Thomas Becket in the *South English Legendaries:* Genre, Materiality, and Why the Reader Matters

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Abstract

The South English Legendaries (SEL) is a thirteenth-century collection of saints' legends. More than just a work of hagiography, this collection demonstrates late medieval genre hybridisation and literary experimentation in the legend of St. Thomas Becket, the twelfth-century martyred archbishop of Canterbury, which exhibits a variety of genre-bending tropes. This project explores how poets incorporate the genre expectations of hagiography, historiography, and romance to capture the attention of a broad audience. The presence of these genres in the legend of Becket corresponds to three traditional perceptions of Becket: as a religious figure, a historical figure, and a legendary figure. Drawing on the fields of "New Philology," genre theory, and reading reception theory, especially Jauss' "horizon of expectations," I argue that the SEL is a work of "edutainment" and explore the dynamic relationship between readers and their concepts of genre. I identify three types of readers—authors, scribes, and manuscript users—across three different stages of the SEL—composition, compilation, and reception—and examine how genre informed interpretation. The SEL poet participated in both secular and religious literary traditions to captivate a broad audience, while the scribes who copied, compiled, and disseminated the Becket legend employed paratextual manuscript features to encourage specific interpretations. Three historical figures, Robert of Gloucester, Sir John Prise, and Sir Robert Cotton, provide evidence of reading engagement to show how interpretations of the Becket legend evolved. The SEL Becket legend was composed as a romance, disseminated as a saint's life, and read as a work of history.

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Dedication

To BPT

To my family

And to the Brothers of the Hollow Victory

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Abbreviations, References, and Sigla

Abbreviations

DIMEV	*Digital Index of Middle English Verse*
EETS OS	Early English Text Society, Original Series
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
MHTB	Robertson and Sheppard, eds., *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
Rolls Series	*Rerum britannicarum medii aevi scriptores or Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages*
SEL	*South English Legendaries*

References

Throughout, I quote in the original language but provide translations in brackets beneath. All translations are my own unless otherwise specified. Additionally, all citations from the SEL are from Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anne J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary,* EETS OS 235, 236 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) unless otherwise specified. For quotations from the SEL, I provide in-text citations, including the title of the legend followed by the line numbers. Biblical references come from Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, eds., *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), and English translations from *The*

Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version (Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2009). I use Vulgate numbering for Psalms, followed by modern numbering in parentheses.

Sigla

Manfred Görlach introduced the following sigla in *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary* (1974), and I have adopted them for ease of reference. Listed below are only the manuscript sigla. For additional sigla, including those for individual legends, see Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, vii-x.

A	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 43
Ar	London, British Library, Arundel 42
Ax	London, College of Arms, Arundel VIII
Ay	Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)
Az	Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 23.7.11
B	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 779
Ba	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional C. 220
Bd	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. D. 200
Be	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. E. 94
Bp	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. C. 3
Br	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Poetry 225
C	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145
Cd	London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra D IX
Cx	London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A II
D	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud. Misc. 463
Dy	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 75
E	London, British Library, Egerton 1993
F	Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, McLean 128
G	London, Lambeth Palace 223
Gr	London, Gray's Inn, 20
Gz	London, British Library, Harley 874

H	London, British Library, Harley 2277
Hx	London, British Library, Harley 2250
Hy	London, British Library, Harley 4012
Hz	San Marino CA, Henry Huntington Library, HM 64
I	Cambridge, St. John's College B. 6
J	London, British Library, Cotton Julius D IX
K	Cambridge, King's College 13II
Ki	Kendal, Kendal Grammar School. A. de Clavasio, *Summa de casibus conscientiae,* Nuremburg, 1498
Ks	Kassel University Library 2° MS Theol.264[1]
L	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud. Misc. 108
Lm	Leicester, Leicester Record Office (formerly Museum) 18 D 59
Lx	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 622
Ly	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 685
Lz	Leeds, University Library, Brotherton 501
M	London, British Library, Egerton 2810
Mz	Minneapolis, Minnesota University Library, Z.822.N.81
N	London, British Library, Egerton 2891
O	Oxford, Trinity College, 57
Ox	Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 237
P	Cambridge, Magdalene College, 2344
Pr	London, Public Record Office, C 47/34/1/5
Q	London, British Library, Additional 10301
Qa	London, British Library, Additional 10626
Qb	London, British Library, Additional 24078
Qx	London, British Library, Additional 22283

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[1] This fragment was recently discovered by Dirk Schultze, and an announcement will be made in a forthcoming *Anglia* volume. Dr Schultze has graciously allowed me to include this new manuscript.

Qy	London, British Library, Additional 24542
Qz	London, British Library, Additional 36983
R	Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 3. 25 (605)
Rm	Leeds, University Library, Ripon Minster Fragment 33
Rx	London, British Library, Additional 62998
Ry	London, British Library, Royal 17 C.XVII
S	London, British Library, Stowe 949
T	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 17
Ta	New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, Takamiya Deposit 139
Tx	London, British Library, Cotton Titus A XXVI
U	Cambridge, University Library, Additional 3039
Ua	Cambridge, University Library, Additional 2585 Parts I + III
Ub	Cambridge, University Library, Additional 4544
Ux	Cambridge, University Library, Dd. 1. 1
Uy	Cambridge, University Library, Ee. 2. 15
Uz	Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 5. 48
V	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. A. 1 (Vernon)
Vx	London, British Library, Vespasian A III
Vy	London, British Library, Vespasian B XVI
W	Winchester College 33
Wa	Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales 5043
Wh	Nottingham, University Library, Middleton Lm 7/1
Wm	Wisbech, Museum 21 (formerly H. 6. 29)
X	Oxford, Corpus Christi College 431
Y	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Additional C. 3
Z	New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, Takamiya Deposit 54

1. Thomas Becket in the *South English Legendaries*

Figure 1.1. "Henry and Thomas in: heartbreak hotel" by Kate Beaton

In her webcomic titled "Henry and Thomas in: heartbreak hotel," pictured above, Canadian comic artist Kate Beaton satirically portrays a dialogue between Henry II and Thomas Becket prior to Becket's nomination to the See of Canterbury.[1] While using a comic as an epigraph might seem odd, this comic succinctly captures what the following pages will discuss. Works of art and

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[1] Kate Beaton, "Henry and Thomas In: Heartbreak Hotel," comic strip, *Hark, A Vagrant*, accessed October 29, 2020, http://www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=7). Beaton's comics often lampoon famous moments in history and works of literature. Becket makes an additional appearance in "Plantagenet family portrait" where Beaton illustrates Becket, prostrate, dead before Henry's family with three swords in him, one of which is held by Henry.

literature that depict Becket reframe, elaborate, and even create all-new *types* of Becket because of the complexity of his historical characterisation. Becket must be considered principally as a cultural force. Beaton illustrates a historical moment of heightened tension between Henry II and Becket in her comic. She breaks the audience's expectation; since Beaton portrays the moment in a comic, the audience should interpret the moment as funny. In the comic, Henry II anticipates the audience's expectation of humour, and the comedy emerges from this fracturing of expectation. The meta-joke functions as a commentary on the audience's expectation of humour. Without ruining the joke further by explaining it, it is sufficient to suggest that Beaton employs the webcomic genre to make light of a historical moment that had significant repercussions. The following chapters will discuss this marriage of genre and reception. Genre and reception are inextricably linked, and Becket, because of his historical characterisations, enables such disparate representations throughout the centuries since his death. While Beaton's comic is a modern example, this dissertation will discuss an alternative form of popular literature, medieval hagiography.

Modern audiences may find it challenging to approach hagiographical works because hagiographical documents have become artefacts of a religious past now considered superstitious in a post-enlightenment world. Modern audiences no longer consider hagiographic works as sources of fact with their miracles, passions, and supernatural narratives. Instead, we read them for their moralising narratives.[2] Saints, like superheroes, are superhuman and rise above the limitations of a corrupt society to act altruistically. In her introduction to *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, Sarah Salih writes, "the saints were at once the superheroes and the celebrities of

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[2] In some cases, authors embrace hagiography for the sole purpose of world building, a testament to the vibrant cultural value that hagiography still has. One recent example of this is Leigh Bardugo, who, in addition to the *Shadow and Bone* series, composed an anthology of "saints' legends" to populate her fictional universe the "Grishaverse." In this anthology, the legends of the saints bear little resemblance to medieval hagiography. Bardugo clearly relies on cultural understanding of the value of saints, through her inclusion of some aspects of saintliness and not others. For example, her saints are patrons of thieves, "good intentions," and "lost causes."

medieval England."[3] Her anachronistic comparison of saints to superheroes adopts modern concepts of genre signifiers to describe the cultural value of saints in medieval England. Indeed, Alicia Spencer-Hall's *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens* "seeks to…[flesh] out more fully the interplay of the medieval hagiographic with the modern cinematic."[4] Both Salih and Spencer-Hall resituate the hagiographical discourse into a lexicon familiar to a modern audience.

To approach medieval hagiographical documents within a cultural context that draws parallels between saints and superheroes is to modernise our understanding of hagiography and impose modern perceptions of genre onto a medieval framework. Such a method, however convenient, problematises the dynamic relationship between saints and the pious. The notion of intercession is intrinsic to the dynamic relationship between saints and their venerators—a notion not exhibited in the superhero-civilian dynamic of twentieth- and twenty-first-century superhero narratives to the same degree. While both saints and superheroes intercede on behalf of others, they do so differently and to different degrees: the former work to secure spiritual salvation, while the latter concern themselves with mortal salvation. Saints and superheroes, while alliterative, are not equivalent. This project investigates medieval hagiographical documents, not in modern terms, but in terms of medieval writers, scribes, and readers, to gain a greater insight into the praxis of medieval hagiographers and their readers. This project seeks to re-evaluate and recentre the materiality of hagiographical documents.

While medieval hagiographical documents varied widely in form, language, and content, this project focuses on just one narrative of St. Thomas of Canterbury, or Thomas Becket as he has come to be known, in a thirteenth-century collection of saints' legends usually known as the South English Legendary (SEL). Becket scholars celebrated the triple jubilee of Becket in 2020: it was 900 years since his alleged birth in 1120, 850 years since his murder in 1170, and 800 years since the translation of his body from his tomb in the crypt of Christ Church Cathedral in Canterbury to

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[3] Sarah Salih, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 1.

[4] Alicia Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens: Divine Visions as Cinematic Experience* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 21.

his shrine in the Trinity Chapel. While 2020 marks a significant year for scholars, Becket has never faded from the popular psyche.

On June 8th, 2017, testifying before the U. S. Senate intelligence committee, former FBI director James Comey referenced Henry II's alleged, infamous rebuke of the archbishop of Canterbury: "Will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?"[5] This invocation of the famous feud between the King of England and the martyred archbishop launched Becket back into the spotlight. Such instances of Becket allusions in the news are more common than might be expected. In 2001, the *Daily Mail* listed Becket among the 100 greatest Britons who ever lived.[6] Five years later, he reappeared in a *BBC History* list of the worst Britons, taking second only to Jack the Ripper, the infamous serial killer of nineteenth-century London.[7] Becket's name is even invoked by the not-for-profit Becket law firm, with the slogan "Religious Freedom for all," which advocates on behalf of those suffering religious persecution. Indeed, it seems that Becket is never out of the spotlight for very long. The reasons for his popularity and divisive reception are many and disparate. He embodies, to some, the spirit of dissent and conviction. To others, he was a shadowy political figure, self-interested, and motivated by the desire for social and political recognition. Still, to others, Becket is a larger-than-life historical figure turned folk hero and legend.

Literature about Becket reflects this tripartite characterisation; he is represented as a historical, religious, or mythical figure or a blend of two or more of these. The complexity of his representation, the fluidity of his characterisation, and the literature and documentary evidence of the twelfth century and thereafter challenge scholarly preoccupations with establishing consistent narratives about him. Medieval, more so than modern, literary sources enjoy this hybridisation, often including details of Becket's life that are not accounted for in the historical records, including,

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[5] Olivia B. Waxman, "James Comey Makes Henry II, Thomas Becket Link: The History." *Time,* 8 June 2017, https://www.time.com/481148/comey-testimony-henry-ii-thomas-becket-will-no-one-rid-me-of-this-meddlesome-priest.

[6] Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London: Hodder Education, 2004), 1.

[7] Sean Coughlan, "Sinner or Saint?" *BBC News Magazine,* January 31, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4663032.stm.

for example, his Saracen mother. The development of his cult immediately following his martyrdom in 1170 and the unprecedented speed with which he was canonised in 1173 by Pope Alexander III reveal how significant Becket was as a cultural force and icon. Catalysed by a series of hagiographical narratives composed in the decade after his murder, Becket's cult grew to be the largest and most successful in England, and he proved to be one of the most important saints of medieval Europe.

1.1 Research Questions

Becket's pre-eminence as an English saint and as a significant historical figure is evident in the placement of his legend within the popular Middle English collection of saints' legends, the *South English Legendaries* (SEL). This project draws on these two different subjects, Becket and the SEL, to examine, with respect to genre and materiality, the dynamic relationship between those who produce books and those who use books. Understanding the Becket legend within the context of the SEL brings insight into what the SEL is, how it was used, and how it evolved. The evolution of the SEL over time, likewise, informs us how perspectives of Becket evolved. Because Becket is, as I will shortly discuss, a complex historical figure, representations of his character provide insight into how authors present and reimagine the saint and historical figure. Finally, examining the materiality of the SEL provides insight into the following issues: how the SEL evolved, how Becket was presented, and how authors, scribes, and readers perceived genre.

Thus, this project contributes to four separate areas:

1. Understanding the accounts of Becket's legend preserved in manuscripts of the SEL.
2. Understanding the SEL itself: what it is, and how it evolved.
3. Exploring how concepts of genre contribute to our understanding of the SEL, its associated texts, and their development over time.
4. Exploring how insights from materiality ("new philology" and manuscript culture, broadly) contribute to our understanding of genre in the SEL and the evolving perceptions of genre over time.

While each of these areas is important to their respective fields of study—Becket studies, SEL studies, genre studies, and manuscript studies—bringing these four areas together reveals more

significant insight into the relationship between premodern and early modern English book producers and users of books. Guiding this project is the question of how narratives are rhetorically structured, both textually and visually, to compel particular readings by book users and to evaluate how readers engage with these narratives when their context or understanding of the subject has changed from the original conditions of the book's production. Thus, this project aims to incorporate these four areas into a discussion of reception: how did readers understand the Becket legend in the SEL, evidenced through the material artefacts?

Throughout this project, I draw on historical readings of the Becket legend as it appears in the SEL to elucidate our understanding of the narrative. As impossible as it is to read the Becket legend as one would have in the Middle Ages, attempting to do so reveals how our preconceived notions about saints' legends have evolved from the past, including our understanding of what constitutes hagiography and associated genres like history and romance. Likewise, by examining the material artefacts, we come closer to experiencing the legend as someone would have in the Middle Ages. What editions of the SEL hide from the reader can be found in the margins, the structure, and the context of the manuscript traditions, illuminating features of genre that are often excluded in scholarly or student editions of medieval works. While manuscripts do not reveal every answer to our questions, they may provide greater insight than a modern edition, and for this reason I rely, as I will shortly discuss, on the extant material evidence to inform this study.

1.2 Thomas Becket: A Biography

Becket was born on the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, Tuesday, December 21st, around 1120.[8] His Norman parents, Gilbert and Matilda, settled into the heart of the City of London along

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[8] While the day is undisputed, several historians have suggested different years for Becket's birth. Most scholars now accept Barlow's date for Becket's birth in 1120. See Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 10. The emphasis of this project is not to reproduce another scholarly biography, of which there are many, but to examine how he is represented in literature, and as a corollary, how he is interpreted. My brief biography of Becket is a summary of key moments at important conflicts in Becket's life, which I have drawn from Barlow's magnum

Cheapside. Though he was not born into an aristocratic family, Becket enjoyed the luxuries of bourgeois society. His father, a merchant, owned property a short distance from St. Paul's Cathedral and the Guildhall, and Frank Barlow has proposed that Becket benefited from his father's successes.[9] In his privileged position, Becket had opportunities to gain an education and associate with aristocrats of twelfth-century London.

Following his martyrdom, a fascinating legend surrounding Becket's parentage and birth emerged alongside the hagiographic tradition, a legend which I cover in further detail in Chapter 4. Its presence in several thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts such as Cotton Julius D XI and Harley MS 978, as well as in the composite lives of Becket, the *Quadrilogus* and others, suggest that not only was the documenting and veneration of the saint important within the literary and liturgical discourses of the later Middle Ages but there also existed a desire to establish and attach a mythic heritage to Becket, enhancing the allure of the martyr.[10] The presence of legends surrounding his parents in documents whose production is so near to the development of his cult points to a thriving *literary* discourse surrounding the saint.

Becket attended school, first at Merton, an Augustinian priory school in Surrey. He continued his education in 1138 in the schools of Paris, where renowned theologians like Peter Abelard and Hugh of St. Victor lectured. The schools, not yet the influential universities they would later become, were occupied by "serious students but also [by] dilettanti."[11] He left after three years. Becket's short tenure in Paris has been attributed, by some historians, to a lack of interest in academic and clerical life. As Barlow suggests, "Either, then, he was not a serious student at Paris, a dilettante who…went simply to add more polish to his manners—even improve his French—or

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opus. Barlow's biography is drawn from the historical Latin accounts, also known as the Canterbury Group, which I discuss shortly. I supplement Barlow with details from the Latin lives.

[9] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 13, 71.

[10] Paul Alonzo Brown, "Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket," PhD diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1930), 28.

[11] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 20.

something went wrong."[12] His departure, either because of familial trauma or distaste for academia, is seen as a turning point in his life. Several of his biographers—Edward Grim, Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, and the *Anonymous I* author—allude to either the loss of his parents' fortunes or to the death of a parent; after all, it was his mother who, explains *Anonymous I*, was the catalyst for his pursuit of higher learning, and her loss had a meaningful impact on Becket's decision to return to London from Paris.[13]

After departing Paris and ending his studies, Becket returned to London and began working for a London banker and social magnate, Osbert Huitdeniers. He kept Osbert's accounts and learned to negotiate administrative and financial tasks during this time. After Becket had worked with Osbert for approximately three years, a colleague of Archbishop Theobald who frequented Gilbert's home insisted that Becket should work in the court of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Becket took this position seriously and dutifully worked for Theobald. On more than one occasion, his peers in the curia took a disliking to him and attempted to have him removed. In particular, Roger Pont-l'Evêque continued to challenge Becket until Roger's appointment to the See in York.

During his stay in the court of Theobald, Becket earned the rank of archdeacon. He returned to his studies briefly, this time intending to study law at the Bologna university. Shortly after returning to England, Becket met Henry II, and they became fast friends. Despite the age gap between them, their mutual interests in sports, including hunting and hawking, and their shared

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[12] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 21.

[13] J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard, eds., *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* [MHTB]*,* Rolls Series (London: Longman, 1875-85), 4:8. "Cum autem Thomas annum aetatis vicesimum primum implevisset, mater, quae sola ut erudiretur instabat, defuncta est, et exinde circa studia Thomas se remissius coepit habere" [But after Thomas had completed the twenty-first year of his life, his mother, who alone was insisting that he be educated, died, and thereafter Thomas began to hold himself more slack concerning his studies]; cf. Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence*, A Life of Thomas Becket in Verse*, trans. Ian Short (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2013), 29. Guernes blames "a set of unfortunate circumstances," which "resulted in [Becket] being deprived of his financial support."

lifestyle bound them in friendship. Shortly thereafter, Becket, at the King's request, filled the vacant seat of the Lord Chancellor of England. His tenure as the keeper of accounts for Osbert and his education in law at Bologna served Becket well as he occupied England's second highest secular rank. During this time, he participated in Henry's military campaigns abroad, including the 1159 siege of Toulouse, where he, "clad in armour and at the head of his troops, […] captured three fortified towns."[14] Following the death of Archbishop Theobald in 1161, Henry II suggested that Becket become the next Archbishop of Canterbury so that Becket might occupy both positions, Archbishop and Lord Chancellor. Having a close ally and friend in the Church would benefit Henry II's desire for a unified authority. However, Becket, reluctant to take the archepiscopal seat, declined to occupy both positions. This rejection of the offer would mark a turning point in Becket's relationship with Henry II. By distancing himself from the Crown, Becket instigated an antagonistic relationship privileging the Church over the Crown, much to the frustration of his friend Henry II. Becket's precipitous alteration in personality and priority calcified Henry II's annoyance with the Church's authority.[15]

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[14] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 58. Scholarly interest in Becket's life often glosses over this time in Becket's life. During this time, Becket employed scutage as a means of financing his troops in this campaign. Scutage was a means of raising an army either through the support of promised knights or through a tax in lieu of knights. This same tax would later come under scrutiny at his trial at Northampton. The funds that Becket raised for his military exploits in France were questioned, because while some funding came from Henry, others were taxes levied against bishoprics. Barlow provides a more detailed analysis in *Thomas Becket,* 58-60. See also Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket*, 28-29.

[15] Anne Duggan notes that Henry's "cultivation of Becket's adversaries" manifested in his support of the authority of Roger of York, whose ambition for the parity of privileges for the See of York would undermine Canterbury's privileges, and therefore divide the authority of the Church. See Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket*, 36. Likewise, Anne Duggan notes that William Fitzstephen, one of Becket's colleagues and a lawyer "traced the beginning of the estrangement [of Becket and Henry] to issues of jurisdiction." See Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket*, 38.

All issues came to a head when the criminality of certain parish clerks was raised by the court of Henry II. When Becket challenged Henry II on the legality of trying a criminous clerk in both the King's court and the ecclesiastical court, Henry became enraged at what appeared to be a betrayal of loyalty.[16] Henry II drew up a series of constitutions asserting royal authority over the Church in England. This charter of proposed new laws, titled the Constitutions of Clarendon, established a precedent for future disputes between the Crown and Church and re-established "ancient customs" that Henry II's predecessors enjoyed. While Becket initially acquiesced, he was scolded by the papal curia for his decision and was made to recant his previous acceptance. This reversal further frustrated an already enraged king who laid charges against Becket for legal issues that arose during Becket's tenure as Lord Chancellor. Becket, ready to agree to the constitutions again, "save the order," i.e., without damaging the Church's reputation, went to trial against the King in 1166 in Northampton. The King, surrounded by earls, barons, and dissenting bishops who disagreed with Becket's perspective on ecclesiastical sovereignty, challenged him on his final decision. Becket's lawyers, friends, and subordinates insisted that he should flee into exile to save his life.

