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Abstract:

The formation of the idea of England came about through a long commingling of many languages and traditions. In my paper I demonstrate the cultural complexity of medieval England by examining several Post-Conquest representations of the Pre-Conquest period in which various peoples construct histories which define and legitimize their “Englishness.” My texts sample several literary genres of history-writing from the 13th century: the Brut tradition, native saints’ lives, the so-called “Matter of England” romances, and the saga. Of foremost interest in each of these genres is the mark each people’s history has made on the physical and linguistic landscape of England. Also at stake are issues of kinship and kingship, precedent and continuity, and more subtle considerations of the interdependence of language, law, religion and community. Although these histories use these issues to express anxieties about the roles of various ethnic groups—the Britons, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Normans—interest in England as a whole begins to take on greater importance than the ethnic heritage of the individual communities that claim their part in it. English history-writing of this period is in the midst of a paradigm shift in which the land itself becomes the constant, whatever peoples may come and go.

INVENTING ENGLISHNESS: 13th CENTURY NARRATIVES
OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

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INTRODUCTION

The discipline of history has in recent years gone the way of physics and literature in proclaiming that the one truth we know is that truth is relative. Histories are not history, but an appropriation of the past which “both reveals and makes history and society.”¹ Relative though history may be, the past was crucial to medieval understanding of contemporary politics, law, and religion. History and precedent declared what was right. Just as the medieval historian offers anecdotes to illustrate the nature of England, Robert Alan Rouse in his *Ideas of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance* offers his own synecdoche to illustrate the vital importance of the past in medieval law-making. In 1381, when the tenants of St Alban’s Abbey staged demonstrations demanding greater freedoms than they were currently allowed, they insisted that the terms of tenancy which they sought already existed in a document from the time of the founding of the church—Offa’s charter. The abbot insisted that there was no such document but “the rebels would not accept that the charter did not exist, and eventually the abbot was forced to write out a new charter confirming King Offa’s privileges.”² In order for a law to be good and true, it had to be perceived as traditional.

¹ Galloway, Andrew. “Writing history in England” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace. Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 255.

² Rouse Robert Allen. *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance*. Studies in Medieval Romance Series, Vol III. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005, p. 93

The formation of the idea of England came about through a long commingling of many languages and traditions. Early English history is often represented as a succession of invasions in which one homogenous group entirely supplants another homogenous group, one after another, until one of these parties spontaneously turns into the English, just in time for the War of the Roses, but of course this is an oversimplification. The Romans did recall their legions, but otherwise nobody packed up and went home when it was another people's turn to rule England. The actual result of the Norman Conquest and other invasions was a fascinating accumulation, not replacement, of cultural influences.

The common perception of the Norman Conquest is as an overthrow of one cultural group by another, of French versus English, but in reality—so far as modern historians tell us—cultural identity had little to do with the invasion itself. A somewhat united England had existed as a political reality only since the reign of Alfred the Great in the late ninth century, and even his realm went only as far as the borders of the Danelaw, with which it existed adjacently for a while, until each took over the other in turn. William represented his invasion not as an expansionist grab for power but as a legitimate dispute about succession. One of the last so-called Anglo-Saxon kings, Edward the Confessor, spent his formative years in Normandy and became a saint revered by Angles and Normans alike. He died childless and two men claimed the throne—William, a member of the community of Vikings who had settled in France, spoke French, and were now called

Normans; and Harold, an Anglo-Saxon who was actually half Danish himself and connected to Cnut by marriage, and Swein Estrithson (then King of Denmark) by blood.³ If William and Harold alone did not involve enough nations in their family ties and allegiances, a third player who entered in the midst of their standoff was the ambitious Harald Hardrada, who intended to make England a tributary of Norway.

The English after the Conquest were a conglomeration of peoples from all over the northern world. Celts, Angles, Saxons, Danes, Normans, and others rubbed shoulders on a small island. Common place defined these diverse peoples as related, though their histories were distinct. Brought together, they began to write new histories, which attempted to explain their relationships to each other and to England.⁴ In this thesis I explore later representations of Pre-Conquest England which express the tensions between the cultural complexity of England's history and the will to imagine it as "meant to be" the single country it becomes.

Rouse speaks of the idea of "Anglo-Saxonism as a discourse of power, in which the Anglo-Saxon past was used to represent the political and social needs of various communities in post-conquest England."⁵ Where Rouse's book covers a single genre thoroughly, I hope by drawing my texts from a variety of genres to bring forward the importance of recognizing those

³ Williams, Ann. 'Godwine, earl of Wessex (*d.* 1053)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [accessed 11 April 2008: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56555>]

⁴ I use the term "England" as used at the time when these histories were written, despite its being sometimes anachronistic to when they took place, because the authors perceived its eventual unification as inevitable, and it is their representations of Anglo-Saxon England, not Anglo-Saxon England itself, with which this paper is concerned.

⁵ Rouse 2005, 2

“various communities.” Introducing his essay on the chronicle form, Andrew Galloway speaks of the distinction made by the monk Gervase of Canterbury, between the humble chronicler and the lofty historian who “uses sesquipedalian words and elegant language to describe the character and life of a single hero.” Of this category, Galloway says, “such writing sounds like biography, romance, or epic.”⁶ It is precisely these genres of history-writing which I explore: native saints’ lives in the *South English Legendary* (early 13th Century), *Havelok the Dane* (late 13th Century) from the so-called “Matter of England” romances,⁷ and the *Brut* tradition, particularly *Layamon’s Brut* (early 13th Century). In addition to representing a sampling of genres each text has a different ethnic or regional thrust. Each considers the mark a people’s history has made on the physical and linguistic landscape of England, and takes a different and often changeable attitude towards the ethnic and cultural requirements which define and legitimize “Englishness.” Issues of kinship and kingship, precedent and continuity, and more subtle considerations of the interdependence of language, law, religion and community mark these narratives.

Geoffrey of Monmouth

The idea of English history as a succession of peoples is expressed in one of the earliest major histories written after the Conquest, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*. It was written in Latin in 1138,

⁶ Galloway 1999, 256

⁷ See Rouse 2005, 52.

only about 70 years after the Conquest and is dedicated to members of the Norman nobility: Waleran, Count of Mellant, and Robert, Earl of Gloucester and grandson of William the Conqueror.⁸ Although my primary text from the *Brut* tradition is Layamon's it is informative to look first at its precursors—this text by Monmouth and Wace's *Roman de Brut*, written in Anglo-Norman French in 1155. Wace's language and Geoffrey's dedication make it clear that both texts were aimed at an Anglo-Norman audience. They tell the story of the Britons, from their immigration from Troy, through the time of King Arthur, to their displacement by the Saxons. In these texts Britain becomes the promised land, the Britons the chosen people—until they displease God, who allows the land to pass to the newly Christian Saxons. This pattern must have been appealing to the newly arrived Normans. It gave precedent and perhaps divine sanction to the passing of England to their administration, and allowed them to inherit all the associations of Troy and Arthur. Although this was the history of another people, they made it their own—it came with the land.

Of England's two most prominent origin myths—Teuton and Trojan—Geoffrey of Monmouth's interest is in the latter. For the Normans, late-comers who were more French than Germanic in culture, their right to the country was based on inheritance justified by analogy and precedent in the classical and Biblical paradigms. William, though distantly related, was not the obvious blood heir to Edward (technically the last Anglo-Saxon king,

⁸ Tatlock's introduction to: Monmouth, Geoffrey of. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Louise Thorpe trans. London: Penguin, 1966, p. 11

despite his “close ties to Normandy”⁹) but the Normans tried to establish the propriety of his succession by interpreting Edward’s childlessness to a chosen spiritual virginity.¹⁰ They played down the importance of physical inheritance and raised the spiritual stakes—the transfer of power was part of God’s plan. The Normans may have looked back into Biblical history and justified their coup by observing there that God grants victory to his favorites and punishes those who have not served him well. Although the classical world is a more immediate influence and source of pride for the Britons (coming originally from Troy, they are the offspring of the ancient classical world, kinsmen and equals to the Romans) it is in the allusions to the more distant Biblical model that Monmouth makes his point about the transfer of power between peoples in England. The Biblical world is far enough removed that nothing of Christ is mentioned between the fact of his birth and the time when the West begins to convert—evidently, if the earth did darken and shake in the moment of the crucifixion, as it does in some traditions, the Britons were too far “over the edge of the world”¹¹ to notice. Distant though the Biblical world is, the Britons are still, by graceful analogy, shown to be the inheritors of this other parent of Western culture. The location of Geoffrey’s narrative in time is not given by numerical dates, but coordinated against the timeline of Biblical history. The British Kings of the early years have strong personalities and memorable stories like the Biblical Patriarchs. Later, except for a few heroes

⁹ "Edward." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007. Britannica Concise Encyclopedia. 15 March 2007.

¹⁰ Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn. “Medieval Virginites: Exemplary Passions and the Erotics of the Sacred” High Medieval Literature Lecture Series. University of York. 26 February 2007.

¹¹ Monmouth 1966, 107

like Arthur, who stands out in the later history of the Britons as Moses does in the history of the Israelites, the parallel continues through a gradual diminishing and corruption of the kings, and an ending in which God allows each chosen people to be displaced by Pagan rulers. In modeling Britain's history after the Biblical model Monmouth fashions the Channel as a new Jordan and England as a new promised land. As the Israelites were punished for their sins by displacement from their land, so the displacement of Anglo-Saxon regimes implied that they too had displeased God. Monmouth uses this analogy to create a convenient "precedent for the dominions and ambitions of the Norman kings"¹² and emphasizes the sins of the Saxons in order to justify their eventual dispossession. The Britons fall to the "savage" and "foreign"¹³ Anglo-Saxons not because of any merit of the Anglo-Saxons but because "God did not wish the Britons to rule in Britain any more."¹⁴ This allows Monmouth to implicate the prior rulers of England in their own downfall, even from the beginning of their era of dominance. The Anglo-Saxons were un-civilized and un-Christian at their beginnings, and perhaps had failed this chance God had given them. The success of the Norman invasion was proof that God had seen that the Anglo-Saxons were no longer fit rulers.

The South English Legendary

At the opposite end from Monmouth in terms of chronology and attitude towards the Anglo-Saxons is *The South English Legendary*. This was

¹² Tatlock in Monmouth 1966, 10

¹³ Monmouth 1966, 284

¹⁴ Monmouth 1966, 282

a popular collection of liturgical material—50 some copies are known, half of these characterized as “major” by Jill Frederick, who writes convincingly regarding the political thrust of the collection. “The D’Evelyn and Mill edition” she tells us, “contains seventy-five saints’ lives, of which thirteen are Anglo-Saxons.”¹⁵ In addition to the early continental saints, the *South English Legendary* presents many native saints. In the native saints’ lives, place receives far more attention than it does in the non-native hagiographies of the same collection. The events of the past are linked to the material world—objects and abbeys and locations that are significant to these tales are still visible in post-Conquest England, and the author or authors invite the hearer to go and see them. The Englishness of the native saints is a vital aspect of their saintliness, and their Englishness is determined in part by their role in the government (a good many native saints have some connection to the monarchy) but more than that, by their kinship and their use of the English language. In the *South English Legendary*, even God communicates in English, much to the confusion of the Pope.

Rather than using the Bible as an analogy, as Geoffrey’s work does, the structure of the *South English Legendary* implies that the history of the saints is a direct continuation of Biblical history. Thomas R. Liszka has observed in his essay “*The South English Legendaries*” (underlining his) that the manuscripts’ structures vary widely due to the demands of conflicting chronologies: the historical order that stories of saints follow stories of Christ

¹⁵ Frederick, Jill. “The South English Legendary: Anglo-Saxon saints and national identity.” *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 58, 59.

and his contemporaries which follow stories from the Old Testament, the order of observances within the year, and—the most imposing chronology of all—the order in which texts came to hand to be added to the manuscript.¹⁶ His useful appendices do show, however, that there is a tendency towards using the historical-chronological as the primary structure of most manuscripts (a secondary structure being the order within the year of liturgical observances), with the *Banna Sanctorum* serving as the axle between the Biblical and hagiographical portions. This poem paints an army of Christ stretching across time: the Patriarchs out in front, John the Baptist bearing his banner, and the saints bringing up the rear guard.

The English saints often carry that sense of battle as they are presented as strong opponents of invaders, be they Danish or Norman. But even more, the English saints' stories concern themselves with continuity of blood and history. They construct a correlative idea of Englishness based on the land and the language: that each historically belongs to the other. Thus the work expresses its discontent with a government which functioned in another language, as in the story of "Wulfstan" which depicts the saint defying "Willam Bastard" who conquered England "ðoru stregðe and felonye"¹⁷:

As sone so [William] was kyng ymad / & all Engelon bysette
 As he wolde mid strange men / ac noman ne miȝte hym lette
 Þis holy sein Wolston / wel ofte him wiðsede
 Þat he wið vnriȝt hadde ido / a such vuel dede

¹⁶ Liszka, Thomas. "The South English Legendaries" *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in the Cultural History of North-Western Europe*, ed. Thomas R. Liszka and Lorna E. M. Walker. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001

¹⁷ "through strength and felony" *South English Legendary*. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill eds. Early English Text Society Vol 235-236. London: Oxford University Press, Amen House, 1956. Vol I 10 (Henceforth *SEL*)

And spak azen hym baldeliche / & ne sparede for no drede
 For he was ðe kundeste Englisse man / ðat was of eny manhede.¹⁸

This passage is Middle English, but the vocabulary is still fundamentally Germanic. Unless “strange” is meant to signify the Modern English word of the same spelling and not its Old English heteronym meaning “strong,” this passage makes no use of the language William brought with him when he “all Engelon bysette.” Frederick takes the former view and glosses “strange” as “foreign,” which if correct means that the one French word the passage accepts into its vocabulary is turned back against those whose first language was French—a foreign word to describe foreign people.¹⁹ Also significant to these tensions is the word “kundeste,” glossed by Frederick as “truest.”²⁰ It is a weightier word than this modern English approximation suggests. According to the OED, “kund” is a form of “kind,” meaning “natural, native,” associated with concepts of kinship and heirship.²¹ To the *South English Legendary* Englishness is defined by the history of land, language, and heredity, but all this is constructed to emphasize its most politically relevant characteristic: the English are, above all, emphatically not Norman.

¹⁸ “As soon as [William] was made king, and all England beset as he wished with strange men, and no man might not allow him, this holy saint Wulfstan, well often he spoke against him, that he had done with unright such a foul deed, and spoke against him boldly, nor spared for any dread, for he was the truest English man that was of any manly virtue” *SEL* Vol I 10

¹⁹ Line 75 (“No strengþe nadde þe stronge men”) makes me think that “strange” is really the French loan word. 73 though, “deoluol & strang inou” makes me ask again.

²⁰ Frederick 2000, 66

²¹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University press, 2008. (Henceforth OED)

Havelok the Dane

Thorlac Turville-Petre is a prominent voice on the matter of the romance *Havelok the Dane*, whose position has been summarized thus: “this poem represents a revisionist account of Viking settlement.”²² In *Havelok*, the Danes do not come to maraud and pillage as they do in the *South English Legendary* but rather to right wrongs and settle peaceably afterwards. As history—the bare fact of the Viking’s presence—is revised for the purposes of this narrative, so too is the historiography. The earliest form in which we find the *Havelok* story is in the Anglo-Norman Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* of about 1140, in which version the dispute involves only regional Anglo-Saxon rulers, not the whole of England and Denmark besides.

