



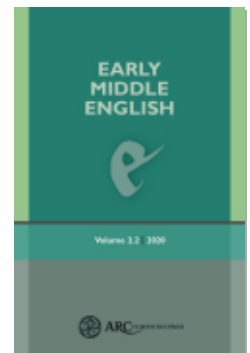
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“HER SHULL DANES SETT BANES”: CULTURAL AMNESIA AND MEDIEVAL MISREMEMBERINGS OF AN ENGLISH NORTH SEA HISTORY

ANDREW W. KLEIN*

IN THE MOST influential chronicle of late medieval England, the *Prose Brut*—a book whose ubiquity among medieval English readers is borne out by a truly impressive manuscript tradition¹—we are told the unexpected story of the final Danish attempt to conquer England in 1366. The botched invasion communicates little of longstanding worth but reminds the English reader of a history of conquest, not to be soon forgotten. The incident is capped by a striking exchange: a Dane leaves, etched into his prison walls, the threatening message, “3et shull Danos pes Wanes.”—“Yet shall Danes these dwellings [conquer].” Later, we are told, an English writer responds beneath, “Her shull Danes sett banes”—“Here shall Danes set bones.”² However questionable the historical truth,³ the tale itself circulated widely thanks to the *Brut*’s popularity, and the scene offers a textual tableau exhibiting a truism famously articulated by Ernst Renan: in nation-making “historical error ... is a crucial factor.”⁴ The final, clumsy prison-wall couplet bears the tension of more than three hundred years between its sparse two lines, demanding that we not forget a defining relationship for medieval England—while ironically warping the historical record.

This article examines how that tension shaped an emerging English identity by looking at several exemplary texts which weigh the “barbaric” Dane against the “Englished” Dane and, in so doing, polemically create a North Sea empire centred on political, geographical, and linguistic notions of Englishness. Beginning with Wil-

* I would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of *Early Middle English* for their generous and helpful advice on this article. An earlier draft was read by Chris Abram, Amy Mulligan, and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, and I thank them for their insightful scholarship and comments.

1 Lister M. Matheson, *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle* (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), 9, identifies no less than one hundred and eighty English manuscripts, noting that the *Brut* was the first chronicle printed in England: “It is no exaggeration to say that in the late Middle Ages in England the *Brut* was the standard historical account of British and English history. It is clear that it occupied a central position in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century historical writing and was a major influence in shaping national consciousness in medieval and post-medieval England.”

2 *The Brut, or, the The Chronicles of England*, ed. Friedrich W. D. Brie, 2 vols., EETS, o.s., 131 (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 2:317.

3 The invasion is completely unlikely, though not beyond possibility, as noted by *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Canuariensis (1346–1367)*, ed. James Tait (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1914), 338.

4 Ernst Renan, “What is a Nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 11.

liam of Malmesbury, whose *Gesta regum Anglorum* (ca. 1125) first highlights the importance of moving away from incivility and “barbarism” in Anglo-Scandinavian kin-culture,⁵ I argue that a defining constant in the emergence of Englishness is the difficulty inherent in remembering a past of violent Scandinavian raids while witnessing successful integration of Danish and Norwegian settlers within England. Generational continuity of this tension is observable in the nostalgic selective-memory of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English romances *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, wherein English and Danish identities in particular were held intertwined over the high and late medieval *longue durée* through literary memorialization in North Sea romances long after the 1035 dissipation of Cnut’s North Sea Empire. Before this chapter of English ethnogenesis closed in the face of more pressing international disputes, that nostalgia, I suggest, served to reinforce rather than dispel communal bonds until the Danes were finally recast in troped characterizations of Germanic paganism in Robert Mannyng’s *Story of England* (ca. 1338) and as threatening *Danois* in the late fourteenth-century *Prose Brut*.

Throughout the period studied here, the English shared an imaginative vision of Danes, and to a lesser extent other Scandinavian groups, which frequently essentialized and racialized presumed Danish identity as a way of establishing and reestablishing national supremacy in the wake of changes wrought by periods of Scandinavian invasion and immigration.⁶ Here, my assessment draws upon Geraldine Heng’s recent elaboration of medieval race as “a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences rather than a substantive content ... [which] demarcate[s] human beings through differences ... that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups.”⁷ As Heng notes, “the differences

5 “Kin-culture,” Azar Gat argues, is the basis for the nation, but kin-cultural group identities exist along a fluid spectrum of ethnonationality. Gat explains that kin-culture, or ethnicity, is “a population of shared kinship (*real or perceived*) and culture” (my emphasis). The potential fictiveness of the term makes it useful here, insofar as it describes a group in the process of being imagined, in William of Malmesbury’s case, narratively. See Azar Gat, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*, with Alexander Yakobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

6 The central focus of this article is the image of the Dane in medieval English literature, and Benedict Anderson’s oft-cited formulation of the nation as an “imagined community” in which the mind of each of its members holds “the image of their communion” has been influential in my thinking. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 6. Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press), 99, usefully adds that this communion occurs “especially in defining one’s national community against large communities of others in oppositional confrontations over territory, political jurisdiction and dominion, and in warfare.” On the long influence of English community in opposition to Danes, see also Mary Rambaran-Olm, “Medievalism and the ‘Flayed-Dane’ Myth: English Perspectives between the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Playing in the Premodern World: Practice and Representation*, ed. Larissa Tracey (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), 91–115.

7 Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27.

selected for essentialism will vary in the *long durée*” and physiognomy is but one of them.⁸ For English imagining of the Danes, racial differentiation worked sometimes along religious lines and at other times along cultural lines to resurrect the image of the “barbarian,” despite the nuanced relationship that had emerged between the English and Danish immigrants. Emphasis on Danish difference or similarity served English writers’ desire to solidify a sense of national identity. In this way, English handling of Danish tropes racialized differentially, always to give shape to an English national narrative.⁹ Similar to Heng’s analysis of medieval English writing on the Irish, for my purposes “the clustering of virulent discourses ... brings into focus processes of racialization that have little to do with skin color, physiognomy, phenotype, genealogy, blood lineage, macrobian zones, or climatology, but point instead to how flexible and resourceful strategies of race-making could be.”¹⁰ Although English writers may have had recourse to genealogy and blood lineage in their representations of Anglo-Scandinavian history, the racialization of the Danes ran largely along other lines. While Danes were at times represented as ethnically contiguous with the English, their racialization kept the English in a dominant position, reasserting English nationhood.¹¹

Given the accretive nature of tellings and retellings of a shared Danish and English history, those English writers studied here negotiated a close history with their Scandinavian neighbours with ambivalence—departing from stark depictions of Danes as a vicious heathen enemy in early versions of the *Old English Chronicle* or Æthelweard’s chronicle¹²—even as early English literature, from chronicles to

8 Heng, *Invention of Race*, 27.

9 “Differential racialization” is a classic tenet outlined by critical race theorists; it “maintains that each disfavored group in this country [here, the U.S.] has been racialized in its own individual way and according to the needs of the majority group at particular times in its history.” See Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 9–10 and 79–80 at 79.

10 Heng, *Invention of Race*, 39.

11 My insistence on the term “racialization” for processes described here is informed especially by the recent special issue “Critical Race and the Middle Ages,” edited by Dorothy Kim, *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019) as well as by Kim’s forthcoming entry on “Race” for the *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* and forthcoming article “The Politics of the Medieval Preracial” (for *American Historical Review*), drafts of which she generously shared with me. Kim argues that to use the term “ethnicity” when “race” is more accurate is to uphold, wittingly or not, white supremacist ideologies. For an excellent outline of the tension between “ethnicity” and “race” in medievalist scholarship, see her “Introduction to Literature Compass Special Cluster: Critical Race and the Middle Ages,” *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019), art. e12549, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12549>. Kim’s outline, taken in consideration with Heng’s definition of medieval race, as noted above, has deeply influenced my recent thinking. While we must acknowledge that race is commonly embodied and expressed materially, this essay also attempts to name racialization when it happens in ways not anchored in bodily observation.

12 See *Fabii Ethelwerdi Chronicorum*, ed. Henry Petrie, *Monumenta historica Britannica, or, Materials for the History of Britain from the Earliest Period 1* (London: Public Records Office, 1848), 499–521. Æthelweard is famously virulent in his depiction of the Scandinavians, calling for the ethnic cleansing of the Danes from England. He denies or purposely forgets the permanence of

romances, continually recounted Anglo-Scandinavian enmeshment as a way of affirming English identity. Unfolding here, we see an awareness of memorialization's potential to negotiate actively between the wicked and virtuous Dane in a way that measures the distance between "us" and "them": above all, the literary record, and use of "Danes" as trope, demonstrates English authors' recognition of Danes as a necessary, persistent part of their identity matrix. The Danes were presented literarily, and often through a conflation of material and national bodies, as bones on which the musculature of later English identities rested. Following the conquest, English historical efforts shifted to finding alternative ways of understanding the past,¹³ and one of the most prevalent threats to the English—Danish and other Scandinavian raiders—evaporated in the process.¹⁴ The "Great Heathen Army" looked less intimidating the further one got from it, and England remembered and absorbed these origins in far less grave terms by the thirteenth century,¹⁵ when Early Middle English writers began to memorialize Anglo-Scandinavian relations from centuries past. As Ali Mazrui suggests, "four processes of social memory are involved in identity-formation[:] preservation, selection, elimination and invention."¹⁶ In Mazrui's terms, positive selection frequently results in nostalgia, while "elimination," or "negative selection," results in cultural amnesia. Both positive and negative cases, as I will show, lead to a process of invention we might better call "false memory." False memories, nevertheless, have the power to construct identity,¹⁷

Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish presence in England by celebrating the finality of the Scandinavians being driven beyond the sea at the end of his chronicle. On Æthelweard's development of material from the *Old English Chronicle*, see L. Whitbread, "Æthelweard and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," *English Historical Review* 74, no. 293 (1959): 577–89. On my use of *Old English Chronicle* instead of *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* see note 20 below.

13 Geoffrey of Monmouth's immensely successful *Historia regum Britanniae* (ca. 1136) offers an example of how English chroniclers, after the Conquest, tried to reorient their historical understanding of themselves via their British ancestry rather than their Germanic and Scandinavian history. On Geoffrey's use of British history to legitimize Norman rule, see Michael A. Faletra, "The Conquest of the Past in *The History of the Kings of Britain*," *Literature Compass* 4, no. 1 (2007): 121–33, and "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 60–85.

14 As R. I. Page suggests in *"A Most Vile People": Early English Historians on the Vikings* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1987), by the time William of Malmesbury was writing (ca. 1120s) "the Vikings seem less of a general threat. They are marginal rather than central to the age" (20).

15 Susan Reynolds has described how, despite the presence of the Danelaw in England from the ninth to eleventh centuries, "once the immigrants or their descendants had become part of the kingdom they do not seem to have been perceived as a separate and identifiable group within it ... [W]hatever the local variations in the law practiced in the kingdom, and however much contemporaries may have recognized some of the varieties as Danish, subjects of the kings of the English were normally assumed to be English themselves." See Reynolds, "What Do We Mean by 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Anglo-Saxons'?" *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 4 (1985): 395–414 at 407 and 409.

16 Ali A. Mazrui, "Cultural Amnesia, Cultural Nostalgia, and False Memory: Africa's Identity Crisis Revisited," *African and Asian Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (2013): 13–29 at 16–17.