After the trial, Becket made his way secretly from the south of England into Normandy, where he found safety in the papal curia and eventually resided at the abbey in Pontigny. He lived in exile for four years, engaging in legal disputes with fellow archbishops, bishops, and the Crown over the Church's rights in England. In the late fall of 1170, Becket returned to England and Canterbury to much celebration. Upon his return, he believed that the rights of the primacy of his archepiscopal See had been breached; he struck back at his political and religious rivals, excommunicating some and placing others under interdict. The Archbishop of York, Roger Pont-l'Evêque, with whom he had lived in Archbishop Theobald's court, had specifically challenged Becket's authority through Young Henry's coronation. Henry II was incensed at what he perceived

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[16] Of course, the issue of clerical immunity was only one of many "betrayals" by Becket; the departure of Becket from the chancery instigated the rapid decline in the relationship between the Crown and Church. See Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket*, 39.

to be an abuse of power and lashed out upon hearing this news, allegedly yelling, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?"[17]

As the story goes, that same night, four knights left Calais for England to confront Becket over this new escalation of the feud. When they arrived, they sought out another knight loyal to Henry II and made their way to the palace in Canterbury, where Becket was residing. They entered and demanded to see him, insisting he recant and leave with them. When he refused, the knights left the palace and armed themselves. They returned to find him still undaunted by the threatening presence of the knights. Monks and other clerics, however, were not so calm and encouraged Becket to flee into the cathedral. He followed them into the north transept where he stayed. Monks attempted to close and lock the cathedral's doors, but he rebuked them for closing the doors. When the knights entered the cathedral, they tried again to arrest Becket, but he kneeled before them, an act that suggests that he was inviting his martyrdom. One monk, Edward Grim, who would describe the events and write a biography of Becket, intercepted the first knight's attack, and his arm was struck. Each knight, in turn, swung and hit Becket, severing the crown of his head. Thus, Archbishop Thomas Becket was martyred on December 29th, 1170.

News of his murder quickly spread around Canterbury, England, and then Europe. Becket was celebrated as a martyr of the Church for his stubborn refusal to subjugate the Church to secular authority. His colleagues and friends began to produce accounts of his life and disseminate them, cementing the cult of St. Thomas of Canterbury in the Church. He was canonised only three years later, in 1173, by Pope Alexander III. The rise of his cult was informed by the legends that detailed his life, and in turn, the popularity of his cult broadened the audience of his hagiographers.

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[17] The first attestation of this phrase comes from Robert Dodsley's *The Chronicle of the Kings of England*, where he writes: "Then the king waxed exceeding wrath, and his countenance changed, and he cried out, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this turbulent priest?" Robert Dodsley, *The Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London: J. Fairburn, Broadway, Ludgate-Hill, 1821), 27. Edward Grim records Henry's outburst as: "What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and promoted in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk" *MTHB* 2.429. See also *MHTB* 1.121-3; 3.127-9, 3.487.

The Latin biographies, which I will briefly describe, had remarkable influence historically in developing a literary tradition of Becket that has continued, almost without pause, since his murder. There are at least fifteen known Latin hagiographies (or biographies) or sources. This number is determined not simply by knowing at least fifteen authors but also by tracing the remnants of now lost hagiographic texts.

1.3 The Tripartite Characterisation of Becket

The earliest hagiographer of Becket was his colleague, the scholar and writer John of Salisbury. Almost immediately after the martyrdom, in 1171, John of Salisbury composed his brief account of Becket.[18] He is also known for his political and philosophical work, *Policraticus*, which he had dedicated to Becket. He was present at the martyrdom and had intimate knowledge of Becket's relationship with Henry II. He would later become the Bishop of Chartres.

Around the same time, Edward Grim, a clerk and witness to and victim of the martyrdom, produced one of the most influential biographies of Becket, sometime between 1171 and 1172. Barlow has described his account as "an ill-organized Life, based on personal knowledge and Canterbury information."[19] Grim holds a unique position among the various hagiographers since he did not personally know Becket but was simply visiting the cathedral at the time of the knights' attack. Michael Staunton judiciously summarises Grim's significance:

> As the murderers bore down on Thomas nearly all his monks and clerks, including a number of his future biographers, fled in fear, but this visiting clerk stood by him. In attempting to block the first of the knights' blows he almost had his arm severed, and this act of bravery earned Grim a special place in the recounting of Thomas's martyrdom and features in many pictorial representations of it.[20]

Because of his personal engagement with Becket's death, Grim's account of Becket's life influenced later biographers. His work is also significant because it influenced future legends and

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[18] *MHTB* 2:299-322 is the current standard edition of John of Salisbury's life of Becket.

[19] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 4.

[20] Michael Staunton, *Thomas Becket and His Biographers* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 28.

narratives; his account of Becket's life was adopted and adapted by others who did not witness Becket's martyrdom.[21]

Anonymous II is another early account of Becket's life and death. Scholars have dated Anonymous II to 1172x1173 as it is likely influenced by John of Salisbury and the oral tradition.[22] The unknown author likely originated from London, and evidence of "prejudice against the archbishop" is present in the narrative.[23] Regarding the Anonymous II account, "the most intriguing aspect of the work," according to Staunton, is that Becket "is not always presented as an example of sanctity and righteousness."[24] Anonymous II is perhaps the earliest instance of a biographer of Becket challenging the stability of his character. As I will demonstrate, Becket's character was never static but fluid.

Benedict of Peterborough was a monk in Canterbury at the time of the martyrdom, and his account circulated with Edward Grim's account. Benedict served as the first custodian of Becket's shrine in the cathedral.[25] It is alleged he completed his hagiography between 1173 and 1174.

William of Canterbury was Becket's deacon and a collector of miracle stories that he later presented to Henry II. Like Benedict, he also served as a custodian of the shrine of Becket. William's account was written contemporaneously with Benedict's.[26]

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[21] *MHTB* 2:353-458 is the current standard edition of Edward Grim's life of Becket, including an appendix containing the preface to the *Quadrilogus*.

[22] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 4; *MHTB* 4:80-144 is the current standard edition of Anonymous II's life of Becket.

[23] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 4.

[24] Staunton, *Thomas Becket*, 40.

[25] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 4; *MHTB* 2:1-19 is the current standard edition of Benedict of Peterborough's life of Becket.

[26] *MHTB* 1 is the current standard edition of William of Canterbury's life of Becket. This volume contains all three books of the William's life of Becket, but also all six books of his miracles.

Robert of Cricklade's account survives because it was used as source material for later lives, including the Icelandic saga *Thómas Saga Erkibyskups*, circa 1200. Barlow notes that the life by Robert did not survive on its own "possibly because it was too favourable to the king."[27] Eiríkur Magnússon notes that "though there is no direct evidence of the existence of a Thomas saga in Iceland earlier than the middle of the 13th century […] we have indirect evidence of it of a much earlier date."[28] The distance between England and Iceland and the speed with which the *Thómas Saga* appears to have been translated from Robert's work demonstrates the rate at which the news of Becket's murder travelled.

William Fitzstephens, a self-described "citizen of London," clerk, and colleague of Becket, composed his account between 1173 and 1174 and independently from the others. Fitzstephens was present at the murder, and his working relationship with Becket during the trials and during Becket's tenure as Lord Chancellor provides a greater insight into the secular political life of Becket that the other hagiographers were not privy to.[29]

Herbert of Bosham's account of Becket "often runs parallel" to Fitzstephens'.[30] Like Fitzstephens, Herbert worked for Becket during the chancellery but was a successful scholar in addition. Unlike the other hagiographers, Herbert attended to Becket during his exile of 1166-1170. His is one of the later compositions, dated to 1184x1186.[31]

Alan of Tewkesbury, unlike the others, compiled the correspondence of Becket and affixed John of Salisbury's *vita* as a preface. The monumental task of collecting and arranging the letters

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[27] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 7.

[28] Eiríkur Magnússon, ed., *Thómas Saga Erkibyskups* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1:xiv.

[29] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 7; *MHTB* 3:2-154 is the current standard edition of William Fitzstephens' life of Becket, including his prologue, describing the City of London.

[30] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 7; *MHTB* 3:155-554 is the current standard edition of Herbert of Bosham's life of Becket.

[31] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 8.

of Becket was completed around 1174x1176 and served as a historically significant contribution to the religious representation of Becket.[32]

Finally, *Quadrilogus II*, a compilation life by Elias of Evesham, was produced near the turn of the century, 1198x1199.[33] The significance of this account is its gathering and assembling of disparate accounts. John of Salisbury, Benedict of Peterborough, William of Canterbury, Alan of Tewkesbury, and Herbert of Bosham are all present in this narrative. Strikingly, *Quadrilogus II* was recompiled and amended with other accounts only a decade later in 1213 by another monk from the same abbey in Crowland, Roger, who interpolated selections from Edward Grim and William Fitzstephens, as well as further correspondence. Roger's attempt at recompiling the collected lives came to be known as *Quadrilogus I.* The confusing numbering of their titles stems from their edited and publication order.

The narrative of Becket's legendary life as chancellor of England and archbishop of Canterbury, beginning with the aforementioned Latin lives, has been recorded and rewritten in the eight and a half centuries since his murder. Scholarly biographies of Becket, including Frank Barlow's foundational study of the historical figure, are numerous. A particular movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw an increased interest in Becket scholarship. Perhaps one of the most influential yet problematic was A. J. Giles's collection *Vita S. Thomae Cantuariensis, archiepiscopi et martyris,* as this multivolume collection, first published in 1845, would inspire James Craigie Robertson and J. B. Sheppard to reproduce a collection as a part of the Rolls Series (*Rerum britannicarum medii aevi scriptores or Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages*). Robertson describes his own edition of the Latin lives of Becket as being edited with "greater care as to the text, and by an intelligible arrangement of the epistles."[34] With a unified and carefully edited collection of the medieval *lives*, other scholars began composing their own biographies of the martyr, including William Henry Black's edition of Robert

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[32] Barlow, *Thomas Becket,* 7; cf. 12 n.20.

[33] Barlow, *Thomas Becket,* 8; see also *MHTB* 4:266-430 and *MHTB* 2:353-5.

[34] J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard, *MHTB*, 1:xxv. Not listed above is Robertson's own biography of Becket, *Becket: Archbishop of Canterbury* (1859).

of Gloucester's account of the life of Becket, *The Life and Martyrdom of Thomas Beket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (1845); John Morris's *The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (1859); Henry Milman's *Life of Thomas à Becket* (1860); Edwin Abbot's two-volume composite translation of the Latin accounts of Thomas' death, *St. Thomas of Canterbury: His Death and Miracles* (1898); W. H. Hutton's composite translation of the Latin lives, *St. Thomas of Canterbury: An Account of his Life and Fame from the contemporary biographers and other Chroniclers* (1899); Robert Benson's *The Holy Blissful Martyr Saint Thomas of Canterbury* (1910); Alfred Duggan's biography *Thomas Becket of Canterbury* (1952); *The Turbulent Priest: A Life of St Thomas of Canterbury* (1957) by Piers Compton; *Thomas Becket* (1968) by Richard Winston; *Thomas Becket* (1986) by Frank Barlow; *Thomas Becket: His Last Days* (1999) by William Urry; *The Lives of Thomas Becket* (2001) a composite translation by Michael Staunton; *Thomas Becket* (2004) by Anne J. Duggan; *Thomas Becket* (2012) by John Guy; and most recently *Thomas Becket: An Intimate Portrait* (2020) by Cary J. Nederman and Karen Bollermann.

This survey represents approximately 150 years of scholarly interest, with each text borrowing, adapting, or sampling the work of its predecessors. Each account varies slightly, with different agendas and different audiences in mind. Robertson's seminal work in the Rolls Series targets the academic audience, while Benson's work does not attempt to subdue its criticism of the state's role in the life of Becket. Barlow's biography of Becket has become foundational for many scholars for its depth and use of Latin biographies, while Anne Duggan's biography primarily focuses on the legal issues that plagued Becket's career as archbishop. Except for Black's edition of a thirteenth-century chronicle, all scholarly or generalist biographies of Becket have relied on the earliest accounts and narratives, the Latin *vitae*. However, each of these biographies signals to the reader the historical nature of the biography as a scholarly interpretation of Becket's life. Moreover, each of these scholarly works emphasises the role of the Latin *vitae* as foundational documentary evidence, an issue which, as I will demonstrate, is problematic both methodologically and hermeneutically.

Alongside modern scholarly interests, authors, playwrights, and poets in the twentieth century have perpetuated cultural interest in Becket and reinserted him into the popular

imagination. First performed and published in 1935, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* provocatively explores the ethics of duty in the face of rising authoritarianism across much of Europe in the 1930s. This play would contribute to Eliot's Nobel Prize for literature. French playwright Jean Anouilh wrote *Becket*, a similarly successful play recounting Becket's relationship with Henry II. This play served as the basis for a screen adaptation of the same name in 1964, starring Peter O'Toole as Henry and Richard Burton as Becket. Anouilh's depiction of Becket as a Saxon and Henry II as a Norman is historically inaccurate.[35] However, this creative departure from history speaks to the function of Becket as a mercurial and rhetorical figure for writers. *This Turbulent Priest,* performed by Paul Kavanagh and Robert McCrea of Bad Husky Productions, frequently draws audiences during festivals in Canterbury, England, and around the country. This historically informed drama relies heavily on the dialogue of the Latin *vitae* but focuses its attention on the consequences of Becket's murder through the reflections of Henry II.

Authors of historical fiction have also heavily used Becket in their works. Ken Follett, in *The Pillars of the Earth,* attributes the successful completion of his novel to the story of Becket's murder: "the problem of the end of the book, which I had not outlined, was solved by a flash of inspiration when I thought of involving the principal characters in the notorious real-life murder of Thomas Becket."[36]

There is an abundance of medieval sources ranging from prophecies to hagiographies, a few of which I have already mentioned. In this section, I will address the Middle English literary, religious, and historical tradition of documenting and narrating the life of Becket. Like the modern

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[35] W. D. Howarth comments: "the criterion of historical accuracy is of debatable value in judging a work which belongs to the province of imaginative literature." The historicity, or its fidelity to the historical record, and imagination, or creative re-invention of the past, of a text like Anouilh's *Becket,* is important only if that is the aspect by which it is assessed. This issue, in particular, is problematic for any discussion of genre in the Middle Ages, and in particular, for the narratives surrounding Becket, who is mercurial. See Jean Anouilh, *Becket, ou L'Honneur de Dieu,* ed. W. D. Howarth (London: Harrap, 1962), 19.

[36] Ken Follett, preface to *The Pillars of the Earth* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 5.

refashioning of Becket in the theatre, medieval England saw a tradition of Becket plays in the form of pageant plays. The earliest extant record of a Becket performance comes from a chamberlains' account, "Iudentibus interludium Sancti Thome Martiris" in 1385.[37] Unfortunately, no such Becket play exists in the form that a modern audience would recognise. There is a regrettable lack of evidence for how the performances would have looked or in what form the text would appear. What little we know comes from sixteenth-century performances where guild records provide further information regarding the production of Becket pageants, as in the guild accounts of the Skinners from 1519:

> Pageant in Midsummer Show; Life and Martyrdom of Becket, beginning with his father Gilbert, imprisoned in a pageant prison with a jailer, the Soldan, and the "Jewess," presumably Thomas's mother, played by Robert Hynstok. The *crosarius* (Edward Grim) and William de Tracy are also named. Pageant wagon hired.[38]

What evidence exists of the late medieval performances of Becket's pageant play reveals a great deal about preoccupation with the narrative, and the documentary evidence extant across England from the late Middle Ages demonstrates the particular popularity of the legend's performance. The ephemerality and temporality of performance make the study of saints' plays and, for this dissertation, the pageant plays of Becket problematic. While there are hints of popular performances in surviving guild, chamberlain, and warden accounts, the material evidence of actual performances is missing, including costuming, transcripts of dialogue, and sets. Nevertheless, the surviving documentary evidence of Becket plays suggests the popularity of Becket and his continued veneration into the 1500s.

In addition to the SEL, Becket appears in two other late Middle English collections, John Mirk's *Festial* and *Gilte Legende*, the Middle English translation of Jean de Vignay's *Légende dorée,* itself a French translation of *Legenda aurea*, by Jacobus de Voragine. While each collection

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[37] Clifford Davidson, "British Saint Play Records: The Saint Plays and Pageants of Medieval Britain," *Early Drama Art and Music* 2 (2002): 16-7.

[38] Davidson, "British Saint Play Records," 17; cf. Jean Robertson and D. J. Gordon, eds., *A Calendar of Dramatic Records in the Books of the Livery Companies of London, 1485-1640* (Oxford: Malone Society Collections 3, 1954).

differs—the SEL, for example, is verse while *Gilte Legende* and the *Festial* are prose—Becket's appearance in all three speaks to the saint's popularity for both medieval writers and audiences. The genre differences, too, impact how medieval audiences experienced Becket. The *Festial* is a collection of sixty-four sermons on the major Christian feasts. It was composed by John Mirk, an Augustinian prior, in the 1380s, and was a campaign to "provide accessible preaching material for a typical poor parish."[39] John Mirk writes in the prologue:

> I haue drawe this treti sewying owt of *Legenda Aurea* with more adding to, so he that hathe lust to study therein he schal fynde redy of all the principale festis of the ȝere a schort sermon nedful for hym to techy[n] and othur for to lerne.[40]

As I will discuss in Chapter 4, prologues reveal a great deal about the intended audience and their expectations of a work of literature. Furthermore, while John Mirk makes explicit the type of work he created (*treti*, "treatise"), the source (*Legenda aurea*), and the uses of his collection (study), the SEL's prologue is less explicit and leaves more room for interpretation. Both Mirk's *Festial* and *Gilte Legende* are closely related to *Legenda aurea*, whereas the SEL draws its Becket legend from another source, the Latin *Quadrilogus*, further differentiating its version of the Becket legend from the other popular collections, which I discuss further in Chapter 3.

This brief survey of Becket materials from the past 850 years is incomplete. There are the volumes lost to time, disaster, and neglect, others still in languages inaccessible to me. Nevertheless, this survey shows that Becket has been a continual presence in both the historical and literary records since his murder and that the Becket story appears in a variety of genres and styles. No single genre dominates the Becket literary landscape. While recent scholarship on Becket prioritises the scholarly monograph and biography, the medieval literary landscape was not so easily defined. From drama to liturgy, biography to prophecies, writers of all kinds of genres refashion Becket for their own creative, political, religious, or rhetorical ends.

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[39] Susan Powell, introduction to *John Mirk's Festial*, EETS OS 334 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xix.

[40] John Mirk, *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Susan Powell, EETS OS 334 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)*,* 3.

1.4 Overview

My title, "Thomas Becket in the *South English Legendaries*: Genre, Materiality, and Why the Reader Matters," is functional. My holistic approach to the SEL addresses both textual and material manifestations of genre to resituate the reader at the centre of the discourse.

Because of Becket's popularity as a saint, we expect to find documents containing his legend; indeed, his legend circulated independently and as parts of collections of saints' legends. In the SEL, the narrative of Becket accounts for a significant portion of the totality of the SEL. While I will discuss the SEL at length in Chapter 2, here I will outline the rationale behind the study of Becket in the SEL.

Scholarship on the SEL revolves around three distinct but connected areas: ontology, development, and audience or use. Those who study the ontology of the SEL are preoccupied with what the SEL is, either textually, generically, narratively, or materially. Such studies of the ontology of the SEL tend to focus on the collection as a whole. Those who study the development of the SEL are focused almost exclusively on the textual history of the SEL. Finally, those who study the audience of the SEL negotiate between examples of its use among different audiences. Of course, studies of the SEL navigate these three approaches just as I do in this project. My approach, however, is not focused on just one of the above approaches but seeks to explore the development of the SEL through an exploration of its ontology and its audience. In other words, I interrogate the relationship between "what the SEL is" and "how the SEL was used" to explore questions of the SEL's development between its initial creation in the thirteenth century to when it fell out of common use following the English Reformation of the sixteenth century. The SEL, however, is unwieldy, and any such study on the SEL as a whole would be a gargantuan scholarly endeavour. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the SEL contains over 200 distinct legends, each varying in length and context. I have, therefore, limited my analysis of the collection to just one narrative, the account of Becket, because he is a culturally significant figure whose story lends itself to genre hybridisation.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part of this dissertation (Chapters 1-3), I describe the theoretical and methodological framework in which I am engaging, including genre studies, manuscript studies, and reception studies. In the second part of this dissertation

(Chapters 4-7), I provide a series of critical readings of the SEL Becket legend from three different types of readers that I define in Chapter 3: poets, scribes, and book users.

My focus in Chapter 1 has been on Becket as a significant literary, historical, and religious icon, to lay the foundation for my discussion of him in the SEL. Chapter 2 focuses on the SEL, the collection of texts in which the legend of Becket appears. I provide a survey of scholarship on the SEL to illustrate the primarily uniform approach with which the SEL has been studied and situated within the literary context of thirteenth-century England. I provide a backdrop to my study of genre by highlighting approaches to genre from both contemporary and medieval perspectives. I am principally concerned with three medieval genres in this project: hagiography, historiography, and romance. In Chapter 3, I shift away from genre to discuss three key concepts: (1) the idea of the reader and different kinds of readers, including poets, scribes, and book users; (2) the materiality of the manuscripts and its connection to "New Philology," a useful lens through which I explore genre; and (3) finally, the characterisations of Becket as they relate to medieval genre conventions. Through a survey of historical and modern imaginings of Becket, I examine the diverse approaches that different authors, poets, and playwrights have taken to construct different representations of Becket.

In part two, employing the methods established in part one, I analyse the SEL account of Becket according to its development, dissemination, and use. Each chapter discusses a different kind of reader as I define them in Chapter 3: Chapter 4 focusses on poets; Chapter 5 focusses on scribes and those who produced manuscripts, other than poets; and Chapter 6 focusses on book users. Identifying different kinds of readers—poet, scribe, and user—I examine how each kind of reader employs or understands genre and how their understanding informs their interpretation.