Although its ethnic thrust is quite different, in its approach to historiography and historicity *Havelok* is very similar to the *South English Legendary*. Both emphasize the importance of blood, a physical relationship, when constructing good kings, and of material evidence in proving their tales’ truth and relevance. Like the native saints’ lives, *Havelok* roots itself in the landscape of England. Turville-Petre describes North Lincolnshire as having “a stable population of partly Scandinavian origin and an economy based on the local industries of farming and fishing.”²³ The very fact that Grim makes his living as a fisherman reflects the realities of life where it was composed.

²² Field, Rosalind. “Romance in England, 1066-1400” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace. Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 166.

²³ Turville-Petre, Thorlac. “*Havelok* and the Chronicles.” *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 143

Even the Danes' linguistic contributions noted in this story are place-names, as Grim becomes honored as the founder of Grimsby.

Havelok was likely written in the late thirteenth century in the Northeast Midlands, which was part of the former Danelaw, and where a substantial portion of the community had Danish heritage. The focus within England is on the inhabitants of Lincolnshire, among whom the primary characters have direct connections to Denmark. But it is not the people's Danishness that *Havelok* celebrates, rather their place in English history and literary tradition. Despite obvious regional pride, *Havelok* is eager to incorporate its story into the larger national one, to "construct[] a revised national story in which the Lincolnshire community plays a central part."²⁴ The story went differently in earlier Anglo-Norman versions—there the tale was acted out in the era of the Britons, and it was not all England and Denmark at stake but mere regional kingdoms, with Havelok helping his queen to take back just East Anglia.²⁵ In the later Anglo-Danish version, the emphasis is on the whole of England. It creates a history in which Danish and English unite to usher in a period of prosperity for England.

The use *Havelok* makes of place is similar to that of the *South English Legendary*, continually gesturing towards the evidence of continuity. It has a more inclusive awareness of demographics, however. Royal blood and the sanction of God are no less important to the legitimacy of rule than in the other texts, but there is in *Havelok* a constant concern that these qualifications

²⁴ Turville-Petre 1996, 143

²⁵ Turville-Petre 1996, 145

be acknowledged by all people, “riche and pouere, heye and lowe,”²⁶ The text is rife with such couplings of social opposites. Havelok has been all things—he is Danish and he is English, he is the scion of royalty and the foster-son of a Grimsby fisherman, he is the savior of a united England. His story contradicts ideas of the Danes as Viking raiders and asserts that just as much as the Norman nobles or the Saxon saints, the Anglo-Danish fisher-folk are English too.

Layamon's Brut

Returning at last to Layamon, we find that the successions in his history are not as simple as those in Monmouth or even Wace, though he follows Wace closely in telling the same story about the rise and fall of the Britons. Faced with the "rival Trojan and Teutonic origin myths in Britain,"²⁷ Layamon explicitly favors the Trojan, but does not dismiss the Teutonic entirely. Layamon's language of composition is English—obviously the Anglo-Saxons were not replaced cleanly and entirely by the Normans the way Monmouth and Wace show the Britons displaced by the Saxons. Although Johnson and Wogan-Browne rightly caution against the “over-simplified view of Layamon writing to and for the politically and linguistically oppressed

²⁶ “rich and poor, high and low” *Havelok the Dane*. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury eds. Originally Published in *Four Romances of England*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999.
[<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/daneint.htm>.] Line 2471.

²⁷ Rouse 2005, 2

‘English people’ of this time”²⁸ (based on the trilingualism of both Layamon’s sources and the manuscript context of his finished work), it is clear that compared to his precursors Layamon, like the *South English Legendary*, has a certain sympathy for the Saxons, perhaps related to his interest in their language. Though he does not go so far as *Havelok*, he moves tentatively towards a cumulative history, in which there is room for more than one people at a time to contribute to the story of England. Above all, Layamon is fascinated with points of cultural contact and blending, particularly in their linguistic manifestations. It may be the Britons and Saxons of centuries before of which he is writing, but given the complexity of post-Conquest England these questions must have had contemporary relevance.

Layamon deals at great length and nuance with the issues of Englishness and history raised in the works introduced above. By examining his *Brut* alongside these works with their far more explicit ethnic loyalties and political agendas, one realizes the complexity of the conversation about nationhood in High Medieval England.

In English history-writing of the period after the Conquest the land itself becomes the constant. Each new wave of immigrants made their mark, but also claimed as their own the history of the landscape and language. As Johnson observes, “Layamon’s narrative also signals that a process of accreting peoples, languages and cultures is at work”²⁹ Once they have

²⁸ Johnson, Lesley and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. “National, world and women’s histories: writers and readers in post-Conquest England” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace. Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 98

²⁹ Johnson 1999, 103

crossed the Channel, that Jordan of Monmouth's, there is room for each new community, Saxons, Normans, or Danes, to call themselves "English" and begin to write themselves into the traditions of that land.

LANGUAGES IN CONFLICT

In high medieval England we find a curious situation in which certain factors—common laws, governance, and place—define the realm as a single nation, but this legal, cultural, and physical space is shared by several languages. In the texts from this period that address nationhood we find some which assert that one of these languages must take precedence over the others, and others which simply explore the spaces where languages meet. All seem to agree that language matters—what is less clear is what the specific situation of languages in England means. The English language was a crucial part of defining English culture, and yet the literature of England was never monolingual. Literacy and Latin came hand in hand, then the Danes brought Old Norse, and by the period with which this paper is concerned, French was the language of government. The *South English Legendary* responds to the political status of French by emphasizing the religious-political powers of English, even over Latin. *Layamon's Brut* also explores anxieties about languages sharing and coming to conflict over cultural and physical space, but in the context of the struggle between the Britons and the Saxons. However variously they approach the subject, texts attempting to deal with English national identity return again and again to the question of language, and the dynamics of power between languages.

In the Middle Ages, and in the Anglo-Saxon period in particular, the perception of salvation was that of the Old Testament: it was not a gift to each person, but a contract with a community, often defined by its language. The *South English Legendary* perpetuated the idea of this correspondence of one language to one people to one offer of salvation by demonstrating the religious-creative power of English words in the discussion of English identity. The life of St Wulfstan, for example, with its contrast between the “strange” Normans and the “kunderste” Wulfstan is not the only moment when Englishness in opposition to an enemy culture is translated into saintliness. When “twei princes of anoþer lond”³⁰ come to ravage England, Edmund stands up to them, and loses his head. His remains—now relics—are found when his head cries out “al an Englisch, her, her, her.”³¹ His body is found, and installed in a shrine. Thus the English language triumphs over the enemy culture even in Edmund’s death, for though she loses a king, England gains a saint.

English even trumps Latin in the story of St Kenelm, an Anglo-Saxon saint’s life included in the *South English Legendary* “from the earliest manuscript.”³² His older sister Quendride, in order to acquire the throne for herself, orders Kenelm’s murder by his tutor—the person who presumably is responsible for Kenelm’s education in Latin, a language necessary to a king. Instead, (in a scenario typical of both foreign and domestic martyrdoms) the tutor silences him by removing his head. The queen attempts to silence his

³⁰ “two princes from another land” *SEL* Vol II 512

³¹ “all in English, here, here, here” *SEL* Vol II 514

³² Johnson 1999, 105

memory by ordering that no one may “anemne enes hure broþer name.”³³ When people learn what she has done and come to seek both the corpse and justice, she turns to the Latin words of her Psalter to “acorsi hure broþer body.”³⁴ But these holy words will not submit to subversion—for her unnatural betrayal, her abuse of her position of kinship and now even scripture, “out borste boþe hure eize.”³⁵ Unlike her brother, cut off in his education, she is literate—but she does not speak correctly and now she cannot see. She has tried to use the wrong words in the wrong language to the wrong end.

The strongest statement in this story about the power of English, even over Latin, is in the means by which this matter of sibling rivalry came to the attention of the whole Christian world. God himself reveals the importance and location of Kenelm’s body directly to the Pope, not by a dream or a sign or direct speech, but in writing. This in itself is interesting but not exceptional, for Christianity, like Judaism, is a heavily text-based religion. What is more significant is that the Pope is stumped. For all his education and authority, he cannot read this message from God, for the “nobloste relike...of al Rome” is “iwrite pur Engliss.”³⁶

While the *South English Legendary* is interested in the power of one language over others, the *Brut* is interested in the meeting of languages, and the cumulative influences of languages in shaping the geography of England.

³³ “name any her brother’s name” *SEL* Vol I 286

³⁴ “curse her brother’s body” *SEL* Vol I 291

³⁵ “out burst both her eyes” *SEL* Vol I 291

³⁶ “written in English” *SEL* Vol I 288

Unlike Monmouth and Wace, who have nothing good to say about the Saxons, when Layamon comes to the point in his chronology immediately before the conversion of the Saxons, he reports the story of Gregory and the “Angels.” Ever since Bede ensured its canonization by including it in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the story of Pope Gregory and the English slaves remained a part of the myths of English origins and identity. Struck by the fair features of some slave-boys in the Roman marketplace, Gregory asks after their origin:

‘They are called Angles,’ he was told. ‘That is appropriate,’ he said, ‘for they have angelic faces, and it is right that they should become joint-heirs with the angels in heaven. And what is the name of the province from which they have been brought?’ ‘Deira,’ was the answer. ‘Good. They shall indeed be rescued *de ira*—from wrath—and called to the mercy of Christ. And what is the name of their king?’ ‘Aelle,’ he was told. ‘Then,’ said Gregory, making play on the name, ‘it is right that their land should echo the praise of God our Creator in the word *Alleluia*.’³⁷

This story is crucial in the history and self-image of the Anglo-Saxons, a moment when their worth is confirmed by the church. Monmouth’s *History* does record that Augustine came to England at the behest of Pope Gregory, but leaves out Gregory’s reasons for sending him, as a celebration of the inherent divinity of the Angles would have been dissonant with Monmouth’s campaign to portray the Saxon rule as a mere placeholder until another great people were chosen to inherit the land. Layamon though, claims in the introduction to his *Brut* to have used Bede as source material and recounts this story, referring repeatedly to the fairness of the English and alluding to the

³⁷ Bede. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Leo Sherley-Price trans. New York: Penguin, 1990, pp 103-104

wordplay of the original in the Pope's exclamation: "Iwis 3e beod Ænglisc / englen ilicchest."³⁸ That Layamon includes this anecdote could be read as his speaking up for the "oppressed" English people and language, or it could be part of a more subtle interest in the interactions between languages. There may be divine signs within English but they are only revealed by the bilingual context of contact with Gregory's Latin, and the story is available to Layamon only through his ability to read the Latin text.

Some critics have perceived in Bede's writing a usage which distinguishes Saxons as pagan Germanic peoples of England and Angles as Christian Germanic peoples of England.³⁹ Layamon's use is similar. He tends to use "Saxon" frequently early in the work, when they are still primarily thought of as foreigners, but shifts to the term "Angle" once they are fully established on the island. This is not a strict demarcation, however, and there are notable instances when Layamon chooses one term over the other in order to give a particular impression. Although he is far more often referred to as a Saxon than an Angle, when Hengest first lands, Layamon lets his audience know by his speech that these are the same people who will eventually give the island its name "we beoð of Alemaine...of Pat ilken ænde / Pe Angles is ihaten"⁴⁰ By contrast, in Cadwalan's reign, after many

³⁸ "truly you are English, most alike to angels" *Layamon* Vol III 181

³⁹ Brooks, Nicholas. *Bede and the English*. Jarrow Lecture 1999, pp. 15-16

⁴⁰ "we are of Alemaine...of the same end that is called Angles." Madden, Frederic. *Layamons Brut, or Chronicle of Britain; a Poetical Semi-Saxon Paraphrase of The Brut of Wace*. (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1847) Vol II 154. (Henceforth *Layamon*). *Layamon's Brut* exists in two manuscripts from the later half of the 13th century, the Caligula and the Otho. I have made use of Madden's edition of the *Brut* despite its age because it

generations of conflict between the two groups, the narrative consistently refers to them as “Englisc men” and the text’s anticipation of their taking the whole country is apparent when Cadwalan himself is even referred as the king “of Englen” or “in Engeland.”⁴¹ The duke Margadud, though, makes a speech against the Saxons rehearsing all the evils they have committed against the Britons and describing the way the Britons have been relegated to the western edges of the land which they once named “Brut-lond,” and reminds the king that these people “comen of Sex-londe.”⁴²

Throughout the work, the confrontation between the Britons and the Saxons is expressed as a conflict between languages. There are three key moments of Saxon treachery and victory in the family drama that initiates the long fall of the Britons, and each time the Saxons triumph by taking advantage of the fact that their language and culture are foreign to the Britons. First Rowena wins over Vortigern by the allure of her exotic speech and customs. Next, she seizes the moment to poison his son Vortimer when he is distracted with laughing at her addressing him in a language he does not understand. Third is the massacre at Stonehenge. Hengest calls a truce and asks the Britons to come unarmed to a meeting where they will strike a peace agreement, then betrays them. The effectiveness of the Saxon treachery is only possible because they are using a language that is unintelligible to the Britons, who do not know to brace themselves for defense because they do not

presents the two texts side by side, and comparison is often revealing. Unless otherwise stated, I take my quotations from the lengthier Caligula manuscript.

⁴¹ Otho. *Layamon* Vol III 271

⁴² “come from Saxon-land” *Layamon* Vol III 273

understand the meaning of Hengest's order to his men: "draw your swords!" It is a vivid reminder that two distinct cultures are at war over this land.

This scene is iconic, and the phrase which Hengest speaks becomes embedded in the story over centuries of retelling. In Nennius it appeared, "Nimader sexa!"⁴³ in Monmouth, "Nimet oure saxes,"⁴⁴ in Layamon "Nime(th eoure fexes!"⁴⁵ "Seax," meaning a short sword or dagger, was in general use in Old English literature, and was still current in Old Norse sagas (in Grettir's fight with Glám, for example). In Middle English, however, it seems to have faded out of general use but fossilized within the context of this story. This phrase was so important to the story that it was preserved even while the key word declined into some regionalism or specificity of usage that made it unsuitable for a general readership (it must not have died entirely for the OED sees it reemerge in the 1800s as "a chopping-tool used for trimming slates"). Although the Middle English Dictionary is not exhaustive, the vast majority of the uses it cites for the entry "sax" are retellings of the same story using the very same phrase, altered only to "Nymep out 3our sexes" by the latest entry, though the last century or so of quotations uses the word "knife" elsewhere in the sentence as a gloss.⁴⁶ Its vitality within the story was due to the etymological connection drawn between the *sax* and the *Saxons*, which creates

⁴³ Nennius. *Historia Brittonum*. William Gunn ed. London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill, 1819, p. 75

⁴⁴ "sax, n¹" OED

⁴⁵ *Layamon* Vol II 214

⁴⁶ *Middle English Dictionary*. Middle English Compendium. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

the idea that the Saxon language itself was the weapon which slew the Britons.

Layamon, with his characteristic interest in place-names, presents the names of several English counties as derived from this episode. While more often renaming is something done by the invaders, to the grief of the Britons, in this case it is the Britons themselves who perform the renaming: “Brutt scupten Ðan londe nome / for Sæxisce monnen scome / & for Ðan swike-dome / Ðat heo idon hæfde / for Ðan Ðe heo mid cnifen / biræueden heom at liue / Ða cleopeden heo Ðat lond al / Æst-sæx & Weft-sæx / & Ðat Ðridde Middel-Sæx”⁴⁷ According to Layamon, the counties settled by the Saxons are given the names Æst-sæx, West-sæx, Middel-sæx, not for the Saxon themselves (the actual root), but for the knives with which they murdered the Britons. They embed the memory of their betrayal in the landscape, and perpetuate the association between *sax* and *Saxon* so that it will never be forgotten that the Saxons inhabit these counties through violence and treachery. In this way the Britons stake a claim through language on territory they have otherwise lost.