17 Mazrui, "Cultural Amnesia," 17.

and, in revisiting Anglo-Danish history as a way of establishing nationhood, English authors found themselves walking a line between amnesia and nostalgia.

William of Malmesbury's Cultural Amnesia

The recursive nature of the English chronicle tradition, in which the authority of a writer relied on reuse of old material, "weaving texts" together to obtain a greater trustworthiness,¹⁸ makes it difficult to consider medieval chronicles without also considering how they adapt, copy, alter, respond to, and disseminate earlier perspectives. The *Old English Chronicle*, for instance, was copied, extended, and revised by different scribes in various manuscripts until the twelfth century,¹⁹ yet afterwards used as a primary source for extremely popular chroniclers such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, who themselves fed into the accretive tradition of English chroniclers.²⁰ While the violent history of Scandinavian raiding made Old English sources particularly opposed to Scandinavian invaders and migrants,²¹ with the successful conquest of England by the Dane Sweyn Forkbeard in 1013 English writers could not ignore (as early chroniclers such as Æthelweard had) the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish settlers with whom they had grown close.²²

18 Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14–20.

19 These manuscripts, collectively called the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in most modern scholarship, are thus not well named, and I have opted to use *Old English Chronicle*. Today's commonly used title both implies a singular text and contributes to popular notions of a stable national or ethnic history. Over the last century, scholars have repeatedly attempted to rename the *Chronicle* to more adequately describe its language (Old English), project (royal), or type (annals). On this naming history, see Nicholas Brooks, "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s) or 'Old English Royal Annals'?", in *Gender and Historiography: Studies in the Early Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. Janet L. Nelson, Susan Reynolds, and Susan M. Johns (London: University of London, 2012), 35–48.

20 Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 158–59.

21 For analysis of the impact of these early sources on developing senses of "Englishness," see Sarah Foot, "The Making of Angelcynn: English Identity before the Norman Conquest," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 25–49, and "Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1999): 185–200. See also Page, "A Most Vile People"; Patrick Wormald, "Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1994): 1–24; and more recently, Julia Barrow, "Danish Ferocity and Abandoned Monasteries: The Twelfth-Century View," in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. Martin Brett and David Woodman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), 77–93; and Simon Roffey and Ryan Lavelle, "West Saxons and Danes: Negotiating Medieval Identities," in *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c.800-c.1100*, ed. Roffey and Lavelle (Oxford: Oxbow, 2016), 7–35. For quite a different perspective, see Craig R. Davis, "An Ethnic Dating of *Beowulf*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006): 111–29, in which Davis argues for a ninth-century dating of *Beowulf* based on Alfred's wish to positively memorialize his Jutish ancestry.

22 For a wide-ranging collection of essays on many of these cultural ties, including mercantile, social, and sartorial, see *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and*

William of Malmesbury was among the first to write of this later Anglo-Scandinavian history, completing his *Gesta regum Anglorum* ca. 1125 in the wake of the successful Norman Conquest. For this reason, I take William as a starting point. Representing the first secular national history written in England following the Conquest,²³ he clearly transforms documentary evidence in crafting a narrative that reflects a project of “civilizing the English.”²⁴ William’s chronicle, despite his observable skills as a researcher,²⁵ presents an early example of the type of negative selection to which Mazrui attributes cultural amnesia. That William omitted anything, whether consciously or not, deserves some consideration. Undeniably, William’s sources are primarily literary. His diligence in using nearly every biography, hagiography, and history available to him has been well documented.²⁶ Yet William is also known to have been tireless in his search for other historical evidence: he uses the visual evidence of monuments, architecture, and geography; he collected travellers’ tales and oral legends; and he incorporated the documentary evidence of charters and deeds.²⁷ Moreover, his pursuit of sources necessitated travel throughout England.²⁸ Regardless of the scarcity of literary evidence for

Tenth Centuries, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). For evidence derived from place names, see Gillian Fellows-Jensen, *The Vikings and Their Victims: The Verdict of the Names* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1994). For a study that offers much evidence for the adaptability and cooperation of those most affected by Danish settlement, see Dawn M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society, and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), and, providing a useful supplement, the essay collection *Every Day Life in Viking-Age Towns: Social Approaches to Towns in England and Ireland, c.800-1100*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley and Letty ten Harkel (Oxford: Oxbow, 2013). The complexity of this history, in which relations are marked by simultaneous moments of peaceful negotiation and ceaseless violent conflict, has been well assessed in *Danes in Wessex*, ed. Roffey and Lavelle. It is worth observing, perhaps, that there are exceptions to the oppositional position in literature—the best of which is *Beowulf*, wherein the early English audience was ostensibly meant to take pride in a shared lineage with the Danes. See Craig R. Davis, “Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992): 23–36, and *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England* (New York: Garland, 1996).

23 As Antonia Gransden points out in *Historical Writing in England, I: c.550–1307* (1974; repr., New York: Routledge, 1996), 167, William’s *Gesta regum Anglorum* is only the second English “secular national history” after Æthelweard’s *Chronicle*.

24 John Gillingham, “Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume,” *Historical Research* 74, no. 183 (2001): 17–43.

25 See Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 166–85, especially 168. On the impressiveness of William’s achievements considering the lack of historical writing preceding his work, see J. Campbell, “Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past,” *Peritia* 3 (1984), 131–50.

26 For a thorough list of William’s sources, see R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, eds. and trans., “Index of Sources,” in *Gesta regum Anglorum (The History of the English Kings)*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998–1999), 2:457–68.

27 See Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 173–75. On the use of non-documentary evidence in twelfth-century historiography, see Antonia Gransden, “Realistic Observation in Twelfth-Century England,” *Speculum* 47, no. 1 (1972): 29–51.

28 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 174–75.

Scandinavian settlement and coexistence in England,²⁹ William had other ways of learning about it. Travelling to York (perhaps the most likely place to discover evidence of Scandinavian settlement), he was, as Elaine Treharne observes, a “thorough source-hunter,” and his work demonstrates willingness to incorporate documents from outside of the chronicle tradition—for instance, by translating one of Cnut’s letters to the English.³⁰ Given William’s openness to diverse documentary sources, he might have accessed treaties from King Alfred’s reign, the many charters or diplomas drawn up between Danish settlers and the English during the reign of King Æthelred, or other documents demonstrating the complexities of Anglo-Scandinavian settlement.³¹ Of course, William’s attention to a multitude and variety of sources makes clear that some process of selection was at play, and that that process was dictated by his desire to set England as a national entity alongside those of continental Europe.³²

Motivated, at least partially, by national interests, William depicts English identity as emerging from the strain of acculturation with a series of invaders, but he uses the Danes especially to drive a narrative of English progress. As the son of a Norman father and English mother, William saw the Danish invasions of the late tenth century and following as a time in which the whole of England “seruitutem infremuisset barbaricam” (bellowed under barbarian servitude).³³ Thus he embraced an amnesiac history that avoided recording lasting Scandinavian contribution to the English cultural matrix. Yet, William’s use of the word *barbarus* diverges from his predecessors, like Æthelweard or the writers of the *Old English Chronicle*. Separating the term from its old synonym *paganus*, he recasts it specifically as a word emphasizing the quality of being uncultivated.³⁴ Although William

29 On the “shortage of material” for early English historians of Viking settlement, see Barrow, “Danish Ferocity,” 92.

30 Elaine Treharne, *Living through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 28–29.

31 For charter evidence from Æthelred’s reign, see Katherine Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England, c.950–c.1015* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2018), 155–200. William might also have accessed the number of treaties written to regulate Anglo-Scandinavian co-existence, beginning with the Danelaw, an example of which is the Alfred-Guthrum treaty. See Paul Kershaw, “The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation and Interaction in Viking Age England,” in Hadley and Richards, *Cultures in Contact*, 43–59. Matthew Innes, “Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism, and Political Allegiance,” in *Cultures in Contact*, 65–88, further offers assessment of how we might read early English sources for Danish and English “ethnicity” by surveying legal and chronicle evidence; the legal evidence sometimes shows up in the *Old English Chronicle*, one of William’s chief sources.

32 Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 170.

33 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum (The History of the English Kings)*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, with R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1.162.

34 See John Gillingham, “The Beginnings of English Imperialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5, no. 4 (1992): 392–409 at 398. On the development of the term *barbarus* from classical roots to its early medieval sense of “pagan” and back to the more classical sense of “uncivilized” in William

distinguishes between Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, as well as a variety of other peoples involved in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh-century invasions of England, his use of *barbarus* for them all essentializes and lumps in these invaders with the Scots, Irish, and Welsh whom he also designated *barbari*.³⁵

As William tells the tale of the Danes and Norwegians in England, his process of selection is, for a time, structured along this idea of a “barbarian” Scandinavian enemy, which in turn builds up a civilized English identity,³⁶ facilitating construction of a history that leaves “barbarism” (read: Danish and Norwegian influence) behind. Paradoxically, however, because part of his grand scheme is to show England’s “progress from barbarism to civilization,”³⁷ I suggest that we also witness in William’s work the close integration of those Danes and Norwegians who had settled in England. So when William relates a Germanic genealogy, he warns his reader to be prepared “ne barbaricorum nominum hiatus uulneret aures desuetorum in talibus” (lest the utterance of barbaric names wound the ears of those unaccustomed to such things).³⁸ His genealogy, which links barbaric history with English origins, shows how William sees the growth of Englishness coming out of a remembrance of barbarism. Although pointing to time’s role in the integration of the Danish settlers—who had “united as one people” (*in unam gentem coaluerant*) with the Angles and Northumbrians³⁹—he observes of one initial settler, the Danish leader Guthrum, that after negotiating for rule over the East Angles and the Northumbrians, “Verum, qui non mutabit Ethiops pellem suam, datas ille terras tyrannico fastu undecim annis proterens, duodecimo uitam finiuit” (As the Ethiopian will not change his skin, he [Guthrum] trod upon the lands given him with the arrogance of a tyrant for eleven years, and finished his life in the twelfth).⁴⁰ Here, William’s recourse to a racialized simile counterfactually asserts that the “barbarian” Dane never truly assimilated into a more civilized form of leadership, thereby also highlighting the “racial logic of the evolutionary kind” so often accompanying colonial narratives.⁴¹

Time erodes the sense of barbarism found in the *Gesta regum*, as settlers become dissociated from their Scandinavian ancestors, but the intermingling of kin is also important to William’s (racialized) vision of the process of civilizational maturity. For example, when Æthelstan is unable to subdue Northumbria, it is because

of Malmesbury’s text and after, see W. R. Jones, “The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 4 (1971): 376–407. See also Patrick Geary, *Myth of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 63–150.

35 Gillingham, “Beginnings of English Imperialism,” 398.

36 On this idea broadly, see Gillingham, “Civilizing the English?”

37 Gillingham, “Civilizing the English?,” 21.

38 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.115.

39 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.125: “Occidentales et Orientales Anglos et Northanimbros qui cum Danis iam in unam gentem coaluerant” (The West and East Angles as well as the Northumbrians who even now are united as one people with the Danes).

40 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.121.