Chapter 4 examines the work of the poets of the SEL accounts of Becket through the text or the words on the page. Here, I discuss framing as a genre feature and provide three different genre readings of the SEL Becket accounts: a hagiographical work, a historiographical work, and a work of Middle English romance. This chapter argues that the poets of the SEL integrate specific genre features rhetorically to frame the legend of Becket, and in particular certain sections of the legend of Becket, drawing on a variety of different genres. The poets' rhetorical use of genre in the legend consequently impacts how manuscripts containing the legend were produced.

Chapter 5 examines how scribal practice informs the ways in which genre is represented on the page and in the document through compilation and paratexts. In this section, I differentiate between the text and the layout. While the scribe had control over both, I am more concerned with the layout as an artefact of genre. Consequently, Chapter 5 explores the scribe as an intercessor between the poets and readers of the SEL Becket legend, as it is the scribe's product with which later readers engaged. This chapter therefore contributes to our understanding of both what the SEL is and how it evolved over time.

Chapter 6 examines three known readers of the SEL from three different periods: medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation. These three readers demonstrate the shifting attitudes towards Becket and the reception of the SEL across these three periods. In this section I argue that the readings of the SEL Becket legend in these periods are informed by attitudes towards genre. Such a historical survey best illustrates shifting perceptions of genre and their utility as an interpretive tool. Significantly, in this chapter I propose that the reading engagement by certain readers is indicative of their responses, not just to the Becket narrative, but to how the legend is presented, namely through its genre features.

In Chapter 7, I identify how this type of study can contextualise other medieval works of literature like the SEL so that we might interrogate medieval works of literature from the perspectives of medieval writers and readers, in a sense to read over their shoulders. Thus, each chapter will engage in a relationship between Becket's legend, the materiality of the SEL documents in which the legend circulated, the rhetorical use of genre, and the impact that genre has on the reader of the SEL, be they the poets, scribes, or book users.

This project is narrowly focused on three medieval genres as they are manifested in one of the legends of the SEL. However, the length and breadth of material—historical, biblical, literary, and scientific—covered in the variety of texts which appear in the SEL collection suggest that further studies of this type might offer a greater insight into the proclivity of medieval authors to hybridise and experiment with their languages and literary cultures. Furthermore, the SEL is evidence of an audience that did not resist such literary experimentation but rather relished the work as it spoke to the variety of their possible interests.

2. Approaches to Genre in the South English Legendaries

There is a dangerous critical heresy, typical of our time, according to which we can do anything we like with a work of literature, reading into it whatever our most uncontrolled impulses dictate to us. This is not true. Literary works encourage freedom of interpretation, because they offer us a discourse that has many layers of reading and place before us the ambiguities of language and real life.

- Umberto Eco, *On Literature*[1]

In his essay "On Some Functions of Literature," Umberto Eco points towards, then untangles, the existential threat that interpretation poses for meaning-making: "The world of literature is a universe in which it is possible to establish whether a reader has a sense of reality or is the victim of his own hallucinations."[2] Our interpretation of a literary work is informed by and predicated on our preconceived notions about what we think we are reading. As I will soon discuss, this Jaussian approach resolves what Eco might call our more hallucinogenic tendencies and grounds our interpretation in a reality founded on tradition and expectation. However, we need to establish a shared lexicon so that, despite our different perspectives, our interpretation, and descriptions of our experiences are grounded in the same vocabulary and informed by layers of meaning, not misunderstandings and misattributions. This chapter will outline these layers and provide a framework for describing precisely what the SEL is, stylistically and functionally, and how genre functions as a critical layer of reading. However, before delving into the relationship between genre and Becket's

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[1] Umberto Eco, "On Some Functions of Literature," in *On Literature,* trans. Martin McLaughlin (London: Harcourt 2004), 4.

[2] Umberto Eco, "Some Functions of Literature," 7.

legend in the SEL, it is first necessary to lay the foundation by contextualising the SEL with respect to genre. In this chapter, I examine what the SEL is, and how it was used, before examining medieval and modern perceptions of the three genres—hagiography, history, and romance—thereby responding to two of the four areas of research I introduced in Chapter 1: how we might understand the SEL, what it is and, how it changed, and how concepts of genre enable a greater understanding of the SEL and its development over time.

2.1 Approaches to the SEL

The SEL poses two distinct ontological issues for medievalists and literary critics: first, modern representations of the medieval text depict and present a static corpus of saints' lives; and second, while the term *legendary* is an appropriate label, it misrepresents the entirety of the collection as a single cohesive work. The following chapter will break down these related but distinct ontological issues before turning to the manuscript evidence in Chapter 3 to reveal how these issues can be better understood and approached to provide a more informed contextualisation of the material.

The *South English Legendary* is not a historical title. Carl Horstmann gave the collection this title for his seminal work on the collection in the nineteenth century. The modern title identifies the language (English), the region in which the collection originated (southern England), and the collection's broad genre (legendary). The *Early South English Legendary*, as Horstmann believed, "is a *Liber Festivalis*, containing sermons, or materials for sermons, for the Festivals of the year in the order of the Calendar, and comprehends not only Saints' Lives for Saints' Days, but also a *Temporale* for the festivals of Christ, an Advent and Christmas cycle, the Passion and an Easter cycle."[3] His inclusion of the term "early" suggests a "late" SEL which is difficult to identify given the variation between all the extant witnesses. By retaining the title Horstmann gave to the collection, D'Evelyn and Mill, the editors of the second EETS edition, firmly cemented the

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[3] Carl Horstmann, introduction to *The Early South English Legendary*, EETS OS 87 (London: Trübner), vii.

collection's title as the *South English Legendary*.[4] Thomas Liszka, in his article "The South English Legendar<u>ies</u>" (2001), challenges the use of this title as the collection never circulated under this name in the Middle Ages and this title does not appear in any extant witness of the collection.[5] Instead, he promotes the plural "legendaries" to account for the variation inherent to the collection. He decentres both the scholarly debate and the editing tradition of the SEL by reflecting the variation of the collection in the collection's title.

To avoid unnecessary confusion, I propose a few key terms related to the textual tradition of the SEL. I hope that, with these terms, scholars of the SEL can disambiguate the relationships between different components of the SEL and their constituent parts. *SEL-texts* are all texts modern scholars assume to be included in the SEL. The *SEL-document* is any document that includes any SEL-text, regardless of how many. Finally, *SEL-collections* are those SEL-documents which contain exclusively or almost exclusively SEL-texts. For example, a legend like Becket's constitutes an SEL-text. The legend of Becket is a discrete literary unit that makes an SEL-document, for example, Cd, when bound with other SEL-texts. L and G are SEL-collections.

The SEL is such a large and problematic collection of hagiographical documents because of the number of SEL-texts which circulated as a part of the collection, and because many SEL-texts were introduced later in the collection's production. Across 69[6] manuscript witnesses or SEL-documents, there are 25 SEL-collections, or witnesses which are textually significant, and approximately 204 SEL-texts. There is ambiguity about certain SEL-texts, like the stories of Judas and Pilate which function as counterpoints to the morally instructive *vitae* of the saints. While they are structurally similar to the *vitae*, they lack basic genre functions that the other hagiographic texts

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[4] Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anne J. Mill, *The South English Legendary,* EETS OS 235 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[5] Thomas R. Liszka, "The South English Legendar<u>ies</u>," in *Rethinking the South English Legendaries,* edited by Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 25.

[6] At the time of submission, this number is accurate, though recent findings, post submission, will increase this number.

exhibit. Other texts, like part three of the legend of St. Michael, are generically problematic: though the text is about a saint, it functions more like a pseudo-scientific treatise.

Most of the SEL-documents circulated with fewer than ten SEL-texts. By a significant margin, the largest collection is Bodley MS 779 (B), which contains 143 SEL-texts. This manuscript was produced in the mid-fifteenth century. In contrast, the earliest extant SEL-document and -collection, L, was produced around 1280 and contains only 68 SEL-texts. Such a stark contrast immediately challenges the notion that the SEL is stable but veritably demonstrates its *mouvance*.

Mouvance is a term that adds value to the scholarly discourse. While Paul Zumthor coined the term in his 1972 article "Essaie de poétique médiévale" to account for the textual mobility of medieval French texts, the term also accurately describes the textual variation of anonymously written works like the SEL, including "modifications of dialect and wording" and the "rewriting and the loss, replacement, or rearrangement of whole sections of a work."[7] *Mouvance* explains four defining features and characteristics of the SEL's textual and manuscript traditions that Liszka seeks to account for in his challenge to Horstmann's, D'Evelyn's, and Mill's titling of the collection: (1) the individual legends within the collection are not static entities invulnerable to change; (2) both the legends and the collection as a whole were vulnerable to fragmentation; (3) the production and circulation of the collection illustrate a complex textual transmission; and (4) the corpus showed growth between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and use into sixteenth century.

Since current editions of the SEL marginalise and do not effectively untangle these four textual complexities, much of the scholarship on the SEL engages with individual legends or certain manuscripts within the corpus. Görlach summarises the current scholarly dilemmas:

> While a collection like the SEL must obviously be considered as a whole, the only approach at once thorough and feasible seems to be a close study of the genesis, sources, and later developments of a single legend. It is this dilemma that has prevented scholars interested in topics with wider implications from making reliable statements on the

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[7] Bella Millett, "What is *mouvance*," Wessex Parallel Web Texts, last modified September 9, 2014. http://wpwt.soton.ac.uk/mouvance/mouvance.htm.

complete collection or those who had investigated a single legend from making convincing or verifiable generalizations.[8]

Still, later in his treatment of the SEL, he writes:

> When scrutinising critical editions and other treatments of SEL legends more than twenty years ago, I found that the discussion of textual traditions and sources was so superficial or so patchy that the hypotheses made by individual authors were impossible to prove or to refute and that the findings did not allow others to build on such shaky foundations.[9]

Görlach identifies the limitations of scholarship on SEL. Because scholars can effectively engage with only one legend at a time, little can be said about the relationship between different legends or even different versions of the same legend. Likewise, since the relationship between the manuscript traditions is not fully understood, any claim made about the manuscript tradition can be neither confirmed nor refuted. Görlach identifies the hurdles that SEL scholarship must overcome to gain a greater insight into the SEL, including the ontological issues of the SEL that I raised earlier. While I will not claim to produce more secure foundations for studying the SEL as a whole, I will untangle, at least in part, how we might examine the SEL and the legend of Becket.

Scholars have traditionally defined the SEL as a thirteenth-century religious verse collection concerning saints. The collection can be divided into two distinct sections: the *temporale,* which are the movable feasts of the Christian calendar, typically centred around Easter, including the Old Testament History and various narratives about the lives of Christ and Mary, and the second section, with which I am most interested, the *sanctorale,* which are the verse-lives of the saints and poems associated with the fixed feasts of the Christian calendar.[10] The SEL was a monumental

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[8] Manfred Görlach, *The South English Legendary, Gilte Legende and Golden Legend*, Braunschweiger Anglistische Arbeiten, Heft 3 (Braunschweig: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1972), 1.

[9] Manfred Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1998), 4.

[10] Pickering refers to the movable feasts as the "expository *temporale,*" while scholarship includes the lives of Christ and Mary as well as the History of the Cross in the *temporale*. See O.

literary and religious undertaking. In length, it is comparable to the *Cursor Mundi*, an encyclopedic history of the world from creation to judgement. It is the sixteenth most commonly copied Middle English poem with 34 textually significant witnesses based on a count of extant manuscripts. This number balloons to 72 manuscripts if we include all partial or fragmentary witnesses. This would make the SEL rival even the *Canterbury Tales*, extant in 88 textually significant witnesses, 84 manuscripts and 4 incunables.[11] The SEL's early composition date, approximately 1275, suggests an emphasis on composing English religious texts, along with *The Prick of Conscience* and *The Northern Homily Cycle,* instead of French and Latin religious literature.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the SEL circulated under many different names, and each name points toward medieval perceptions of what the SEL was. As Liszka notes, there are only six titles under which the SEL circulated: *Vita Sanctorum,* in MSS. H and M; *Legenda sanctorum,* in P; *Legenda sanctorum in lingua Anglicana,* in D; *Legenda aurea,* in G; and *Temporale in Anglicis* in I.[12] In most of these, the collection circulated as a *legenda*. It is possible that due to the SEL's production shortly after the composition of the *Legenda aurea* (*La*), the mid-thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives by the Dominican monk and future archbishop of Genoa Jacobus de Voragine, the English poet(s) or scribes co-opted the same title given the immense popularity of the Latin collection.

Because the SEL's production is so close in time to that of *La*, many of the issues raised by scholars concern the two collections. In his extensive analysis of the collection, Görlach argues

S. Pickering, "The Expository *Temporale* Poems of the *South English Legendary*," *Leeds Studies in English*, n. s. (1978), 1.

[11] Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 737.

[12] Liszka, "The South English Legendaries," 25. In his article, Liszka notes that Horstmann proposed the medieval title *Mirrour of Saints' Lives*, but Liszka jokes that, like the proof for Fermat's last theorem, no such evidence exists.

that the *La* "has proved to be *the* decisive source for vernacular legends (not only in form of trans-lations, paraphrase or allusion, but also as a pattern for arrangement)."[13] While the relationship between the SEL and *La* cannot be overlooked, others have raised issues with the idea that the SEL is simply an English translation of *La*. Beverly Boyd emphasises that "we are led to suspect that the scribes had no more idea than we have what the contents of the *South English Legendary* were supposed to be."[14] Boyd's comments are particularly poignant given the inconsistency between the various manuscript witnesses, an aspect of the collection that audiences do not experience in mod-ern editions. "The materials which Horstmann called the *Early South English Legendary or Lives of Saints,"* writes Boyd, "stem from fragments involving a *liber festivalis*, and at least one revision of it, and […] neither original nor its revision was known in complete condition to the scribes of any of the extant manuscripts."[15] Unlike Boyd, Görlach imagines lost manuscripts in order to compensate for lacunae. In short, Görlach assumes an SEL that was a stable, cohesive work at one point in its textual history. The differences between Boyd's and Görlach's visions of the historical SEL are numerous and complex. However, their conceptions of the SEL might be a matter of examining the same coin from two different sides. While Görlach shows a preoccupation with the collection as a whole, Boyd wrestles with the individual legends themselves.

To create compromise, William Robins summarises the significant differences between the two prevailing ontologies of the SEL: "Their differences derive in large measure from relying on contrasting ways of construing the nature of a 'collection.'"[16] These differences have governed scholarly understanding of SEL development. While Görlach and Boyd were at odds with their understanding of the production of the SEL, their theories are complementary. Görlach assumed

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[13] Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, 4.

[14] Beverly Boyd, "New Light on the 'South English Legendary,'" *Texas Studies in English* 37 (1958): 191.

[15] Boyd, "New Light," 193.

[16] William Robins, "Modular Dynamics in the South English Legendary," in *Rethinking the South English Legendaries,* ed. Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 192.

that the SEL was like a calendar and had a limited set of slots occupied by a limited number of shorter texts or legends. Robins describes this model as "slots in the liturgical cycle."[17] The consequence of Görlach's narrow understanding of the SEL has had long-lasting and prohibitive consequences that can be identified through a brief scan of SEL-related texts in the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse* (*DIMEV*). Multiple redactions of legends that co-circulated, like the legend of Becket, are not considered discrete texts.

Moreover, nested collections of short texts, like the Miracles of St. Mary, are often perceived as discrete texts by modern scholars, while medieval and early modern English readers saw them as a single work. While we readily provide each miracle story with its own DIMEV number, medieval audiences, especially early modern audiences, did not differentiate the different narratives. This is readily apparent in manuscripts like Cd, which I discuss in Chapter 6. Boyd's less stringent policy on what did or did not constitute an SEL-text does not account for the initial development of the SEL. However, it provides a better understanding of why a witness like B is just as textually significant as G. Just because later witnesses seem to have a more *ad hoc* approach to compilation should in no way impact our understanding of early developments. In short, the SEL was both programmatic in its conception (Görlach's stance) and *ad hoc* in its execution (Boyd's stance). Robins' considerable work to reconcile both theories expands our understanding of the SEL as a living compilation or, as Robins suggests, a "tradition."

Robins' description of the SEL as a "tradition," as opposed to a cohesive collection, leads to the notion that the SEL is a corpus of texts rather than a text. Likewise, Liszka's observations about the medieval titling of SEL collections lead to the notion that the SEL is not just a collection of texts but a collection of different collections of texts, hence the pluralisation of *Legendaries*. Ultimately, instead of focusing on the relationship between the SEL and other works like *La*, we might focus on the dynamic relationships between the different SEL witnesses. Indeed, *La* was an influential source, and certain legends within the SEL tradition are anglicisations of sections of *La*; however, scholars should first analyse the SEL on its own merits, not simply as an English alternative to *La*. Admittedly, the historical significance of *La* informs both the scholarly fiction of

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[17] Robins, "Modular Dynamics," 193.

the title of the SEL and the debate concerning its textual history. However, we must consider other cultural and literary forces at work in the thirteenth century that informed and drove the development of the SEL tradition.

Scholarly debate about the metre of the SEL presupposes theories about the origin and textual development of the SEL, therefore attesting to the significance of the ontology question. Such debates situate the SEL within a broader literary, cultural, and religious context. Scholars have variously described the metre of the SEL as Alexandrine or septenary. As Görlach notes, "there is much variation between the 'regular' line of fourteen syllables and seven stresses and all kinds of deviation."[18] This discrepancy, i.e., Alexandrine vs septenary, results from the wide variation between the manuscript witnesses and the idiosyncratic nature of scribal practice. David A. Lawton suggests that metrical confusion in the SEL can be attributed to the fact that "some of the loose septenaries of the [SEL] read more like alexandrines."[19] For example, Görlach posits that there is a "general tendency" to "regularise" the metre, but that certain redactions, including P and M, show evidence of scribes who were more concerned with "pure rhyme" than with metrical consistency.[20] Based on this observation, Görlach claims that

> Since the original texts were probably never intended to conform with a strict metrical pattern, and later scribes did not care much about the metre, this aspect does not seem to contribute to a more reliable definition of the unity and the scope of the original collection.[21]

However, such a reductive claim is predicated on the idea that witnesses produced later were somehow corrupted. While problematic, this view of the SEL fits within Görlach's hypotheses of a lost original SEL-text. In other words, Görlach's scansion of the SEL is not informed by the actual

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[18] Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary,* Leeds Texts and Monographs NS 6 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1974), 11.

[19] David A. Lawton, "Middle English Unrhymed Alliterative Poetry and the *South English Legendary*," *English Studies* 61, no. 5 (1980): 393.

[20] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 11.

[21] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 11.

literary traditions within which the SEL was produced but based on a sort of scholarly fiction or idealised version of what the SEL should be.

Like Görlach, Thompson broadly defines the metre of the SEL as "seven-stress, roughly iambic, rhyming couplets."[22] Thompson's use of the term "septenary" to describe the metre of the SEL closely connects the SEL tradition to the prosody of certain Anglo-Norman, continental French, and Latin literary traditions. She continues, "the [SEL] uses a version of the Latin septenary, albeit one more successfully adapted to the demands of *popular entertainment*, which itself permits a fuller development and expression of a specifically English poetic style."[23] Rhiannon Purdie notes that the Middle English septenary, which is "equivalent to the Latin trochaic tetrameter line," is an evolution of the Latin Victorine stanza.[24] The Middle English septenary couplet is recognisable by the seven-stress line with a medial caesura following the fourth stress. Notably, Purdie suggests that the ballad quatrain emerged from the Middle English septenary couplet using line breaks instead of caesuras. Using Purdie's notation, the SEL's metre is represented by aa^7bb^7, while the ballad quatrain is $a^4b^3c^4b^3$. These are two visually different methods to represent the same metre. The distinction between the ballad quatrain and the septenary long-line is primarily graphic. As Purdie notes, "the ease with which slightly different tail-rhyme stanzas were equated in practice can be seen in numerous poems where the stanza form gradually […] alters as the poem progresses."[25] In one SEL witness, D, we see this in action (p. 124, Figure 5.1).

Thompson suggests that the septenary long-line "allows for the subtlety of dramatic and poetic effect."[26] Certainly, syntactic units of meaning are carried over line breaks with regularity

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[22] Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 9.

[23] Thompson, *Everyday Saints,* 54. Emphasis mine.

[24] Rhiannon Purdie, *Anglicising Romance: Tail-Rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 30. For a longer discussion of the evolution of graphic tail-line and the development of Middle English tail rhyme, see Purdie, 27-31.

[25] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 30.

[26] Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, 9.

in the SEL. However, it is worth pointing out that the Middle English septenary in the SEL is an emergent metre with various graphical forms. While it emerges from other poetic traditions, it is a Middle English verse form, situating the SEL within a Middle English literary context, not simply an anglicisation of French or Latin verse. The debates over whether or not the SEL is Alexandrine or septenary and how consistently scribes maintained metre over rhyme affirm the importance of the SEL's ontology and attest to the difficulty in defining what the SEL is.

SEL-texts are graphically presented in the septenary long-line or the ballad quatrain. As I previously mentioned, D switches freely between aa^7bb^7 and $a^4b^3c^4b^3$, though larger units of meaning are marked by initials and not stanza layout. *The Life of St. Margaret* in the Auchinleck manuscript, a saints' legend unrelated to the SEL, is similarly written out in the septenary long-line.[27] Another SEL text found in Cambridge University Library Dd.1.1. (Ux) is written in ballad quatrains.[28] In D, for example, the opening of the *Banna sanctorum* appears thus:

> Now bloweth þe newe frut
> Þat late bygan to sprynge
> Þat to his kynde eritage
> Mannekynde shal brynge[29]

whereas in G, it appears thus:

> Now bloes þe newe fruyt ꞓ þat late bigan to springe[30]

While Görlach and Lawton see the metre of the SEL as a result of poetic degradation and corruption, Thompson attempts to explain the SEL's verse form as a consequence of its dramatic and narrative needs. Purdie notes that there is often "uncertainty about the distinction between septenary couplets and ballad quatrains."[31] Perhaps this is because they are two graphic ways of representing the same metre. The SEL's use of both suggests something about its literary context. Perhaps a better explanation of the SEL's metre is its position between an emerging Middle English

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[27] Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates' 19.2.1, f. 16va.

[28] Cambridge, University Library Dd.1.1, f. 296v.