Throughout the *Brut* naming, particularly of towns, is an act of commemoration and appropriation, a means by which to own the event which passed there. It is curious to consider Layamon’s explanation of the naming of Hengest’s castle:

Ða scop he hire nome....Kaer-Carrai an Bruttisc / & Ænglisc
cnihtes / heo cleopeden Ðwong-Chastre / nu and auere mare/ Ðe
nome stodeð Ðere....a Ðet com Densce men / and driuen ut (da

⁴⁷ “The Britons shaped to that land a name for the shame of Saxish men and for the treachery that they had done. Because they with knives bereaved them of life, they called all the land East-sax and West-sax and the third Middle-sax” *Layamon* Vol II 220

Bruttes⁴⁸ / ðene Bricce nome heo ðer sætte / & Lane-castel
hine hæhten.⁴⁹

The question which immediately arises is this: how is it that the name Thongchester “nu and auere mare...stodeð ðere” when it has already been supplanted? Even though its use has not survived into Layamon’s time, he seems to claim that a commemorative name is in some way permanent. The history that happened there belongs always to that place, even when the people have moved on.

This anxiety about the replacement of names is repeated on the national level. Even in the foundational moment when the Britons are naming themselves and their speech, Layamon foreshadows their end, interrupting his own account of Brutus’ granting Cornwall to his friend Corineus to tell how after Gurmond came with the Saxons and conquered the Britons, and how they “Engle-lond heo hit clepeden.”⁵⁰ “Brut-lond” is not inherently or perpetually known by this name, but only “ða while ða hit wes on heore hond.”⁵¹ And yet, at the first settlement by the Britons when Brutus gives his name to the land and to the people, Layamon writes “& 3eð ðe nome læsteð / & a summe stude cleouied faste.”⁵² The last line in the Otho version is even

⁴⁸ The inconsistency here--how the Danes drove out the Britons when by the end of the *Brut* the Britons had all left England and the Danes not yet come—is addressed by the Otho, which changes this word to “cnihtes”.

⁴⁹ “Then he created for it a name...Caer Carrai in British, and English knights, they called it Thong-chester. now and ever more the name stands there...until that Danish men came and drove out the Britons, then a third name there set and Lancaster called it.” *Layamon* Vol II 171 14231-44

⁵⁰ “Called it England” 84

⁵¹ “the while that it was in their hand” *Layamon* Vol III 273

⁵² “and yet the name lasts and in some manner (or place) cleaves fast” *Layamon* Vol I 83

more definite: “and eue more standeþ.”⁵³ As with Thongchester, Layamon seems to say that names never cease to matter, even when they fall out of use. Names and languages and peoples accumulate—they do not erase one another.

The attack by Gurmond is not the end of “Brut-lond,” but it is a setback from which the Britons never fully recover. Right after the defeat at Sparewenchestre (another instance of commemorative naming),⁵⁴ Gurmond makes the threat that each Briton must give up either his life or his religious identity. Immediately following this threat, in the midst of a violent and emotional scene, is an abrupt non sequitur to a consideration of the etymology of “Engle-land”. First it locates “Angles” as the land “biside Allemaine”, and recounts the terms of the agreement with Gurmond; significantly, it does not refer to the Saxons by that name, though this is the term which has been used throughout the Gurmond episode up to this point. Now it changes; the lines read:

Of Englen heo comen / and Þer of heo nomen nomen / and
 letten heom cleopien ful iwis / Þat folc Þat wes Ænglis / & Þis
 lond heo cleopeden Ængle-lond / for hit wes al on heore honde.
 / Seodðe ærest Bruttes / bæhzen to Þissen londe / Brutaine hit
 wes ihaten / of Brutten nom taken / a Þat Þis folc com / Þa
 Þisne nome him binon / and moniee of Þan burzen / and monie
 of Þan tunen / and monie of Þan londen and of Þan hamen / heo
 binomen heore namen / al for Bruttene sceome.⁵⁵

⁵³ “and ever more stands” *Layamon* Vol I 83

⁵⁴ “Sparrowchester” *Layamon* Vol II 176

⁵⁵ “Of Angles they came and thereof took their name, and let themselves be called full surely that folk that was English, and this land they called Angle-land, for it was in their hand. Since first the Britons came to this land, Britain it was called, from Britons took name, until that this folk came, that took this name from it. And from many of the cities and many of the towns, and many of the lands, and of the homes they took their names, all for the shame of the Britons.” *Layamon* Vol III 178-9

Returning to the term which gave the country an entirely new name drives home both the political significance of place-names and the idea that the Saxon victory is no mere change of regime or even dynasty but a fundamental replacement of the entire culture. The change is not confined to the highest levels of government, but is felt throughout the entire society—every city and town and home has its British name *binomen*, taken away. There is significance in the punning juxtaposition of *nomen* “took” and *nomen* “name” Even within this excerpt a synonym and a variant spelling appear for these terms respectively: *taken* and *nom* (and *namen*); their identical orthography is no accident. The line simply says that a certain name was taken—that is, came from—a certain origin. What it implies, however, is that naming *is* taking. Giving a place a name is actually *taking* the place.

Punctuating the slow defeat by the Saxons, with which nearly two thirds of the *Brut* is concerned, is a period of glory for the Britons—the reign of Arthur. It is not my intention to present a thorough discussion of the Arthurian section of the *Brut* at this time, as it has already been given much attention by Arthurian scholars. There are, however, aspects of the conflict between Britain and Rome which I would touch on briefly as they bear relevance for the struggle between the Britons and the Saxons. The war is fought over the strange counter-claims of two empires, each of which asserts their right to rule the other based solely on the historical precedents that Rome has previously ruled Briton and Briton has previously ruled territories which

are subject to Rome. The point in the conflict between Briton and Rome that is most relevant to the conflict between the Britons and the Saxons (in which the roles are reversed and the Saxons the aggressors) is the use of British language as a method of dominance. Before Walwain slays Marcel, he boasts, “Marcel far to helle / & tel heom Þer spelles....and haldeð Þer unker rune”⁵⁶ “Rune” in this context most likely refers to secret military counsels—speech which has the power to precipitate war. Marcel has caused violence through his language, so Walwain retaliates with his—as he slays Marcel, he says “Þuf we eou scullen techen / ure Bruttisce speche!”⁵⁷ This motif is repeated by Arthur later in the battle. He menaces a captive who, he says, “ʒulpe biforen Þan kaiseisere / Þat Þu me woldest a-quellen,”⁵⁸ with the promise that he “Þe wulle teche / Bruttusce spæche.”⁵⁹ If this were the only time this threat were spoken, it would seem a simple case of the punishment fitting the crime (speech for speech), but Walwain’s use of the same words against Marcel is more complicated to read—Marcel is about to die; he is not really going to learn the British language. This reveals the full significance of this assertion of Walwain’s and Arthur’s. There is more expressed in these moments of linguistic dominance than simple military victory—they hint at the concept of cultural death, the process by which the language of the victor overwhelms that of the defeated.

⁵⁶ “Marcel, fare to hell, and tell them there stories...and hold there your counsels” *Layamon* Vol III 55

⁵⁷ “thus we shall teach you our British speech!” *Layamon* Vol III 55

⁵⁸ “boasted before the caesar that you would kill me” *Layamon* Vol III 68

⁵⁹ “will teach you British speech” *Layamon* Vol III 68

RELIGIOUS AND LEGAL SYSTEMS

These histories make sense of their world by ordering conflicts into binaries. The interrelated cultural systems of one group are staked against the same systems of another group—in the *Brut*, the British language is opposed by the Saxon language, the British religion is opposed by the Saxon religion, the British legal code is opposed by the Saxon legal code. The same occurs when the Britons are in conflict with the Romans. As we saw at the end of the previous chapter, their languages are cast as opposing forces. Their religions are too—the Romans are anachronistically presented as pagans during the battle. When two separate cultures do unite against the Britons—the Saxons and Gurmond's African mercenary army—they are treated as functionally the same culture because both groups are pagan. A pagan is a pagan—anyone who worships any gods other than the Christian God can be considered part of the “them” who cooperate in assaulting Christianity. This is the danger of the foreign—a person who does not share in all aspects of British culture will weaken the entire network of cultural expectations which form the foundation of the society.

Merlin's famous exposure of the two dragons struggling beneath the castle in the *Brut* tradition can be read in terms of cultural conflict and decay. In Layamon's version, Merlin tells Vortigern outright that all his woes are the

produce of his illegitimate kingship; he implies that if the laws of succession had been followed and Constance had not been murdered, the nation would have remained strong under that dynasty. As good kingship was considered an inheritable attribute at this time, this may be the reason for the assumption that Constance would have ruled better than Vortigern—however it is also pragmatic to say that Constance, as the legitimate heir, would not have been in a weak position where he would have been tempted to make questionable alliances to protect himself from his own people.

Whatever may have followed from rule by Constance, the result of Vortigern's actions is this pair of dragons who "bi-tokneþ kinges þat ȝet beoþ to comene."⁶⁰ Simply, one dragon represents British kings, the other Saxon kings. The recurring demolition of the castle prefigures the violent overthrow of cities (like Sparrow-Chester) and illustrates the destruction that comes to a country in which the throne is being violently contested. More than just opposing sets of kings though, the red and white dragons represent two different systems: two languages, two cultures, two legal traditions. Without a firm foundation on a single code, the infrastructure of the society will fail; the castle will crumble.

Layamon could easily have portrayed the ultimate Saxon takeover as a violent victory like the atrocities of Gurmond's army, but this is not how the rule of the Britons ends. They do not admit defeat after any act of violence and destruction, but rather after the Saxons commit an act of peace: the

⁶⁰ "betoken kings that are yet to come" Otho. *Layamon* Vol II 247

establishment of an effective code of law, language, and bureaucracy. No longer are the two dragons battling—there is a single effective ruler who is capable of enforcing a single order.

Cadawaler, now a refugee in Brittany, is told:

Hu Aðelstan her com liðen / ut of Sex-londen / and hu he al
 Angle-lond / sette on his azere hod / and hu he sette moting / &
 hu he sette husting / and hu he sette sciren / and makede frið of
 deoren / & hu he sette halimot / & hu he sette hundred / and Ða
 nomen of Ðan tunen / on Sexisce runen / & zilden he gon rere /
 mucle & swiðe mære / & Ða chirchen he gon dihten / aft
 Sexisce irihten / and Sexis he gan kennen / Ða nomen of Ða
 monnen....Wa wes Cadwaledere / Ðat he wes on liue / leofere
 him weore on deðe / Ðeone quic on life / særi wes his heorte /
 and sorhful wes his duzeðe.⁶¹

Here acts of naming are embedded within—and by implication, are themselves—acts of law-making. Naming is an assertion of ownership, as Athelstan completes the process begun after the assault led by Gurmond and claims the towns under his authority by setting them names “on Sexisce runen.” “Runen” is an interesting word choice—its primary meaning according to both the *OED* and the *Middle English Dictionary* has most often conveyed mystery and secrets, but expanded to include the whispering of such secrets, hence taking private counsel, and ultimately speech or language itself. Several of these uses appear in *Layamon* and are quoted in both dictionaries.

⁶¹ “How Athelstan here came sailing out of Saxland, and how he set all England in his own hand; and how he set mooting, and how he set husting, and how he set shires, and made chaces of deer; and how he set halimot, and how he set hundred; and the names of the towns in Saxish speech; and guilds he began to rear, great and very splendid, and the churches he began to make, after the Saxish manner, and in Saxish he began to speak the names of the men....Woe was Cadwalader, that he was alive; he would rather be dead than quick in life. Sorry was his heart, and sorrowful were his people!” *Layamon* Vol III 286. (A moot is a judicial meeting, a halimot a hall-moot. Husting is house-thing in the Germanic sense of Thing, as in the Icelandic All-Thing, the annual meeting of representatives from all over the island. Hundred is hundredweight.)

This sentence in the *Brut* is the earliest example either dictionary gives of *runen* being used to indicate “a form of speech; a language”⁶² It is as though the time for private plotting of strategy and treachery is over, now the Saxon language has openly taken power. The building of churches indicates a sophisticated infrastructure and betokens legitimacy and permanence. The qualification “aft Sexisce irihten,” after the Saxish manner, is a reminder that the common Christianity of the Saxon and British cultural codes does not make them interchangeable, though it makes them equally legitimate. The legal/cultural systems represented by Cadwalader and Athelstan are both located outside England—Cadwaler is in exile, and though Saxons have been living in England for years Athelstan is deliberately described as arriving directly from Saxland. Neither Briton nor Saxon is a native system; there *is* no native system. In this moment, the land is a neutral constant.

The first half of this list of accomplishments seems like bureaucratic trivialities compared to the glorious military feats of earlier rulers. There is weighty symbolism in the successful building of churches (particularly when juxtaposed with Vortigern’s earlier failure to build a defensive structure), but achievements like drawing shire boundaries and establishing weights and measures seem tediously civilian and commonplace. Yet Athelstan’s ability to consider and administer such details is contingent on England’s having strength and stability enough that martial considerations do not exhaust his resources and attention.

⁶² “roun” OED

Law is a type of cultural memory, as in the sagas, which often read as one long set of legal case studies, recounting the laws which were brought from Norway or developed as the population in Iceland grew and new situations of conflict arose. It may also originate from a single executive as an assertion of control, as with William the Conqueror's ambitious Domesday survey, for which it has been said that "the vigor of the English royal government under William the Conqueror, [was] unmatched in Western Christendom"⁶³ Such an act of authority strengthens the monarch's position, but mutual understanding of a certain set of standards also strengthens the community and the country. Vortigern's rationale for not granting Hengest a castle—the Saxons live according to one set of laws, the Britons another—is an expression of the very reasonable anxiety about how a community can function when half the population understands their interactions according to a different set of laws than do the other half.

England's self-identification as a Christian nation is most interesting for the way its historiographers deal with those periods and peoples in its history which were not Christian, such as the Saxons until the coming of Augustine in 595 or the Danish colonization of the late 9th century. The presence of paganism is a threat to England not only for the obvious spiritual reasons, but because it is associated with a cultural and legal system incompatible with the established Christian society. To have two systems of law and religion at work in the same space creates anxieties about social

⁶³ Hollister, C. Warren. *The Making of England: 55 B.C. to 1399*. Seventh Edition. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996, p. 124

expectations. How can a contract be made between a man who swears on a ring and a man who swears on a book? As Rouse asks, “is legal affinity...a quality of geography or of ethnicity?”⁶⁴ These questions are keen today as European governments compromise with their non-assimilating Islamic immigrant communities, and were equally urgent in Anglo-Saxon writings which deal with the interface between the Christian Anglo-Saxons and the pagans who settled in the Danelaw. Although there was no longer a significant non-Christian presence in England after the Conquest, writers continued to be fascinated by the implications of paganism in this Christian nation. The writer of *Havelok* attempts to revise the Danelaw’s pagan past and illustrate the Englishness of those of Danish ancestry by emphasizing both Christianity and deference to English law in his Danish-born leading character. Layamon examines the changing nature of the conflict between the Briton and Saxons before and after the Saxons’ conversion.