41 Heng, *Invention of Race*, 38–39.

Sihtric—"gente et animo barbarous" (a barbarian both by lineage and spirit) and a relation of Guthrum the Dane⁴²—resists him. Sihtric's barbarous *gens* marks him as unwilling to enter into "entirely all of England,"⁴³ even though many Danes and Norwegians had done so. William's knowledge of this intermingling—evidence that his amnesia is part of a conscious process of negative selection—is revealed in his recollection of Æthelred's order to kill all the Danes in the kingdom in the infamous St. Brice's Day Massacre of 1002. As William has it, Æthelred murdered,

preter Danos, quos leuibis suspicionibus omnes uno die in tota Anglia trucidari iusserat, ubi fuit uidere miseriam dum quisque carissimos hospites, quos etiam arctissima necessitudo dultiores effecerat, cogeretur prodere et amplexus gladio deturbare.

(the Danes, all of whom he had ordered to be cut down on one day in all of England on unwarranted suspicion, whereby it was wretchedness to behold when every man was forced to betray his dearest guests, whom had been made more dear still by the closest connection, and to drive off embraces with a sword.)⁴⁴

The terror and sadness in this passage, elicited by the antithetical phrasing and superlatives that run through it, reveal William's awareness that kin-culture had indeed developed between the Danish and the English. In a poetic image, he suggests the bond of intermarriage ("arctissima necessitudo") even as the potential for procreation is subverted by the destructive force of the sword. William sees the progress of ethnogenesis, from barbarism to civilization, disturbed by an ironic turning of Englishness to barbarism as a united people were forced to sunder their bonds.

That William saw such slaughter as a sign of barbarism is apparent later, when he describes King Cnut bringing a new wave of Danes to England. In a well-known anecdote, after an early victory against the English, Cnut has the noses and ears cut from his hostages at Sandwich and orders them to be gruesomely put to death with what William calls "barbarica leuitate" (barbarian levity).⁴⁵ Describing Cnut's successful defeat of Edmund Ironside at Assandun, William then laments, "Ibi Cnuto regnum expugnauit, ibi omne decus Angliae occubuit, ibi flos patriae totus emarcuit" (There, Cnut destroyed the kingdom; there all the glory of the Angles fell; and the whole flower of the country withered).⁴⁶ But time wears away Cnut's barbarism, and William soon begrudgingly admits Cnut's successes as a ruler who reigned with civility.⁴⁷ Throughout this portion of the *Gesta regum*, he thus plots the trajectory of a developing Englishness in relation to its negotiation with barbarism.

⁴² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.134.

⁴³ See William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.134: it is Æthelstan's conquest of "omnem omnino Angliam ... preter solos Northanimbros" that initiates the dispute between him and Sihtric.

⁴⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.166.

⁴⁵ See William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.180: "Itaque, licet se dedidisset, barbarica leuitate iussus est iugulari."

⁴⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.180.

⁴⁷ See William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 1.181: "iniuste quidem regnum ingressus sed magna ciuilitate et fortitudine uitam componens" (having assumed the kingship unjustly, he nonetheless led life with great civility and courage).

Post-Conquest historians like William set the stage for later depictions of Danish interactions with the English, in which the poetics of “barbarism” became the mainstay of English nation-making, but one further aspect of William’s process of selection in the *Gesta regum* stands out in comparison with Geffrei Gaimar’s *L’Estoire des Engleis*. Geffrei, a clerk with Lincolnshire connections, wrote his metrical chronicle in the first half of the twelfth century,⁴⁸ at the same time that William was writing the *Gesta regum*. Like William, Geffrei demonstrates an interest in northern England through the inclusion of several events focusing on the Danes. Notably, however, Geffrei includes the story of Havelok, the legendary Danish king who was said to have ruled over both England and Denmark, while William omits it. Although William and Gaimar clearly had different tastes, we might share the surprise of fourteenth-century chronicler Robert Mannyng that so few early chronicles, including William of Malmesbury’s, included this story of King Havelok.⁴⁹ Had William not encountered the tale? Unlikely for our “thorough source-hunter”! Rather, with its valorization of Anglo-Danish union, it is likely that Havelok did not fit William’s focus on moving the English into the larger sphere of European civility.

As we turn our eye to English poetic endeavours in the thirteenth century, we will see that, as the Danes’ arrival in England receded into the past, the figure of the Dane could take on a more imaginative, even romantic quality than William conduced. Thus, King Havelok received more individualized treatment by writers who continued to negotiate the dynamic between “barbaric” Danes and “civilized” English. The distancing of England from its early Scandinavian history allowed English writers, especially of romances like *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, to embrace an amnesiac history by expressing a sense of English identity against that of northern neighbours. With the period of cruel invasions further behind them, the English could fully abstract the Danes, through literary reworkings, until they became racialized like the Arab Muslim or the Scot. Paradoxically, the Danish reign of England, which could be positively memorialized in accounts of Cnut’s reign (like those in the works of Matthew Paris or Robert of Gloucester’s thirteenth-century English metrical *Chronicle*⁵⁰) was also coloured by a nostalgia that lent itself to the romance genre.

Rewriting North Sea Unity in *King Horn*

The thirteenth-century English romance *King Horn*, despite its ambiguous geography, employs Anglo-Scandinavian identities to unify a transnational Englishness against external threatening forces or internal political strife. The way it sorts

48 Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis (History of the English)*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

49 All citations of Mannyng (mostly later in this article) are from *Robert Mannyng of Brunne: The Chronicle*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), part 2, lines 519–38, hereafter cited parenthetically in text by part and line number (e.g., 2:519–38).

50 On the glorifying of Cnut as a “uniter” of kingdoms, see Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 171–74.

through positive and negative interpretations of the Dane trope is not explicit but can be observed in the poem's intriguing textual history. The main part of *King Horn's* story, rewritten along at least three strikingly different traditions within a period of less than a century, provides a unique opportunity to witness the expansion of an insular English identity along a directional axis that extends to Denmark. The earliest extant version of the Horn story is the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn*,⁵¹ which was adapted into two separate Middle English versions: the late thirteenth-century *King Horn*⁵² and the early fourteenth-century *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild*.⁵³ Through these variations, King Horn presents a network of English ambivalence, with the differing versions revealing a deeper story—one of increasing uncertainty over how to identify England's true villains. This narrative fluidity, as the versions echo and alter each other, imagines the union of an expansive, transnational, North Sea Englishness based on a tense process of positive and negative selection in keeping with the cultural amnesia suggested by Mazrui.

The Early Middle English *King Horn* reorients English geographic boundaries to generate a singular identity between the Danes and the English against external, foreign enemies in a vague past. The poem's plot is relatively simple: it describes how a young prince, Horn, born in "Suddenne," is set adrift by Muslims who have invaded and killed his father, Murry.⁵⁴ Horn makes his way to "Westernessee," where he wins the love of the king's daughter, Rymenhild. When their love is discovered, Horn is banished to Ireland, where he ably defends the Irish king from Muslim invaders. Disguised as a beggar, Horn eventually returns to Westernessee, where he saves Rymenhild from marriage to the story's villain, Fikenild. After marrying Rymenhild himself, Horn returns to Suddenne to rule as rightful king.

Much of the scholarship on *King Horn* has focused on the identity of the Muslim or Arab invaders ("Sarazins") in the poem. Determining that the poem's initial locale is somewhere in England,⁵⁵ many argue that the "Sarazins" are in fact

51 See *The Romance of Horn by Thomas*, ed. Mildred K. Pope and T. B. W. Reid, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955, 1964). The French *Romance* is extant in three manuscripts and two fragments, all thirteenth century.

52 All citations of *King Horn* are from Rosamund Allen, ed., *King Horn: An Edition Based on Cambridge University Library MS Gg. 4. 27 (2)*, Garland Medieval Texts 7 (New York: Garland, 1984), hereafter cited parenthetically by line number. Translations are my own.

53 See *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (Heidelberg: Winter, 1988).

54 Throughout this section, I refer to the enemies depicted in *King Horn* as Muslims. While there continues to be debate concerning to which people the word "Sarazin" refers in *King Horn*, I find Diane Speed's argument, in "The Saracens of *King Horn*," *Speculum* 65, no. 3 (1990): 564–95, most persuasive. For the suggestion that this literary character is a "hybrid" Muslim-Viking, see Kathy Cawsey, "Disorienting Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval English Manuscripts," *Exemplaria* 21, no. 4 (2009): 380–97 at 385. Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, "The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure," *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12548>, has recently offered a convincing autoethnographic critique of the term, arguing that continued uncritical use of "Saracen" in scholarship obfuscates the inherently racist ideology behind medieval Europeans' depictions of Muslims. See further discussion below.

55 See Speed, "The Saracens of *King Horn*," 564; *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands

Scandinavian raiders, and have subsequently used the poem as an example of the capacious ambiguity of the term “Saracen.”⁵⁶ Diane Speed, however, has effectively rebutted this view of *King Horn*,⁵⁷ arguing instead that the invaders in the poem are one and the same as literary depictions of Muslim warriors so famous from the French *chansons de geste*. And yet, *King Horn*’s near contemporary analogue, *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*, written around 1320, tells a parallel story with the racial components of the narrative entirely changed. In *Horn Childe*, Horn’s father rules in Northumbria, where, after fending off Danish invaders, he is slain by Hiberno-Scandinavian marauders. Horn flees south to England where he wins the affection of Rinnild, daughter of king Houlac. In this version of the tale, as in *King Horn*, Horn must flee when his relationship with Rinnild is discovered. He passes into Wales before going to Ireland to aid that land’s king. Horn then returns to England, weds Rinnild, and leads an army to retake Northumbria.

The differences between these two versions of the Horn story are tantalizingly suggestive, yet *King Horn* and *Horn Childe* both find their source in the popular twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn*. The transmission history is difficult to untangle. *King Horn* survives in three manuscripts—Cambridge, University Library MS Gg.4.27.2; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 108; and London, British Library MS Harley 2253—all copied in the first half of the fourteenth century. *Horn Childe*, which differs especially in its geography as outlined above, is extant only in the well-known Auchinleck Manuscript, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1, written ca. 1330–1340, which makes it a very close contemporary of the Harley 2253 *King Horn*. Maldwyn Mills claims that while the French *Romance* is “not necessarily the direct source for most of what we find in *HC* [*Horn Childe*], [it] quite certainly stands closer to such a source than does any other surviving version of the story.”⁵⁸ Whichever version of the English Horn story came first, their contemporaneity is significant. What we are met with, in two divergent traditions that by the fourteenth century were being actively copied and most likely recited,⁵⁹ are *competing* narratives that sought to memorialize *either* a story

(Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), 16; Walter Oliver, “*King Horn* and Suddene,” *PMLA* 46, no. 1 (1931): 102–14; George H. McKnight, *King Horn, Floriz, and Blauncheffur, The Assumption of Our Lady*, EETS, o.s., 14 (1901; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1962), xviii–xix; and Joseph Hall, ed., *King Horn* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901), liv–lv.

56 See Charles W. Dunn, “Romances Derived from English Legends,” in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500, I: Romances*, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), 19; Beatrice White, “Saracens and Crusaders: From Fact to Allegory,” in *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway*, ed. Derek Pearsall and Ronald Waldron (London: Athlone, 1969), 171; Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the “Chanson de Geste”* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 290n51; Thomas J. Garbáty, *Medieval English Literature* (Lexington: Heath, 1984), 143n42; and Kathy Cawsey, “Disorienting Orientalism,” 384.