[29] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 463 (D), fol. 1r.

[30] London, Lambeth Palace 223 (G), fol. 48r.

[31] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 30n.

poetic tradition, especially one focused on entertainment, and a compromise for scribes who navigated the transmission of various texts in multilingual England.

Following the Fourth Lateran Council, there was a general increase in literature "designed to educate the clergy, then the laity in the doctrine of the Church."[32] One consequence was a marked increase in not just Latinate writing, but also vernacular writings targeted toward the laity. Laurel Braswell labels this increase in religious literature the "didactic movement" and argues convincingly that the thirteenth century was "characterized by a succession of theological, homiletic, and liturgical documents."[33] During this time, works like *La,* while still in Latin, fulfilled in part the mandate to provide moral instruction to both a clerical and lay audience. Of course, by virtue of its composition in Latin, lay access to *La* would be limited to those literate few, i.e. those that could read Latin. While a lay audience may have experienced the collection through a priest's sermons, ocular or personal reading of the collection would be limited to those who could read Latin. The SEL filled this gap in access to edifying saints' legends for an English-speaking and -reading audience. Additionally, it is worth noting that there was an increase in the production of English vernacular works during this time, either translations of Latin texts or "original" compositions.

Works like the *Ormulum, Handlyng Synne,* and the SEL participated in this didactic movement. Various chronicles, romances, lyrics, lais, gestes, and debates were produced and disseminated in this period. While the thirteenth century may have produced several important religious works, it also produced many secular works. While the *Ormulum*, *Handlyng Synne,* and the SEL seem to follow the mandate of Lateran Four, the SEL stands apart for its distinctive use of genre. Braswell identifies three genre traditions that were promoted and consequently emerged as priorities for Christian authors following Lateran Four: homily, theology, and liturgy. While the SEL is often, if not always, grouped with the religious writings of the thirteenth century, its ability to provide instruction is not strictly limited to the homiletic, theological, or liturgical. Braswell

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[32] Laurel Braswell, "The South English Legendary: A Study in Middle English Religious Literature of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries" PhD diss., (University of Toronto, 1942), 1.

[33] Braswell, "South English Legendary," 1.

moved beyond comparing the SEL to *La*, but the breadth of her study still focuses on a selection of texts that fall into the same religious category. New, exciting opportunities and discoveries await if we turn away from the religious-focused literary traditions and turn instead to works of literature whose primary function was not religious edification but entertainment. As I will demonstrate, it is clear that the poet(s), redactors, scribes, and later readers approached the SEL not explicitly as a collection of religious legends but as religious legends informed by and sculpted by non-religious works, including works of popular culture, like romances, and scholarly works, like legal histories. For example, we should take equal consideration of the impact that Middle English romance had on the development of the SEL and works like *La*. The connections between the SEL and its co-circulating texts provide the most significant clues to the SEL's purpose and audience, thus addressing the second of the ontological problems: the purpose of the SEL.

A greater understanding of the SEL itself and how scholars have approached the collection reveals how genre can enable a greater understanding of the collection as a whole, and in particular how it was received by audiences. By contextualising the SEL within a broader literary tradition, we begin to see how it followed literary conventions, but more importantly, how it also subverted expectations. However, because the SEL collection is so large and diverse, to meaningfully make sense of the collection, as I indicated in Chapter 1, it is useful to examine the Becket legend to identify how that text fits into the SEL tradition and how the poets situate it within the broader context of Becket's different legends.

2.2 Becket in the SEL

There are three significant features to address when discussing the SEL and the SEL-text of the legend of Becket: the number of extant witnesses, the numerous ways in which Becket is inserted into the SEL-collection, and the disparity in the length of the texts of Becket compared to other SEL-texts.

The SEL-text of Becket traditionally is divided into two discrete texts: the *vita,* which exists in two redactions—*Life of St. Thomas Becket* (Harley text; *DIMEV* 1507) and *Life of St. Thomas Becket* (Laud text; *DIMEV* 6687)—and *Translation of Thomas Becket* (*DIMEV* 4768). Collectively, these three texts appear in 22 SEL-documents, or nearly one-third of all extant

witnesses, including fragmentary witnesses. If we do not differentiate the two redactions of the *Life of Thomas Becket*, then his life is among the five most popular SEL-texts, along with St. Dunstan, St. John the Evangelist, St. Mary of Egypt, and St. Michael Part III. The Harley redaction is the most frequently reproduced version of the story, appearing in 16 witnesses. The Laud version, the earlier of the two, appears in only five witnesses. The *translatio* appears in 14 witnesses, ten of which circulated with the Harley redaction, three with the Laud redaction, and once in isolation, in Br. DIMEV erroneously suggests that Br contains two accounts of the translation of Becket, but it actually contains only one on fol. 95r-95v. Br is anomalous in this regard.

There is sufficient textual and documentary evidence to suggest that the poet(s) intended Becket to appear in more than just a *vita* and *translatio*. With respect to genre, the account of Becket is divided into clear and distinct textual units: (1) a prologue, (2) *vita*, (3) *passio,* (4) *miraculum,* and (5) *translatio.* While the *passio* and *miraculum* are genre subdivisions of the *vita*, the prologue and *translatio* are clearly and deliberately indicated in both the text, through genre signifiers, and the document, through paratextual reading aids, as I will discuss in Chapter 5. The prologue is particularly significant as it appears as a distinctly separate text in the earliest witness of the SEL. Likewise, the *translatio* of Becket is also clearly demarcated as a distinct textual unit. A comparison between the prologue and the *translatio* is important, especially in light of the fact that Becket's translation narrative appears in manuscript witnesses that do not contain the longer SEL account of Becket, like Br, though it does contain a quatrain life, *Jesu that Died Upon the Rood* (DIMEV 2911).

The length of the life of Becket is also a significant feature of the text. By a significant margin, it is the longest of the many SEL-texts. At over 2500 lines long, it makes up a disproportionate amount of the SEL as a collection. There are two possible reasons for its length: heightened interest in the English saint's life and the possibility that it was originally an independent verse translation of another text and became attached to the SEL. The length of the Becket legend in the SEL is certainly noteworthy, especially as it enables the poet to engage with various genres and reach a broad audience.

Finally, worth noting is the date of the feast of Becket's martyrdom, December 29th. As it is one of the last feasts celebrated in the collection, by date, it also functions, as Catherine Sanok

suggests, as a sort of "book end" to the collection.[34] While the *Banna sanctorum* begins the collection, the legend of Becket concludes the SEL, epitomising the idea of the "hardi knight" first explained in the prologue. However, the collocation of these two SEL-texts is rarely this simple. I discuss the *Banna sanctorum* at length in Chapter 4 and the collocation of the Becket legend more closely in Chapter 5.

2.3 Approaches to Genre

One difficulty in discussing the idea of genre is the nebulous concept of genre itself.[35] Not only do genres change and evolve, but the lexicon with which we discuss genre can be inconsistent

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[34] Catherine Sanok, *New Legends of England: Forms of Community in Late Medieval Saints' Lives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 47.

[35] My discussion of literary genre depends mainly on the following studies: Paul Strohm's analysis of medieval terms for genre in "*Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende*: Some Generic Terms in Middle English Hagiographical Narrative," *Chaucer Review* 10, no. 1 (1975), and "*Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie*: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives," *Speculum* 46, no. 2 (1971). My discussion of modern genre theory is grounded in Alistair Fowler's work *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), which I respond to using the work of Hans Robert Jauss in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). I additionally draw on a variety of modern and medieval sources for definitions of hagiography, including Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints,* trans. Donald Attwater (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962) and Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae Patrum*, *MGH: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum,* ed. B. Krusch (Hanover, 1969). For my definition of historiography, I discuss Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Michael Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), and Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies (or Origins),* edited by W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911); my discussion of romance is informed by Denise Ming-Yueh Wang, "Generic Problems in Middle English Romance: A

depending on the context and materials discussed. For example, what we understand to be romance now differs significantly from what a medieval audience would understand to be romance. Likewise, we might discuss romance as a genre or as a mode. To engage in genre theory is to contend with the mercurial vocabulary. Thus, discussing the genre of a work like the SEL is complicated because we often misunderstand medieval approaches to genre and because our lexicon has since evolved. First, I will discuss the variety of terms scholars have applied to the SEL to lay the foundation for discussing medieval approaches to genre. I will then turn to greater issues in genre theory that we must contend with before finally turning to medieval approaches to genre, especially hagiography, history, and romance.

As a consequence of the growth of the SEL over the 200 years of its production, it is difficult to pinpoint with confidence the moment at which it became the SEL as it is currently recognised or if the modern scholar's platonic SEL ever existed at all. Resolving such an ontological problem is beyond this project's scope, but, as Görlach emphasises, sustained research on the SEL must begin with an in-depth analysis of the manuscript witnesses. If the manuscripts themselves do not immediately reveal their ontology, then analysis of their genre signifiers provides an alternative ontology from which we can press forward.

Paul Strohm's work on medieval genre terms provides a helpful lexicon, a communal foundation upon which the SEL can be better understood. Within the broader genre boundary of *hagiography*, the *legenda* "originated as a neutral plural marginal designation for those portions of hagiographical writings which were 'to be read' in liturgical services—normally, as *lectiones* of the nocturnes of the matins service."[36] The general division of the SEL into the *temporale* and

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Jaussian/Bahktinian Study" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1993), Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975), Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), James F. Knapp and Peggy A. Knapp, *Medieval Romance: The Aesthetic of Possibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), and Carol Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

[36] Strohm, "*Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende*," 71.

sanctorale indicates as much, referring to those parts of the missal. Throughout the Middle Ages, the term *legendary* expanded "to include all popular collections of lives and passions of confessors and martyrs, private and non-liturgical as well as liturgical in intention."[37] This expansion of the genre term *legenda*, suggests Strohm*,* "can be explained not only by the impetus of the popularity of Jacobus's *Legenda*, but also by the inclusiveness with which the *legenda* conveniently embraced a wide variety of hagiographical genres."[38] The *legenda* became an umbrella under which all manner of hagiographical writings could appear, including *vita*, *passio*, *miraculum*, *translatio*, *inventio*, *gesta*, *historia*, *sermo*, *visio*, and *legenda*.[39]

In a manner similar to Strohm's general statements about hagiographical documents of the thirteenth century, but addressing the specifics of the *SEL,* Derek Pearsall identifies many different types or genre boundaries within the SEL:

> Materials for the Legendary were drawn from a variety of hagiographical traditions, English, Latin, and Anglo-Norman, and the Legendary absorbed also a great variety of other material: legends and folk-lore, in the accounts of purgatory (St Patrick) and the blessed isles (St Brendan); medieval natural science, in the account of hell in St Michael; recent English history, in the story of St Thomas and St Edmund Rich; even romantic adventures, in the story of St Thomas's parents.[40]

However, Pearsall tends to deride the SEL for its apparent lack of some undefined literary quality: "accumulation is the whole principle of such a work: if one saint's life is good, three score are better, and the same with tortures and miracles."[41] Certainly, while the SEL grew by accretion as it developed, its growth is not the result of its easily imitable style but rather the principle of broad appeal. As the SEL grew, its textual tradition became increasingly complicated.

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[37] Strohm, "*Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende*," 71.

[38] Strohm, "*Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende*," 72.

[39] Strohm, "*Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende*," 72; Strohm differentiates *legenda* and *Legenda*, where the former references a literary tradition (*romaunce*, *lyf*), the latter references a collection of hagiographical documents. See Strohm's "*Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie*: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives," *Speculum* 46, no. 2 (1971): 348-359.

[40] Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1977), 104.

[41] Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, 104.

Thus, the genre of the SEL is problematic. Modern conceptions of genre do not easily map onto the meandering, often interwoven, and liminal medieval conceptions of genre. In fact, using the term *genre* when discussing medieval texts is problematic, given that the term did not appear until the late eighteenth century.[42] Alastair Fowler comments: "Medieval literature can easily seem a generic chaos. As we have seen, even when familiar terms are used, the works they label […] have very little in continuity with the corresponding genres."[43] This is not to suggest that medieval authors and poets did not conform to a *kind* with regularity during the development and production of literary texts, nor does this suggest that medieval authors and poets rejected conformity to expectations and traditions. To wrestle medieval texts into neatly defined boundaries, which modern genre theorists have been predisposed to do, is to misunderstand how medieval authors and poets understood the act of composition and the types of discourse possible. Medieval authors were aware of genre and its importance even though their lexicon differs significantly from that of the modern genre theorist.

Fowler rejects the idea that genres "exist simply and immutably, [and] that they are permanently established once and for all, so that they apply equally to all literature, before and after, past, present, and to come;"[44] however, this argument still insists upon genre as a necessity. As I will shortly discuss, it is not the existence of genre which is problematic, but the notion that genre is primarily a system of classification, fixed or unfixed. Fowler's observation that genre cannot exist immutably is a step in the right direction but is still problematic. Fowler does not take issue with genre itself, but with the idea that genres exist in fixed forms. Moreover, by shifting the lexicon of genre theory from genre to *type*, Fowler simply replaces one word with another. By attempting to salvage genre theory from those who would insist that "genres are definable and

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[42] Published in 1831, a letter between Charles Jenner and David Garrick composed in 1770 makes use of *genre* in our modern sense of categories of art. See *OED,* s. v. "genre, n.," accessed June 14, 2021. https://www-oed-com.cyber.usask.ca/view/Entry/77629.

[43] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 191.

[44] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 24.

mutually exclusive,"[45] Fowler is still preoccupied with the idea that genre is primarily a system of classification, even if he begins to shift the lexicon of genre theory.

Take, for example, a few key terms he introduces: *genre mixture*, *hybrid,* and *genre modulation*. Functionally they appear to be identical. A *genre mixture* is diametrically opposed to the *pure genre* which the classicists and neoclassicists praised above all. Fowler never explicitly states what a genre mixture is, but only that it is not a pure genre. He summarises his thoughts by recalling Northrop Frye's theory of genres: "mixture is simply combining these [novel, confession, anatomy, romance], regardless of structure."[46] The *hybrid* is simply a genre mixture "where two or more complete repertoires [genre markers] are present in such proportions that no one of them dominates."[47] Both of these rely upon an already established system of categories, like Frye's, which self-identify as particular genres so that the mixture, or hybrid, can be determined. *Genre modulation*, like *hybrid,* is "a modal abstraction with a token repertoire."[48] Fowler's system is teleological. In order to identify a genre *hybrid*, or even *genre modulation*, a reader must already be acquainted with genre markers of two (or more) distinct genres. Fowler acknowledges the necessity of recognition: "The processes of genre recognition are in fact fundamental to the reading process. Often, we may not be aware of this. But whenever we approach a work of an unfamiliar genre—new or old—our difficulties return us to fundamentals."[49] Ardis Butterfield suggests that modern scholars are predisposed to the pursuit of genre theory as "a desire for crude taxonomy,"[50] by claiming that Fowler's argument insists upon genre classification: "For it is difficult to see how one could set up principles of comparison between works without calling genre assumptions into

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[45] Fowler*, Kinds of Literature*, 38.

[46] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 183.

[47] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 183.

[48] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 191.

[49] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 259.

[50] Ardis Butterfield, "Medieval Genres and Modern Genre Theory," *Paragraph* 13, no. 2 (1990): 184.

play."[51] In other words, genre or *type,* according to Fowler's system, must still exist as a quality of a work so that the reader has a point of comparison. However, what happens when there are no, or limited, points of comparison? What happens to a system of classification when the classes themselves are undefined or undefinable? How can history become legend, and legend become myth, without textual change? I propose that it is necessary to introduce both context and reader into the discourse so that genre theory is not the theory of classification but the theory of the relationship between the expectations of the author and reader within a given context. If genre theory is, in fact, less concerned with the crude taxonomy of literature, as Fowler suggests, then the reader gains agency and participatory power; that is, genre theory is no longer a teleological system—genre is not an intrinsic quality of literature—but is a system to describe the relationship between the author and the reader.

Genre theory is a toolbox to understand *how* a text can be interpreted within a certain context by certain readers given our understanding of the author's perception of an ideal reader. Within this toolbox are genre markers, tools that help us to interpret a work: materiality, structure, content, form, and function. While a glossy, A4 codex filled with colourful images (like a magazine) reveals a great deal to its reader about how it should be interpreted, so too will a thick codex in fine print with no images (like a volume of legal precedent). Likewise, a story beginning with "once upon a time" evokes a mood entirely different to "a dark and stormy night." These signs direct the reader to certain conclusions about and interpretations of a work. Of course, as perceptions of these signs change, so can their meaning. In order to identify these markers, though, they necessarily must be understood to be genre markers.

Genre is, in many ways, inextricable from the broader literary context. As Hans R. Jauss notes: "Literary genres do not exist alone, but rather from the various functions of a given period's system, to which they connect the individual work."[52] Specifically, Jauss establishes the relationship between an individual text, its manifestation of genre markers, and a broader cultural framework. Therefore, the identification of a text's genre cannot be determined in isolation, in a

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[51] Butterfield, "Medieval Genres," 184.

[52] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic,* 106.

vacuum. Jauss argues that a text can only be "historically determined, delimited, and described."[53] If a text's genre markers are primarily interpretive, historically determined, and subject to the "functions in the lived world,"[54] then it is necessary to examine the text in its original context. Moreover, literary analysis needs to be accompanied by careful historical contextualisation.

One of Jauss' major contributions to genre theory is the idea that genre is defined by its *alterity*. In other words, the signs of genre or the genre markers are interpreted by their difference to other types of genre markers. A magazine invites certain interpretations and expectations that a scholarly monograph does not, even if they are both about celebrities. I argue that the reader, broadly speaking, uses these genre markers to form an interpretation of the work.[55] While the author creates these genre markers, once the work leaves the hands of the author, the power in the author/reader relationship shifts towards the reader. Therefore, we must not consider solely the author's creative force in the development of genre but also the reader's engagement. In a medieval context, the author ought to be considered the first reader; the scribes, compilers, and commentators, second readers; and every other active user the third reader. The reader actively participates in the definition of genre; consequently, genre is mutable and constantly in a state of change. Genre theory is less about taxonomy than it is about interpretation. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the text and the text's reception in any analysis concerned with defining genre.

Disassociating the idea of genre from a system of classification is counterintuitive. Modern readers associate groups of texts or even define texts by their genre. Medieval texts must be considered from the perspectives of medieval readers, authors, scribes, and book users. Through the lens of the medieval reader, we gain a greater understanding of medieval literature, particularly medieval approaches to genre. This idea has historically been challenged, as Stanley Fish notes:

> Twenty years ago, one of the things that literary critics didn't do was talk about the reader, at least in a way that made his experience the focus of the critical act. The prohibition on such talk was largely the result of Wimsatt's and Beardsley's famous essay "The Affective

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[53] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 80.

[54] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 100.

[55] As I will discuss in Chapter 3, I consider authors, scribes, and book users all as readers.

Fallacy," which argued that the variability of readers renders any investigation of their responses ad-hoc and relativistic.[56]

The fundamental difference between Wimsatt/Beardsley and Jauss is in their views on the participatory nature of medieval literature. While modern readers receive their book as a finished product, medieval readers did not. The modern print book is bounded in form, i.e. the reader has no control over the published form of the book. Medieval readers had significantly more control over the production of the medieval book. They could choose what was copied, what it looked like, and how it was bound. Books were highly individual and special objects, valued among one's possessions. Since medieval books were not bounded in form in the same manner as modern books, medieval readers could materially contribute to their production. Even medieval readers who annotated their books participated in the production of the book in fundamentally the same manner as the scribes who originally produced the book. Of course, modern readers still have the capacity to materially alter their books in different ways (annotations, underlining, etc.). Nevertheless, the control that a medieval reader had over their book differs from the highly commercialised publishing industry of modernity.

While Wimsatt and Beardsley depreciated reader response as a relativistic methodology, such examination for medieval works is necessary when the document and text through which we analyse the reader is highly individual and ad-hoc. The ad-hoc nature of a medieval reader's contribution to a manuscript's production and the ad-hoc production of certain manuscripts necessitates the inclusion of the book producer as a focus of analysis, including scribes, binders, and illuminators, but it does not devalue a reader's interpretation. Further, the expectation of, or experiential engagement with, a document and text is of prime importance when discussing medieval perspectives of genre. For this reason, the Jaussian concept of the "horizon of the expectable" is particularly useful. Jauss writes:

> This horizon of the expectable is constituted for the reader from out of a tradition or series of previously known works, and from a specific attitude, mediated by one (or more) genre and dissolved through new works. Just as there is no act of verbal communication that is not related to a general, socially or situationally conditioned norm or convention, it is also

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[56] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 344.

unimaginable that a literary work set itself into an informational vacuum, without indicating a specific situation of understanding.[57]

Unlike classical and neoclassical approaches to genre, which are demonstrably problematic when addressing medieval works of literature, a Jaussian perspective does not draw boundaries around texts but identifies genre markers as signifiers perpetuated through time and through different audiences. What readers expect, then, is the adoption, adaptation, or modification of a text as it filters through literary traditions; a reader has certain expectations of a text, based upon pre-experienced interactions with similar texts. Readers employ previous experience to inform their interpretation of new works. There is a vitality to genre that is denied by crude taxonomies. As Frederic Jameson suggests, "Genres are essentially contracts between a writer and his readers."[58]

Take, for example, Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*, a parody *rym* of a gallant knight of Flanders. So dull is the tale that the Host demands that the pilgrim Chaucer stop: "'Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee,' / Quod oure Hooste, 'for thou makest me / So wery of thy very lewednesse.'"[59] The host's "eres aken" while listening to Chaucer's *tale* because it is a terrible *rym*. The tale displays all the visual and textual markers of Middle English romance because romance had become sufficiently well-established for poets and scribes to parody the genre. The Host, who functions as the reader's advocate in the narrative, dislikes the tale of Chaucer the pilgrim because it is uninspired. Chaucer's execution of the genre is so effective that nothing remains interesting about the tale. The Host expects a good story but hears only stock motifs and genre features of romance. The dynamic relationship between the tale, genre, and the reader is at the centre of Chaucer's elaborate joke. It is comedic to those who have the pre-existing knowledge to understand the narrative genre signifiers but also the structural and formal genre signifiers in the form of the tail-

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[57] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 79.

[58] Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 135.