Despite his interest in language and language barriers (evident in the episode concerning the massacre at Stonehenge) Layamon is generally willing for convenience sake to depict all parties as capable of communicating with one another. This is a literary convention familiar to the modern reader who has been taught by films to expect the majority of alien creatures capable of speech of any sort to be fluent in English. Our ability to suspend disbelief is taxed, however, when Gurmond arrives on the scene. Gurmond is a vicious African prince who refuses the kingdom which is his inheritance, saying he would rather go to war and win lands instead. He travels to England via

⁶⁴ Rouse 2005, 112

Ireland, consents to an alliance with the Saxons, destroys the Britons, and hands the country over to the Saxons when he is done. When Gurmond goes to Northumberland “and spoken wið Sexisce men,”⁶⁵ no mention is made of how they happened to speak the same language. Even disregarding the improbability of mutual intelligibility or even of their finding a common language in which to conduct business, the business itself is hard to understand. Gurmond has nothing to gain from the Saxon alliance. His army’s strength is such that he could easily have taken the Saxons too when he was through with the Britons. What reason does he have to help them?

Gurmond and the Saxons have one thing in common—they are pagan. Layamon conflates all pagans into a single group, whose common heathendom overrides all other cultural differences. The proposed alliance between Gurmond and the Saxons rests upon the premise that “Þu art heðene king / we heðene kepen.”⁶⁶ To the modern reader this is as peculiar a situation as if an Aztec were to say to a Presbyterian, “you don’t worship Zeus, I don’t worship Zeus, we should team up!” Like many medieval texts though, *Brut* flattens the religious world into a binary and invents a united heathendom as a foil to Christendom, in which the fact of being not-Christian is the first order of each person’s identity. Pagans of all extractions are willing to unite for any chance to pursue their reason for existence: the persecution of Christians.

Layamon had reason to make such assumptions about pagan cultures—he saw evidence of the interchangeability of pagan pantheons

⁶⁵ “Spoke with Saxon men” *Layamon* Vol III 164

⁶⁶ “You are a heathen king, we heathen warriors” *Layamon* Vol III 163

preserved in the names of the days of the week. Monmouth has Hengest say that the Saxons worship “the gods of our own country,”⁶⁷ implying a bond between religion and nationality, but the gods he names have no connection to the land, language, or culture of the Saxons: they are “Saturn, Jove and the others.” Likewise Wace names an almost exclusively classical pantheon which includes Phoebus, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mercury. Both do mention that Friday is named for Frea and that Mercury also bears the name Woden, hence the name “Wednesday.” This seems to be the extent of their knowledge of the old northern religion, and even this probably arrived through Roman sources. It was Tacitus who identified Mercury as “the deity whom [the Germans] chiefly worship,⁶⁸” and this equating of the two gods is still evident in the name of this day in the Romance languages; *mercredi* in French, for example.

Layamon offers a more complex pantheon, which includes Phoebus, Saturn, Woden, Jupiter, Mercury, Apollo, Tervagant, and Frea. This is a curious collection. Gone is the traditional idea that Mercury and Woden were the same, meaning that Layamon was probably not directly familiar with classical sources. He knows enough about the old religion to say confidently that “Woden hehde þa hæhste laze / an ure ælderne dæzen,”⁶⁹ yet it is still Mercury who is identified first, as the “hæhste”⁷⁰ without qualification, revealing the ubiquitous classical cultural lens through which even an English writer viewed the Saxon past. Layamon has received something of both the

⁶⁷ Monmouth 1966, 157

⁶⁸ Tacitus. *Germania*. Internet Medieval Sourcebook. Paul Halsall ORB sources ed. Jan 1996. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/tacitus1.html>

⁶⁹ “Woden had the highest law in our elders’ days” *Layamon* Vol II 158

⁷⁰ “highest” *Layamon* Vol II 157

classical and Germanic traditions, and navigates as well as he can between them.

Tervagant is a mystery. Though the OED does not record the name appearing in English prior to Layamon's work, he appeared earlier in the *Song of Roland* in his more conventional role as one of the "infernal trinity"⁷¹ (with Mahoun/Mohammed and Apollo) believed by medieval Europeans to be the gods of Islam. The *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* suggests a Germanic origin for the name Termagant: "the author of *Junvs* says this was a Saxon idol and derives the word from *tyr magan* (very mighty)."⁷² but this is only speculation—the OED simply defines Termagant as "an imaginary deity."⁷³ Layamon's uses of Tervagant are consistent with this fogginess of origin and signification. The Romans call on him, the Saxons count him as one of their gods. In one episode, where Wace describes the Saxons turning to idolatry ("the Christians called on Christ, and the heathen answered, clamouring on their gods of clay,"⁷⁴) Layamon shows them instead invoking Tervagant: "Pacistine ...cleopenen crist godes sone / beo heom a fultume / & Ðe heðene leoden / æc lude cleopenen / Ure godd T'uagat / whi trukest Ðe us an hond."⁷⁵ Tervagant seems to be a catch-all for pagan practices of any kind.

⁷¹ Introduction to: *Song of Roland*. Dorothy L. Sayers trans. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1957, p. 20

⁷² Brewer, Ebenezer Cobham. *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable Giving the Derivation, Source, Or Origin of Common Phrases, Allusions, and Words that Have a Tale to Tell*. Henry Altemus: Philadelphia 1898, p 1215.

⁷³ OED

⁷⁴ Wace, Eugene Mason, Layamon, Mediaeval Academy of America. *Arthurian Chronicles*. Eugene Mason Trans. University of Toronto, 1996, p. 23

⁷⁵ "The Christians...called Christ, God's son, to be a help to them, and the heathen people also called aloud "our god Tervagant, why do you fail us now?" *Layamon* Vol II 264

With his characteristic interest in etymology, Layamon expands upon Wace and Monmouth's mention of Woden and Frea as begetting the names Wednesday and Friday, and explores the whole week. Curiously, the Caligula and Otho manuscripts diverge here. The Otho begins the week as the Christian world does, with Monday, while the Caligula begins with Wednesday, acknowledging the status of Woden. It is possible that Apollo and Tervagant are meant to have some association with Sunday and Monday, being a god of the sun and a god associated primarily with Islam, of which the symbol is the moon, but I believe this is unlikely, for the first list of gods the manuscripts present does not match up directly with the lists of days (and in fact includes one god too many to make a week). When it says that they are named for the sun and moon, it means simply that. Thursday is less certain. Other than the two named for fundamental heavenly bodies, each day is given a specific named deity; Thursday is given "Pan Punre," to the thunder. It is apparent to a modern reader that Thursday is named for Thor, the god of thunder and analogue to the lightning-hurling Jupiter/Jove, (hence the Spanish *jueves*, Thursday). Why is this not stated? Does Layamon, or the scribe who wrote out this section, expect the audience to know who Thor is, or do they not know themselves? Neither Layamon nor either scribe seems to have much independent knowledge of the Germanic pantheon, for neither manuscript adds any new Germanic names to the pair received from Wace. Finally (in the order of the Otho manuscript) he lists Saturday, named for Saturn. This is accurate but strange—the entire English week is named for Germanic gods, or

Germanic terms for heavenly bodies, and there at the end comes the odd duck, a classical god. What is all the more curious about this name is the fact that today the Romance languages and even German give the day a name derived from the concept of “Sabbath-day” (e.g. Spanish *sabado*), while English (like Dutch) preserves a Roman name which was an anachronism.⁷⁶

The idea that all pagans worshipped all pagan gods indiscriminately is in some ways the product of the medieval perspective that creates that concept so prominent in recent scholarship, the “other”: a united “heathendom” which exists to provide opposition to a similarly united Catholic Christendom. On the other hand, Layamon’s sources seem to be limited, and what evidence he did have included the days of the week—a series of Germanic names ending with a Roman one. Layamon’s portrait of all pagans as worshipping the same mixed-origin pantheon may seem confused, but it is not entirely illogical or unfounded, given what he had to work with. Just as certain saints are more revered in one country than another, so too with pagan gods, and just as all saints are ultimately available to all Christendom, so too are all pagan gods available to all pagan peoples.

When the pagans unite against the Britons in the Gurmond episode, the Britons’ battle for their land is framed in explicitly religious terms. Gurmond commands that each Briton found should be killed immediately, “buten he libben wolden / his lif in Ðraldome / and for-sake godes mæsse / and luuien

⁷⁶ Attentive readers will notice that I have not discussed Tuesday. Modern etymology states that Tuesday is named for the god Tiw/Tyr. Layamon states that it is named for Tidea. I have so far found no satisfactory explanation of what this name might have meant to Layamon.

hædenesse.”⁷⁷ This war is not between factions or tribes or nations but religions; thus the Britons’ deaths are not the meaningless collateral damage of a struggle over power and property, but countless individual acts of martyrdom.

But the terms change when the conversion of the Saxons follows right on the tail of Gurmond’s atrocities, blurring the formerly stark legal and cultural distinctions between the Saxons and Britons. The Britons have just lost an element of their identity by the “taking” of names; now they lose identity further when the “other” they define themselves in opposition to is removed. The Pagan versus Christian binary is lost when the Angles become the protagonists of the famous conversation with Pope Gregory, in which their inherent potential for salvation is revealed in the English language. This leads to the coming of Augustine (called Austin in this text) in 597, which undermines both the concept of a singular Christendom and the ability of the Britons to consider their struggle a holy one. The Britons now must grasp for new terms to describe the difference between themselves and the Saxons, and turn to the foreignness of both the Saxons and their saint. They reject the missionary who converted the Saxons and dismiss him as “Austine þan uncuðen.”⁷⁸ The bishops of the Britons will not bow to Augustine, the ambassador of the Pope, and in fact declare him “ure fulle ifa”⁷⁹ for “he hafueð ifunden here / hundes heðene / Þa comen of Sexlonde / mid

⁷⁷ “unless he would live his life in thralldom and forsake God’s mass and love heatheness” *Layamon* Vol III 177

⁷⁸ “Austin the stranger” *Layamon* Vol III 193

⁷⁹ “our full foe” *Layamon* Vol III 193

Gurmumde Ðan kinge / Ðeo he alle fullehteð / and to gode fuseoð / Ðeo haldeoð ure kinelond / mid unrihted on heore hond.”⁸⁰ Although it is generations here since they have come to England, the Britons have not forgotten that the subjects of Augustine’s baptism “comen of Sexlonde;” they are foreigners and invaders who hold Christian lands unrightfully. The last thing the Britons think they deserve is the grace, and more, the legitimacy bestowed by baptism. This destroys the most fundamental proof of the righteousness of the British cause—the idea that the Saxon heathens were a threat to Christendom. For the first time, the Britons must face a conflict which they cannot frame in terms of “Christian versus Pagan.”⁸¹ From the beginning, the British-Saxon conflict has been expressed as a defense of Christianity. When Vortimer, the first king to oppose the Saxons, rallies the Britons he “hehte ælcne mon / Ðe luuede Ðene cristidom / Ðat heo Ða hæðene / hatien scolden / & Ða hæfden bringen / to Vortimer Ðan kinge”⁸² They are fighting, not for love of kin or king or even the country, but for love of the Christendom. The fight had been from the start a high matter of religion and martyrdom, a struggle between good and evil, but with the coming of Augustine the duality is shattered and the terms must be redefined.

There is of course the question of what was meant by “the Christendom.” Christendom today means all Christians or Christian nations

⁸⁰ “he has found here heathen hounds that came from Saxland with Gurmond the king; he baptizes them all and hastens them to God, who hold our kinland with unright in their hand.” *Layamon* Vol III 193

⁸¹ Even when Arthur fights Rome the narrative conveniently forgets that Rome was the capital of the Western Church and portrays the “Romanish” men as worshipers of Mahoun who count among their allies the heathen kings of Ethiopia, Africa, and Lybia. *Layamon* Vol III 91

⁸² “ordered each man who loved the Christendom that they must hate the heathens and bring their heads to Vortimer the king” *Layamon* Vol II 190

collectively, when it is used as anything more than a synonym for “Christianity.” The definite article that frequently precedes the term in the *Brut* rings strange in modern English and alerts us to a usage which does not exactly coincide with our own. Stephen Harris argues convincingly that the word “Christendom” in the Anglo-Saxon period referred to a “Pan-Germanic polity,”⁸³ but this meaning does not make sense by the time we come to *Layamon*, not only because the dynamics of England’s continental relationships have changed, but because the Christendom Laymon speaks of is being defended *against* a Germanic people. What then does it mean to *Layamon*? The fact that the rest of the Christian world does not come to the aid of the Britons in their wars against the heathens, and is in fact perfectly willing to convert them, implies that “the Christendom” is not an alliance of the collective Christian nations. On the other hand, neither is it so nebulous or individual as personal spirituality.

After Vortimer chases Hengest out and turns to the task of setting his realm to rights, his greatest anxiety is not the restoration of the faith of Christianity but its laws and policies. When he speaks of his father’s mistakes he says that he “ƿa hæðene laze / luuede so swiðe”⁸⁴ and states that his intent is to “aniðeir Hegastes lazen / & hine & his hæðene-scip / Ʒæ he hider

⁸³ Harris, Stephen J. “The Alfredian *World History* and Anglo-Saxon Identity” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Vol.100 No.4, October 2001. University of Illinois Press, p. 483

⁸⁴ “the heathen law loved so much” *Layamon* Vol II 198

brohte.”⁸⁵ The heathens themselves have left, but their laws must still be purged. He invites bishops from Rome who “ferden Ʒeond Ðis lond / & setten hit al a godes hond / & Þene cristindom heo rihten / & Ðat volc Ðer to dihten”⁸⁶ These bishops serve the Pope but they take their specific orders from Vortimer (and return to Rome as soon as the job is done); thus they lend religious authority to what is actually a mission to establish earthly order. The policies Vortimer asks bishops to enforce encompass not just the restoration of Christian worship but Christian justice and charity, including ideas with New Testament origins like brotherly love and fair dealings with widows, and also subsequent additions such as the freeing of slaves.⁸⁷ To restore the Christendom, then, means to reestablish a healthy, functioning legal code that orders society based on Christian thought, not just to revive Christianity within the churches or the faith of individuals. Christendom has a definite implication of a corporative identity.

The conflict between the Britons and Saxons as Christians and heathens is presented in terms of a conflict of legal codes from the very beginning, as when Vortigern won't give Hengest a castle, saying that there would be an uproar from the people if he did “for Ʒe haldeð Ða hæðene laƷe / Ðat stod on eoure ælderen dæƷe / & we haldeð cristes laƷe / & wulleð auere an

⁸⁵ “put down Hengest’s laws and him and his heathenship that he brought here” *Layamon* Vol II 197-8

⁸⁶ “fared around this land and set it all in God’s hand, and they righted the Christendom, and to that end instructed the folk” *Layamon* Vol II 198-199

⁸⁷ He also says, “& her ich bi-teche eou an hond / al freo ælc chiric-lond” And here I give you in hand all free each church-land. *Layamon* Vol II 197 This act seems innocuous, but it is almost certainly expressing an opinion about the contemporary struggle between the church and crown, which came to a dramatic clash between Henry II and Thomas Becket about a century before the date of the *Brut* manuscripts.

ure dæȝe.”⁸⁸ Even Rowena’s treacherous approach to Vortimer, “Hal wrð Ðu lauerd king / Bruttene deorling / ich æm Ðe icomen to / cristindom ich wulle auon / on Ðan ilke dæie / Ðe Ðu seolf demest,”⁸⁹ is as a gesture of concession to his rule and the primacy of his code. Christendom is more than just law though; it is in the culture, and even the people. During Gurmond’s vicious invasion it is said twice within a few lines that he “for-dude Ðane cristindom”⁹⁰ The first comes after the fiery razing of Cirencester/Sparrowcester, when he, a heathen, is made king; thus he has razed both structural and political aspects of the country’s infrastructure. Immediately following is the account of his brutal mutilation of the people, each according to their role in society. This too ends with the observation that “Ðus he....fordude al Ðisne cristindom.” He has destroyed the society’s physical and legal body.