57 Speed, “Saracens in *King Horn*.”

58 Mills, *Horn Childe*, 44.

59 See William A. Quinn and Audley S. Hall, *Jongleur: A Modified Theory of Oral Improvisation*

of English insularity staving off Scandinavian attackers *or* a story of an expansive Englishness that took its share in a North Sea empire.

While all versions of the tale are rife with Scandinavian, Old English, and Germanic names,⁶⁰ firmly grounding the narrative in an Anglo-Scandinavian context, the peoples and places in *Horn Childe* act to circumscribe the action within Britain, “fix[ing] the setting as an area much subjected to Scandinavian invasion.”⁶¹ The Danes, the Irish, the Welsh, the Northumbrians, and the English—between them, the narrative is hedged in on all sides. This focus on internal action has led to the identification of *Horn Childe*’s events with the historical tenth-century northern conflicts revolving around Eiríkr blóðøx’s Northumbrian reign.⁶² Most importantly, however, *Horn Childe*’s narrative confines Englishness to its geographic insularity. As Matthew Holford explains, it is “a story about English power *within* the British Isles.”⁶³

While *King Horn*, on the other hand, maintains many features from the *Romance*, including the Muslim enemies,⁶⁴ it simplifies and abstracts the geography. By loosening geographical ties and replacing the primarily Danish enemy with Muslims in its opening incidents, *King Horn* unbinds the concentric circles of Englishness presented by the *Horn Childe* narrative and extends the narrative along an eastern–western line that stretches between and joins Denmark, England, and Ireland.⁶⁵ The poet accomplishes this by highlighting throughout the poem Horn’s twin identity as originating in “Suddenne” and in the sea. When Horn travels to Westernesse for the first time and meets King Almair, who demands to know who he and his party are, Horn initially responds, “We beoþ of Suddenne” (We are from Suddenne) (181). When Almair pushes him to reveal his name, Horn answers,

Horn ihc am ihote,
Icomen vt of bote
Fram þe se side (207–9)

(I am called Horn,
Come out of a boat,
From the sea side)

and its Effects on the Performance and Transmission of Middle English Romance (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982).

60 For instance: Godhild, Hapulf, Fikenhild, Apelbrus, Rymenhild, Cutberd, Purston. For a full, comparative list of primary character names across the *Romance*, *King Horn*, and *Horn Childe*, see Hall, *King Horn*, liii.

61 Speed, “The Saracens in *King Horn*,” 567.

62 Mills, “General Introduction,” in *Horn Childe*, 62–68.

63 Matthew Holford, “History and Politics in *Horn Child and Maiden Rinnild*,” *Review of English Studies* 57, no. 229 (2006): 149–68 at 150 (my emphasis).

64 As Speed observes in “Saracens in *King Horn*,” 567, the “Saracens” in the *Romance* come “explicitly from Islamic regions” of North Africa, Persia, and Canaan.

65 Ireland is the only real-world place name in *King Horn*.

Horn's identity becomes enmeshed with his drifting, marine existence even as he pursues a land to call his own. This fluidity, effected by the "littoral setting" of the poem, means that, as Sebastian Sobecki points out, "Horn's identity is shaped by his borderline existence."⁶⁶ Consequently, in *King Horn*, Horn's encounters with outsiders hold the potential to alter his identity, an aspect of the narrative emphasized by Horn's assumption of both a pseudonym (Cutberd in Ireland) and a beggar's disguise upon his return to Westernesse. *Horn Childe*, by contrast, keeps its narrative land-locked.

The geography of *King Horn* also differs from *Horn Childe* in a striking fashion—one which helps make sense of the controversial appearance of Muslims in the West. The tale makes its beginning in Suddenne, the meaning of which has never been agreed upon by scholars.⁶⁷ Although many argue "Suddenne" suggests some locale in southern England, I find one of the earliest hypotheses more convincing. Early critics of the poem supposed "Suddenne" could be the same as "Suð-Dene" as recorded in *Beowulf*, the home of the Southern Danes.⁶⁸ While George McKnight argued that the word's phonology fails to support such a conclusion,⁶⁹ we now have plenty of evidence for the evolution of Old English voiced dental fricatives to voiced alveolar stops.⁷⁰ Understanding Horn's homeland in *King Horn* to be southern Denmark or Jutland reorganizes the ethnic and racial dynamics of the poems, and the assignment of Horn's origins to Denmark fits well with a number of aspects of *King Horn* as we have it. And yet, if Horn begins his story in Denmark, it makes little sense to have the Danish invade. The author, instead, conjures Muslim invaders, who unite all of the "West" (a favourite directional label in the poem) against an eastern enemy. By introducing Muslims to the narrative, the *King Horn* poet chooses a more coherent vision of western culture against a common foe and may also draw on memories of diplomatic voyages undertaken by Muslims from Spain to Ireland or Jutland.⁷¹ This orientation logically places this version's "Suddenne" at the far east, giving credence to Horn's cryptic description of himself to Rymenhild as "Wel feor icome bieste" (come very far from the east) (1157).

⁶⁶ Sebastian Sobecki, "Littoral Encounters: The Shore as Cultural Interface in *King Horn*," *Al-Masāq* 18, no. 1 (2006): 79–86 at 82.

⁶⁷ See notes 54 and 55 above.

⁶⁸ See Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), line 463: "Panon he gesohte Suð-Dena folc" (Then he sought the South Danes). Cf. Ohthere and Wulfstan's interpolations in the Old English *Orosius*: "Be westan Suððenum is pæs garsecges earm þe liþ ymbutan þæt land Brettannia" (At the west of the South-Danes is the arm of the sea, which lies around the land of Britain). See *Ohthere's Voyages: A Late Ninth-century Account of Voyages Along the Coasts of Norway and Denmark and Its Cultural Context*, ed. Janet Bately and Anton Englert (Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 2007), 43.

⁶⁹ McKnight, *King Horn*, xviii.

⁷⁰ See Juliette Blevins, "New Perspectives on English Sound Patterns: 'Natural' and 'Unnatural' in Evolutionary Phonology," *Journal of English Linguistics* 34, no. 1 (2006): 6–25 at 11–12.

⁷¹ See Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 120–25, and Speed, "The Saracens in *King Horn*," 564–65n4.

Horn's journey in *King Horn* from Suddenne to Westernesse to Ireland and back, then, lays the groundwork for the establishment of a North Sea empire centred on Englishness. It also leverages differential racialization in a way that supports this project, uniting the Danish and the English by racializing a Muslim enemy along religious lines, a tactic emphasized by frequent references to the Muslim invaders' "heathen" faith and desire to slay "alle that Crist luveth upon" (all who believe in Christ) (43–44). That there were other well-known versions of the Horn story circulating at the same time reveals just how conscious this literal (and littoral) reorienting of the tale was. By the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, writing against a background of endless attempts to reconquer the Holy Land and ceaseless wars with the Irish, Welsh, Scots, and French, English writers were no longer sure which racialized group felt most threatening. Frequent tales of crusading coming from the East undoubtedly caused the realities of the "Viking Age" to fade into a nostalgic imagining of past Anglo-Scandinavian unions. Tellingly, in the last movement of *King Horn*, when Horn reveals himself to Rymenhild before marrying her and retaking Suddenne, he asks, "Ne canstu me noȝt knowe? ... Ihc am Horn of Westernesse" (How can you not know me? ... I am Horn of *Westernesse*) (1233–35, emphasis added)—his identity no longer tied to marine wanderings. "Westernesse" has been thought by most scholars to stand for England;⁷² Horn, the Danish king, come from the East, now identifies himself as Western, as English.

The Virtuous Viking and the Dastardly Dane in *Havelok the Dane*

Havelok the Dane,⁷³ a thirteenth-century Middle English romance often compared to *King Horn*, shares in *King Horn*'s nostalgia for North Sea unity, but, whereas *Horn*'s versions revise Anglo-Danish enmity, *Havelok* directly addresses Viking-raided trauma. The only complete manuscript copy of *Havelok* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 108) draws attention to the international focus of the narrative almost immediately in its fragmentary incipit: "Incipit vita Hauelok quondam Rex Anglie et Denemarchie" (Here begins the Life of Havelock, former King of England and Denmark).⁷⁴ The poem points to a historic political union between the kingdoms of England and Denmark and, despite a hagiographic tone,⁷⁵ its incipit indicates the text's historical veracity in the eyes of the scribe.⁷⁶ The tale of *Havelok* certainly made

⁷² See Speed, "Saracens of *King Horn*," 565.

⁷³ All citations are from *Havelok*, ed. G. V. Smithers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), hereafter cited parenthetically by line number. Translations are my own.

⁷⁴ Editors have amended this from the fragmentary "...elok qu... Rex Anglie et Denemarchie."

⁷⁵ See Julie Nelson Couch, "Defiant Devotion in MS Laud Misc. 108: The Narrator of *Havelok the Dane* and Affective Piety," *Parergon* 25, no. 1 (2008): 53–79, and Kimberly K. Bell, "Resituating Romance: The Dialectics of Sanctity in MS Laud Misc. 108's *Havelok the Dane* and *Royal Vitae*," *Parergon* 25, no. 1 (2008): 27–51.

⁷⁶ *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Sands, 55, suggests that the scribe's subtitle ("quondam Rex Anglie et Denemarchie") "must have matched some sort of popular realization that Englishmen of

an impact, for the story of the Anglo-Danish king entered into the general English historical tradition by the mid-fourteenth century, appearing in various chronicles despite its regional, East Anglian flavour.⁷⁷ Part of its success, I suggest, is that the poem, and the tale more broadly, affords storytellers particularly acquainted with the regions of Danish settlement the opportunity to reflect on the poles of the monstrous and the civilized outlined in earlier sources like William of Malmesbury. The poem expressly plays along fluid boundaries of nationhood and offers containment of these divergent aspects of Anglo-Danish interaction through its marriage between two peoples' disinherited rulers across the marine space of the North Sea.

Havelok tells the story of how England's heir, Goldeboru, and Denmark's heir, Havelok, both suffer under usurpers of their fathers' thrones. Havelok is spared by the fisherman Grim, who had been asked to kill him by Godard the usurper. Grim raises the boy, but young Havelok grows with such an appetite that he is forced to seek his own fortune in England, specifically Lincoln. While in Lincoln, Havelok is noticed for his strength, and, thinking that Havelok is a commoner, Godrich, the usurper of England's throne, marries Goldeboru to him. Afterwards, Havelok dreams of reclaiming his birthright and presenting it to Goldeboru. He sails to Denmark with his adopted brothers and wife, disguised as a merchant, and succeeds in reclaiming Denmark. All return to retake England in Goldeboru's name, finally establishing Havelok as King of England and Denmark.

The theme of restoring order through transnational unity and the importance of the lower classes to economic prosperity in this tale reveal the worth the *Havelok*-author saw in communion with the Danes. This positive, working-class "revisionist" version of Anglo-Danish history has received much attention.⁷⁸ As Eleanor Parker observes, "*Havelok's* positive view of the Danish contribution to English history, in which the Danes bring to England the rule of a just king and families of industrious settlers, is not simply a reflection of the likely sympathies of its Lincolnshire audience but part of a distinctive historiographical tradition, concentrated in but not limited to the East Midlands."⁷⁹ For an author familiar with Lincolnshire writing

the North were in blood half-Scandinavian and that they just before the Conquest had actually been part of a dual kingdom of England and Denmark."