[59] Geoffrey Chaucer, "Sir Thopas" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), lines 919-21.

rhyme presentation on the manuscript leaf.[60] Purdie notes that "the tail-rhyme romance is […] unique to Middle English," describing its layout as "asymmetric units rhyming *aab* or sometimes *aaab*."[61] It is precisely because the genre markers of Middle English romance were so well established that Chaucer is able to parody a romance effectively.

Scholars often define the SEL not by its alterity to other texts but by its relationship to its textual tradition. For example, L is the oldest extant witness, B contains the most legends, and G is the best arranged and ordered. Additionally, scholars often return to umbrella terms like *hagiography* and *legendary* to describe the collection as a whole. However, this is an overly simplistic perspective and does not acknowledge the genre experimentation of the poets. While the SEL is substantially a collection of stories about saints, the forms those stories take differ. In modern terms, scholars employ numerous genre labels for the series of texts which are now associated with the legends of Becket. These include *life, hagiographical romance,* and *translation*. Our modern terms, which derive from the medieval terms and bear some resemblance to their medieval ancestors, do not always capture precisely the same idea as the medieval terms. In other words, while *life* and *lyf* appear similar, they are not necessarily identical. Our understanding of genres differs from that of medieval writers and readers.

Since the hagiographical tradition in Middle English literature is born from the earlier Latin tradition, it should come as no surprise that the genre terms used in Middle English documents derive from Latin. Strohm provides a useful, albeit incomplete, list of frequently used terms, *passio, vita, miraculum,* and their Middle English counterparts, *passioun, lyf,* and *miracle.*[62] These terms each have a specific meaning as they each identify the type of narrative explicitly. The legend of Becket, for example, contains elements of *lyf, passioun, miracle, historia,* and *translatio,* and it cannot easily be assigned to just one of these genres. It does, as I will demonstrate, also resemble

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[60] For a more in-depth discussion of Chaucer's "Sir Thopas," see Purdie, *Anglicising Romance* 74-78; cf. Rhiannon Purdie, "The Implications of Manuscript Layout in Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas,*" *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41, no. 3 (2005): 263-74.

[61] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, 1, 4.

[62] Strohm, "*Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende,*" 62.

Middle English romance. Thus, the genre of the SEL Becket legend is complex. With few exceptions, the original poet and subsequent scribes did not distinguish between the genres as they wove different genre signifiers into one cohesive narrative.

Even though modern genres may resemble medieval genres, we cannot consider them identical. Because of this, our modern genre titles should not be applied to the SEL. Nevertheless, I use terms like *saint's life* and *history* out of convenience. While these terms do correspond to medieval genres, I am not implying that they mean the same thing to a medieval reader. Instead, we should focus our attention on medieval approaches to genre in our readings of the SEL. When reading the Becket legend in the SEL, we should consider three medieval genres: *lyf* or *vita*, *historia,* and *romaunce.* Markers of these popular medieval genres are frequently evident in the SEL Becket legend. By returning to medieval perceptions of these medieval genres, we more closely align ourselves with medieval readers.

Perhaps the genre that is most explicitly and most frequently associated with the SEL and the legend of Becket is the saint's life (*vita, lyf*). To delve deeper into hagiographical writing is to explore medieval Europe's religious and cultural traditions. As Hippolyte Delehaye notes, "more often than not the hagiographer would reply to this question [the question of writing uncritically and without discrimination] that his intention was to write history" [63] but the "work of a hagiographer may be historical, but not necessarily so." [64] Indeed, as I will soon discuss, hagiographical and historical texts are similar to each other, as they both claim to document and narrativise the past. However, hagiography emerged as a literary tradition which included more than just historical narratives about saints. Charles Jones suggests that early saints' lives "were a form of Christian panegyric based on public records," but "in time those passions became primarily fictional and, as saints' lives replaced passions, oriental tales were easily assimilated into the form."[65] Jones reinforces the idea that the origins of the medieval hagiographical traditions were

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[63] Delehaye, *Legends of the Saints,* 52.

[64] Delehaye, *Legends of the Saints*, 4.

[65] Charles Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1947), 52.

based on the documented treatment of early Christians but soon evolved to perform some other purpose. While early hagiographical accounts may have been rooted in realism, the evolution of the form turned romantic, where romanticism is "aspiration, elevation, exaltation, [and] edification."[66]

In one of the earliest collections of saints' lives, Gregory of Tours writes:

> Unde manifestum est, melius dici vitam patrum quam vitas, quia, cum sit diversitas meritorum virtumque, una tamen omnes vita corporis alit in mundo. [67]

> [When it is clear that is preferable to speak of the life of the fathers than lives, because, although there is diversity in merit and virtue, in the world one life nourishes all bodies.]

His discussion of early Church fathers and saints as emulations of Christ informs Jones' assumptions about the origins of Christian hagiography and Delehaye's notion that hagiographical writing is somehow related to historical writing. More important, however, is Gregory's hint at the edifying nature of hagiographical writing. By asserting that Christ's life nourishes all bodies, Gregory asserts a theological premise. Since Christ's life is the model, all Christian lives *are* to emulate the singular life of Christ. Thus, according to Gregory, it is more appropriate to define the saints' life, not the saints' lives, since saints, in various capacities, emulate Christ's life. The saint's life is singular in its emulation of Christ's life. The function of the life of the saint was then to model Christian living.

Thomas J. Heffernan offers an alternative term to *life, vita* or the broader term *hagiography: sacred biography.* In addition to documenting and modelling Christ-like behaviour, *sacred biography*, according to Heffernan,

> refers to a narrative text of the *vita* of the saint written by a member of a community of belief. The text provides a documentary witness to the process of sanctification for the community and in so doing becomes itself a part of the sacred tradition it serves to document.[68]

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[66] Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles,* 52.

[67] Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae Patrum*, *MGH: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum,* ed. B. Krusch (Hanover, 1969) 662-3, as quoted in Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

[68] Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 16.

In short, *sacred biography* not only describes but becomes a participant in the cult of a saint. Its use as both documentary evidence of the culture of saints and an object or artefact of devotion uniquely situates the *sacred biography* as integral to understanding the culture of saints and their reception by a broad audience. Heffernan's use of this term situates hagiography firmly in the realm of both genre and reception studies:

> This definition of *sacred biography* implies an interpretive circularity in the composition and reception of these texts. First, the text *extends* the idea that its subject is holy and worthy of veneration by the faithful, and, second, the text as a documentary source of the saint's life *receives* approbation from the community as a course of great wisdom.[69]

In sum, hagiographical writing emerges as a literary tradition, documenting models of good Christian living and recording the veneration of the faithful.

The legend of Becket in the SEL is a hagiographical text. It participates within a broader hagiographical tradition using vocabulary particular to medieval perceptions of saints. The Becket legend in the SEL, as I will demonstrate, captures Gregory's argument that the life of saints emulates the life of Christ. In several instances, the poet of the SEL directly correlates the deeds of Becket with the deeds of Christ. Not only does this connection between the two emphasise the edifying nature of Becket's life, but, as I will argue, it links the messianic characterisation of Becket with Christ the Messiah. Not only is Becket holy in his moral character, but he emulates Christ in his sacrifice and defence of the Church, its followers, and Christian authority. Many episodes in Becket's life are composed as analogues to scriptural passages about Christ. In particular, the last days of Becket are close reflections of the final days of Jesus, from his entry into Jerusalem to his crucifixion. Such direct comparisons between Becket and Jesus reinforce the primacy of Becket's cult in England; not only is Becket a holy man worthy of veneration and devotion, but he is also a saviour of the people against tyrannical authority. While medieval devotees of Becket would not have seen Becket as superior to Jesus, they certainly would have seen similarities, given Gregory's understanding that saints are emulations of Christ. Following Gregory's definition of *saints' life*, we should describe Becket's legend in the SEL as a *vita* or *lyf*.

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[69] Heffernan, *Sacred Biography,* 16.

As genres, *saints' lives* and *romance* share many characteristics. They both focus on the deeds of an individual or group of individuals. They emphasise specific virtues. They often engage in dialogues between good and evil. However, *romance* is a highly contested term.[70] The heterogeneity of the Middle English corpus precludes the possibility of one universal definition. Not only does the term *romance* refer to a linguistic grouping (languages descending from Latin), literature about martial figures (*King Horn*), literature with fantastical settings and unexplainable events (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), but also to stories about courtly life, love, and nobility (any number of Arthurian romances with Sir Lancelot). As Ojars Kratins summarises, "romance is one of the most abused genre terms of medieval literature."[71] Further to the point, "the term communicates very little, especially when it is applied to such a conglomerate body of works as 'The Middle English Romances.'"[72]

Derision of the ubiquity of the term is not unduly deserved, but it must be qualified. Denise Ming-Yueh Wang comments that Middle English romance suffers from the same issues which plague modern genre theory and its application to medieval texts: "the failures of modern definition and classification are results of attempts to impose order on too great a variety of works, believing that some kind of definition(s) and classification(s) can serve to interpret the texts."[73] While Middle

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[70] When Northrop Frye redefines romance as a mode, Frye attempts to situate romance within a longer tradition of literature, one that is relativistic. The idea of romance as mode, which Barron continues, however, does little to cement any definition. Instead, Barron just swaps the vocabulary. For Frye's description of romance as mode, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). See also Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture and Other Writings on Critical Theory 1976-1991,* ed. Joseph Adamson and Jean Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) at 25-62. Cf. W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987).

[71] Ojars Kratins, "The Middle English *Amis and Amiloun*: Chivalric Romance or Secular Hagiography?" *PMLA* 81, no. 5 (1966): 347.

[72] Kratins, "Middle English *Amis and Amiloun,*" 347.

[73] Wang, "Generic Problems," 22.

English romance has become a placeholder for a series of medieval vernacular texts, there is a scholarly assumption that "heterogeneity is an intrinsic feature" of the textual domain.[74] Because of the classification issues centred around Middle English romance, scholarship on romance has become structured around identifying key features or genre markers in individual texts. Andrea Hopkins proposes that romances are "stories which typically examine the conduct of their characters in relation to an ideal," and "are characteristically preoccupied with particular idealisms."[75] Such a broad definition seems hardly critical enough to differentiate one text from another or even separate hagiography from romance. James F. Knapp and Peggy A. Knapp propose that romance "invites its readers to step out of the actual world and experience the intriguing pleasure of possibility."[76] This perception of romance revolves around the effect that it has on the reader, a notable departure from other definitions like Barbara Fuch's, which suggests that "the term describes a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealisation, the marvellous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity."[77] Like Hopkins, Fuchs creates too broad a definition, justifying such a definition because "it accounts for the greatest number of instances, allowing us to address the occurrence of romance with texts that are clearly classified as some other genre."[78] Of course, attempting to define romance over such a period will necessitate generalisations.

Carol Fewster notes that "romance has a formalised and distinctive style—and one that implies a set of pre-established audience expectations."[79] Fewster points towards works like Chaucer's *Sir Thopas,* which effectively parodies Middle English romance by drawing on and exaggerating the auditory, visual, and narrative elements found in Middle English romances. Although the presence of these elements might vary, Fewster concedes that despite the

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[74] Wang, "Generic Problems," 21.

[75] Hopkins, *Sinful Knights*, 2.

[76] Knapp and Knapp, *Medieval Romance,* 3.

[77] Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

[78] Fuchs, *Romance,* 9.

[79] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* i.

heterogeneity of Middle English romance, "there is an archetypal romance style."[80] The "romance style," as Fewster frames it, might be best understood as distinguishing features or markers that differentiate romance from other genres. While there is considerable overlap between these markers, as Strohm acknowledges, whether or not medieval writers explicitly acknowledged the genre, there is something distinctly *romance* about certain texts. Examining the openings of suspected Middle English romances, we discover a common trope: textual hints of oral delivery. For example, this formulaic introduction found in *Otuel and Roland* begins the romance by an unnamed narrator pleading to an audience to listen: "Herkenyth, lordynges, and ȝevyth lyst" (line 1).[81] "Þarfore listens a lytel stownde" (line 6), begins the narrator of *Ywain and Gawain*.[82] The narrator of *Amis and Amiloun* pleads: "For goddes loue in trinyte / Al þat ben hend herkeniþ to me / I pray ȝow" (lines 1-3).[83]

This motif surprisingly can be found in the SEL Becket legend. Manfred Markus has noted consistent evidence "of the speaker's or narrator's suggested presence."[84] Phrases like "þe boke tellez me," "for sothe," "I onderstonde," and "I wot" rhetorically function as a present speaker, whether or not the story was ever recited aloud.[85] While this motif demonstrates a tantalising connection between the SEL Becket legend and the Middle English romance corpus, it is far from the only one.

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[80] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre*, ii.

[81] Mary Isabelle O'Sullivan, ed., *Firumbras and Otuel and Roland,* EETS OS 198 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[82] Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington eds., *Ywain and Gawain,* EETS OS 254 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[83] MacEdward Leach, ed., *Amis and Amiloun,* EETS OS 203 (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

[84] Manfred Markus, "The Language and Style in the Becket Story of the South English Legendary: Towards a Computerized Analysis," in *South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment,* ed. Klaus P. Jankofsky (Tübingen: Francke, 1992), 117.

[85] Markus, "Language and Style," 117.

It is clear that no modern definition of Middle English romance sufficiently accounts for the heterogeneity of the medieval genre; it is clear that for a medieval audience, romance was a genre. While our inclination is to define romance by its main character, a hero who is perceived to be martial, or by the hero's actions in the face of challenges, it is likely more effective to simply look to the canon of Middle English romances to survey their similarities. In Chapter 4, in lieu of defining romance, I draw comparisons between accepted Middle English romances and the SEL legend of Becket to explore how the poet drew parallels between Becket and romance heroes like Bevis, Roland, Turpin, and Horn, to affect the audience's interpretation of the narrative.

Modern perceptions of medieval genres are often reductive. Attempts to categorise texts by genre result in broad and often unhelpful definitions, which distract and perpetuate beliefs about medieval approaches to genre often not grounded in history. To overcome this obstacle, I have elected to turn to medieval authors to investigate what they have to say about their work, to come closer to a medieval interpretation so that we can re-evaluate our own preconceived notions about medieval genres. As I will argue, the SEL legend of Becket marries a variety of medieval genres, including historiography, in interesting ways—ways which complicate our understanding of the SEL Becket legend.

So far, I have discussed modern and medieval approaches to *hagiography* and *romance*. As I have noted with *hagiography* and *romance*, modern conceptions of medieval genres often differ from real medieval approaches. While modern terms, including *sacred biography,* are helpful, terms like *romance* remain problematic. In lieu of defining the term, then, I turn towards describing the SEL's genre hybridisation through a Jaussian method via alterity. I ask how the SEL is similar to and different from works contemporary with the SEL. Gregory of Tours provides a framework for discussing saints, while Middle English romances like *Amis and Amiloun* provide comparable examples for romance. I will now turn to the medieval concept of history as a genre and medieval approaches to historical writings.

To look for a medieval perspective of what constituted historical writing, we might begin with the man who defined words, Isidore of Seville. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore writes that "Historia est narratio rei gestae" [history is a narration of deeds accomplished], and "quae enim

videntur, sine mendacio proferuntur" [what is seen is revealed without falsehood].[86] In this first part of his definition, Isidore begins to differentiate historical writing from other forms of writing, namely argument and fable, drawing on his perception that "apud veteres enim nemo conscribebat historiam, nisi is qui interfuisset, et ea quae conscribenda essent vidisset" [among the ancients no one would write a history unless he had been present and had seen what was to be written down].[87] Isidore prioritises first the witnessing of events and second the style of their narration. Later, he more clearly articulates the difference between history, argument, and fable:

> Nam historiae sunt res verae quae factae sunt; argumenta sunt quae etsi facta non sunt, fieri tamen possunt; fabulae vero sunt quae nec factae sunt nec fieri possunt, quia contra naturam sunt.

> [Histories are true deeds that have happened, plausible narrations [arguments] are things that, even if they have not happened, nevertheless could happen, and fables are things that have not happened and cannot happen, because they are contrary to nature.][88]

According to Isidore, "historiae autem ideo monumenta dicuntur, eo quod memoriam tribuant rerum gestarum" [and for this reason, histories are called "monuments," because they grant a remembrance of deeds that have been done.][89] Isidore demonstrates how medieval genres like history and hagiography overlap, as they are both concerned with the edification of their audiences. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, hagiographical texts like the SEL Becket and more liturgical references to saints like St. Stephen engage in a sort of biblical history which runs parallel to secular history. Whereas certain Middle English romances would be seen as fables, in the eyes of Isidore,

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[86] Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies (or Origins),* edited by W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 1:41; translation from Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, and J. A. Beach, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

[87] Isidore, *Etymologies*, 1:41; translation from Barney, Lewis, and Beach, *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 67.

[88] Isidore, *Etymologies*, 1:44; translation from Barney, Lewis, and Beach, *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 67.

[89] Isidore, *Etymologies*, 1:41; translation from Barney, Lewis, and Beach, *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 67.

both the biblical histories and other *temporale* texts that circulated with the *sanctorale,* like the Becket legend, constitute *historia*.

Laura Ashe argues that medieval "history was essentially textual." [90] Further, Ashe suggestively posits a relationship between historical writings and hagiography. While discussing Ailred of Rievaulx, Ashe notes how medieval historians approach history through a propagandist and ahistorical lens to illustrate a greater truth. She writes that "such an attitude to history is fostered by the genre of hagiography, which by its nature employs the details of earthly life only as a means of access to the divine truth presumed to lie behind them."[91] Thus "we may observe a wholesale flattening of historical sense, by which the pastness of the past is lost, in place of which transhistorical categories of values are first created, and then exploited in the service of the present."[92] As I discuss in Chapter 4, this flattening of history can be seen in instances where the SEL poet adapts multiple historical sources into one cohesive work that serves the rhetorical purpose of building up Becket's character at the cost of conflating significant historical moments and documents, such as the Constitutions of Clarendon.

Thus, the medieval historian's role was not only to document but also to interpret the past for the present.[93] As with any text, the interpretation is informed by tradition. Treating medieval historical works apart from other medieval genres is to impose modern expectations of history on medieval historical works artificially. Instead, I treat medieval historical texts like any other medieval genre: as subject to traditions and genre hybridisation. Further, a modern sense of historical writing differs dramatically from that of the medieval historian. Staunton, in his work on the Angevin historians, notes a few substantial trends, all of which point out the genre features, content, and themes of what constituted history to a medieval historian:

> There are important differences, though, between medieval ways of interpreting and judging the past and how modern historians have sought to do so. Different values inform

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[90] Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34.

[91] Ashe, *Fiction and History*, 33.

[92] Ashe, *Fiction and History*, 33.

[93] See also Ashe*, Fiction and History*, 34.

their judgements: medieval writers show a greater acceptance of violence, for example, and hostility to outsiders, and less interest in religious tolerance and personal liberty.[94]

Medieval perspectives and attitudes towards what historians were willing to write about and the tone with which they discussed their subjects, consequently, appear foreign to modern inclinations towards objectivity. A challenge, then, for a modern reader of medieval historical works is the presence of such elements as "divine causes, and the less frequent but common references to fortune."[95] Likewise, references to "the green children and talking werewolves," as Staunton notes, might disproportionately inform how modern readers interpret medieval works of history.[96] What is important to acknowledge is that medieval historians read historical works and were thus informed and aware of the traditions that went into historical writing. Like Ashe, Staunton posits that historical writing was primarily interpretive.

One important subgenre of historical writing is the chronicle. Chris Given-Wilson defines the "chronicle" as a

> record or register of events in chronological order. In practice, when used to describe medieval texts, it is commonly employed (as it was in the middle ages) to describe any work the subject matter of which claimed to be essentially historical, whether that meant events in the past or events contemporary with the time at which the author wrote.[97]

Given-Wilson draws on Gervase of Canterbury, the twelfth-century historiographer, in his discussion of chronicles as a subgenre of history, notably because Gervase himself, like Isidore, preoccupied himself with what history meant. The chronicler, writes Gervase, "annos incarnationis domini annorumque menses computat et kalendas, actus etiam regum et principum quae in ipsis

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[94] Michael Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

[95] Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England,* 7.

[96] Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England,* 7. Staunton provides further examples demonstrating that the more exotic elements we find in medieval historical works belong in a "well-developed tradition of interpretation."

[97] Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), xix.

eveniunt breviter edocet, eventus etiam, portenta vel miracula commemorat" [computes years *Anno Domini* and the months and kalends and briefly describes the actions of kings and princes which occurred at those times; he also commemorates events, portents and wonders].[98] Like Given-Wilson, my interest in Gervase's definition of "chronicler" lies in his inclusion of portents and wonders as events appropriate for inclusion in a chronicle. As Ruth Morse has suggested, "what counted as history embraced a much wider spectrum of presentation than later came to be acceptable."[99] This included events like prophecies, which Ashe alludes to, and miracles, but it also included legal documents and charters. Although they were not narratives, charters documented the events of the present for the edification of future readers and to record contemporary events for posterity.

Jacques Le Goff writes, "historically Christian teaching presents itself as the memory of Jesus transmitted by the series of Apostles and their successors."[100] If history, and particularly Christian teaching, was dominated by the understanding that history is memory and those moments are commemorated, then a work like the SEL, which celebrates Christian feasts calendrically, is "indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable."[101] In many ways, the poet of the SEL recovers Christian teachings and memory for future consumption, participating in a lineage from Jesus to an eschatological end. The work's annual repetition in the liturgy marks the passing of both the Christian year and the secular year. Theological typology is a significant feature of medieval

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[98] Gervase, *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury,* ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series (1879), 87; translation from M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*: *England 1066-1307,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 102; cf. Denys Hay, *Annalists and Historians* (London: Methuen, 1977), 58-9.

[99] Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89.

[100] Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory,* trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 70.