Anxieties about the Danelaw had more to do with law and religion than ethnicity. Harris writes that Vikings and Anglo-Saxons were considered to be commonly descended from the Goths, thus ethnically related.⁹¹ While it was less for a Briton, the wergeld (the fine owed to the family of a person who was killed) was the same for Vikings and Anglo-Saxons of the same rank.⁹² Although Old Norse deeply influenced English (it gave us our third-person plural pronouns) the conflict is not expressed as being between two

⁸⁸ “for you hold the heathen law that stood in your elders’ days, and we hold Christ’s law, and will ever in our days” *Layamon* Vol II 168

⁸⁹ “Hail be you, lord king, Britons’ darling. I am come to you, I wish to receive Christendom, on the same day that you yourself deem.” *Layamon* Vol II 201

⁹⁰ “destroyed the Christendom” *Layamon* Vol III 176

⁹¹ Harris 2001, 507

⁹² Harris 2001, 508

languages. The sagas, in fact, claim that the languages were not distinct—most famously, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* claims that until the coming of “Vilhjálmr bastardr,”⁹³ “Ein var Þá tunga á Englandi sem í Nóregi ok í Danmörku.”⁹⁴ If the Danes were considered to have similar background and similar language to the Anglo-Saxons, what differentiated them? Their religious and legal systems—there is a reason why the Danish region of England was called the *Danelaw*. When Miller explains the literal etymology of our word “law,” (from Old Norse *lög* as “things that had been laid down”) he is quick to explain the expanding meanings of this term in Old Norse usage: “it also indicated the community that shared those laws, a community that was then known as ‘our law’... ‘Law’ even came to be thought of as the land in which those people who followed one particular law dwelled. Hence the name *Danelaw*...”⁹⁵

Egils Saga takes place in part in the *Danelaw*. It looks back to the reign of Athelstan, grandson of Alfred the Great. Eric, who like Egil had ties to Iceland and Norway, went raiding down the coast of Scotland, to England, where he settled into a new position, ruling Northumbria on behalf of King Athelstan. The saga was written in Iceland, probably in the first half of the 13th century, and contains a Scandinavian perspective on English history, in

⁹³ “William the Bastard” Townend 150

⁹⁴ “There was then one tongue in England as in Norway and in Denmark” Matthew Townend sees enough possibility of accuracy in this statement that he devotes an entire book to the question of intelligibility: Townend, Matthew. *Language and history in Viking age England: linguistic relations between speakers of Old Norse and Old English*. Turnhout, Belgium : Brepols, c2002. (His translation of this passage: “The language in England then was the same as in Norway and Denmark” p. 150)

⁹⁵ Miller, William Ian. “Of Outlaws, Christians, Horsemeat, and Writing: Uniform Laws and Saga Iceland” *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 89, No. 8 (Aug., 1991), p. 2082

which the north of England is simultaneously, and with equal legitimacy, the property of the English (Anglo-Saxon) king in the south, and fully a part of the Norse world. *Egils Saga* considers the Norse and the English to have equal claims to this part of the world, and its actual governance a matter to be decided by the ebb and flow of men's careers in raiding and politics, an attitude almost as far removed as possible from the appeals to divine arbitration in most of the insular works.

The Sagas, as much as the Insular texts, were struggling with the meeting of two legal systems within a single community.⁹⁶ *Egils Saga* deals with this issue as it concerned the Danish communities and territories in England. It mentions Prime Signing as one method of resolving the problem, at least temporarily:

Konungur bað Þórólf ok þá bræðr, at þeir skyldu láta
prímísignask, því at þat var þá mikill siðr, bæði með
kaupmönnum ok þeim mönnum, er á mála gengu með kristnum
mönnum, því at þeir menn, er prímísignaðir váru, höfðu allt
samneyti við kristna menn ok svá heiðna, en höfðu það að
átrúnaði, er þeim var skapfelldast.⁹⁷

Prime signing—making the sign of the cross over a heathen—is an act of religion, but it has a legal function, like a visa. It puts a person under the rules of the country he is entering.

⁹⁶ Miller 1991, 2085

⁹⁷ “The king bade Þórólf and his brother, that they should allow the prime-signing, because that was then widely customary, both with merchants, and with men, who engaged in speech with Christian men, because those men, who were prime-signed, had all social contact with Christian men and also heathens, and had that as belief, which to them was most agreeable.” Sturluson, Snorri. *Egils Saga*. Einarsson, Bjarni, ed. London : Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003, pp. 71-72

The Danish travelers had a remarkable degree of fluidity regarding their loyalties to place or person. Both Eric and Egil are travelers who belong in part to each nation in which they have kin or friends or property. In England, Eric makes an easy switch from raider to ruler, with no questions asked about his nationality, and Egil's loyalty is to the king who employed him, not to his fellow Danes. When they meet in England (albeit the Danish province) where neither is native, Arinbjorn argues that, despite their feud, Eric should not slay Egil because he is "innlenzkir ok útlenzkir"—native and foreign.⁹⁸ He is foreign in that he comes from Iceland, but he has been in England before and served its king and has the promise that he may remain there if he wishes.

The Saga's conception of England encompasses similar geographic boundaries as the *Brut*, but pays more attention to the status of the lands to the north. The saga states: "Skotland var kallat þriðjungr ríkis við England,"⁹⁹ implying that Athelstan's government encompassed both, but because the *ríki*, the realm, is nameless, that it was not thought of as an entity independent of its current ruler in the way Norway, Iceland, England are. In fact, the saga says, Athelstan's hold on Scotland is weak—it is not part of England, but "skattgilt," made tributary, "en þó var þat fólk jafnan ótrútt honum."¹⁰⁰ An agreement is therefore made between Eric and King Athelstan that in return for refraining from plundering England, Eric should have Northumberland as long as he defends England against her many enemies in the North.

⁹⁸ Sturluson 2003, 115

⁹⁹ "Scotland was called a third of the realm as compared with England" Sturluson 2003, 72

¹⁰⁰ "and there were the folk ever disloyal to him" Sturluson 2003, 101

Northumbria is liminal in that it occupies the physical space between (the rest of) England and Scotland, and also, in this text, the cultural space between England and the Scandinavian sphere.¹⁰¹ *Egils Saga* conceives of the Danelaw/Northumbria as the area of overlap on a Venn diagram. The prominent characters with whom the saga is concerned are first and foremost

¹⁰¹ I must digress here to explain what is meant by “Northumbria.” The terms “Northumberland” and “Northumbria” are used interchangeably in many of my sources. It is clear from the context that Layamon and others are not referring exclusively to the modern county of Northumberland, but rather a larger territory more or less equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria—essentially, as the name suggests, all the English territory north of the Humber, including York. The *SEL* defines the region this way: “Ðe king of Norþhumberlond – was king ich vnderstonde / Of al Ðe lond biþende Ombre – anon into Scotlonde” (*SEL* Vol I 281) In order to avoid confusion, I use “Northumbria.” The overlap between Northumbria and the Danelaw is more or less from the Humber to the Tees.

England, though it dominates Scotland, does not include it. The Saga says in Chapter 50 that when Athelstan was a young king those who his forefathers had conquered rebelled: “Bretar og Skotar og Írar” –Britons, Scots, and Irish. Conspicuously, not the other English—the Icelanders are writing from a perspective that considers the other English kingdoms (of Mercia, Wessex, etc) to belong naturally to a greater whole. This idea of England includes Northumbria, but more for strategic purposes than for any sense of identity that is bound to the land. It is not essential. The loss of the old Mercian or West Saxon kingdoms would be catastrophic to the sense of England which was promoted in the reign of Alfred and continued as the center of England during the period when its borders were pressed back by the Danelaw. Northumbria, although roughly the same geographic extent as Mercia, is not the English heartland, and is readily disposed of at need. England does not cease to be England without it.

Northumbria has a similar status in *Layamon’s Brut*. There too it is a borderland that can be granted to a third party commissioned to defend the heartland: Vortigern is conscious that the Saxons cannot be reconciled into British culture because they are not Christian, just as the Danes lived by their own legal code, hence the *Danelaw*; “Ah neoðeles ich wille eou at-hælde / an mine anwalde / for norð beoð Ða Peohtes / swiðe ohte cnihtes / Ðe ofte ledeð in mine londe / ferde swiðe stronge / & ofte dod me muchele scome / & Ðerfore ich habbe grome.” (“But nevertheless I will retain you in my power, for northward are the Picts, such worthy knights, who oft lead in my land an army most strong and often do my much shame and therefore I have injury.”) *Layamon* Vol II 159 When Merlin exposes the two dragons beneath the castle the red can be assumed to represent the Britons, because of the traditional association of the red dragon with Wales, and also because “boldest of worms” is slightly more approbatory than “unlike any animal”. Merlin’s statement “Ðe an is a norð half / Ðe oðer a suð half. / Ðe oder is milc-whit / ælche deore unnlich / Ðe oðer ræd also blod / wurmen alre baldest” (“The one is on the north side, the other on the south side. The one is milk-white, unlike any animal, the other red as blood, boldest of all worms”) *Layamon* Vol II 243 pairs white with north, which is frequently associated with the Saxon invaders. Northumberland is the retreat of the Saxons each time they are driven back by the Britons. It was a disposable region, constantly in the possession of enemies or being given away as payment as when Modred promises “al biþonde Ðerere Humbre,” (“all beyond the Humber”) *Layamon* Vol III 129) to Childrich of Saxland in exchange for his military aid. Even in this insular text, Northumberland is looked upon as a borderland or appendage that is basically included in England but not a vital part of it.

participants in the Scandinavian network of cultural, familial, military and economic relationships. The land, however, is presented as English, as belonging ultimately to King Athelstan. The population in general is likewise two things at once. The saga tells us that the “Skota ok Dana eða Norðmanna...mjög herjuðu á landit ok þóttusk eiga tilkall mikit þar til lands, því at á Norðimbralandi váru þeir einir menn, ef nokkut var til, at danska ætt átti at faðerni eða móðerni, en margir hváirtveggju.”¹⁰²

This is a startlingly straightforward statement. We have seen Monmouth argue the rights of the Normans through elaborate analogy which considers insular, classical, and Biblical history, and Layamon alter his story into one with a more complex conclusion regarding the roles of different peoples in the history of England. We have seen the *South English Legendary*, particularly in the stories of Wulfstan and Kenelm, construct an anti-Norman sense of England based on relationships between land, language, and legitimacy of succession. These insular traditions’ cases can be reduced to: as this is how it was, this is how it should be. *Egils Saga* is much simpler: this is how it is. It accepts that the demographics of that place and time are complex, and regards with neutrality the competing claims to the land that result. The sagas though were written in Iceland, and it is easy to be pragmatic when the land in question is not yours.

¹⁰² “Scotts and Danes and Norsemen...harried the land much and it seemed to them they possessed great claim there to the lands, because in Northumberland *the only people who were of any importance* had Danish family on the father’s side or the mother’s side, and many both.” Sturluson 72. Phrase in italics taken from the translation provided in the entry “nokkurr” in the glossary of the Einarsson edition of *Egils Saga*.

Havelok is set in Grimsby, not far from York, the setting of the episode of *Egils Saga* episode we have been considering. It is on the wrong bank of the Humber to be part of Northumberland, but like York it was part of the Danelaw. Unlike the saga it was written in the same region in which it is set, in the late 13th century (the most complete manuscript dates from c. 1300-25)¹⁰³ and so cannot be as disinterested as the sagas which were composed far off in Iceland. Although it is set partially in Denmark, *Havelok's* perspective is decidedly insular. It is the author's campaign to show his region's contribution to English history and identity by reconsidering the role of Danes and the Danelaw in the making of England. Although it promotes the accomplishments of the Danes, it is concerned with them above all as Anglo-Danes. *Havelok* is the prince of Denmark, who is cheated out of his inheritance by the regent charged with raising him, while the same fate simultaneously befalls the princess Goldburu in England; as an adult *Havelok* redresses both crimes.

Havelok the Dane is one of the "Matter of England romances."¹⁰⁴

Like the sagas, which were as much casebooks for Iceland's evolving legal system as entertainment, the romance form had its "legal preoccupations."¹⁰⁵ Crane writes of romances that their "a concern for just procedure often transforms crises that could be occasions for warfare into lessons in

¹⁰³ *Havelok*, intro.

¹⁰⁴ "Among the corpus of Middle English romance there are many narratives that purport to be historical in nature. Romances of the Arthurian world vie for attention alongside legends of antiquity and of the Carolingians. Found also within this body of 'historical' romances are a number of texts that concern themselves with the pre-conquest history of England—those that have been termed the Matter of England romances." Rouse 2005, 52

¹⁰⁵ Rouse 2005, 98

legality”¹⁰⁶ This is the case in *Havelok*, as Rouse argues at length.¹⁰⁷ *Havelok* gives us two cases of bad rulership, Godrich and Godard, both regents who try to dispose of their wards, Goldburu in England and Havelok in Denmark. Godard orders Havelok’s death, but Havelok is smuggled out of Denmark to England, where he is raised humbly as the foster-son of Grim, a fisherman. Not knowing that he is royal, Godrich attempts to reduce Goldburu’s rank and rid himself of her by marrying her to Havelok. Havelok, now grown, goes back to Denmark to seek justice for himself, and then returns to England to do the same for his wife.

The manner by which each of the false kings comes to power contrasts the legal systems of Denmark and England. Denmark is more violent—Godard orders Havelok killed, while Godard disposes of the princess through a more “legal” process of locking her up until she is old enough to be married below her rank and thus forfeit the crown. The deposition of each king provides a similar contrast. In Denmark, Havelok exacts his revenge and then seeks approval; in England he first arranges for his wife’s claims to be corroborated, then formally charges Godrich with his misdeeds. Denmark is the violent past. In England, on the other hand, we have the good king Athelwold “of word, of wepne, he was bold.”¹⁰⁸ Until he died and the stewardship passed to the treacherous Godrich England was ruled by Athelwold’s arms, his *wepne*, but also by his word—by law. In displacing the

¹⁰⁶ Rouse 2005, 98

¹⁰⁷ “In his time were gode lawes: Romance and the English Legal Past” pp 93-133 in Rouse 2005.

¹⁰⁸ “of word, of weapon he was bold” *Havelok* 107

legal heir, Godrich disrupts the rule of law. Havelok restores it. In Denmark Havelok behaves like a maverick action-hero, taking justice into his own hands, but when he returns to England he stops compulsively at every stage to secure recognition of his rights and oaths of loyalty, making it clear which side of the law he is on.

