensable—to spiritual welfare in one narrative and to secular welfare in the other. The prominence of England in these poems fantasizes social and spiritual validation for a non-courtly, non-ecclesiastic vernacular identity, highlighting a desire for an empowered Englishness found throughout the L manuscript.

Like numerous other poems in the L SEL and along with King Horn, the romance Havelok and St. Kenelm thematize England and Englishness. The significant number of English saints found in the L SEL has been well-documented. Of the sixty original sanctorale texts extant in the L SEL, ten are of English saints and two additional ones, SS. Augustine of Canterbury and Gregory the Great, dramatize the conversion of England.¹ The trend of appending historic and more contemporary English lives to collections of ancient and continental lives began with the Latin legendaries of the eleventh century, which Rosalind Love describes as a “gradual modernization and anglicization of the originally Continental (possibly Flemish) ‘Cotton-Corpus legendary.’”² By the twelfth century, these compendiums had increased to multivolume affairs and more English saints, including St. Kenelm, were added to the collections. Love remarks “that the multi-volume legendary came to be an essential part of the library of almost every religious house” in England.³ Though no direct influence can be confirmed, the SEL appears as a vernacular manifestation of these Latin collections.⁴ The


³ Ibid., xxviii.

⁴ The earliest SEL collections are usually dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth century; extant in over sixty manuscripts, the elastic anthology maintained a widespread popularity through the fourteenth century. On the SEL tradition, its lack of