[101] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1987), 69.

historiography, and it can be illustrated by one of the SEL poet's sources, the *Quadrilogus,* which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

At the end of the twelfth century, there was an explosion of historical writings recounting major and memorable events, such as the death of Becket. Staunton, commenting on these authors, who include Ralph of Diceto and Gerald of Wales, notes several key questions that should be asked of these medieval writers:

> How do these writers interpret recent events? What literary and intellectual traditions did they draw on, and how did they use those traditions? What do their writings reveal about their views of particular events and themes, and their understanding of their past, present, and future?[102]

Many of these questions can be used to interrogate the SEL account of Becket. What, for instance, were the poet's sources? On what traditions did he draw? What did he perceive as historically memorable? Most importantly, with what events did he want his audience to be most familiar? It is clear that the poet is familiar with historical writing and engages in the practice of historiography periodically throughout the poem. Without acknowledging as much, Staunton is asking what twelfth-century historians read. By interrogating the sources of authors, we implicitly interrogate their reading practices, and this shift in perspective opens up new avenues of investigation. If we are to embrace medieval authors as not just authors but also as readers, then we can begin to ask how they interpreted their sources and how that influenced their writings, how they perpetuated certain ideologies, and what impact this has on literary traditions generations later.

It is undeniable that the SEL legend of Becket is in part historical as much as it is hagiographical. The question I seek to answer is where the poet switches between genres and why. One of the most significant moments in the legend of Becket is his experience at Clarendon and Northampton. The events of Clarendon act as a catalysing moment for the poet of the SEL account of Becket. Much of the remainder of Becket's life depended on these few days. The relationship between Henry and Becket truly breaks down because of differing opinions on legal procedure, and a historiographical narrativisation frames this fracturing of their relationship.

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[102] Staunton, *Historians of Angevin England*, 6.

The SEL poet draws upon two congruent notions of what constitutes history: religious and secular deeds. These are congruent because religious time maps onto but extends beyond the records of secular time from creation to an eschatological end. Whereas secular history marks the passage of time as historians compose and readers interpret it, religious history is cyclical and imbued with ritual memory. When Becket celebrated the mass of St. Stephen, for example, he fractured the relationship between religious and secular history; that is, he celebrated the feast of a saint, but not on his customary feast day. In other words, Becket broke with the expectations of how a calendar should be used. It is because of fracturing that the moment in Becket's legend is notable. In Chapter 4, I address a key moment in the narrative that glosses over documented historiography by favouring hagiographical embellishment, which suggests that the poet is familiar with the two genres. Why does the poet oscillate between historiography and hagiography? What moments of the narrative lend themselves to historiographical motifs, and why does the poet present these moments in lieu of maintaining the hagiographical model as he does at the end of the poem?

By examining this genre makeup, with an emphasis on the medieval, not modern, perceptions of genre and particular attention paid to material manifestations of genre, we gain a greater insight into how the SEL should be read. In the following chapter, as I theorise types of readers and reading engagement, I consider three different types of readers—poets, scribes, and users—and how their perception of genre informed their reading approach.

3. The Material Reader

I know that, for me, seeing someone reading creates in my mind a curiosity coloured by the book and the setting in which it is being read.

> - Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*[1]

3.1 The Idea of the Reader

In this chapter, I interrogate the role of the author. However, I am less concerned with the function of authorship and *auctoritas* than I am with the relationship between the author and the text. Indeed, the authority of the author and the function of the author are linked, and while Stanley Fish proposes that "interpreters do not decode poems; they make them," Robert Sturges is correct to suggest that Fish "is participating in a merging of author and audience like that taken for granted by the medieval literary community."[2] This merging of author and audience ought to reframe our perception of authorship. While medieval authors acknowledged their participation within literary traditions or the production of collaborative works (chronicles and commentaries, for example), we often take for granted that medieval authors were additionally readers, perpetuating a literary culture and participating in a literary tradition.

For this reason, we should consider poets and authors as *types* of readers. In so doing, I situate the poet not as the primary creative force at the leading edge of a lineage of creative development but as a reader who belongs to a broader tradition of cultural consumption—a reader

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[1] Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (Vintage Canada, 1998).

[2] Stanley Fish, "Poem," in *Is there a text in this class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 327; Robert S. Sturges, *Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading in Literary Narrative, 1100-1500* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 4.

who both consumes and creates. That is, the poet is not isolated. Poets ingest and regurgitate the culture they are exposed to and contribute through their own creative impulses. The poet of the SEL Becket legend was familiar with and consumed the different variations of the historical and religious narratives, which I more closely examine in this chapter, to reconstruct a new narrative that combines elements and features of different genres to retell the story for a new generation of audiences. Therefore, the SEL account of Becket reveals just as much about the poet as it does about the poet's audience.

Increased interest in the production and dissemination of the SEL has resulted in various hypotheses concerning the identity of the poet(s) of the SEL. Since no colophons or incipits explicitly name or point towards a specific person, identifying an individual is unlikely. Oliver Pickering, Thompson, Görlach, Boyd, and Braswell, among others, have suggested potential candidates, but evidence pointing towards any individual based on style and geography is speculative. Horstmann, who erroneously suggests an earlier composition than the *Legenda aurea*, suggests that the SEL was "most likely the joint work of a whole abbey" like Gloucester.[3] Problematically, a misplaced prologue in the earliest extant witness of the SEL identifies a single poet who "seems to be speaking of his own book."[4] This single author's self-identification in the form of the first person in a unique prologue to the collection suggests that Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108 (L), including the Becket legend, was conceived by an individual poet. In other words, before the rebinding and addition of non-SEL-texts, the poet of this misplaced prologue conceived of the SEL as a cohesive whole. We cannot know with certainty if this same poet composed all of the SEL-texts. Additionally, whether or not this poet collected and compiled the work through his own volition is impossible to determine. That L is the earliest extant witness of the SEL does suggest that it was the project of an individual whose intention was to provide reading material that followed the Church calendar. However, since the L prologue is extant only in the one witness, it does not sufficiently identify the SEL author. In fact, due to the arrangement of the legends, the

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[3] Horstmann, introduction to *The Early South English Legendary*, viii.

[4] Boyd, "New Light," 192.

misplaced prologue, and multiple instances of rearrangement, it cannot be determined whether or not L was even a first attempt at producing the SEL collection.

Pickering identifies another poet, which he calls the "Outspoken Poet," who contributed to many of the saints' lives and *temporale* materials. This poet stands out among the others for

> the direct, colloquial way in which he addresses his audience, frequently supplying or anticipating their reactions; lively illustrations from contemporary life, often including direct speech; expressions of wonder, and of imaginative sympathy with individuals […] and repeated, often exclamatory, rhetorical questioning.[5]

Thompson characterises one SEL poet as connected to the audience: "a fictive 'I' is established early on, and the audience is linked to the narrative voice through its frequent use of 'oure.'"[6] Furthermore, the poet connects with the audience narratively, as in the life of Edmund Rich:

> Even when Archbishop Edmund […] deliberately speaks Latin to his clerks to keep a poor woman from understanding his words, the sympathetic representation of her plight […] supports our sense that the audience is meant to identify with both her and her inability to understand Latin.[7]

Though we do not have a firm understanding of who the poet of the SEL was and who the contributing poets were, scholars have begun to form a vague portrait of a poet whose simple and direct style, interpolated breaks from the narrative to expound upon the story, and sympathy with a broad audience suggest someone who is concerned with the moral wellbeing as well as the edification of their audience.

One common issue in all theories about the poet of the SEL is their conflation of narrator and poet. Pickering and Thompson assume that the narrative voice, "Outspoken" or otherwise, is the poet. Additionally, there is no absolute way of confirming that the poet of the Prologue in L is the same as or different from the poet of the *Banna sanctorum*. While their reading schedules align,

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[5] O. S. Pickering, "Outspoken Style in the South English Legendary and Robert of Gloucester," in *Rethinking the South English Legendaries,* ed. Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 109.

[6] Thompson, *Everyday Saints,* 46.

[7] Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, 47.

the manner of introducing subject matter differs significantly. The *Banna sanctorum* shows considerably more literary aptitude than the prologue of L.

Because of the increase of SEL-texts throughout the later Middle Ages, it is clear that there were multiple contributing poets. As I mentioned previously, the medieval writer was also a reader. In response to the question, "what is the efficient cause, or who is the author, of this book?"[8] Bonaventure describes the four ways of producing a book:

> Ad intelligentiam, dictorum notandum, quod quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliqus scribit aliena, addendo, sed non de suo; et iste compilator dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia, et sua tamquam annexa ad evideniam; et iste dicitur commentator, non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua et aliena, sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem; et talis debet dici auctor.[9]

> [To understand this point we should note that there are four ways of producing a book. One who writes the words of another, neither adding to them nor changing them, is called merely a scribe. One who writes down the words of another, adding to them but not adding his own words, is called a compiler. One who writes down both the words of another and his own as well, but principally those of another, adding his own as corroboration, is called a commentator, not an author. One who writes down his own words and those of another, but principally his own, and those of others by way of corroboration, should be called an author.][10]

Bonaventure effectively outlines four persons involved in the production of medieval books: the scribe, compiler, commentator, and author. To this list, I might add translator, as I will demonstrate. It is significant that the inclusion of another's words limits even Bonaventure's understanding of authorship and authority. While an author writes his own words, he does include the words of others. Inherent in Bonaventure's definition of authorship, therefore, is the implication of

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[8] Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure: Commentary on the Sentences: Philosophy of God,* trans. R. E. Houser and Timothy B. Noone (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2013), 13.

[9] Bonaventure, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia,* vol. 1 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1882), 14-15.

[10] Bonaventure, *Works,* trans. Houser and Noone, 14.

readership. To be an author is to read. Likewise, to be a scribe is to be a reader. These two concepts, authorship and reading, are inextricably linked.

The debate about the sources of and influences on the SEL is yet to be settled, but scholars generally accept Hermann Thiemke's identification of the Latin source material for the SEL version of the life of Becket. Thiemke's literary analysis of the Canterbury Group's material and comparative analysis with the SEL account of Becket point to a close relationship between the *Quadrilogus* and the SEL. The poet of the SEL used, as a source, the *Quadrilogus* for his verse translation of Becket's life. Thiemke concludes his argument by claiming that "die me. Legende ist eine unmittelbare freie Übertragung des *Quadrilogus*" [the Middle English legend is a free verse translation of the Quadrilogus].[11]

Thiemke's conclusions about the SEL authorship and source material do not neatly fit into Bonaventure's medieval definitions of authorship, primarily because Bonaventure does not explicitly discuss the idea of translation and medieval translation theory. Nevertheless, the relationship between the *Quadrilogus* and the SEL does raise interesting points. The translator of the *Quadrilogus* was producing something new to reach an entirely different audience. However, this claim comes with a few assumptions. The first is about language. The *Quadrilogus* and the SEL Becket legend are composed in two different languages. While this is obvious, it must still be asserted that the production of the SEL is fundamentally the result of the act of translation. This observation suggests, more significantly, that the translator had access to the Latin lives. The second obvious implication is the shift in the form: the narrative shifts from prose to poetry. This shift in form too suggests the significance of form for audience engagement, interests and reading practices. While Bonaventure's definition of authorship reveals the inherent relationship between authorship and reading, that the SEL is a translation of a Latin prose text points to important questions regarding the translator's audience. If we take Thiemke's assertion that the SEL account is a free verse translation of the *Quadrilogus*, it is possible to dissect the SEL Becket legend to explore the genre similarities and differences between the two accounts.

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[11] Hermann Thiemke, *Die ME. Thomas Beket-Legende des Gloucesterlegendars: Kritisch herausgegeben mit einleitung* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1919), lii.

The *Quadrilogus* has a complex textual history itself. There are two redactions, One and Two, so titled because of the order of their print publication. The order of their composition is the reverse, that is, *Quadrilogus Two* is the first composed.[12] The *Quadrilogus* compiles multiple lives of Becket composed by Becket's colleagues in the decade following his murder: John of Salisbury, Benedict of Peterborough, William of Canterbury, Alan of Tewkesbury, and Herbert of Bosham. In *Quadrilogus One*, the lives by William Fitzstephen and Edward Grim are added. As Robertson notes, "It may indeed be said, in justification of the title *Quadrilogus,* that there are never more than *four* contributors to the story, as Alan's narrative ends before that of Benedict begins."[13] The prologue to *Quadrilogus One* includes the first recorded legend of Becket's Saracen mother, evidence in favour of Thiemke's assertion. It is, however, the prologue to the *Quadrilogus* that is most important for this study. In the *Quadrilogus Two*, E. of Evesham, the compiler, writes:

> Qui quoniam plures erant, nec poterat fieri quin alicui aliquid deesset quod alter forte haberet, jussit paternitas vestra ut inspectis singulorum codicibus ea tantum ab unoqoque excerperem, et excerpta seriatem ordinarem, quae ad historiam de martyre continuandam sufficerent.[14]

> [As it could not be but that any one writer might be without something which another perchance might have, your fatherhood desired that from the writings of each I should extract and should arrange in order such things as should suffice for a continuous history of the martyr.][15]

E. frames the composite life of Becket as a continuous history, adapting the other lives to produce what might be conceived of as an all-encompassing narrative of the life of Becket. The monk continues:

> Tale aliquid ex ipsis Evangeliis legimus factum ab eo qui nobis ex quatuor unum fecit.[16]

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[12] J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard, *MHTB* 4:xx. If you believe this to be needlessly confusing, that is because it is. I apologise on behalf those that have come before me who have not made the distinction more intuitive.

[13] Robertson, *MHTB* 4:xix.

[14] Robertson, *MHTB* 4:425.

[15] Robertson, *MHTB* 4:xix.

[16] Robertson, *MHTB* 4:425

[Some such thing we read of as having been done from the Gospels themselves by the man who out of the four made one narrative for us.][17]

E. frames his narrative as history but justifies it on religious grounds. Thiemke notes:

> Man kann [*Quadrilogus*] mit einer Evangelienharmonie vergleichen. Das Bestehen auf der Vierzahl im Namen soll auf das Leben Jesu hinweisen.[18]

> [[The Quadrilogus] can be compared to a gospel harmony. The insistence on the number four in the name is intended to point to the life of Jesus.]

In essence, the poet engages with Isidore's notion of what constitutes history—the narration of deeds done, preferably by a witness— but justifies it on its religious merits. E. suggests that because there are four authors, the text imitates the Gospels and, therefore, invites comparison to the life of Jesus. Invoking this idea of theological typology, he writes both secular and religious histories, mapping the religious timeline onto secular time. As the source material for the SEL, the work done by E. of Evesham and later Roger of Croyland (the compiler for *Quadrilogus One*) informs the SEL poet's direction. The SEL account of Becket is based on a self-described history of Becket and therefore, also participates in theological typology. Unsurprisingly, we still find these genre signifiers of historical texts as artefacts in the SEL Becket legend.

While there has been a great deal of debate since the first edition of the ESEL was published, only intermittent interest has been paid to the scribes of the SEL. Since the scribes actively worked to disseminate the SEL to a wider audience, this chapter focuses on addressing this lacuna of SEL scholarship. Given the period of approximately 200 years in which new SEL narratives were being composed and compiled, the argument that a group produced the SEL collection is beyond doubt. While a single SEL witness may have been compiled by an individual, the SEL-collection as a concept was clearly the product of generations. Beyond identifying the poet(s) by name or by affiliation, any understanding of the location and affiliation of the scribes would be an incisive piece of evidence pointing towards further understanding of the SEL's production. D'Evelyn and Mill, in their edition of the SEL, point towards the SEL as a mendicant

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[17] Robertson, *MHTB* 4:xix.

[18] Thiemke, *Thomas Beket-Legende*, xl.

teaching aid, noting narrative sympathies towards both Dominic and Francis.[19] Boyd has, I believe, successfully argued that the earliest SEL witness, L, is not representative of the original composition and is a corrupted witness given the problematic and obviously erroneous ordering of the narratives. She notes that

> the strangely garbled and incomplete nature of the manuscripts we have been discussing (MSS. Laud 108, Harley 2277, Corpus Christi 145, Ashmole 43, and Cotton Julius D. ix), and the hitherto unexplainable variation of their contents, suggest that the materials which Horstmann called *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints* stem from fragments involving a *liber festivalis,* and at least on revision of it, and that neither the original nor its revision was known in complete condition to the scribes of any of the extant manuscripts.[20]

While this insight into the development of the SEL problematises scholarly assumptions about the *origins* of the SEL compositions, it actually provides insights into the scribal role in disseminating the collection. L's arrangement is unordered; its prologue appears in the middle, and it was rebound with the addition of Middle English romances. These two facts suggest that L represents two moments in time when scribes manipulated the collection. The role of the scribe in disseminating the SEL becomes a locus for investigating the scribal role in book production, but more importantly, it makes way for further interrogating the role of the scribe as both an active and professional reader of the SEL. In other words, the relative mobility of SEL legends within a collection suggests the fluidity with which scribes selected, arranged, and disseminated the collection.

Scribes producing the SEL, Wells demonstrates, borrowed from *La*. She notes, in particular that the SEL "show[s] close verbal resemblances to the text of the *Legenda Aurea.*"[21] Whether or not the SEL is merely an anglicising of *La* or if it is a spiritual successor has been debated by

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[19] D'Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary*, EETS OS 244, 17.

[20] Boyd, "New Light," 193.

[21] Minnie E. Wells, "The South English Legendary in Its Relation to the *Legenda Aurea*," *PMLA* 51, no. 2 (1936)*,* 353. Furthermore she notes that Horstmann's initial claim that the SEL was produced prior to the *La* rests on the assumption that Jacobus produced the *La* only after he became the Archbishop of Genoa.

Görlach and Boyd. Nonetheless, order, arrangement, and purpose can be read as aspects of genre, regardless of *La* influence. Ultimately, it was the scribal interpretation of the SEL with which medieval audiences engaged. Who were these scribes? Moreover, what did they believe they produced by copying and disseminating the SEL?

The first of these questions is the most difficult to answer as the scribes elected to remain anonymous, with only one scribe known by name. Nonetheless, we can deduce certain tendencies of the scribes based on the material and textual characteristics of the SEL. It is impossible to discuss the scribes of the SEL without addressing the complicated nature of the development of the SEL. However, it is sufficient to say that the SEL experienced many revisions, according to Görlach, Pickering, Boyd, and others, notably the development of the *temporale* in the later years of production. Görlach, in his assessment of the "revisers," notes three "difficulties":

1. The gaps in the transmission of the early texts.
2. The fact that popular style as that employed for the SEL was easy to imitate.
3. The status of the temporale texts and their affiliation to the legendary.[22]

Görlach is most focused on identifying the revisers and demystifying their role within the production of the SEL but takes only a textual approach in his process. Scribal roles involved more than simply copying text from one leaf to another. In lieu of singularly focusing on the textual elements of the SEL when determining the identity and role of the revisers, I propose that we refocus our gaze to include the material and visual artefacts remaining in the SEL witnesses, including the marginal apparatuses that the scribes employed to guide their readers through the work.

The scribe played a more significant role in the copying and transmission of the text than might be expected, especially in regard to the layout of the text, which, as I will show, provides valuable insight into how a text was read. As Malcolm Parkes notes, "scribes introduced new

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[22] Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, 47.

layouts and new ways of presenting texts."[23] Scribes developed certain layouts of the page to facilitate the navigation of a text, the *ordo narratio* and the *ordo tractatus* and, as Parkes labels them, the hypertexts, which were copied and transmitted on the same page. The function of the scribe was more than just to copy a text but to present the text in a manner that best befitted the purpose of the text and the needs of the reader. In this regard, the scribe acted as an intercessor, a sort of in-between-reader, who produced copies informed by the scribe's own biases, training, and beliefs about the text.

If we imagine the life of a manuscript and the many hands it passes through, we find that, even before it reaches the hands of what is more traditionally identified as a reader, it is read: by the translator whose work is informed by other texts, and by the scribe who reads the exemplar and makes informed decisions about layout. The final reader engages with a text and document, which has been filtered through the effort of two previous types of readers: the author and the scribe. The end-user is compelled by circumstance to engage with the material not necessarily as the original author may have intended but as a result of the manuscript passing through a variety of hands as it is produced. That is, the user is not reading an ideal, original work but a work filtered through multiple influencers.

Unlike my two previous *types* of readers, i.e. the author and scribe, these users are not as readily accessible to scholars because they do not always leave an indelible mark on the book. Their initial engagement with a work might never be recorded. Types of readers, or users, exist which we might look to for examples of reading engagement, but these readers should not be taken as representative of readership in general, but as isolated and idiosyncratic. These users might be students, scholars, clerics, or even children. While we cannot assume that an individual reader is representative of a a typical reader, given the evidence of some readers, especially those post-Reformation, we can assume that some readers are representative of types of readers. For example, in Chapter 6, I identify three readers who participated in particular reading practices, one of whom

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[23] Malcolm Parkes, "Layout and Presentation of the Text," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain,* vol 2*,* ed. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55.

is Robert Cotton. His reading of the SEL is likely to be representative of collectors of medieval manuscripts, but not of readers of the SEL as a whole.

Like students who use a textbook, marking the page with highlighters to draw their attention to important facts or figures, medieval and early modern readers participated in a similar tradition. The reason a user might mark up a codex ranges from comprehension to memorisation, sustained critical analysis to mindlessness. Each cause of physical and material engagement with a codex is evidence of reading engagement. In the words of Eddy, "we can uncover clues to the identities of the audiences for these Middle English texts, and […] the nature of these audiences will have determined interpretation and the *expectation* of interpretation."[24] The markings left in codices by users provide new insight into the text. We can, in other words, begin to look over the shoulders of the historical readers and assess their engagement with the work, experiencing second-hand their impressions.

A significant number of SEL witnesses exhibit in some capacity a form of material reading engagement. For this reason, the SEL is an optimal study of medieval and early modern reading engagement. We see various users, from children to learned politicians, leaving their marks on the page. In these marks we can see the effects of the rhetorical use of genre developed by the authors and disseminated by the scribes.

3.2 Reading the Materiality in Manuscripts

Embedded in the discourse of SEL scholarship is the primacy of the linguistic and textual: an inheritance from the works of Horstmann and classic philology. While this project does not seek to upend this method, I wish to argue for a more holistic approach given the nature of manuscript production. Drawing on the seminal work of Stephen Nichols, I employ material readings informed by the "new philology," which acknowledges the multifaceted features of the manuscript—text,

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[24] Nicole Eddy, "The Romance of History: Lambeth Palace MS 491 and Its Young Readers," in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 300.

image, layout, etc.—to demonstrate how it is the combination of these features which affects our experience with manuscript documents containing the SEL. For this same reason, I draw upon the contemporaneously developed field of "new materialism," and, in particular, Jane Bennett's work which ascribes to the material object a sort of vitality. While these objects are the product of human creation, they transcend the immediacy of their time and place and continue to impact their users and the scholars who seek to better understand their cultural significance.