Field writes that “Havelok is eventually a good king because he ruled in accordance with Christian morality and with the support of all ranks of society.”¹⁰⁹ Havelok’s success is due to more than brute strength—he is a vulnerable child at the beginning of his story, in the hands of someone charged with disposing of him, but he is saved when a light shines from him in his sleep, a mark that he is favored by God. Havelok has God’s approval, but he also needs a sign of approval from the people. This he asks for and receives many times over. Havelok demands confirmation that every English man, high and low, recognizes “That Goldeboru that was so fayr / Was of Engelond rith eyr,”¹¹⁰ and repeated oaths of “manrede”. In this way the author emphasizes that Havelok is English not only by residence or even by his contributions to the nation, but by kinship, through his wife. By marrying into the royal line, he acquires an English family history. This Dane from Lincolnshire is no usurper, but a true Englishman.

Havelok’s most pointed comment about the role of the Danes as Englishmen returns to the perpetual idea that England’s identity lies in her Christianity. Godrich lies about the nature of Havelok’s invasion in order to

¹⁰⁹ Field 1999, 166

¹¹⁰ “That Goldburu that was so fair was of England the rightful heir” *Havelok* 2768-9

rally an army, evoking the popular but archaic image of Danes as pagan

Viking raiders:

Lokes whare here at Grimesby
 Is uten-laddes here comen
 And haves the priorie numen
 All that evere mighten he finde,
 He brenne kirkes and prestes binde.
 He strangleth monkes and nunnes bothe—¹¹¹

In fact, when Havelok lands in England the second time, his first act is to swear that he

...sholde make,
 All for Grim, of monkes blake
 A priorie to serven in ay
 Jesu Christ, till domesday.¹¹²

This is a crucial detail. Godrich's claims prove that the cultural memory of the pagan pillagers was strong. It had to be countered with a history in which the Danes are good Christians.

Havelok is accepted because he establishes that he is on the right side of every issue. He works within the English legal, religious, and social establishment. His ascension is deliberately lawful in every way. He does not assault the English cultural systems, but rather defends and restores them.

Godrich betrays one of the most fundamental requirements for the prosperity of the nation—the legitimacy of kings. Havelok restores both legitimacy and the rule of law. Although he is ethnically an outsider, Havelok contributes to

¹¹¹ "Look where here at Grimsby out-landers are come here and have taken the priory, all that they ever might find, they burn churches and bind priests, they strangle monks and nuns both" *Havelok* 2579-84

¹¹² "should make, all for Grim, of black monks, a priory to serve in perpetuity, Jesus Christ, till Judgment day." *Havelok* 2520-3

the stability of kinship in the royal line by his adherence to English ideals of law and justice.

KINSHIP, LEGITIMACY AND BETRAYAL

Kinship is at the heart of concepts of national identity. The Germanic term *kingdom* developed from the idea of a family unit. A king was a *cyning* in Old English. The suffix “-ing” or “-ling” is related to the diminutive in duckling or German *liebling*, but in Old English its force was less of diminution than possession and descent; thus a *cyning* is one descended from (good) kin.¹¹³ In the Anglo-Saxon era, kings were given elaborate genealogies which explained such things as the kinship between the English and the Danes or the right of a particular family to rule by tracing back the ancestries of kings to figures historical, legendary, mythic (like Odin), and even Biblical (to Seth/Sceaf, the son of Noah.)¹¹⁴ The Biblical model encouraged this paradigm—in the Old Testament, family dramas drive the history of nations, and the character of entire peoples is explained by their descent from a single charismatic ancestor.

Despite the difficulties of conceiving of the English of the high medieval period as biologically related, given the plethora of languages and cultures cohabitating in the space called England, kinship remained a vital anxiety in discussions of national identity in post-Conquest texts. In the *South*

¹¹³ See the entries for “king,” “-ing³” and “-ling, *suffix*¹” in the OED.

¹¹⁴ Mitchell and Robinson’s *Beowulf* 219. For more on this subject see Harris 2001, and Davis 2008.

English Legendary, where the lives of the native saints like Wulfstan and Dunstan are bound to the fortunes of the nation, motifs of kinship abound. The continuity of rule is closely associated with prosperity; conversely, strains within families, betrayals, and displacements threaten the larger polity. In the stories of Havelok and Goldburu, Edward the Elder and Kenelm in the *South English Legendary*, and Rowena in the *Brut*, when the line of succession is broken by trouble within the family, the consequences directly affect how various communities and nations negotiate identity.

Kinship of Saints

Kinship is as important for the Anglo-Saxon saints as for monarchs. Sometimes it is expressed as a familial relationship to the monarch, other times by excessive attention to the Englishness of the saint, which expresses his kinship to the people of England. These relationships give saints the authority to act as leaders and offer advice or even take action in matters of national politics. Most native saints do double duty serving both the Church and the Realm. Even those saints who are not royalty themselves have royal connections—Dunstan for example has a good relationship with every king who reigns during his adult life, except Edwine. At the very least, saints offer monarchs criticism or serve as models for the way the king ought to behave. When the head of state is weak or cowardly or Norman, the heads of the church take his place as leaders of the country who epitomize the ideals of

Anglo-Saxon Englishness. An English saint is as much a leader of his people as a soldier of God.

An insular saint is not the same as an Anglo-Saxon saint. Alban, like Augustine, was an apostle to the British Isles, but there is one vital difference between them—Augustine came in 597 and converted the English, but Alban was martyred nearly 300 years earlier in 303 after bringing Christianity to the Romano-Britons. Though Alban is a saint associated with England, his story as told in the *South English Legendary* takes a different form from the Anglo-Saxon saints lives because he lacks the kinship to contemporary England which the Anglo-Saxon saints have. There is clear cultural continuity from Wulfstan or Dunstan, who move in recognizable church structures and familiar towns, but Alban’s Romano-British England was of a foreign faith, government, and language. While the Anglo-Saxon saints’ lives are full of elaborations on politics and relationships with the monarchy and a constant interest in precisely where things happened, Alban’s life is told more like those of the non-native saints, with little context and much torture. Alban is not an English saint, but a saint who “[was] her of Engelonde / Imartred.”¹¹⁵ He came originally “of heþene men,”¹¹⁶ and that’s as much as the *South English Legendary* will say--although the Justice asks him “of wat kunne” he comes and Albon promises to “answere sone / of wat cunne ich am icome” he never does elaborate.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ “was martyred here in England” *SEL* Vol I 238

¹¹⁶ “from heathen men” *SEL* Vol I 238

¹¹⁷ “of what kin” “to answer soon of what kin I am come” *SEL* Vol I 239

St Dunstan's saintliness is bound up in his Englishness, and the way his Englishness is expressed borders on xenophobia. His story is as interested in his relevance to England as his Saintly qualifications. As important as any miracle is the journey Dunstan makes around England with two other bishops, Saints Aþelwold and Oswold, after the death of King Edwine to purge the country of the results of his "uuel red."¹¹⁸ They "eche luþer person caste out."¹¹⁹ But where is "out"? Out of the church or the community? Or are these men expected to leave the country like the outlaws of the sagas and travel to Ireland or the continent? The *South English Legendary* does not specify. Whatever is beyond the bounds of English land and society may as well be the outer darkness of the old Germanic cosmography. Dunstan's great virtue is that he never rests—he works constantly with his hands as much as his spiritual or intellectual faculties in order "to fle[o] idelnesse."¹²⁰ He achieves his first miracle while still in his mother's womb and is constantly active until his death. Yet there is one point at which his story stalls—when he is exiled in St. Amant. Nothing of note happens while he is there. It is an empty placeholder where he bides his time until he can be in England again. Either he loses his saintly identity when he is removed from England, or else the author is suppressing any accomplishments from this period of his life and thus refusing to allow France to participate in his fame. He is a saint of England only. Even his first miracle, accomplished before his birth,

¹¹⁸ "evil counsel" *SEL* Vol I 207

¹¹⁹ "cast out each evil person" *SEL* Vol I 209

¹²⁰ "to shun idleness" *SEL* Vol I 206 Single letters in brackets are original to this edition of the *SEL*.

establishes the inseparability of his saintliness from his kinship and Englishness. While his mother is pregnant with him a great light shines from the taper she holds, to the wonder of the rest of the church, and the *South English Legendary* says: “Bote [of] Ðat holy child – Ðat in hure wombe was Pere / Al Engeland ssolde beon liȝt”¹²¹ The light he brings is not reserved only for those whose lives he touches directly, but neither is it for the Christian world in its entirety—it is for England.

The relevance of kinship to kingship is examined in the story of St Wulfstan, where Wulfstan’s legitimacy is contrasted with William’s illegitimacy. William is accurately but pejoratively described as “Willam Bastard” who conquered England “ðoru stregðe and felonye.”¹²² Succumbing to a legitimate invasion is a sign of weakness or the loss of God’s favor, so deception and duplicity are ascribed to the invaders. The act of invasion may or may not be inherently wrong, but it is always wrongfully conducted. There is an expectation of fair play even in war, and there is not even a double standard at work, for it is applied to the Britons as much as the Saxons: when the Britons do get ahead thanks to Penda’s treacherous murder of Oswald, Cadwalan has mixed feelings: “hit likede wel Ðan kinge / buten for ane Þinge / hit of-Þuhte him ful sone / for Ðan swikedome.”¹²³ Only Havelok’s invasion is not committed treacherously, and in his romance there is an obsessive

¹²¹ “But by that holy child that was there in her womb, all England should be lit” *SEL* Vol I 205

¹²² “through strength and felony” *SEL* Vol I 10

¹²³ “it pleased the king but for one thing; he regretted it full soon for the treachery” *Layamon* Vol III 264

refrain reminding us that he is the rightful heir, marked by God, so his invasion is not really taking the country but taking it back.

The *South English Legendary*'s account of the Norman invasion has little to do with events as recounted by modern historians and everything to do with the origins and character of legitimate authority. The *South English Legendary* has mixed feelings about Harold. It does take his side in the fight with William but only as the lesser of two evils, "vor Harald was suþþe kyng – wiþ traison alas / þe croune he bar of Engelond – wuch wile so it was".¹²⁴ This is the same situation which leads to the fall of the Britons in the *Brut*—Vortigern too was not the rightful king, but a usurper who "swike wes ful deorne."¹²⁵ A legitimate king would have been able to defend the realm.

History says that Harold lost because his forces were exhausted and overextended and unlucky, but the *South English Legendary* doesn't even remember the Battle of Fulford or any of the other circumstances which had weakened Harold's army. Instead, it insists that the reason for the English loss was the disloyalty of certain barons. The text says that the Normans would not have stood a chance

Aȝen þe baronie of Englelond - þe wile hi wolde be[o] triwe
 Ac alas þe tricherie – þat þo was and ȝute is
 þat broȝte þo Englelonde – alto grounde ywis
 Vor Englisse barons bycome somme – vntriwe and fals also
 To bitraie hom sulf and hore kyng – þat so mucche triste ham
 to.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ "for Harold was in truth king – with treason alas, he bore the crown of England – such wile as it was" *SEL* Vol I 10

¹²⁵ "was a traitor entirely in secret" *Layamon* Vol II 145

¹²⁶ "against the barony of England if they would have been true, but alas the treachery that then was and yet is that then brought England to the ground in truth, for some of the English

It is not weakness but betrayal that loses the battle. Barring divine punishment, how else could it be that they lost, if the English are God's people?

After the Conquest, Wulfstan's protest against William's regime takes the form of a sword-in-the-stone style miracle. When the archbishop Lanfranc and the bishop Gundolf (who had been colleagues in Normandy)¹²⁷ remove Wulfstan from his post at William's urging, Wulfstan humbly accepts their decision, but thrusts the cross he has worn into Edward's stone tomb before he takes his leave. No one can remove the cross until the church leaders relent and ask Wulfstan back—he withdraws it without difficulty.¹²⁸ Thus Wulfstan demonstrates not only that he has the approbation of God, but also that he has a link to Edward, the last legitimate king. William and Harold disturbed the peace of natural succession—though each king covets it, it is Wulfstan who receives Edward's kinship through the miracle. As his vocal criticism of William and his tacit criticism of the church leaders demonstrate, his loyalty is not to the church or the monarchy as institutions, but to the legitimate English embodiment of both—the sainted king Edward.

Kinship is more than just good blood in these texts. It is a measure of Englishness. Kinship is vital to any sort of leader, not just the sons of kings.

barons became untrue and also false, to betray themselves and their king that trusted them so much" *SEL* Vol I 76-80

¹²⁷ Brett, Martin. "Gundulf (1023/4–1108), bishop of Rochester" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [accessed 29 April 2008: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11738>]

¹²⁸ This trope rings Arthurian to the modern reader, but it is also present in the Germanic tradition: Sigmund in the *Volsungasaga* is the only man who is able to draw out the sword which Odin leaves thrust into the tree in the middle of King Volsung's hall.

It is the difference between an admirable invasion like Havelok's and an act of treachery like William's. English kinship is as important to the Anglo-Saxons saints as their miracles, even their obedience to the church. Kin—and therefore England—comes before all other alliances and institutions.

The Evil Step-Mother

An evil step-mother in a royal family confuses kinship and succession: trouble in the royal family means trouble for the nation. In fairness to the step-mothers who are so often the scapegoats, I should offer the qualification that the scenarios in these histories are not constructed in quite the way we expect of fairy-tales, for the “children” who suffer for the conniving of their step-mothers are sometimes (like saint Edward and Vortimer) already adults, and when it is a child who is suffering it is often not a step-mother but another sort of guardian (an older sister in Kenelm or a male regent in Havelok) who causes their grief. Yet thematically, all are the same situation: a person with the authority of a parent who is not truly a parent disturbs the proscribed order of kinship and succession when they undermine the rightful heir for the sake of their own ambitions.

In Havelok we have what Field has called “a remarkable analysis of tyrannical misrule that is both personal and structural.”¹²⁹ Godard and Godrich are the guardians of Havelok and Goldburu respectively, each in his own way tries to do away with his ward and assume power. Serious consequences for the nation result. Godrich rules through lies and intimidation. When he sets

¹²⁹ Field 1999, 166

about to raise an army, he cannot appeal to the people's love of him, but their love of their own "leme or lif;"¹³⁰ if any refused him, "he swor bi Crist and by Seint Johan / that he sholde maken him thral / and all his ofspring forth withal."¹³¹ When Havelok and Goldburu triumph over Godrich and restore the correct bloodline to the throne, they begin an era of fruitfulness for the nation, which is mirrored in their own family—with fifteen sons and daughters they are assured that England will not lack for an heir of their kin. Unfortunately, *Havelok* is the only text we will look at where such a restoration is possible. The rest of the evil step-mothers are women, who seem to be much more effective than these men at causing the deaths of their wards and step-sons.

In the story of Saint Edward, the step-mother figure achieves her ends—Edward is dead and the throne must pass to his half-brother. Another saint, Edward's spiritual kinsman, Dunstan, must crown Edward's half brother, his royal kinsman. But "Pis godeman sein Donston / Hatede mucche to crouni him / ʒif he it miʒte forgon / Ac Po he it moste nede do / for it was riʒt & lawe"¹³² Dunstan is caught in a situation where what is lawful and what seems just do not coincide. In this case blood is thicker, and the succession of kings trumps the succession of saints.