77 On the proliferation of *Havelok* narratives, see Richard J. Moll, "'Nest pas autentik, mais apocrophum': *Haveloks* and Their Reception in Medieval England," *Studies in Philology* 105, no. 2 (2008): 165–206, and Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 143–44. On the legend's regionalism, see Scott Kleinman, "The Legend of *Havelok the Dane* and the Historiography of East Anglia," *Studies in Philology* 100, no. 3 (2003): 245–77.

78 See Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 151–52; Derek Pearsall, "The Development of Middle English Romance," *Mediaeval Studies* 27, no. 1 (1965): 91–116 at 99; Eleanor Parker, "Havelok and the Danes in England: History, Legend, and Romance," *Review of English Studies* 67, no. 280 (2016): 428–47, and "'Over the Salt Sea to England': *Havelok* and the Danes," in her *Dragon Lords: The History and Legends of Viking England* (New York: Tauris, 2018), 159–85; Dominique Battles, "Reconquering England for the English in *Havelok the Dane*," *Chaucer Review* 47, no. 2 (2012): 187–205; and David Staines, "*Havelok the Dane*: A Thirteenth-Century Handbook for Princes," *Speculum* 51, no. 4 (1976): 602–23.

79 Parker, "'Over the Salt Sea to England,'" 179.

about the founding of Grimsby and those who lived there, orienting the tale around the benefits of Anglo-Danish economic ties makes sense. Grimsby was an economic hub, connecting England to a network of Scandinavian trade following the Conquest,⁸⁰ and these narrative concerns of social class and economy are innovations particular to *Havelok the Dane* that set it apart from its French origins.⁸¹ Like *King Horn*, *Havelok* finds its source in French originals, both Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire* and the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc*,⁸² probably written around 1200. The French lay, however, attempts to fashion an Arthurian romance out of its subject matter, "cultivat[ing] external chivalric trappings with a vengeance."⁸³ In the English *Havelok*, as John Boots argues, we find by contrast a poem "stripped entirely of chivalric interest" in order to suggest more political, national themes.⁸⁴ This vision of Anglo-Danish unity on the ground, as it were, also provides us with an image of the needed broadening of elite groupings "within a common public culture," a necessity for the development of a sense of nationhood.⁸⁵

But really *Havelok* represents the complicated process of positive and negative selection in memorialization. The poet emphasizes the Englishness of these itinerant Danes mainly when the hero is back among his own Danish people, where his hybridity embodies the historic tension between the civilized and monstrous Dane. There are Danes in this poem who demonstrate an economic, tradesmen-like worth, and there are the vicious, ravaging Danes familiar to us from the earlier chronicles discussed at the beginning of this article. Despite the careful juxtaposition of the "twin nations" of England and Denmark,⁸⁶ the *Havelok*-poet imagines stark differences between the two countries. For one, the treacherous, even Judas-like,⁸⁷ regents differ in degrees of heinousness. Godard (Danish) slits the throats of Havelok's sis-

80 Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 40.

81 See also John Halverson, "Havelok the Dane and Society," *Chaucer Review* 6, no. 2 (1971): 142–51 at 150. Halverson observes many of the poem's "bourgeois elements," arguing by comparison with its French original that *Havelok* is essentially a "middle-class" poem, a "peasant fantasy of class ambition and resentment."

82 See *The Anglo-Norman Lay of Haveloc*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015).

83 John P. Boots, "Parataxis and Politics: Meaning and the Social Utility of Middle English Romance," in *A Humanist's Legacy: Essays in Honor of John Christian Bale*, ed. Dennis M. Jones (Decorah: Luther College, 1990), 7.

84 Boots, "Parataxis," 5–7.

85 Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 10, where Turville-Petre also sees use of the English language as the "precondition of the process of deepening and consolidating the sense of national identity." He is drawing from Anthony Smith's description of "vertical" and "lateral" *ethnie*, which unite the aristocracy but must be deepened to include the common public to evolve an *ethnie* towards a nation. I am arguing that *Havelok* uses the downward class-mobility of the Danish prince to effect this deepening. See also Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 43–70.

86 See Parker, "Havelok and the Danes in England," 435.

87 For instance, *Havelok*, lines 319, 425, 482, and 1134.

ters in front of him “al so it were upon his gamen” (as though it was his pleasure) (468) after wickedly torturing them all with hunger and thirst. He then “for rewnesse” (out of pity) (502)—difficult not to interpret ironically—sends Havelok away to be drowned. Goldeboru receives remarkably light treatment in comparison. She is sent away to Dover, where she is kept in a castle, secluded and poorly fed. Godrich evasively keeps his oath, though, by marrying her to “the best” (199) when he unites her with Havelok, widely known as an amazing—the best—shot-putter. Some critics see this distinction between England and Denmark along lines of state-sanctioned brutality as purposefully drawn, to indicate the “civilizing” effect of English legal procedures.⁸⁸ This view is in keeping with my own reading of *Havelok* as a work invested in negotiating the paradoxes inherent in the trope of the Dane.

But the Danes reveal a darker side still upon Havelok’s return with his wife and adopted family to Denmark. In his absence, perhaps due to the lack of Havelok’s saintly influence, the Danes have become menacing folk. The local lord, Ubbe, welcomes Havelok’s merchant-disguised party, largely on account of Havelok’s physical attractiveness (1646–50), and invites Havelok to come and dine with him at his home, “þou and þi fayre wif” (you and your pretty wife) (1662). Upon drawing attention to Goldeboru, Ubbe immediately reassures Havelok, with sinister undertones, to “haue þou of hire no drede— / Shal hire no man shame bede” (not worry on her account— / Nobody will give her shame) (1665–66). The sudden, unexpected sexual menace immediately occupies Havelok’s mind; he is,

ful sore drad
With him to ete, for hise wif;
For him wore leuere þat his lif
Him wore reft þan she in blame
Felle or lauthe ani shame. (1669–74)

(Sorely afraid
To eat with him, on account of his wife.
For he would rather have his life
Rent from him than she into blame
Fall or take any shame.)

Nor are his fears misplaced. At table, Ubbe sends his wife to dine with Havelok so that he might dine with Goldeboru, for “In al Denemark nis wimman / So fayr so sche” (There is no woman in Denmark / As pretty as she) (1721–22). By the end of the meal, amidst mounting tensions, Ubbe appoints one of his trusted men, Bernard, to guard Havelok and his wife for the night, because he realizes that “for [Goldeboru] shal men hire luerd slo” (for Goldeboru, men might kill her husband) (1746). This turns out to be a necessary, though deficient precaution, for sixty young ruffians turn up at Havelok’s room that night “for his wif” (1871).⁸⁹ The ensuing

⁸⁸ Larissa Tracy in particular, in *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), 140–55, argues this point at length, focusing on scenes of flaying in *Havelok*. See also Robert Allen Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 103–5.

⁸⁹ It is perhaps worth noting that the author’s sense of sexual danger in the poem may have been

lively battle sees Havelok's small group defending themselves successfully against all sixty attackers, but Havelok is nevertheless wounded in his thigh ("þhe") (1985). This wound, in a narrative not given to great symbolic sophistication, recalls for us the wound of the Fisher King and other tales of Grail knights, where a thigh wound is commensurate with sexual sin or wounding. The assault on Havelok here thus leaves him marked by the threat of sexual violence, and reminds us of his earlier fear, expressed in terms typical of the period, that his wife would be brought into disrepute ("blame") and "shame" were she to suffer rape. The sequence of events also establishes the new society in which Havelok finds himself. The scene, with its tense build-up of sexual overtones, finds no parallel in Gaimar, where Argentille (Goldeboru) is abducted and recaptured in the course of a few lines; the romance may be inspired by the *Lai d'Haveloc*, in which Argentille is set upon by lustful young men.⁹⁰ The *Lai*, however, provides nowhere near the detail of the several hundred lines that *Havelok* uses to establish this sinister set piece. The Danes here are barbaric men who echo the threatening carnality of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah or the giants of other romances, and they present us with the image of piratical, thieving Danes.

This image is taken up again in a surprising place when Havelok returns to England once more, to establish Goldeboru as rightful queen (and himself as king). Aware of the imminent arrival of the "Denshe," Godrich, scrambling, delivers an impassioned speech to his people:

Lokes hware here at Grimesbi
His uten-laddes here comen,
And haues nu þe priorie numen—
Al þat euere mithen he finde,
He brenne kirkes and prestes binde;
He strangleth monkes and nunnes bape.
Wat wile ye, frend, her-offe rape?
Yif he regne þus-gate longe,
He moun us alle ouer-gange—
He moun vs alle quic henge or slo,
Or þral maken and do ful wo,
Or elles reue us ure liues
And ure children and ure wiues. (2580–92)

informed by the old custom of marriage *more danico*, sometimes referred to in the chronicles and often misunderstood as marriage by abduction. However, *more danico* may simply have referred to secular marriage. See Philip Lyndon Reynolds, "Germanic Law: Irregular and Informal Marriage," in *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Mediaeval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 107–17 at 112. Ruth Mazo Karras, "Concubinage and Slavery in the Viking Age," *Scandinavian Studies* 62, no. 2 (1990): 141–62 at 157 and 144, also demonstrates that the status of concubinage was often "intimately connected with" or equated to slavery. This fact goes some way in informing my reading of Godrich's fear of the Danes and the potential abduction of women and children (see below).

⁹⁰ See Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, lines 529–45, and *Lai d'Haveloc*, lines 652–718.

(Look where here at Grimsby
 Havelok's army of outlanders come
 And have now taken the priory—
 Everything he can find ever,
 He burns churches and binds priests.
 He strangles both monks and nuns.
 What will you advise from this, friends?
 If he reigns in this manner long,
 He might destroy us all.
 He might hang us alive or kill us all,
 Or make us thralls and give us great woe,
 Or else deprive us of our lives
 And of our children and our wives.)

The passion of Godrich's speech is effective, if not ironic given his own position as a usurper. Yet Godrich's characterization of Danish forces recalls the early historical tragedies of Danish Viking attacks on Lindisfarne and elsewhere, recorded with despair in the *Old English Chronicle* and in later sources. Godrich depicts Havelok, whom he has married to Goldeboru, as the Danish leader of an army of foreigners ("here uten-laddes") and reports, falsely, that he has taken the Grimsby priory, burned churches and bound priests, strangled monk and nuns alike. The usurper predicts that, before long, Havelok will have enslaved them all and abducted their children and wives.

In a persuasive reading, Parker sees Godrich's propagandistic lines laced with an irony difficult to ignore given Godrich's own position and Havelok's earlier founding of a priory, and she downplays the rapaciousness of the Danes.⁹¹ However, following upon Havelok and Goldboru's own experience in Denmark as outlined above, I see greater ambivalence. The persistence of the image of the Danes as coastal terrorists was not easily forgotten. The well-known thirteenth-century chronicler Matthew Paris, for instance, wrote that Valdemar II of Denmark intended to invade England. He later reported that London merchants, hearing about Valdemar's gathering fleet, had panicked, believing the Danish king would take up the ways of his forefathers.⁹² The horrors and trauma of pillaging invaders, written across much of England's history a few centuries prior to *Havelok's* composition, creeps threateningly beneath these lines, giving Godrich's speech an edge that complicates the depictions of England and Denmark, and of the English and the Danes, in the poem. Though Godrich is a traitor, he is able to racialize Havelok as the Dane and leverage his origins against him to gather support for himself.