Reading manuscripts requires, according to Nichols, "two kinds of literacy: reading text and interpreting visual signs."[25] Reading the text of the SEL Becket account requires textual literacy; reading the presentation of the text, namely its visual framing, including reading apparatuses or paratexts, layout, and decoration, requires visual literacy. And just as genre features can be embedded in text, genre features are also found in a document's visual, non-textual elements. Since these features are inserted by scribes and informed by scribal practice, an examination of the visual genre signifiers reveals a second layer to the document, one imposed on the work by a reader who had a vested interest in the production of the document and its dissemination. The locus of my gaze becomes marginal and interlinear. More important, however, is the deference I pay the document itself as a unique presentation of the work. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the material relationship between genre and the SEL. Throughout this project I reference the editions of the SEL text, but only out of convenience for my reader, as I acknowledge the primacy of the unedited text in the manuscript. By doing so, I draw on the "new philology."

M. J. Driscoll neatly summarises the key tenets of "new philology":

1. Literary works do not exist independently of their material embodiments, and the physical form of the text is an integral part of its meaning; one needs therefore to look at "the whole book" and the relationships between the text and such features as form and layout, illumination, rubrics and other paratextual features, and, not least, the surrounding texts.

2. These physical objects come into being through a series of processes in which a (potentially large) number of people are involved; and they come into being at particular times, in particular places and for particular purposes, all of which are socially,

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[25] Stephen Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 8.

economically and intellectually determined; these factors influence the form the text takes and are thus also part of its meaning.

3. These physical objects continue to exist through time, and are disseminated and consumed in ways which are also socially, economically and intellectually determined, and of which they bear traces.[26]

A textual tradition such as the SEL, which spans centuries and grew through accretion, is subject to the whims of scribes and users. It is not the primary goal of this project to hypothesise an ur-SEL, but to assess the historical significance of the SEL as a case study for better understanding medieval perceptions of genre. Through Driscoll's description of the "new philology," we might see how this attitude toward manuscript culture is relevant to this study of Becket's legend in the SEL.

However, "new philology" is over three decades old, having been presented in a special issue of *Speculum* in 1990, and its impact on our understanding of manuscript culture, and the importance of evaluating and incorporating the materiality of manuscripts in our examination of medieval texts has been criticised. While I focus on the material manifestations of genre in Chapter 5, there are limitations to what the material evidence can reveal to the reader. Material evidence is only able to provide clues about reading engagement, for example, by readers who leave marks on the page. Likewise, the very nature of manuscript culture and a text's *mouvance* indicates that some manuscript witnesses of the SEL provide much more insight into how these documents were used than other witnesses. For example, in my discussion of one witness, D, in Chapter 5, the material evidence, while providing significant insights into scribal practices, ultimately poses more questions than answers tangential to this study of Becket in the SEL. Therefore, I illustrate throughout Chapter 5 and 6 that the arguments I make are particular to the manuscripts I examine and should not be universally applied. This is especially true of Chapter 6 where I examine three readers of the SEL Becket legend.

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[26] M. J. Driscoll, "The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New," in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, ed. Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 90-1.

Nevertheless, this material philology lends itself to this type of study, which emphasises the ways in which materiality has agency. The SEL was not passed down orally but mediated through material objects subject to alterations themselves. Simply put, a scribe producing a witness of the SEL was influenced by an exemplar. Likewise, a user of the SEL was influenced by the material of the scribe's work. This chain of transmission—document-scribe-document-user—provides a more granular understanding of the sources of influence and interpretative agency. By examining the materiality of the SEL, we see the residual effects of use not otherwise represented in traditional philological examinations. The manuscript history of the SEL illuminates the material aspects of genre and their utility as interpretive tools.

4. The Poet as Reader: Genre Development in the South English Legendaries

Authorship in the Middle Ages was more likely to be understood as a participation in an intellectually and morally authoritative tradition.

- Andrew Taylor in *The Idea of the Vernacular*[1]

Throughout the first three chapters, I laid the foundation for the argument that the poets of the SEL employed genre rhetorically to evoke certain reading expectations in the legend of Becket. In Chapter 3 I demonstrate, just as Taylor notes in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, that poets participated in traditions of writing, and for the SEL-poets, this includes the traditions of hagiography, history, and romance. This chapter will draw upon the theories of genre outlined in Chapter 2 to illustrate how genre features particular to hagiography, history, and romance, anticipate types of readings. I begin this chapter by situating the SEL within a tradition of texts that include prologues to explore how the *Banna sanctorum* introduces genre as a means of meaning-making for the poets, thus suggesting the importance of genre throughout the collection, and in particular the legend of Becket. I then provide three close readings of moments within Becket's legend that best illustrate the legend's participation within multiple genre traditions, illustrating how the genre-hybridisation of the SEL and Becket legend can be read multiple ways. This chapter focusses on both our understanding of how the Becket legend is preserved in the SEL and how this legend enables a more nuanced discussion of medieval perceptions of genre.

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[1] Andrew Taylor, "Part One: Authorizing Text and Writer," in *The Idea of the Vernacular,* eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999), 1.

4.1 Genre Framing

A comparative analysis of the prologue of the SEL titled the *Banna sanctorum* and other contemporaneously written Middle English prologues reveals a great deal about the concerns and preoccupations of the SEL poet. Compared to other thirteenth- and fourteenth-century vernacular texts composed in England, the SEL does not emphasise any concern with the language of the composition but emphasises, in particular, the audience and how the work ought to be read. At this time, while the English literary tradition was competing for audiences that had access to a wide variety of literature composed in Latin and French, poets and authors dedicated time and effort justifying the use of the English language as a mode for a growing lay audience. Turville-Petre posits that "the very act of writing in English is a statement of belonging."[2] The poets and authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who competed against the other languages used in Britain were carving out a niche for an audience who were developing a sense of collective identity. English is not just a language but a political statement and a cultural signifier: composing in a language that did not have the longstanding traditions of Latin and French literature needed justification. Middle English prologues that emphasised English over other literary languages encouraged an English identity and specified an English audience. As a rhetorical device, the prologue became a strategic locus for the poet and author to circumscribe the purpose and audience of the work. Instead of simply introducing a text, prologues "fashion and define an audience in relation to the work they are introducing."[3] By explicitly arguing for and defining an audience in *relation to* the text, the author situates a text within a broader cultural context and invites the reader into a dialogue, reinforcing the idea that literature is participatory.

Composed at the same time as the SEL, the prologue to *Cursor Mundi*, the monolithic history of the world from creation to judgement, captures the developing sense of the importance of the English language:

> Ofter haly kirkes state

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[2] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity*, *1290-1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

[3] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation,* 28.

This ilk boke ys translate
Until Ingeles tonge to red
For the love of Engli lede,
Englis lede of Engelande
The commune for til understand
French rimes here I rede
Communely in iche a stede
That mast ys worth for Frenche man.
Quat ys worth for him nane can?
[…]
To lewet and Englis men I tel
That understands quat I spel
Now of this proloug wel I blyn
In Cristes name my boke begynne.[4]

The anonymous poet is particularly concerned with the overrepresentation of French and Latin works of literature in England and challenges the presentation of French literature to an English-speaking audience: "Quat ys worth for him nane can?" The "lewed" Englishman, one who cannot read Latin, cannot understand the language, so the poet must translate it into the English tongue.

Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* takes an approach in its prologue similar to that in the *Cursor Mundi*. In this didactic work, the poet emphasises the need to have an English text for an English audience:

þat may weyl on englyssh told,
To telle ȝow þat, y may be bold;
for lewde men y vnder-toke
On englyssh tunge to make þys boke.[5]

It is significant that English poets of the thirteenth century dedicated lines in their poems to justify using the vernacular, especially since the works were literary and concered religious topics. While Latin was the language of liturgy, theology, and scholarship, literature was still composed in French and Anglo-Norman. Robert of Brunne, like the anonymous poet of *Cursor Mundi*, qualifies his use

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[4] Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor Mundi*, EETS OS 57, 99, 101 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1874-93), lines 73-82; 91-94.

[5] Robert of Brunne, *Handlying Synne*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS OS 119 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901), lines 41-44.

of English as he carves a space for his work in the broader literary environment. He draws parallels to other literary works with which his presumed audience would be familiar: "For many ben of swyche manere, / Þat talys and rymys wyl beþly here; / Yn gamys, & festys, & at þe ale."[6] Robert of Brunne acknowledges another literary tradition of hearing stories: "Loue men to lestene troteuale: / Þat may falle ofte to vylanye."[7] Robert of Brunne, like the anonymous poet of the *Cursor Mundi*, is concerned for the moral wellbeing of his audience and, to encourage lay piety, these poets direct their works to a lay audience.

The SEL, alongside the *Cursor Mundi* and *Handlyng Synne*, is typified by scholars as "religious instruction or information in an entertaining and comprehensible manner suited for the uneducated" in the thirteenth century.[8] As Thompson has argued, this is overly "problematic and reductive."[9] However, comparing the three works illustrates a common preoccupation of religious didactic poets of the period: providing moral instruction in a language understood by the laity. The poet of the SEL demonstrates a similar concern but, unlike contemporaries, does not explicitly make a justification for the use of English. This difference is significant for two reasons: the poet is already employing other non-linguistic markers to identify a particular intended audience, and the primary concern of the SEL poet is not the language but the types of popular literature. The SEL poet treats these issues with the same rhetorical strategy: he employs genre as a tool to target his audience and to negotiate a compromise between the Latinate religious literature familiar to, but not intended for, a lay audience and the secular, vernacular kinds of literature which, like the *Cursor Mundi* poet and Robert of Brunne, he deems as "lesyinge" (*Banna sanctorum* line 60). In other words, the poet wanted to produce a text that accomplished the goals of both moral instruction and entertainment.

Medieval England was multilingual. Each language served a purpose and targeted specific audiences. As I have already mentioned, French and Anglo-Norman were traditionally literary and

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[6] Robert of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 45-47.

[7] Robert of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 48-49.

[8] Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, 22.

[9] Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, 22.

entertaining, while Latin was the language of the educated and the church. The developing English literary culture likewise had its own audience and traditions. But the medieval English literary context does not necessarily support the idea that these languages were at odds with each other but rather that they coexisted peacefully. Scholars have suggested that medieval English writers participated in a multilingual literary context that was somehow combative. Indeed, the polemics established in Middle English prologues might suggest that authors were at odds with other languages, which encouraged their justification of the English language, but the extant manuscript evidence does not support this argument. Harley 2253, for example, freely uses all three languages in prose, poetry, and liturgy. Turville-Petre argues that "nationalist polemics sets up a scheme of languages in conflict"; however, these polemics are illusory.[10] A cursory reading of these prologues suggests conflict, but the manuscript evidence, as Turville-Petre emphasises about Harley 951, indicates "the most tangible evidence that there were groups of readers, clerical as well as lay, who were happy to accept texts in all three languages."[11] The medieval authors composed in a language appropriate for their intended reader. While *La* was circulating in England, its immediate audience was limited to those who could understand Latin, though it may also have been used as a source for preaching. Anglo-Norman saints' lives were composed to accommodate those who could not understand Latin but were invested in "heroic poetry of an exemplary nature."[12]

As Turville-Petre notes, the linguistic overlap between England's three dominant languages extended to the period's literature. This is exemplified by the literature born out of the political and religious turmoil of the late twelfth century following Becket's murder. In the years immediately following his death, Latin lives were composed to commemorate the struggle between Church and State. These Latin lives circulated in France and Britain, and shortly after that, a French translation of one of the Canterbury Group's lives by Edward Grim was composed by Guernes de Pont-Sainte-

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[10] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 181.

[11] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 181.

[12] M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 242.

Maxence.[13] He travelled to England and composed a new version of the story, which survives in Anglo-Norman in six manuscripts.[14] Guernes was not attempting to compete with the Latin tradition of producing Becket narratives: his life adopted traditional Latin hymnal characteristics and is, in part, a verse translation of an already circulating life. Rather, it seems that he was catering to a specific Anglo-Norman audience. He was, after all, concerned with others pirating his work and saw England as a "readier market for the sales of this work."[15] Since the Latin lives and Guernes' life coexisted, it is unsurprising that other writers attempted similarly to produce and translate Becket's life for a lay audience whose primary language was English. The SEL is one such example.

The SEL was composed in a time when English authors began catering to an English-speaking audience. This, as I have already briefly discussed, is evidenced through the apologia in prologues. However, the absence of such an apology suggests that the SEL identified its audience differently. There is sufficient evidence to suggest why the author did not compose an apology in the prologue, and this evidence is centred on the author's understanding of genre, reception, and interpretation. The SEL author did not need to justify the use of the English vernacular because the SEL signalled its audience through genre. Certain genre features are alluded to and employed in the *Banna sanctorum*, making the targeted audience clear. These genre features function as signals to audiences who seek out specific genres of literature.

The *Banna sanctorum* is a 68-line extended metaphor about Christianity that introduces several key concepts to the reader. Earth was a garden, and God was its gardener. When he planted the seed of Christianity, the ground was so hard and wicked "luþer" (*Banna sanctorum* line 5) that it needed to be watered with the blood of Christ to bloom. However, Christ's blood was not enough to keep the bloom growing, and it required the blood of the martyrs. Drawing upon scriptural imagery, the poet contextualises his work within a broader literary tradition. The allegory quickly

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[13] Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, 249; see Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, *A Life of Thomas Becket in Verse,* trans. Ian Short (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013).

[14] Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, 249.

[15] Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, 250.

and effectively moves from the creation of the world to the emergence of Christianity. Abruptly shifting in tone and metaphor, the poet turns his attention to saints: "Verst þe martir seinte Steuene · & þe apostles þat were ded" (*Banna sanctorum* line 17). These martyrs' blood, like Christ's, would "norisschi þat swete sed" (*Banna sanctorum* line 18). The saints and martyrs are described as "oure Louerdes knyȝtes" (*Banna sanctorum* line 19).

Just 19 lines into the prologue, the poet signals his audience. By shifting the metaphor from scriptural or religious to contemporary and secular, the poet establishes his intended audience: those who are aware of and invested in a literary culture surrounding knights. The poet continues with the romance metaphor:

> Þe bataille was strang inou · þat oure swete Louerd nom
> And his deciples suþþe abrod · to holde up Crisendom
> Wanne a king wole bataille nyme · to holde up is riȝte
> He ordeineþ verst is ost · and ȝarkeþ hem to fiȝte
> Byuore he set is alblasters · and is archers also
> Is trompours to scheuwe wat he is · & is baner þerto
> And if þe king þanne aredy is · mid þe ueorste he wole be
> Vorto hardie al is men · þat non ne scholde fle
> Þanne mot in þe rerewarde · hardy knyȝtes wende
> Hare louerdes riȝt to holde up · and þe bataille bringe to ende. (*Banna sanctorum* lines 21-30)[16]

The saints are the Lord's knights who battle in his name. This is a significant shift in genre from the beginning of the prologue, which comfortably rests within a liturgical setting. This genre departure from a more explicit religious text signifies how the poet targets a broader audience. This is expanded upon further when the poet writes "men wilneþ muche to hure telle · of bataille of kynge / And of kniȝtes þat hardy were · þat muchedel is lesynge" (*Banna sanctorum* lines 59-60). The poet's audience wants to hear thrilling and entertaining stories of knights and kings and their battles, but he asserts that those stories are all lies. Instead of retelling these stories, which are lies, the poet will tell stories of apostles and martyrs that "nis no lesinge" (*Banna sanctorum* line 62).

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[16] In lieu of footnotes, I provide in-text citations for quotations from the SEL for efficiency and clarity. For other primary texts, I provide footnotes.

His drastic shift in tone here is curious: as Thompson comments, "now that he has their full attention he piously reminds them that though they love stories about knights those stories are lies—interesting, since it was the poet who put thoughts about knights in their heads in the first place."[17]

The poet seems to deride romances for spreading falsehoods and not contributing to society's moral edification; however, his use of the genre conventions suggests that he saw an opportunity to adopt a method of storytelling that would cater to an audience's interests. By introducing the saints and martyrs as knights, he leads his audience into a rhetorical trap. Despite presenting romance and hagiography as "polarised genres," he acknowledges, implicitly, the rhetorical utility of employing popular genres as a compromise between entertainment and moral instruction.[18] He was, in short, producing edutainment: "an activity or product intended to be educational as well as enjoyable."[19] Like Guernes, the SEL poet is simply catering to a vernacular, in this case English-speaking, audience.

We can see the full effect of the poet's practice of hybridising genres in the life of Thomas Becket. Unlike other shorter lives which appear in the SEL, the life of Thomas is extensive, so long that it too has what is effectively a prologue of its own, though, as I discussed in Chapter 2, labelling it as a prologue is problematic. Like other romances, the life of Thomas begins with his father. The story of Gilbert Becket follows his travels to the Holy Land, where he meets his future wife Alisaundre.[20]

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[17] Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, 6.

[18] Robert Mills, "Conversion, Translation and Becket's 'Heathen' Mother," in *Rethinking the South English Legendaries*, ed. Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 382.

[19] *OED,* s.v. "edutainment, n.," accessed December 30, 2021. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/240901.

[20] Historically, it is accepted that Becket's mother was called Matilda. It is unclear why the poet of the SEL changed her name. It could be that he was trying to make the mother's name more foreign to fall in line with the legendary aspects of Becket's heritage which were, by the time the

As the story goes, Gilbert makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a servant named Richard. While there, the two men are captured by Saracens and imprisoned. Gilbert's reputation earns him the grace of Amiraud (the Middle English variant of *emir*, the chieftain), for he "þoȝt him god & hende" (*Becket* line 16). Amiraud has no heir other than a daughter, who quickly falls passionately in love with Gilbert. She often sneaks into his prison cell and asks him about England, its customs, and Christianity. Amiraud's daughter tells Gilbert that she will forgo her inheritance, leave her land, and become a Christian if he will marry her. Fearing trickery, Gilbert "in grete þoȝte" agrees to marry her, but escapes from prison and returns to England instead.

Suffering greatly because of her love, Amiraud's daughter chases after Gilbert. Despite knowing only one word in English, "London," she arrives in the city and is mocked and scorned by children and young men. By chance Richard, Gilbert's servant, hears her shouting in the street and runs to tell Gilbert of her appearance. Gilbert, no longer in doubt of her affection, rushes to see Amiraud's daughter, and she swoons at the sight of him. He seeks out the bishops, who are then at St. Paul's Cathedral, for advice. The Bishop of Chichester informs him that her arrival is a sign of God and reveals that it is the will of God that the two be married because a holy child will be born to them. Amiraud's daughter, before the bishops, converts to Christianity and is baptized. In the

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SEL was composed, accepted as truth, given the number of surviving versions of the legend. See Brown, "Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket," 28. While there seems to be no evidence to suggest that the *Quadrilogus* served as the source for the name "Alisaundre," its appearance in the SEL suggests that this detail was not definitive. "Alisaundre" is not even the only name by which Becket's mother went by in the SEL. In Rawl. Poet. 225 (R), "Iewes" capture Gilbert, and Becket's mother is named "Ysope." Cf. Brown, "Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket," 34 for further discussion. While the Jewish variant is unique, the two redactions of the Becket legend, Laud and Harley, differ in length and detail, where the Harley account does not even name Becket's mother. Beyond the Saracen princess legend, Barlow even identifies one Latin life that calls Becket's mother as "Roesia" or "Roheise." Cf. Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 12. Even today, this myth of Becket's parentage continues to proliferate. See Mills, "Conversion, Translation, and Becket's 'Heathen' Mother," 382, for a brief survey.

moment of her baptism, she loses her Saracen identity, gains the name Alisaundre, and becomes a Christian woman. That same night, Becket is conceived. Gilbert feels compelled to return to Jerusalem on another pilgrimage because of the seemingly miraculous arrival of Alisaundre, her baptism, their marriage, and the conception of Becket. He is gone for three years before he returns to London to his wife and son. While Gilbert is away, Alisaundre reads to Becket and teaches him to lead a chaste and pure life.

The opening to the life of Becket functions on three rhetorical levels: it models conversion and translation from the pagan other to Christianity and anticipates a discussion of sanctity. It establishes a tradition of exile and pilgrimage for the hero. It embellishes a humble heritage of a tame mercantile origin, appropriating romance motifs. In these ways, the romance of Gilbert and Alisaundre anticipates a longer narrative of conversion and transformation, the Life of Becket.

Thus, the romance of Gilbert and Alisaundre anticipates, in many ways, Becket's own transformation from a secular political figure to a religious leader and martyr. In the romance of Gilbert and Alisaundre, Becket's Saracen mother illustrates these features. Linguistically and culturally, she undergoes conversion from the Saracen other to the English Christian mother. Becket undergoes a similar conversion from worldliness to piety. While these transformations cannot be perfectly mapped onto each other, there is a sense of foreshadowing, and the poet invites the audience to draw parallels between the two figures. Not only does Alisaundre's transformation appear miraculous through her sudden comprehension of English, which is never really addressed, but she also gains her Christian identity and the name Alisaundre. She is no longer subject to marginalisation and othering. Foreshadowing Becket's transformation through his mother heightens his own transformation: not only was Becket the son of a merchant (*bordeys*), but his mother was a heathen! (*Becket* line 3).

Two key characteristics of Alisaundre that solidify her as a model for Becket are her perseverance and conviction. Not only are these features praised by the narrator, but they are identified as Christian traits, signalling to the audience that she is more than just a heathen. The narrator even identifies Alisaundre as "hardi," echoing the language in the *Banna sanctorum* (*Becket* line 70). The poet writes that Alisaundre's ability to find Gilbert in London, despite not knowing English, is evidence enough that she is godly: "Hou þingþ ȝou was heo hardi oȝt · for

Gode me þingþ heo was" (*Becket* line 70). Even before her conversion to Christianity and subsequent baptism, Alisaundre is signalled as a remarkable figure to the audience. She travels to London despite not knowing whether or not Gilbert is still alive, nor whether or not he will marry her. The description of her voyage to London lasts 16 lines, seven lines of which detail all of the dangers she is willing to suffer to see again the man she loves, including sickness, death, hunger, woe, and the perils of both sea and land. Alisaundre's transformation from heathen to Christian comes from her willingness to persevere through the dangers of her unknown world.