While the situation the step-mother creates is morally complex, the villain is not. She is simply fulfilling an archetype. She really is Edward's

¹³⁰ "limb or life" *Havelok* 2555

¹³¹ *Havelok* 2563-5

¹³² "this goodman saint Dunstan hated much to crown him if he might forgo it, but he had to do it, for it was right and lawful" *SEL* Vol I 113

stepmother, though he is already grown. Although her schemes against Edward are part of a plan to put her own son in line for the crown, ambition alone is not the root of her mistreatment of him. The first mention of her reads “His fader nom anoþer wif / Ðat luþer was and qued”¹³³ From the first moment she is introduced into the story and into the family, she is “luþer,” evil. She is a threat. A few lines later, the story explains why: “he[o] louede lite seint Edward / for stepmoder is selde god”¹³⁴ When Saint Edward goes to visit his half-brother, his stepmother engineers his murder. In order to maneuver him into a position of vulnerability where he can be killed, she goes out to intercept him and stalls him by insisting that he stay and have a drink before he rides on. When Edward bends down to accept the drink, a priest in his step-mother’s party stabs him. Although it is not the drink itself that kills Edward, she is still enacting a trope as common in fairy tales and other Germanic literature as the evil stepmother, and one we will see again in the *Brut*: a woman offering a poisoned cup.

The story of Kenelm in the *South English Legendary*, like the plot of *Havelok*, centers on a child-heir dispossessed by the very person who ought to be caring for him, despite clear signs that they are favored by God. The text is rich with issues of cultural contact and contrast in the powers of Latin and English, the role of the pope in the monarchy, the relevance of the local to the greater Christian world and vice versa—all raised by a single sibling rivalry. Kenelm’s entire relevance to the church is based on his blood relationships.

¹³³ “his father took another wife, who was evil and wicked” *SEL* Vol I 110

¹³⁴ “she had little love for saint Edward, for a stepmother is seldom good.” *SEL* Vol I 110

He was only seven years old, too young to be a prominent church leader like many saints. He was not killed for his faith specifically, nor did he perform any miracles in his short lifetime before he began to survive his sister's attempts to kill him. Kenelm is significant only because he was the child of an English king.

The step-mother figure, "Ðis luÐer quene,"¹³⁵ is all the more sinister a villain by the fact that she is so close to legitimacy: Quendride is no stranger, but Kenelm's sister, his own kin. She of all people ought to be protecting, even acting maternally toward him, but "Ðer nis no felonie – Ðat womman ne can Ðenche."¹³⁶ She, like Edward's step-mother, acts for envy of his inheritance, but also for pure malice. The term "luÐer" applied to her in the first sentence in which she appears after her father's death. It is subsequently used again and again to describe not just the dirty deed but the queen herself. She "turnde to felonie" the minute she came into a step-mother role.¹³⁷ As with all saints, and as with fairy-tale children like Snow White, Kenelm proves difficult to kill. Like many of her counterparts, Quendride sends the child out into the woods to be killed; first though, like Edward's step-mother, and like Rowena in the *Brut*, she offers him a poisoned cup.

Rowena is the most complicated of the step-mothers. Like the others she instigates a family drama with national consequences, but the situation is even more volatile because she is a Saxon and her step-son is a Briton. Her

¹³⁵ "this evil queen" *SEL* Vol I 290

¹³⁶ "there is no felony that woman cannot plot" *SEL* Vol I 283

¹³⁷ "turned to felony" *SEL* Vol I 282

actions make the struggles between languages, religions, cultures and legal systems intensely immediate and personal.

Rowena is a sinister variant on the peace-weaver topos. Hers is an archetype of the Germanic tradition, the woman who is married into a hostile tribe and expected, whether by simply being given or by active diplomacy, to mend and maintain the relationship between formerly warring parties. According to Layamon's portrayal, the practice is unfamiliar to Vortigern. Peace-weaving between tribes is a Germanic practice, part of a foreign cultural system. For the Britons, Rowena is an invasion, a threat, because as a peace-weaver she embodies a foreign law code. Her enactment of this role commands acceptance not only of the Saxons, but of Saxon cultural terms.

The Britons were right to be concerned, as the threat she poses is not merely symbolic—instead of working towards compromise between her family and her in-laws, Rowena's only aim is the advancement of her own kin. Just as the evil step-mother is an inversion of the mother figure, when Rowena poisons Vortimer, she does not step out of the peace-weaver role but actually inverts it, performing a reversed and malicious version of the most visible task of her archetype. Turning to *Beowulf* as a source for comparison through its generous catalogue of peace-weaving women, we see Wealhþeow and others carry out their diplomatic efforts through the ceremony of offering the cup; it is the right and duty of the hostess to bear the cup around in a gemütlich, intimate gesture of trust-building. Rowena upsets this convention when she comes into Vortimer's hall as a guest and offers him a cup of his

own wine. She has such gall that as she offers him the cup she “hailede him,”¹³⁸ crying “Lauerd king wæshail” that is, “be hale”—she offers a toast to his health with the very drink that will kill him.

This scene also returns to the *Brut*'s preoccupation with Saxon linguistic hegemony. The wassail itself is an interesting word. It bears obvious resemblance to the Old English greeting *wes þu hal*, ‘be you well’, but the origin of its association with drinking is less clear. The OED offers a lengthy note on its etymology, in which it states that:

It seems probable that this use arose among the Danish-speaking inhabitants of England, and became more or less common among the native population; in the 12th c. it was regarded by the Normans as markedly characteristic of Englishmen. The earliest known occurrence of the phrases is in Geoffrey of Monmouth VI. xii. (c1140), in the well-known story of Rowena...¹³⁹

Accurately or not, to the Normans and within the *Brut* tradition, the “wassail” that Rowena uses first to seduce Vortigern and then to murder his son signifies a Germanic English culture, much like movie scripts of the past century might characterize a person as Jamaican by assigning them the salutation “hey mon” or a Plains Indian the solemn, ridiculous “how.”

Rowena speaks three times, and twice her language is identified. In each of the parallel scenes she acts out with father and son, it is deliberately noted that her use of a language that is foreign to them is the key to her success and their destruction. But what is that language? In the later,

¹³⁸ “hailed” or “toasted.” *Layamon* Vol II 202

¹³⁹ “wassail, *n*” OED

murderous scene, it is identified as “Saxisc”.¹⁴⁰ This seems consistent with the text’s use of “Saxon” both as a pejorative and as belonging to this early period, when the Germanic invaders are still strangers in the land. The first scene is different, and it is no accident, for the patterns are the same in each manuscript. Although the Wassail is twice described in this earlier scene as a custom of “Sæxe-londe,” Rowena’s language is here called “Ængle” and the line which introduces her speech reads: “& Þus ærest sæide / in Ængle londe.”¹⁴¹ Just as Hengest first identifies his origin as the land of “Angles”, Rowena’s first and most important speech foreshadows the Germanic linguistic supremacy which will come to the island by giving the language the name more readily identified by contemporaries as the very language in which Layamon is writing. In so constructing the beginning, he reminds readers of the end, and implicitly questions the direction of relations between languages in his present-day England. With yet another language now the ascendant, will the country change its name again? Does a new name and a new language create a new country, or is the history of the land cumulative of all its names and peoples?

“Laverd King, was hail!”¹⁴² is Rowena’s one and only line in Monmouth, where neither she nor the English language are as deliberate and effectual as they are in Layamon. In the former, it seems almost by accident that Vortigern is married to her—he makes a drunken application for her and Hengest, unprepared for this possibility, first “consulted his brother Horsa and

¹⁴⁰ *Layamon* Vol II 202

¹⁴¹ “and thus first said in English land” *Layamon* Vol II 174

¹⁴² Monmouth 1966, 159

the other senior men who were around him as to what he should do about the King's request"¹⁴³ in order to determine an acceptable deal to be struck. In Layamon though, it seems to be Hengest's intention in bringing Rowena to Britain to marry her to Vortigern. He builds up expectation of her coming by announcing repeatedly in the King's presence that Rowena is "swiðe deore"¹⁴⁴ to him, and takes care to dress her elaborately and richly for her first meeting with Vortigern. While Monmouth's Rowena comes into the feast from another room almost casually, with no mention of any others with her, Rowena in Layamon's version participates in the pageantry of approaching Vortigern dressed in her finest with an escort of "hæze iborene men"¹⁴⁵ lending occasion to the moment. Monmouth identifies her beauty as the thing which allures Vortigern, even before he asks for her speech to be interpreted to him; her language is only a barrier. Layamon on the other hand leaves out any mention of Vortigern's reaction to her physical beauty and concentrates instead on his interest and participation in the custom she introduces to him. The interpreter in Layamon's version expands Monmouth's neutral explanation with the editorial that "Dis beoð sele lazen / inne Saxe-londe / & inne Alemaine / heo beoð inhalden aðele."¹⁴⁶ and Vortigern's cry of "Maiden

¹⁴³ Monmouth 1966, 160

¹⁴⁴ "very dear" *Layamon* Vol II 167

¹⁴⁵ "high-born men" *Layamon* Vol II 174

¹⁴⁶ "these are good customs in Saxland, and in Alemaine they are held noble." *Layamon* Vol II 175

Rouwenne / drinc bluðeliche”¹⁴⁷ reveals much more interest and joy in participation than Monmouth’s cold “[he] ordered Renwein to drink.”¹⁴⁸

Rowena’s part in poisoning Vortigern’s son is likewise more active than in Monmouth’s telling. In Layamon’s version, the drama is heightened when Rowena goes before Vortigern herself, professing the desire to be baptized. Instead of an unfortunate but businesslike betrayal by a nameless servant, we are given a face-to-face confrontation in which Vortimer’s Christian good faith is played upon and taken advantage of by his step-mother. It is an intimate and painful betrayal, and as a reiteration of the earlier offering of a cup and toast to Vortigern, it leaps to notice. This is a significant scene. It is less important in Monmouth, where Rowena’s motivation is an oddly arbitrary “evil spirit”¹⁴⁹ which urged her to kill Vortimer for envy of his virtue. Though Rowena studies poisons herself, she delivers it through a servant “whom she had first corrupted with innumerable bribes.”¹⁵⁰

Just as Rowena’s motivation in Monmouth’s version was simply evil, her method was simply mercenary; his is a story which could have been played out just as easily within a homogenous community. In Layamon’s version though, the betrayal is a crucial scene which represents the idea that this was not just a conflict between two peoples, but two languages and cultures. He tells us that Rowena thought to “hire fader wreken & hire

¹⁴⁷ “Maiden Rowena, drink blithely” *Layamon* Vol II 176

¹⁴⁸ Monmouth 1966, 159

¹⁴⁹ Monmouth 1966, 162

¹⁵⁰ Monmouth 1966, 162

freondene deað”¹⁵¹ This motive twists the peace-weaver archetype, for the essential intention of the custom is to end this cycle of retribution. Rowena’s language is her most dangerous weapon. First she comes to the king and lies smoothly, professing her submission to Vortimer’s culture, that she will take Christianity on Ðan ilke dæie / Ðe Ðu seolf demest”¹⁵² Although, as we have seen, this text can conveniently ignore language barriers at times, the fact that later in the scene there seems to be nobody on hand to translate her “Saxisc” speech to Vortimer, it is tempting to speculate that she is supposed to have spoken these appeasing lines in British. Rowena speaks once more, when she reenacts the typescene she had with Vortimer’s father. Her words to Vortimer are almost identical to those she used to Vortigern: “Lauwerd king wæshail / uor ðe ich am swiðe uæin.”¹⁵³ Unlike Vortigern who, the text tells us countless times, “of ælchen vuele he wes war,”¹⁵⁴ Vortimer is ignorant of Rowena’s meaning but no less susceptible to the evils of its influence. Where Vortigern was seduced by Rowena’s exotic Germanic speech and customs, Vortimer is merely amused, but his laughing gives her the diversion she needs to slip poison into the cup she offers him. The message is clear: any participation in Saxon culture will poison that of the British.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ “avenge her father, and her friends’ deaths” *Layamon* Vol II 199

¹⁵² “on the same day that you yourself deem” *Layamon* Vol II 201

¹⁵³ “Lord king, wassail, I am most joyful for you” *Layamon* Vol II 202

¹⁵⁴ “of each evil he was aware” *Layamon* Vol II 168

¹⁵⁵ The Britons’ grave anxieties about intermarrying with other cultures, particularly heathen ones, are part of their identity as God’s other chosen people. When the Saxons begin to assimilate such that “nes nan swa wis mon / no swa zer witele / Ðat mighte to-dæle / Ða cristine & Ða hæðene” (there was no man so wise nor so quick-witted that he might distinguish the Christians and the heathens, *Layamon* Vol II 161) this is not viewed positively as evidence of the compatibility of these races/cultures, but rather as a sinister threat to the purity of the British race, and therefore to their relationship with God. Comp. Deuteronomy

Family dramas are more than fairy tales, though they often take forms with much in common with them. Like fairy tales, they express certain fundamental anxieties about human relationships. But as they are used by Layamon and others, these family dramas do something more—they express in microcosm the social history of the nation. A history that concentrates on the relationships within royal families would seem to be of the “great man” school of historiography, but the figures in many of these medieval histories are clearly too archetypal to be faithful representations of real people. They are neither entirely allegorical nor entirely literal, but somewhere in between these domestic dramas express the history of the larger national family.

7:1—7:4: “1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Gir'gashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Per'izzites, and the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; 2 and when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, *and* utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: 3 neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. 4 For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly” (King James Bible. American Bible Society, 2000).

PLACE AND THE ACCRETION OF HISTORIES

England is, essentially, a place. This seems like the most concrete of all conceptions of England so far discussed, yet the use that is made of place differs widely in the narratives at hand. The *South English Legendary* constructs the land as a physical link to the past which excludes newcomers like the Normans whose history was only recently planted in English soil; the *Brut*, however, uses place as the common element of many peoples' histories.

The *South English Legendary* emphasizes the link between history and the land. The English saints' lives, unlike the *South English Legendary's* stories of earlier martyrs which tend to be litanies of tortures with very little background, take great pains to locate the saints in the political and physical landscape of England. The story of Kenelm opens with a long and (in terms of plot) superfluous description of the political map of England in Kenelm's time. Although the author is ostensibly describing the division of the former Anglo-Saxon kingdoms because they no longer exist and need to be explained, the names of shires and towns and rivers that figure into the explanation are nearly all recognizable at a glance even today¹⁵⁶—thus the geographical digression serves to strengthen the sense of continuity between the time of Kenelm and the author's present. The text goes on to tell us that

¹⁵⁶ For example: "Homber and Temese – Seuerne ðe Þridde is"... "ðe ssire of Oxenford / Leicestre ssire Lyncolne ssire - & ðe ssire of Her[t]ford" *SEL* Vol I 280

we may still view the Psalter on which the evil queen's eyeballs landed. "Þe sauter is ȝute at Wynchecombe - & wo so wolde come Þerto / Þer me may ȝute ise[o] – ware Þe dede was ido."¹⁵⁷ This emphasis on physical continuity, even more than the emphasis on the English language, creates a sense of the relevance of the past by making it immediate and tangible.

Both the *South English Legendary* and *Havelok* offer artifacts and other connections to the material world as proofs of the historicity of their tales. Most of the material products of these tales are legitimized by their connection to Christianity: they are churches and abbeys, like that "priorie" founded in memory of Grim, or items on display within such buildings, like the evil queen's Psalter. On the purpose and power of these references Jankofsky observes, "the bond between the inner truth of the story and the outward truth of historical reality is established and reinforced in a manner such as to render it verifiable by all."¹⁵⁸ But these artifacts do more than prove the past. They prove the relevance of the past to the present: saints' relics are valued precisely because they still have the potency to effect miracles, and the seal of Grimsby is invoked not only to prove Havelok's existence but to invite feelings of historical continuity and participation in the story in those who still live under it.