Contrary to what some scholars imply,⁹³ therefore, *Havelok* reveals a conception of the Danes as rapacious and barbarous *even as* it complicates that identity

91 Parker, "Havelok and the Danes," 430–31.

92 See Lars Kjær, "Runes, Knives, and Vikings: The Valdemarian Kings and the Danish Past in a Comparative Perspective," in *Denmark and Europe in the Middle Ages, c.1000–1525: Essays in Honour of Professor Michael H. Gelting*, ed. Kerstin Hundahl, Lars Kjær, and Niels Lund (New York: Routledge, 2014), 255–68 at 259–60.

93 See, for example, Dominique Battles: "the Danes appear as allies rather than foes"

by imbricating Danishness with historical Englishness. Godrich's speech echoes the rhetoric of oppression which establishes the colonial dynamic so problematic and ambivalent in England's history. After all, Cnut's successful reign is inevitably evoked in the narrative, and the English must have understood themselves to be the inheritors of a shared history with their Danish neighbours. *Havelok* simultaneously confirms and denies reports of the barbarity of the Danes through its conflicted accounts of Havelok and Grim's family and Godard and Ubbe's subjects; and, simultaneously and despite this, the poet presents a union between the nations as desirable, even unavoidable given their parallel existence, carefully negotiated by the poem's English representative, Goldeboru.⁹⁴ In *Havelok*, the initial union between Havelok and Goldeboru also initiates the union of nations, as an unwitting marriage between a princess and prince. Havelok's prophetic dream, interpreted by Goldeboru (who has in turn been encouraged by an angel) reveals the sanctified union of nations under the cross-marked Dane (1263). Havelok describes how, in his dream, his limbs extended so long that he embraced all of Denmark (1296–97), and, in a second dream, he flies over England with his Danish people and encloses the whole of it in his hand—"And, Goldeboru, Y gaf it þe" (And, Goldeboru, I gave it to you) (1312).

Havelok's dreams, presented in bodily terms, represent the physicality of imperial movement, the seizing of land by means of force, yet the English poem transmutes Danish imperialism into English imperialism, as Havelok envisions himself giving England back to Goldeboru. The poem also provides an interpretation of the dream to Goldeboru who, thanks to the heavenly messenger who had visited her, is ready to advise Havelok on how he should first return to Denmark to retake his kingdom there before returning to bear the English crown (1315–53). The poem is everywhere, in the end, about England; it begins with Goldeboru's story, grounding us in England, and Havelok, though he reclaims his original kingdom, settles in England, with Ubbe to rule as his representative in Denmark. Michael Faltera, too, has described how *Havelok* "reduces ethnic plurality and class hierarchies into a utopian vision" in such a way that Havelok's "Danishness consolidates the status of 'Engelond' and Englishness as stable and usable concepts."⁹⁵ But I do not believe such plurality is automatically reduced in these narratives, nor is it "ethnic";⁹⁶ rather,

("Reconquering England," 203). Rather, it requires the might of one Dane, raised in England, to strongarm the Danes into joining a union with the English.

94 Goldeboru's influence on the trajectory of the poem can scarcely be overstated, although her position, aside from the description here, is not my focus. For Goldeboru's uniquely active role as peace-weaver and queen in *Havelok*, see Larissa Tracy, "Peace Weaving and Gold Giving: Anglo-Saxon Queenship in *Havelok the Dane*," in *Remembering the Medieval Present: Generative Uses of England's Pre-Conquest Past, 10th to 15th Centuries*, ed. Jay Paul Gates and Brian T. O'Camb (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 168–94.

95 Michael Faltera, "The Ends of Romance: Dreaming the Nation in the Middle English *Havelok*," *Exemplaria* 17, no. 2 (2005): 247–80 at 248 and 280.

96 This puts class issues aside for the moment. For interpretation of the ways in which *Havelok* addresses class specifically, however, see Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 154. For a slightly

we see the confrontation of the wicked and racialized Dane, recalling William of Malmesbury's essentializing view, with the saintly Anglicized Dane, evidence of the development of a new English empire that likens the saintly to the English.⁹⁷ In knitting these nations together by means of a virtuous Anglo-Dane who returns to Denmark to fight against the wicked, the romance negotiates the growth of English boundaries, transforming a horrendous past of Viking raids and Danish conquest into a dream of Northern English Empire.

Putting an End to North Sea Fantasies in Mannyng's *Story of England* and the *Prose Brut*

The dream of an England as part of a larger cultural body caught on, if the proliferation of the Havelok and Horn legends is any indication. Havelok shows up in a number of the most popular chronicles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, despite the difficulty in placing him with any historic specificity. The thriving of the Havelok legend is symptomatic of a larger sense of confusion that later chroniclers began to exhibit over what "English" meant in the face of repeated conquest.

Robert Mannyng, writing in 1338 and often translating the work of the earlier chronicler Henry of Huntingdon,⁹⁸ voices this confusion in his *Story of England*.⁹⁹ Mannyng's text, even at a passing glance, is notable because it represents an early chronicle tradition in the English vernacular, following the North Sea visions in the romances of *Horn* and *Havelok*, that is viewed as particularly concerned with developing a sense of English nationality at a time when tensions with the French were coming to a head.¹⁰⁰ Scholars have seen Mannyng as pitting the English against Nor-

different perspective from Turville-Petre's, see Dayton Haskin, "Food, Clothing, and Kingship in *Havelok the Dane*," *American Benedictine Review* 24 (1973): 204–13 at 212: Haskin reads the poem as influenced by homiletic traditions but argues that "the poem can be read as a dramatic demonstration of the interdependence of all men—rulers and subjects alike." Similarly, Aaron Hostetter, "Food, Sovereignty, and Social Order in *Havelok the Dane*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 110, no. 1 (2011): 53–77, especially at 72, sees Havelok's sovereignty as derived from a reciprocity between subject and sovereign.

97 Nevertheless, this fraught history did not simply disappear among English writers, as evidenced by the persistent post-medieval myth of English churches hanging from their doors the flayed skins of the Danish victims of the St. Brice's Day massacre. As Rambaran-Olm points out in "Medievalism and the 'Flayed-Dane,'" 107, "the legend offered the English, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, some level of justice against the tenth-century marauding Danes, thus further emphasizing a sense of continued and unmixed or 'pure' 'English' identity rooted in Anglo-Saxon England."

98 *Langtoft's Chronicle* serves as the source for the second part of Mannyng's *Chronicle* (also known as *Story of England*). See Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 142.

99 I follow Joyce Coleman, "Strange Rhyme: Prosody and Nationhood in Robert Mannyng's *Story of England*," *Speculum* 78, no. 4 (2003): 1214–38, in using the title *Story of England* for Mannyng's verse chronicle. Coleman offers several persuasive reasons for this choice, not least of which is that Mannyng himself refers to his work as such and we thus obscure an important indication of his nationalist purposes in choosing a different name.

100 See Thorlac Turville-Petre, "Politics and Poetry in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Case of

man, French-speaking stock. But while Turville-Petre and others have pointed out that Mannyng sees an “English” *felawschip* centred around the *lewed* (unlearned) use of the English language at his time of writing,¹⁰¹ the poet nevertheless must engage with a many-peopled history of the English that disrupts such straightforward notions of linguistically-derived identity. When the Saxons invade, for instance, and succeed in conquering the Britons, their heterogeneous complexion causes some concern for the new populace:

We be comen all of kynde of Germanie
þat chaced has þe Bretons here of þer kythe. (2.29–30)

(We are all naturally come from Germany
Which has chased the Britons here from their homeland.)

Acknowledging that the Germanic tribes have supplanted Britain’s original inhabitants, Mannyng observes that an ethnic shift has occurred. Indeed, what can “England” be for Mannyng, except a German nation at this point? A little later, drawing from Henry of Huntingdon, Mannyng provides a cryptic answer:

[Huntingdon] sais þis lond high bretayn þat now has oþer name.
Ingland now is cald for Inglis men, we find;
þe folk þat is þerein, it is of divers kynd (2.98–100)

([Huntingdon] says this land is called Britain that now has another name.
England now is named after Englishmen, we find.
The people that is therein—it is of diverse kind.)

There are no pretensions here to cultural or ethnic purity; rather, what makes one “Inglis” appears to be simple geographic location, for the people who live within England’s borders are of diverse “kynd,”¹⁰² a theme to be taken up by the *Prose Brut* author as well.¹⁰³ Mannyng provides immediate confirmation of the primacy

Robert Manning’s *Chronicle*,” *Review of English Studies* 39, no. 153 (1988): 1–28 at 26: Mannyng “provides the English with a sense of identity, a sense of their history as a nation, and a sense of their own worth.” See also Douglas Moffat, “Sin, Conquest, Servitude: English Self-Image in the Chronicles of the Early Fourteenth Century,” in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne, 1994), 146–68.

101 Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 34–38. See also Thea Summerfield, *The Matter of Kings’ Lives: The Design of Past and Present in the Early Fourteenth Century Verse Chronicles by Pierre de Langtoft and Robert Mannyng* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 143–49, 159–66, and 215–16; and Nicholas Watson, “The Politics of Middle English Writing,” in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 331–52. For an alternative viewpoint, see Coleman, “Strange Rhyme”: Coleman argues that it has been a mistake to see Mannyng as any kind of “working class hero” when there are indicators that he was motivated by his gentry patrons.

102 See the online edition of the *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Frances McSparran, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000–2018), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary>, s.v. kind(e 1: “In accordance with the ordinary course of nature, natural.”

103 See Margaret Lamont, “Becoming English: Ronwenne’s Wassail, Language, and National Identity in the Middle English Prose *Brut*,” *Studies in Philology* 107, no. 3 (2010): 283–309.

of geography with his subsequent use of the trope of the “five sorrows of the land” (2.103–38), that is, the invasions of Romans, Scots and Picts, Saxons, Danes, and Normans. It is the “land” that suffers in this trope, not the people, for the chronicler sees England’s people as changeable. This fascinatingly abstracts notions of “Englishness” away from its people, and complements the classic focus of chroniclers on geography first. In this conception, the name “English” is adopted by whatever “divers” people inhabit the island—suggestive of later, modern nations and multiculturalism.

Despite this laissez-faire attitude towards national identity, Mannyng nonetheless, like others before him, grapples with the tension between seeing England’s Danish history in a positive or negative light. For him, it is religion that thrusts a wedge between the Scandinavians and the English, which implies, at least in Mannyng’s conception of history, that Christianity remains the ultimate cultural category. Though arguments that the universal church superseded other forms of cultural or political community in the Middle Ages are outdated,¹⁰⁴ this deference to a larger cultural unity prioritizing religion need not occlude the formation of ethnic community, and in fact racializes the Danes via its essentializing narrative. When Mannyng attempts to fit the tale of Havelok into his history—significantly, around the time that Alfred is beginning to fend off the Danes in earnest—he does so by having Havelok’s father, “Gunter the Dane,” invade England and begin desecrating saintly relics, only to be converted to Christianity. After he tells of Gunter’s conversion, thus establishing Havelok and his family as properly Christian, Mannyng wonders at the silence of other chronicles regarding Havelok’s tale, which he says is well known. He gives us a brief sketch of the events, with little detail, as no one before has recorded “in story how Havelok þis lond wan” (the history of how Havelok conquered this land) (2.520).¹⁰⁵ One of Mannyng’s scribes, copying the Havelok section of the chronicle, seemed somewhat uncomfortable with this grandiose version of events: he added a long summary restricting Havelok’s eventual rule to Lindsay and Norfolk.¹⁰⁶

The chronicler, nonetheless, uses the potential Christianity of the Danes to negotiate their problematic association with the English. For Mannyng, Havelok is an anomaly among the Danes, who are generally lukewarm Christians in *The Story of England*. Predictably, he is highly critical of Sweyn Forkbeard, the first real Danish king of England, and takes obvious glee in the drowning of twenty-four thousand Danes in the Thames in a botched invasion when he remarks with satisfaction, “þe Develle haf þer bones” (The Devil take their bones!) (2.1000). When Sweyn

104 See, for instance, Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of Its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 78–96. For a cogent response, see Kathy Lavezzo, “Introduction,” in *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, ed. Lavezzo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), vii–xxxiv.

105 Mannyng seems unaware of Gaimar, but he lists the omission in Gildas, Bede, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, and Peter Langtoft.

106 See *Robert Mannyng of Brunne*, pages 500–02 (no line numbers).

is slain, Mannyng describes the Dane's pitiful cries: "With þat word he felle down dead as any stone, / lyfe & saule to helle, & flesch, blode, & bone. / Now, Suane dede & wonnes with Sathanas" (At that utterance, he fell down dead as a stone, / life and soul [gone] to hell, and flesh, blood, and bone) (2.1041–43). While Mannyng is generally conservative in his commentary on historical personages and rarely elaborates on deaths in this fashion, here his enthusiasm recalls the phrases of crusading romance writers who frequently comment on the infernal destination of their Muslim villains. Of Cnut's reign, however, Mannyng is largely adulatory, as are other chroniclers. Mannyng's handling of the Danish invaders is conditional and selective, part of the proliferation of these events into legend. His inclusion of legendary or pseudo-historical figures like Havelok and, later, Guy of Warwick is an indication that the lines between history and romance, between reality and fantasy, have become further blurred by the combination of amnesia and nostalgia first noticeable in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*.¹⁰⁷

Having established the importance of North Sea fantasy in building English identity in early medieval English texts, we can now return to the fantasy with which this essay opened: the story of the final attempted 1366 Danish invasion, in the most popular English chronicle of the late fifteenth century, the *Prose Brut*. William Caxton's 1480 printing of the *Prose Brut*,¹⁰⁸ under the name *The Chronicles of England*, eventually established the *Brut* as the *de facto* account of English history for generations to come. Indeed, as Julia Marvin observes, "The written versions of Havelok most widely distributed in the Middle Ages are also among the least known today: they are found not in romance, nor in even verse, but in the prose *Brut* chronicles."¹⁰⁹ As the most popular English history, attested by both numbers and influence, the print *Prose Brut* played a special role in cementing the particulars of English history for a wider audience.¹¹⁰ Its primary interest, as a collaborative multi-generational project, was "to create a single, defining history of England that incorporates, nonetheless, its repeated colonization and ethnic fragmentation,"¹¹¹ and this project includes a rehearsal of Anglo-Danish relations over the *longue durée*.¹¹² The *Prose Brut* comes down to us in various forms, but scholarly consen-

107 For cogent analysis of the Danes in *Guy of Warwick*, see Eleanor Parker, "Danish Sovereignty and the Right to Rule," in *Dragon Lords: The History and Legends of Viking England* (New York: Tauris, 2018), 139–58.

108 For a list of Caxton's editions and printings, see N. F. Blake, ed., *Caxton's Own Prose* (London: Deutsch, 1973), 11.

109 Julia Marvin, "Havelok in the *Prose Brut* Tradition," *Studies in Philology* 102, no. 3 (2005): 280–306 at 280.

110 On the number of manuscripts and print editions, as well as the chronicle's influence, see Matheson, *The Prose Brut*, in particular 23–27.

111 Lamont, "Becoming English," 285.

112 For a recent assessment of *Prose Brut* print editions, see Neil Weijer, "Re-Printing or Remaking? The Early Printed Editions of the *Chronicles of England*," in *The Prose Brut and Other Late Medieval Chronicles: Books Have Their Histories. Essays in Honour of Lister M. Matheson*, ed. Jaclyn Rajsic, Erik Kooper, and Dominique Hoche (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), 125–46.

sus remains that it was first composed in Anglo-Norman sometime after 1272 and received several continuations until around 1400, when it was translated into English. The English version was continued through various manuscript traditions, but the incidents discussed in this article are found in the “Common Version,” the most widespread of these.¹¹³

The accretive nature of the *Brut* shows that conflicted feelings over England’s chequered history with their Danish neighbours in particular were persistent and that the literary history of the Danes in England outlined above rooted itself deeply in the English psyche. The history’s broad appeal is unquestionable, so we can look to it as the place where what might have at first seemed like regional interest achieved a wider English audience—for instance, drawing on Gaimar’s version of the Havelok legend, the *Brut* includes Havelok’s reign over England shortly after Arthur’s death. In general, however, the Danes are painted in the *Brut* as a kind of perpetual archvillain to the English, looking at English soil with rapacious eyes from the beginning. For example, one of the *Brut*’s first mentions of the Danes involves the Northumbrian king Osbriht’s rape of the wife of Buerno, a Danish lord. When King Gudrun of Denmark hears news of the rape, “Þai were wonder glade in hert, for-asmiche as þai myzt fynde cause forto gone into Engeland forto werr oppon þe Englisshe-men” (They [the Danes] were extremely joyful at heart, inasmuch as they could [now] find cause to go into England to make war upon the Englishmen).¹¹⁴ While they are cast in this villainous light, the *Brut* author also recognizes the Danish claim to England based on a history of Viking invasion: describing Sweyn’s invasion of England, he explains that Sweyn came “to conquere al þat his Ancestres hade bfore þat tyme” (to conquer everything that his ancestors had conquered before that time) (118). Sweyn’s invasion is thus justified along hereditary lines, and when he arrives, he is welcomed with open arms because the English despise their king, Ailred (Aldrede) (110). After Sweyn does succeed in gaining the crown, “he regnede nobli, & levede but xv 3er, & deide, and liþ at 3ork” (he reigned nobly and lived only fifteen years, and died and lies at York) (118).

Although the *Brut* narrative thus has Sweyn welcomed by the English, according to our author this does not mean that the Danes were easily adopted by them. Sweyn and his children receive the parenthetical epithet “þat was Danois” (he who was a Dane) with a persistence that is impossible to ignore in this portion of the history. The author appears at pains to keep straight for his readers that these rulers and their progeny were distinctly *Danish*, even as he unites Edmund Ironside with Cnut “as þai hade bene briþer” (as if they were brothers) (119), in a way strikingly different from William of Malmesbury’s depiction centuries earlier. In fact, the relationship between Edmund and Cnut, which derives in part from Gaimar, is much more than amicable:

113 The complicated relationship and history of the *Brut*’s versions in Anglo-Norman, Latin, and English is best laid out in Matheson, *The Prose Brut*, 1–56.

114 *The Brut*, 104. All citations of the *Prose Brut* are from the second volume of Brie’s edition (see note 3 above), hereafter cited parenthetically in text by page number. Translations are my own.

And after, þo regnede Kyng Edmunde Irenside and Knoght þe Danois. But þus it fel afterward, and in þe same ȝere þat þai were accorded, and somiche loueden togeder, wherof a false þef traitoure had enuy vnto þe loue þat was bituene ham, and frendeship, whos name was Edrith of Stratton, þat was a grete lorde, þat was Edmund Irensides man, & of him helde all þe londe þat he hade. And noþeles he þouȝt his lorde to bitraie. (125)

(And then afterwards, Edmund Ironside and Cnut the Dane reigned. But thus it happened after, and in the same year that they were accorded, that they loved one another so much that a false, thieving traitor, was envious of the love and friendship that was between them. His name was Edrith of Stretton, who was a great lord that was Edmund Ironside's man, and he held all of his land from Edmund. Nevertheless, he thought to betray his lord.)

The love between these English and Danish kings is strong enough to make other nobles at court jealous and tests national loyalties. While the language of this passage tells us that great love can grow between an Englishman and a Dane, the situation appears untenable. The Danes remain outsiders. Even as the *Brut* continues to depict Danish rulers in a favourable light until the death of good king Harðacnut, whose sole vice was gluttony (125), its author never loses sight of the Danes as separate, as "Danois."

In the end, for all his praise of the Danish occupation of England, the *Brut* author makes it clear that there were real divisions between the Danes and the English. After Harðacnut's death, the English hold a council in which they decide "Nevermore after þat tyme no man þat was a Danois, þouȝ he were ner so great a man amonges ham, he shulde never bene Kyng of Engeland for the despite þat þe Danois had done to the Englisshemen" (Never after that time should a man who was a Dane, even if there had never been as great a man among them, ever be King of England, because of the injury that the Danes had done to the English) (126). After the close bond between Cnut and Edmund, this comes as a bit of a surprise. What is the "despite" to which the English had been subject during Cnut's reign, a time when, for all the violence surrounding its beginnings, English authors seem to agree that the people of England flourished? It is at the level of the people, not the kings, that difficulty manifests. The author, for instance, relates an exemplary anecdote, in which the English were expected to make way deferentially for the Danish at any bridge crossing. If they did not bow their heads to the Danes, moreover, the Danes would beat and "defoule" (damage or pollute) the English. The English, then, have waited to cast off their colonial oppressors, finally to drive the Danes out of England, and the episode concerning bridge crossings, derived partially from Gaimar (4767–80), suggests that the oppression was not uncommonly motivated by a perceived ethnic difference between them. Since the framing of the incident as a demonstration of why the English should never again endure Danish subjugation is from the Anglo-Norman *Brut* tradition, it represents a gradual interpretation of received history as the *Brut* was formed. This ambivalent but eventually decisive attitude, borne of the thirteenth-century traditions, is also why, in the *Prose Brut*, Godwin comes across as particularly hateful when he seeks to install as king his son Harold, the son of Cnut's daughter, and therefore signal an English-Danish union (126). Such a thing could

not have been desirable to the company who had just sworn to resist Danish rule in perpetuity. And from this point on, we find scarcely a mention of the Danes in the entire chronicle, until the abrupt and disastrous invasion attempt in 1366.¹¹⁵

Nestled between accounts of Anglo-Spanish diplomacy, the *Brut*-author tells of how, in June of 1366, Danish ships set out for England. The passage reads in full:

This same zere, in þe monþe of Iuyn, þere come a gret companye & navee of þe Danes, & gaderyd hem togedir in þe Norþ See, purposyng hem to come into Engeland, to reue & to robbe, and also to slee; with whom, countreden & metten in þe see, Maryners and oþer orpyd fightyng men of the same cuntre, & disparpled hem; & þey, ashamed, went home aȝen into her owne cuntre. But amonge al oþere was a boystous and a strong vessell of her nauie that was ouere-sayled of the Englissh men, & was perissid & dreynt; in þe whiche, þe stiward & oþer worthy & grete men of Denmark, were take prisoners, &, by the Kyng of Engeland & his counsell, yprisoned. The whiche lordes, þe Danes afterward comen & soghten al about for to haue had her goodes þat þei had lost; and þei, not wel apayed ne plesid of þe answere þat þei had here, turned homwardes aȝen levyng behind hem in her ynnys, pryvly ywriten, in scrowes and on walles, "*3et shull Danos þes Wanes.*" Than happed þere an Englissh writer & wrote aȝens þe Danes in þis menere wyse: "*Her shull Danes sett banes.*" (317)

(This same year, in the month of June, there came a great company and fleet of the Danes who gathered together in the North Sea, proposing that they come into England to pillage and to rob and also to murder. [English] sailors and other valiant fighting men of the same country opposed and met them in the sea and scattered them. And they [the Danes], ashamed, went home again to their own country. But among all the other [ships] was a boisterous and strong vessel of their fleet that was overtaken by the Englishmen, and it was destroyed and sunk. From this ship, the steward and other worthy and great men of Denmark were captured and imprisoned by the King of England and his councillors. Afterwards, the Danes came for those lords and sought all about to obtain the goods that they had lost; and they, not well satisfied nor pleased with the answer that they had here, turned homewards again, leaving behind them in their lodgings, clearly written, in scrolls and on walls, "Yet shall Danes [conquer] these dwellings." Then an English writer chanced upon the writing and wrote against the Danes in this manner: "Here shall Danes set bones.")