These physical artifacts tie the past to the present and the local to the universal. The location of Kenelm's holy body goes from being an intensely

¹⁵⁷ "the psalter is yet at Wynchecombe and whoso would come thereto may yet see there where the deed was done." SEL Vol I 291

¹⁵⁸ Jankofsky, Klaus P. "National Characteristics in English Saints" *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*. Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 88

local matter of some gossip about a the strange habits of a “wite cou”¹⁵⁹ to a matter for the highest authority in earthly Christendom, when a writ from heaven itself, with “lettres al of golde”¹⁶⁰ falls through a shaft of light into the hands of the Pope. The artifacts of this story—both physical and geographical—emphasize that it was a topical event, and allow people to take pride in the participation of an English town in an event of such significance it engaged not only the world beyond the channel but the world beyond the grave. The immediacy of artifacts makes the past a visceral reality and suggests that the importance England gained through this event is still present, passed down through the land and the people.

The *South English Legendary* and *Havelok* each have their ethnic allegiance—*Havelok* appeals to a Northern and Anglo-Danish demographic compared to the southern and predominantly Anglo-Saxon focus of the native saints’ lives. Although *Havelok* is an incorporation of the Anglo-Danes into English history, it remains loyal to its region and its people, being sure to reward the cook, Bertram, and others from Havelok’s life in Grimsby at the end of the narrative. In *Havelok*’s constant interest in Grimsby and the *South English Legendary*’s attempt to show the descent of contemporary England directly from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Kenelm’s day, appeals to a specific geography amount to appeals to a specific perceived ethnic group.

In the *Brut*, a new paradigm is forming. We have seen how *Layamon*’s *Brut* differs from its precursors in taking an interest in language

¹⁵⁹ “white cow” *SEL* Vol I 286

¹⁶⁰ “letters all of gold” *SEL* Vol I 288

and place-names more akin to *Havelok* than Monmouth. In the *Brut*, however, geography does not limit but rather expands its scope—it begins to incorporate both Briton and Saxon history into the larger history of England. Although the Britons are thought to be physically gone from the country, their story remains in the land. Place names (like West-sæx and Sparewenchestre) use the Saxon language, yet encode the presence of the Britons because they are named for conflicts between the two peoples. The history of the Britons is in the land. Also, although they are invaders and pagans, Layamon has interest and sympathy for the Saxons, particularly in comparison to Monmouth or Wace. Their history is not to be written over by those who have taken the land since, but incorporated into a history that includes all English peoples.

We have seen how Layamon incorporates the story of Pope Gregory and the English slaves into his narrative. There is evidence elsewhere in the *Brut* that he did not include this positive portrayal of the Saxons on a whim, or merely because chronology dictated it. Layamon does more than accept this story into his tale when he comes to it—he foreshadows it in his earliest mention of the Saxons: “Pis weoren Ða færeste men / Pat auere her comen”¹⁶¹ Fairness, of course, is the most visible similarity between the Angles and Angels, and that which first catches Gregory’s eye in the marketplace, setting in motion England’s eventual salvation.¹⁶² That Layamon readily and consciously incorporates this pro-English story into his necessarily anti-Saxon

¹⁶¹ “These were the fairest men that ever came here” *Layamon* Vol II 152

¹⁶² In Old English, the word cognate to our “shining” was frequently applied to spiritual beauty, as with the “ælfsciene” Judith.

Brut reveals his bias—he is not really writing a history of one people, the Britons, but a history of the land itself, which persists beyond the comings and goings of kings, dynasties, and cultures.

What god or fate drove the Saxons to Briton in the first place?

Monmouth explicitly characterizes the final Saxon victory as a punishment for the failures of the Britons, making the Saxons a scourge of God, a tool in His plan, but the more immediate cause for the initial voyage of Hengest and Horsa is population control. Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon all indicate that there are too many people in the Saxon homeland, so some must leave. The curious point is that it is explicitly bounty, an excessive fertility of people, which makes them too many for the land. It could just as easily have been a famine, the infertility of the soil which drove them out. If having too many healthy babies is their greatest problem, this is a fortunate people. Of the three, Wace makes it most explicit that this prosperity of population is not blind luck when he writes into Hengest's mouth the line "women and men are more in number than the sand,"¹⁶³ a reference to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 22:17: "in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which *is* upon the seashore."¹⁶⁴ Wace does use this formula to indicate a great host elsewhere, when he is discussing various armies, but he must have been conscious of the allusion to the promise of fruitfulness that is repeated throughout the Bible. Whether they know it or not, this people is favored by God. The Saxons, of

¹⁶³ Wace 1996, 6

¹⁶⁴ King James 2000

course, do not know this God who is driving their history. They still see themselves subject to arbitrary lots, a type of fate appropriately like the inescapable *wyrd* of Old English poetry. Both Monmouth and Wace also have Hengest volunteer the information that they were led by Mercury (often equated with Odin) to the land of the Britons, but in Layamon's version Hengest's tale sticks to the political facts of this world. Only in this version is their coming to England not attributed to the guidance of a false god.

The *Brut* puts pejorative emphasis on the foreignness of the Saxons when they first arrive and repeats this judgment in commenting on episodes of the struggle in which they have done something which Layamon deems treacherous or false, yet as the narrative continues this sense that they are invaders and strangers begins to fade. Their conversion is of course a crucial moment in removing the otherness of the Saxons. This moment, as we have seen, is accepted as an important piece of the history of the country, despite its being a setback for the *Brut*'s eponymous protagonists. Usually the name "Saxon" is used to emphasize this people's foreignness and "English" is to emphasize their inevitable (from Layamon's perspective) victory, but in this case, both names are used: "he füllehtede Englisce men / he füllehtede Sexisce men."¹⁶⁵ Perhaps Layamon has received some traditions of the Angles and Saxons as two distinct peoples, distinguished simply by origin rather than his more poetically weighted usages and is attempting in this moment to acknowledge that. Even if this is true, and even if baptism does not explicitly turn Saxons into Angles, there is still artistic significance in his placing of the

¹⁶⁵ "he baptised English men, he baptised Saxish men" *Layamon* Vol III 191

two names next to each other at this particular moment. This moment is the pivot where what Layamon means by Saxons begin to become what he means by English.

Whether because of the circumstances which have weakened the Britons' culture and legitimized the Saxons' or the simple passage of time, the Britons themselves give up the idea of the Saxons as foreigners. Although Margadud, the duke of South Wales, “æuere he Ængliscce men / bi-hehte hærm”¹⁶⁶ and argues for the priority of the Britons, he is an exception in this era. Even the royal families have blended, for the first time since the family drama of Vortigern and his in-laws. A strange episode occurs in which the “eorles, beornes, biscopes, and boc-ilarede men”¹⁶⁷—that is, the secular, ecclesiastical, and intellectual leaders—intervene to stop the battle between Æluric and Cadwan. No mention is made of whether these are the cultural leaders of the Saxons or the Britons—there may be a formal distinction between, but they are in concord with each other on this matter at the least. These battles and coups are not about ethnicity nor religion nor culture; without the aspect of cultural conflict this war is reduced to a petty matter of politics and power. The internal politics of Oswy's kingdom are likewise concerned more with personalities than ethnic distinctions. His own cousins wish to overthrow him; they go first to Penda, another Saxon, for aid, and he sends them on to Cadwalan, a Briton.

¹⁶⁶ “ever he promised English men harm” *Layamon* Vol III 272

¹⁶⁷ “earls, barons, bishops, and book-learned men” *Layamon* Vol III 204

In this section of the *Brut*, after the Saxons have been converted and taken control of a large part of the island, terminology becomes difficult. Layamon demonstrates the knowledge that England was once five smaller kingdoms under the Anglo-Saxons when he describes England's division under Gurmond: "Ʒa ne mihtte heom iwurðe / wha þis lond scolde aȝen / and to-wende mid alle / a muchelere wraððe / and fif kinges a-neouste / heo makeden in þisse londe / And ælc nom of oðere / al þat heo mihten / ane while un-some; and an oðere while isahte."¹⁶⁸ This carving up of the country implies that it was previously a single unit, and the critical attitude Layamon takes towards those responsible for the division expresses his opinion that it should be, must be, is inevitably, a united whole, whoever rules it. His contemporary perspective rebels against the conception of a fragmented England—though Oswy and Penda are kings themselves (of Bernicia and Mercia respectively) and Layamon must acknowledge this or his plot would fall apart, he still seeks unity by depicting Cadwalan not as a regional king but a king over kings. His *leoden*, his people, include "riche and hene,"¹⁶⁹ but also "Englisce and Bruttisce."¹⁷⁰ Admittedly, this latter pairing comes from the mouth of Penda, who has his own agenda and reasons for flattering the king. What is more telling is Cadwalan's response: told that Oswy has failed

¹⁶⁸ "They could not honor among themselves who should own this land, and disagreed with all in great wrath and they quickly made five kings in this land. And each took from the others all that they might, one while in enmity, and another while reconciled" *Layamon* Vol III 179

¹⁶⁹ "rich and poor" *Layamon* Vol III 268

¹⁷⁰ "English and British" *Layamon* Vol III 268

to appear to pay his respects to him, he gives Oswy the benefit of the doubt, reasoning that either he is too sick to travel “oðer uncuðe leoden / icumen beoð to his ðeoden”¹⁷¹ If invasion by “unucuðe leoden” is possible, in Cadwalan’s eyes Oswy’s own people must not be “unucuðe leoden,” but native and legitimate. The English are no longer considered foreign by the Britons. With several English kingdoms to deal with, but the preeminent king presumed still to be the Briton, Layamon struggles to express just who or what it is that he is king over. “ne wes icleoþed Cadwalan / king ouer Anglen,”¹⁷² he writes. “Ðis him spac Cadwaðlan / Ðe king wes of Englen” says one manuscript, while the other finishes this phrase: “Ðat king w.. in Englonð”¹⁷³ It seems the land must take the name of the Angles now, as they are the majority of its people or because they control most of the land, albeit under the remote supervision of a Briton king. Cadwalan’s kingdom then, is not his people, but the place itself, whoever may inhabit it.

All three histories begin outside of Briton, following the Britons (then Trojans) in their migration, but not one chooses to follow them after they have fallen from power and their leaders have migrated again to another land. It is not really the Britons who matter, but England. In his select positive portrayals of the Saxons, Layamon, more so than Monmouth, is beginning to give up the idea of history as the story of an ethno-cultural group in favor of that of history as the story of a place. Monmouth’s History begins “Britain,

¹⁷¹ “or foreign people are come to his land” *Layamon* Vol III 270

¹⁷² “Now Cadwalan was called king over the Angles” *Layamon* Vol II 257

¹⁷³ “Cadwalan, who was king of the Angles / in England” *Layamon* Vol III 271

the best of islands.”¹⁷⁴ He writes for a Norman audience and offers them grounds to interpret their coming as the second coming of the Britons—they have made the island “Britain” again. Layamon, by contrast states that he hopes “of Engle / þa æðelæn tellen / wat heo ihoten weoren / & wonene heo comen / þa Englene londe / ærest ahten.”¹⁷⁵ Here he states outright his interest in naming, but curiously puts less store in a name than Monmouth: for Layamon the country is the true protagonist, as great under the name England as it was under the name Britain. Layamon transforms Monmouth’s successive history, which allows the Normans to claim the land, into a cumulative history which allows the country to claim the histories off all the peoples whose stories have been played out on its soil.

Of the many ways in which *Layamon’s Brut* appropriates the history of the Britons as the history of England, perhaps the most significant may be the alteration of a scribe, for it appears in only one of the two manuscripts. It comes in the *Brut’s* last words on Arthur. Wace claims to leave “hidden in doubtfulness” the matter of “whether he liveth or is dead” though his own opinion is bleak if his last words on the matter are any indication: “the earl took the land to his keeping. He held it as bidden, but nevertheless Arthur came never again.”¹⁷⁶ Layamon, on the other hand, writes with hope of the departure of the greatest hero of the Britons, who gave them their last glory in their long struggle against the Angles/Saxons: “Bruttes ileueð zete / þat he bon

¹⁷⁴ Monmouth 1966, 53

¹⁷⁵ “To tell of the noble men of England, what they were called and when they came who first possessed first possessed the English land” *Layamon* Vol I 2

¹⁷⁶ Wace 1996, 114

on liue / and wunnien in Aualun; mid fairest alre aluen / and lokieð euere
 Bruttes ȝete / whan Arður cumen liðe.”¹⁷⁷ Here the manuscripts agree, more
 or less, though there are gaps in the Otho. In what follows however, the two
 manuscripts diverge drastically in meaning, though only one word is changed.
 The Otho states that Merlin has prophesized “Þat Arthur solde ȝite / come
 Bruttes...for to healpe,” the Caligula “þat an Arður sculde ȝete / cum *Anglen*
 to fulste”¹⁷⁸ In the Caligula version, Arthur no longer belongs to his people,
 but to the country. Arthur, the man and the story, is inherited with the land.

¹⁷⁷ “The Britons believe that he is yet alive, and dwells in Avalon with the fairest of all elves [cwene, queens, in the Otho] and the Britons every yet look to when Arthur comes sailing.” *Layamon* Vol III 145

¹⁷⁸ “That Arthur should yet come to help the British [Otho] /English [Caligula]” *Layamon* Vol III 146

AFTERWORD

Anxieties about nationhood may be couched in different vocabulary today, but the core ideas are still the same. America is a nation framed above all by place, Judaism a nation framed above all by kinship, and the fact that a Quebec separatist movement exists in Canada is evidence of the continued importance of language. In creating and maintaining the myth of any nation, people still tell stories about the past which, as we are increasingly aware, tell us as more about the values of the writers than about anything in the past.

In the introduction to *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance*, Robert Allen Rouse speaks of the range of concepts of Anglo-Saxon England, from a “concrete thing” to John Niles’ “post-structuralist” view that it is a “rhetorical trope...*nothing other than what it has been perceived to be*” (italics his).¹⁷⁹ It is the latter with which this paper has been concerned, not Anglo-Saxon England as reconstructed by the supposedly objective historians of today but the “continual refashioning of what Anglo-Saxon England represents” by high medieval historiographers.¹⁸⁰

The plurality of English culture in the Middle Ages has received much attention in the scholarship of the last decade, and with good reason. It is a subtle, unfolding story. Although the *South English Legendary* is exclusive in

¹⁷⁹ Rouse 2005, 3,4

¹⁸⁰ Rouse 2005, 5

its concept of Englishness within the text, the context in which it is found tells a different story. In one manuscript,¹⁸¹ bound alongside the *Legendary* is *Havelok*, a story celebrating the Anglo-Danes which was in turn was adapted from an Anglo-Norman text, the *Estoire des Engleis*. Both the *South English Legendary* and *Havelok* also had their relationship to the *Brut*—Julia Marvin has written about the use of the Havelok story in this tradition,¹⁸² and P.J. Frankis argues that Layamon read and made use of the Life of St. Gregory in the *South English Legendary*.¹⁸³ The story of Havelok was also “integrated to a surprising degree into the dominant historiographical mode of the age—the chronicle.”¹⁸⁴ Each of these narratives in its various contexts superficially repeats the same story about Anglo-Saxon England, but their evolving use tells a new story about the people writing and reading them.

¹⁸¹ Bodleian Library MS Laud. Miscellaneous 108

¹⁸² Marvin, Julia. “Havelok in the Prose *Brut* Tradition” *Studies in Philology*, 2005 Summer; 102 (3): 280-306.

¹⁸³ Frankis, P.J. “Layamon’s English Sources” *J.R.R. Tolkien Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979 p. 75 n 16

¹⁸⁴ Rouse 2005, 91

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