The *Brut* author embellishes the Latin of the only source for this incident, John of Reading.¹¹⁶ For instance, here the Danes, come "to reue & to robbe, and also to slee"

115 There are two other brief incidents: at *Brut*, 131–32, where Edward the Confessor has a vision in which the Danes fail to launch an attack on England, drowning at sea, and prompting him to laugh out loud at mass; and at 135, when Harald Hardraða's failed attempt to retake England by entering through Scotland is reported briefly and decisively: "King Harold of England quelled [killed] King Harold of Danmarc."

116 See *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis*, ed. James Tait (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1914), 171. No other versions of this tale have been identified. The text is as follows:

"Consequente mense Junii, in praedam ac spoliationem Angliae magna classis Danorum in mari boreali convenit; quae a nautis aliisque pugnatoribus partium illarum dissipata, confusa repatriavit. Una tamen robusta navis dictae classis ab Anglis transvelificata periit; in qua senescallus ac alii potentes Daciae captivati, per consilium regium incarcerationantur.

(to pillage and to rob and also to murder), summoning an old spectre of Danish rapaciousness and violence that we have seen often in imaginings of Anglo-Danish history. The English, catching wind of the invasion, meet the invaders at sea where they humiliate the Danes, beating them at their own watery game until they are “ashamed.”

Unlike other acts of positive or negative selection, this event looks to be wholly fabricated—pure fantasy. The episode is not recorded anywhere prior to this, aside from the nearly contemporary and less widely read *Chronica* of John of Reading that seems to have provided the *Brut* with its source. The event does not appear in the Anglo-Norman *Brut*. It is unlikely that Valdemar III, King of Denmark when the incident is claimed to have happened, would have sent a fleet to attack England. Oddly enough, Valdemar *had* contemplated attacking England around 1353 and again in 1359—French sources claim that he wished to marry his son to the daughter of King John II of France and that he offered to bring twelve thousand soldiers to England should the marriage occur, and pay the sum of six hundred thousand florins¹¹⁷—though this does not seem as odd when one considers the long-standing wars between England and France at the time. Valdemar may even have been eager to do so because he saw his ancestors as having been unjustly deprived of their rightful territory of England,¹¹⁸ but evidence of this proposed arrangement is found only in French sources and does not seem to have been widely known among English and Danish writers. Valdemar, moreover, was busy with an invasion of Sweden in 1366, making the *Brut* attack even less likely.¹¹⁹

We are justified in wondering why the *Brut* chronicler chose to incorporate the story and why it was then copied into so many manuscripts. Whatever else one might observe, it was clear by the fifteenth century that Anglo-Danish relations were reaching a point of clearer disentanglement. For one, by the end of the four-

Quosdam postea requirentes a praedicto consilio, cum bonis suis amissis, non placati responso revertebantur, relinquentes post se in hospitiiis scripta: ‘Yuete schulle Danes waste thies wanes.’ Scriptor quidam Anglicus praesentium: ‘Here shall Danes sett hir banes.’”

(In the following month of June, a great fleet of Danes gathered in the North Sea in search of booty and the spoils of the English. That same fleet, having been scattered by sailors and other fighters of those parts, returned to their homeland frustrated. Nevertheless, one strong vessel from the aforementioned fleet did perish, intercepted by the English, on that ship a high-ranking official and other powerful Danes, having been captured, were imprisoned at the order of the royal council. Afterwards, requesting those individuals from the previously mentioned council, along with their lost goods, they [the Danes] were turned away, not satisfied with their response, leaving behind themselves some writings in their lodgings: ‘Yuete schulle Danes waste thies wanes.’ A certain contemporary English writer added: ‘Here shall Danes sett hir banes.’)

117 The details can be found in Dietrich Schäfer, *Die Hansestädte und König Waldemar von Dänemark* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1879), 154–56.

118 Valdemar’s plans, as understood from French sources, are analyzed at length in Frédéric Schiærn, *Descente en Angleterre Projetée par Le Roi de Danemark Valdemar Atterdag de Réunion avec les Français* (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1860), at 20 especially.

119 Jens E. Olesen, “Inter-Scandinavian Relations,” in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. 1, *Prehistory to 1520*, ed. Knut Helle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 710–70 at 718.

teenth century Margaret I of Denmark had established the Kalmar Union, uniting Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in hopes of competing with the trade dominance of the Hanseatic League. Margaret had attempted to broker a marriage treaty with Richard II of England that would protect their trade interests. For decades Margaret and Richard hinted at this potential union and, upon Richard's death, Henry IV took up the negotiations, proposing a double marriage of England's heirs, Philippa and Henry, to Danish royalty.¹²⁰ The double marriage never occurred, though Eric of Pomerania, Margaret's grand-nephew, did marry Philippa. Their marriage led to a strong alliance between England and the northern kingdoms, the potential of which was never fully realized: while Philippa was active in her role as queen, she died childless in 1430. Even while Philippa was still alive, the relationship between the Danes and the English had been tense, dominated by trade and fishing disputes. With Philippa gone, fifteenth-century Anglo-Danish relations deteriorated as minor skirmishes over the stockfish trade and cod fishing led to real violence and abductions requiring royal intervention.¹²¹ For much of the fifteenth century, then, Anglo-Danish relations remained a source of irritation for the English populace.

The prison-wall couplet in the *Brut*, drawing to a close as it does an imagined incident, is a moment of defiant finality that supports the lines being drawn politically between the English and their northern neighbours in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The defiance of the rhyming riposte makes the moment triumphant for the English, as, in the end, the ominous Danish threat falls flat. Although no longer the bogeymen of coastal nightmare, these Danes also no longer hold the promise of a North Sea union. It is perhaps nothing small that we are reminded by later versions of the *Brut* how Havelok, that popular Anglo-Danish hero, "reyned be his wives titel, & not be his owne" in England (588), a contrast with *Havelok's* scribal incipit some centuries earlier. That the apocryphal 1366 invasion was recounted at all shows how English writers had crystalized an idea of their old enemies abroad, removed from the sense of a complicated past indicated by William of Malmesbury's description of Scandinavian settlers united with the English *arctissima necessitudo*. Surprisingly, this turning away from the cruel Danes of bygone days meshes with what Margaret Lamont has called the *Brut's* "fairly consistent agenda of cultural amalgamation."¹²² Looking towards an English of the future, the English of the later Middle Ages needed to stop looking over their shoulders at enemies who had become more trope than reality. Ironically, the Danes had already begun to set their bones to rest in England centuries ago, and John of Reading's, the *Brut* chronicler's, or the prison graffitist's clever addition increases the irony by

120 See Anthony Tuck, "Some Evidence for Anglo-Scandinavian Relations at the End of the Fourteenth Century," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 5 (1972): 75–88.

121 See Kristen A. Seaver, "The English in the North Atlantic," in *The Last Vikings: The Epic Story of the Great Norse Voyages* (New York: Tauris, 2010), 137–57. Also relevant is Göran Dahlbäck, "The Towns," in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. 1, *Prehistory to 1520*, ed. Knut Helle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 611–34 at 621. For the English role in trade difficulties more generally, see Olesen, "Inter-Scandinavian Relations."

122 Lamont, "Becoming English," 307.

drawing attention to the lasting nature of Danish bones, buried in English soil, even as Robert Mannyng had emphatically sent Danish bones to the devil in his poem. That this short 1366 entry was picked out from John of Reading's otherwise unremarkable history and subsequently immortalized in *the* most read English history of the later Middle Ages tells us that John was not the last Englishman to revel in the finality of getting the last word against the "barbaric" Danes.

By the time the *Brut* was in print and being read widely, the nostalgia for a shared Anglo-Scandinavian past may have become *passé*. By degree, as engagement with the French grew all-consuming in the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses, nostalgia had turned to estrangement. With less need for differentiation from the Danes, as English identity took on a more discrete form among and against other European national identities, there was less need to promote an image of the stereotyped, racialized Dane. Yet it is undeniable that for many centuries, since the earliest English chronicles, English identity was persistently structured by its relationship to Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish invasion, conquest, and settlement. The ways in which authors selected moments to memorialize and moments to forget reflected their different approaches to understanding a developing national identity in relation to a troped Danish entity—a symbolic characterization of the Other. What these authors did, especially as they departed from the historical record, was explore the different possibilities of self-/nation-making depending on selective emphasis and fabricated history. As James Knapp and Peggy Knapp have recently argued, "romance story-telling can call into question the conceptual certainties of the everyday," encouraging readers (and writers) to consider the existence of "possible worlds."¹²³ Especially during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the English recalled kin-cultural ties with their North Sea neighbours in fictive narratives like *King Horn* and *Havelok*, and they reimagined a possible history and a possible world where the tensions of the past resolved into stronger transnational unity; the old Danish enemies faded from memory, and the tales of *Horn* and *Havelok* flourished in popular chronicles. Later, in providing an alternative history and final Danish "invasion" of 1366, one that proliferated with the introduction of print, generations of readers could imagine a possible world that offered closure through a final versified telling-off of the old enemies—nonetheless drawing attention to the Danish bones set beneath the ground on which English history was written.

123 James F. Knapp and Peggy A. Knapp, *Medieval Romance: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 16.

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Abstract: For centuries medieval English depictions of “Viking” invasion and settlement of England vacillate between positive and negative appraisal of Anglo-Scandinavian relations. While this vacillation operates at times through distortion of the historical record, English national identity emerges as distinct from its northern neighbours, in particular the Danes. Over this *longue durée*, authors process the complicated English relationship to the Danes who had settled in England and those who remained a threat abroad by employing a troped and racialized figure of the Dane, from early chronicles like William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta regum Anglorum*, to the romances *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, and in later, popular chronicles like Robert Mannyng’s *Story of England* and the fifteenth-century *Prose Brut*. By turns viewed with fear and nostalgia, the Danes are definitively cut off from England in the *Prose Brut*, wherein the successful repelling of an imagined fourteenth-century Danish invasion offers a final fantasy of closure to this facet of English ethnogenesis.

Keywords: national identity, Englishness, Danes, Middle English romance, *Prose Brut*, William of Malmesbury, *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*