The reason for Alisaundre's perseverance is her love for Gilbert, which is the motivating force behind much of the narrative. Alisaundre's conviction, her love of Gilbert, is so strong that she is willing to lose all she knows. Because of this affection, she is willing to endure the possibility of death and suffer the ridicule and scorn of being othered. Alisaundre's baptism signifies her rebirth as a Christian woman and the death of her heathen past. Her character and willingness to endure "gret peril" in her pursuit of Gilbert anticipate similar characteristics and behaviours that Becket also models. When the bishop of Chichester exclaims that Alisaundre's arrival in London "a bitokne of God is · and noȝt of manne," he implies that there is a divine reason for her arrival: "þer miȝte some holy child · bytwene ham beo ibore" (*Becket* lines 102, 104). The prophecy is fulfilled through God's intervention in connecting Gilbert and Alisaundre first in the Holy Land and then through Alisaundre's perseverance in her journey to England from the Holy Land. Becket shows similar perseverance and conviction in the final moments of his life when his fellow monks encourage him to flee, but he refuses. When the knights attack him, he bows in prayer. No matter the consequences, nor the difficulties placed before him, Becket refuses to back down.

As Mills suggests, "Christian life itself may be comprehended as a string of lesser transformations, of which Becket's own conversion from the worldly administrator to pious archbishop is a prime example."[21] The legend of Alisaundre's conversion and transformation foreshadows Becket's own perseverance and transformation. His perseverance is most clearly seen in his refusal to acquiesce to the power of royal authority over the rights of the Church. Indeed, this refusal is the catalyst for his murder and his ultimate transformation from mortal to martyr. The

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[21] Mills, "Conversion, Translation, and Becket's 'Heathen' Mother," 383.

poet of the SEL clearly parallels Becket and his mother. It is Alisaundre who instructs Becket in the ways of a Christian life: "Is moder him wolde alday rede · and faste on him crie / To lede chast lif & clene · and fleo lecherie / And louie for al oþer þing · God and seinte Marie" (*Becket* lines 153-5). The role of Becket's father is less significant, as Gilbert's death is mentioned in neither the romance nor the life.

We might ask why medieval authors emphasised the relationship between Becket and his mother, Alisaundre. As Clanchy notes, "it was mothers who could be instrumental in shaping the earliest intellectual ambitions of their children."[22] Alisaundre's role as an educator to Becket affirms this maternal role. Likewise, the relationship between Mary and the Child Jesus, and Alisaundre and Becket, is further explored as the poet acknowledges the significance of St. Mary in Becket's life. St. Mary is one of only a few additional saints referenced in the entire legend and is referenced in connection with Alisaundre's moral and religious instruction for Becket. Barlow notes that "his mother and the mother of God were apparently the only women of importance in his life."[23] Further, we find in the "Anonymous I" biography of Becket that "his mother was particularly devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and as a result, he too through his life, took Mary as his main guide and comforter."[24] While it is unlikely that the poet is directly comparing the Virgin Mary to Alisaundre, the passage does emphasise the relationship between mother and child, and enable an audience to consider the image of Alisaundre instructing Becket, as we see in images of Mary instructing Child Jesus.[25] As Rudy suggests, "women teaching their children to read not

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[22] M. T. Clanchy, *Looking Back from the Invention of Printing: Mothers and the Teaching of Reading in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 31.

[23] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 17.

[24] Barlow, *Thomas Becket,* 16.

[25] For further information, cf. Clanchy, *Looking Back from the Invention of Printing*, 33; see L. Saetveit Miles, "The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation," *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (2014): 632-69.

only became a social norm, but a form of saintly imitation."[26] The purpose of this passage is not to suggest that Alisaundre is a saint herself, but to identify her as a mother of someone great.[27]

Even after an analysis of the romance of Gilbert, modern audiences must seriously ask why it is that such a legend, filled with stock-motifs of romance and unbelievable events, should become associated with Becket, and what purpose the story serves within a larger collection of sacred biographies. Brown theorises, "the story was deliberately utilized by some hagiographer for the purpose of embellishing the rather tame account of his hero's origin."[28] I agree with this hypothesis, but I believe it can be pushed further. That this story is affixed to the life of Becket in a collection of saints' lives, which the poet presents as tales of knights and kings, means that the poet is deliberately experimenting with genre. Moreover, the poet of the SEL deliberately signals to the audience what to expect in the life of Becket. The legend of Gilbert and Alisaundre contains many

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[26] K. M. Rudy, "An Illustrated Mid-fifteenth-century Primer for a Flemish girl," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 69 (2007), 77.

[27] While no such prophetic miracles or visions occur in the SEL account of Becket's life, there are a number of legends which suggest that Becket's mother had visions about Becket's birth, including one in which his blanket covered the whole of England. See Robertson, *MHTB* 3:13: "Beatum Thomam, antequam exiret de ventre novit Dominus et praedestinavit; et qualis quantusque futurus esset matri per revelationem declaravit. Siquidem illa praegnans adhuc vidit per comnium quod archiepiscopalem ecclesiam Cantuariensem totam in utero haberet; eumque in lucem editum obstetrix in manibus tollens aid, 'Archiepiscopum quendam a terra elevavi'" [Blessed Thomas, before he would emerge from the womb, God knew and predestined him, and through revelation he declared to his mother what kind and how great his future would be. Indeed, while she was with child, she saw through a dream that she had had the entire archiepiscopal church of Canterbury in her womb; and the midwife lifting him up into the light in her hands said, "Certainly, I raised an archbishop from the earth"]. As with her role as educator for Becket, Alisaundre's capacity to demonstrate the power of God is inherent to her characterisations in all of the Becket legends.

[28] Brown, "Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket," 71.

elements similar to those in thirteenth-century English romances, elements which Brown aptly summarises in *"Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket."* For example, the motif of the converted Saracen princess tells a tale of a princess who "embodies a Christian's ideal of female Saracen behaviour: she falls madly in love with a western knight, may betray her family or Saracen allies for his sake, and eagerly undergoes baptism to become both Christian and eligible for marriage to the hero."[29] As Brown notes, other such features include English nation-building, themes of exile and return, tyranny, friendship, and gentility. In each of these, the poet draws parallels between the romance prologue and the life of Becket. While Gilbert and Becket share the ability to quickly earn the trust of authority figures, seen in, for instance, Gilbert's relationship with Amiraud, it is the similarity between Alisaundre's transformation and Becket's transformation that the poet wishes to emphasise in the legend.

4.2 Genre Readings

Because the legend of Becket has such a complex textual history and was transmitted, interpreted, and disseminated in a variety of contexts, the SEL account can be read as hagiography, history, or romance. The text's proclivity to oscillate between different genres enables complex readings by different audiences. Engaging with Becket's legend through the lens of different genres— hagiography, history, and romance—enables a more insightful discussion about what hagiography, history, and romance looked like to medieval authors. The following sections examine three aspects of the legend which best demonstrate how Becket is a Christ-like figure, a legendary hero, and historical figure. I conclude by drawing these three readings together in one scene. During the pivotal moment when Becket appears to discuss Henry's constitutions at Clarendon, the poet draws upon genre features of hagiography, history, and romance, in a moment of true genre-hybridisation, effectively enabling the reader to experience a moment of English history that is both entertaining and morally edifying.

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[29] Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 62.

4.2.1 Hagiography

> Ihesu crist my lemmon swete
> Þat diȝest on þe Rode tre
> Wiþ al my might I þe be seche
> For þi woundes two and þre
> Þat also faste mot þi loue
> In to myn herte ficched be
> As was þe spere in to þin herte
> Whon þou soffredest deþ for me.[30]

This prayer, which circulated in two SEL manuscripts, Vernon and Simeon, reveals the intimate connection between medieval lay piety and the Passion of Jesus. Late medieval mystical traditions especially emphasised the importance of meditating on the wounds of Christ. Imagery of the five wounds extended beyond the genre boundaries of theology, mysticism, and liturgy; the affective image of Jesus on the cross became a point for meditation in Middle English literature as a whole. The wounds became metonymic and a locus of meditation for medieval laity. The SEL's poet alludes to key biblical moments, especially the Passion, with a focus on the wounds of Jesus, in the legend of Becket to assert Becket's Christ-like role for the English people. The poet, then, constructs a narrative which enables his audience to reflect on the life of Jesus while presenting the case that Becket is deservedly a saint because his life echoes key moments of Jesus'.

Given that the legend of Becket in the SEL is about a saint, it is traditionally read as a hagiography. However, a reading of specific hagiographic genre conventions is instructive to clarify, not simply assume, the work's genre. As Delehaye notes, "a hagiographer generally prepared, worked over and adapted his material, and thus in some measure gave it the mark of his own personality…but he did not mind if he destroyed the character of his documents, and so would amplify them and combine them in various ways."[31] Likewise, Sarah Salih, commenting on the role of the hagiographer, suggests that "the hagiographic narrator typically takes the position of mediator, both between the saint and the audience and between textual tradition and his own present

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[30] Frederick J. Furnivall, eds., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS,* vol. 2 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901), 476. See DIMEV 2818.

[31] Delehaye*, Legends of the Saints*, 66-7.

day."[32] The SEL poet adapts the legends surrounding Becket and inscribes in them edifying characteristics through scriptural references from his textual sources. The poet crafts the narrative into a saint's life by associating Becket first with other saints and then ultimately with Jesus. The aim of the poet is to produce a work which closely aligns the characteristics of Becket with those of Jesus through biblical allusions so that Becket becomes a Christ-like figure, one whose story is worth remembering and imitating.

Early in the narrative, Becket's relationship to the Church and to other saints is reinforced through his education with his mother, Alisaundre:

> Is moder him wolde alday rede · and faste of him crie
> To lede chast lif & clene · and fleo lecherie
> And louie for al oþer þing · God and seinte Marie
> And serui ham and Holy Churche · & beleue all folye. (lines 153-6)

From a young age Becket is instructed in the traditions and beliefs of the Church. Historically we know that Becket had a very close relationship with his mother, who was "particularly devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and as a result he too, throughout his life, took Mary as his main guide and comforter."[33] The SEL's inclusion of this particular detail of Becket's early life is significant because little is known of his life before he became chancellor. In fact, only ten lines are dedicated to Becket's childhood between his father's legendary journey to the Holy Land and his entrance into the court of Archbishop Theobald. But Mary is not the only saint that the SEL links with Becket.

On Tuesday October 13th, 1164, the trial at Northampton was nearing its conclusion. Becket had spent the previous day in bed stricken with "maudeflank" and was unable to attend the trial. On the Tuesday, Becket, with his chaplain, possibly Robert of Merton,[34] sang the mass for St. Stephen, the first martyr, including its politically poignant *introit* Psalm 118 (119):23, 86:

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[32] Salih, *Companion*, 11.

[33] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 16.

[34] See Duggan, *Thomas Becket,* 73.

Sederunt principes, et adversum me loquebantur: et iniqui persecuti sunt me: adjuva me, Domine, Deus meus, quia servus tuus exercebatur in tuis justificationibus […] omnia mandata tua veritas inique persecuti sunt me adjuva me.[35]

[For princes sat and spoke against me: and the wicked have persecuted me: help me, my Lord and God, for thy servant was employed in thy justifications […] All thy statutes are truth: they have persecuted me unjustly, do thou help me.][36]

This is significant for two reasons: first, that the date on which Becket celebrated his feast is not the actual calendrical feast day; and second, narratively, the celebration of St. Stephen is more complex than just a historical celebration of a feast day, but a foreshadowing of Becket's own martyrdom. The feast of St. Stephen is celebrated on December 26th, and Becket chose to celebrate it over two months early because, as the narrator interjects, "Þer ferste offis was propre inou · to þe stat þat he was inne" (line 934). The state that Becket was in was clearly a state of reflection and anticipation given his current tumultuous relationship with Henry.

The hostility between Becket and Henry was reaching a climax, and the narrator took this opportunity to invite the audience to consider Becket's state of mind. During the trial, he was surrounded by the king, his knights, bishops, and barons, all of whom are described by the poet as "tirans" (line 742). This is a clear parallel to Psalm 118 (119):23: "Etenim sederunt principes et adversum me loquebantur" ["for the princes sat, and spoke against me."]. The narrator, again interrupting the narrative of the poem, provides an English translation for the audience, translating the Latin sung mass into the easily accessible vernacular:

For wane princes habbeþ isete · & aȝen me ispeke iwis
And luþer men porsuede me · Louerd min help þou be[o]. (lines 936-7)

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[35] Psalm 118 (119):23; 86; see Chiesa cattolica, *Missale romanum, ex decreto sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum* (Compoduni: Kempten, 1857), 21. See David Knowles, *The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) at 77, and Duggan, *Thomas Becket*, at 73n. British Library MS Harley 4951, an eleventh-century witness of the *introit* to the mass of St. Stephen, contains both the musical notation and the text, including a highly decorated initial, f. 135r.

[36] Psalm 118 (119):23, 86. Translation my own.

The poet makes a suggestive decision in the translation of the mass; while the liturgy clearly evokes imagery of a trial with princes sitting and prosecuting the speaker, the SEL poet translates "porsuede" for *persecuti sunt*, effectively changing the image of a trial into a hunt.[37] The poet simultaneously reimagines Becket as subject to both legal procedures and a hunt. He is no longer simply subject to the etiquette of a courtroom but the brutality of a hunt, foreshadowing his escape from the grasp of the tyrant Henry before ultimately being hunted down in his own cathedral.

Thus, for Becket, the invocation of the *introit* for the feast of St. Stephen was literally his adoption of the psalm as representative of his own circumstance; he was surrounded by those prosecuting and pursuing him. The poet co-opts this passage and associates it with both the scriptural reference and the legacy of St. Stephen so that the audience might reconsider the political turmoil and threats Becket faces. However, the *introit* of St. Stephen's mass has more relevance still to Becket.

By translating the *introit*, the poet focuses the attention of the audience on scripture and the liturgy's religio-historical context. Becket is not an isolated figure in his struggles, but is intimately connected to Christian history, the persecution of early Christians, and the pantheon of Christian saints. The SEL's account of Becket's connection to St. Stephen enables compelling interpretations. As a hagiographical text, this passage reinforces the unity of all saints and their singular emulation of Christ, and additionally as a rhetorical strategy to foreshadow the prosecution of Becket at Northampton and his eventual murder in the cathedral.

The SEL poet does more than just associate Becket with other saints as an avenue of moral and liturgical edification, however. By comparing the key moments of Becket's life with the scriptural history of Jesus, the poet deliberately engages with the notion of Gregory of Tours that sanctity stems from the sacred: Jesus is the source of sanctity. There are two moments near the end of the poem which explicitly draw parallels to the last days of Jesus: his entrance into Jerusalem and the crucifixion. By exploring these parallels, the poet not only expounds upon the holiness of

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[37] See MED s.v. *purseuen,* v., accessed August 20, 2022. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED35302/.

Becket as a saint but emphasises the parallels between Jesus the messiah and Becket's role as a saviour of English people and the Church from royal tyranny.

Upon Becket's return, "the archbishop's cross had been raised in the prow as the ship came into harbour, and a crowd of poor people acclaimed his coming and prostrated themselves for his blessing."[38] In contrast, his enemies had gathered to arrest him for his diplomatic transgressions and excommunications of high-ranking churchmen and nobles. His entrance into Sandwich and journey to Canterbury were turbulent, and Becket's previous correspondence had alluded to his expectation of hostility upon his return to England.[39] While the historical evidence suggests that Becket's return was controversial, the SEL poet glosses over the controversy and presents Becket's return as accompanied by the "crois and wiþ tapres," saying that there was "ioie and blisse" (lines 1890-1). The poet extends the description of the arrival of Becket at Sandwich, describing the celebration of all those in attendance:

> Hy þonkede alle Iesu Crist · þat hy moste þe day ise[o]
> Of bellen and of tapres · so gret was þe soun
> And of eche meolodie asong · þo he com into þe toun
> Þat me nemiȝte oþer þing ihure · bote þe noise so gret
> More ioie nemiȝte be[o] · þanne was in eche stret
> As oure Louerde a Palmesoneday · honured was inou
> Þo he rod into Ierusalem · and toward þe deþe drou
> Also was sein Thomas · as þou miȝt ise[o] þere
> For oure Louerd [wolde] þat is deþ · semlable to is were. (lines 1892-1900)

The poet makes the remarkable claim that the English celebration rivals the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem. This allusion to Jesus accomplishes two goals: first, it demonstrates the value that Becket had for the English as their religious leader; and second, it foreshadows the impending death of Becket. Both of these contribute to the direct comparison of Becket with Jesus and to the Christ-like role that Becket would ultimately assume. The poet's interruption of the narrative with direct address to the audience in the above passage, "as þou miȝt ise[o] þere," anticipates the direct comparison between Jesus' death and Becket's. In the SEL Easter text, Jesus is described as a

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[38] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 224.

[39] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 224.

martyr: "Hit betokeþ al þat he wolde · for us imartred be[o]" (*Easter* line 39). The poet clearly establishes a lexicon consistent across a wide array of texts to describe the Passion of Jesus so that Jesus becomes a model for all saints. The language surrounding the Passion of Jesus serves as a point of reference for comparison between not just Jesus and Becket, but Jesus and all saints, as Gregory of Tours asserted.

Perhaps the most compelling comparison between Becket and Jesus appears during Becket's martyrdom. After he arrived in Canterbury, Becket spent only a few weeks before he was ultimately murdered in the cathedral. His murder, which solidifies his eventual sanctity, is deliberately compared in the SEL to the Passion of Jesus. In his final sermon, Becket delivers a message to his congregation that "myn endeday is nei icome · I ne worþ here noȝt longe / Icham for Holy Churche rite · iredy þane deþ auonge" (*Thomas Becket* lines 1981-2). These words echo those of Jesus at the last supper where, also in the SEL, the poet writes: "Ihesus wuste ȝare / Þat his tyme was ney ycome þat he sholde hennes ffare / Out of þis wordle to his ffader."[40] The reference to Matthew 26:18 suggests that, like Jesus, Becket anticipates his own imminent martyrdom. It is also significant that Becket makes this claim immediately before performing the eucharist, a re-enactment of Jesus' last supper. Like Jesus, Becket prepares "his followers," the congregants, monks, and others in the cathedral, for his murder. Because the poet's audience would already be familiar with both the gospels and the legend of Becket, the foreshadowing serves to emphasise, not introduce, the martyrdom. Comparisons between Jesus and Becket are not simply a rhetorical device intended to guide the expectations and anticipations of the audience but also serve to connect the two figures and unite them. Becket is like Jesus in that he too anticipated his death and articulated it beforehand to his "frendes" (line 1979).

But all of the preceding passages where Becket is compared to Jesus build up to the climax of his legend, his martyrdom. In this account, the poet deliberately extols the similarities between

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[40] Beatrice Daw Brown, ed., *The Southern Passion*, EETS OS 169 (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 867-869a. Brown's *Southern Passion* is edited from Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepysian 2344 (P), which also contains the legend of Thomas Becket.

Becket and Jesus to mythologise the historical murder, in an attempt to further associate the martyrdom of Becket with the crucifixion of Jesus.

Shortly before vespers on Tuesday, December 28th, 1170, Becket was in the archbishop's palace by Canterbury Cathedral. Four barons with their men came to arrest Becket, claiming that Henry had instructed them to do so. These four barons, William de Tracy, Reginald FitzUrse, Hugh de Morville, and Richard le Bret (Brito), met with the royalist Ranulf de Broc, who was occupying the archbishop's lands.[41] Conspiring for the benefit of Henry following his infamous outburst, "What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and promoted in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk!",[42] the four barons attempted to arrest Becket. His retinue, aware of the danger that he was in, encouraged him to flee, but Becket rejected this advice and proceeded to the cathedral with "a crois an honde" (line 2097). Shortly after entering the cathedral, the four barons confronted the archbishop with drawn weapons and attempted to seize him. Barlow suggests in his analysis of the event that it "got out of hand."[43]

That the events surrounding Becket's attempted arrest and subsequent murder were out of hand, could only be an understatement. Of those congregants, monks, and colleagues present who later provided written accounts, only one was actively involved in the conflict, Edward Grim, a monk who had no previous connection to the other members of Becket's retinue. Others, like John of Salisbury, fled and hid. Therefore, it is difficult to surmise precisely who struck Becket when and how frequently. Anne Duggan mentions four attackers and wounds and her summary of the events is worth quoting in full:

> In trying to protect the archbishop, Master Edward Grim thrust out an arm and so shared the first blow from FitzUrse (or de Tracy), which glanced off the top of Becket's cranium, cut through his clothing to the shoulder bone, and nearly severed Grim's arm as the sword thrust down; another slashing blow or two to the head, perhaps from de Tracy, struck the archbishop to the ground, and, as he lay there, Brito [Bret] sliced off the tonsured crown of his head with such force that his sword broke on the pavement… Then Hugh de Horsey,

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[41] Barlow, *Thomas Becket,* 235; Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket,* 205.

[42] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, 235, n15.

[43] Barlow, *Thomas Becket,* 247. Cf. Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket,* 212.

nicknamed Mauclerk, a clerk in the service of Hugh de Morville, put his foot on the neck of the fallen man, and scraped his bloodied brains out on to the paved floor.[44]

The assailants in this summary description numbered four and delivered to Becket four wounds: two to the top of the head, a third severing the crown from the skull, and a fourth removing the brain from the skull. There is little doubt that the third wound was fatal and the fourth was meant to be desecrating.

The SEL account of the murder differs slightly in one important aspect: the number of wounds. Delehaye remarks that a legend "presupposes an historical fact which is its subject or occasion," and that the "historical fact is embroidered or distorted by popular imagination."[45] The legend of Becket's murder certainly satisfies these criteria, and as a hagiographical text, the key moment of embellishment lies in the number of wounds received. The SEL begins the account of the murder as follows:

> Sire Reynaud le Fiȝ Ours · mest sorwe of echon
> Forto smite þis holyman · is swerd he drou anon
> Ac Edward Grim þat was is clerk · of Grantebrugge ibore
> To helpe is louerd ȝif he miȝte · pulte is arm byuore
> He wonded is arm swuþe sore · þat blod orn adoun
> Mid þulke dunt also he smot · sen Thomas ope þe croun
> Þat þe blod orn bi is face adoun · in þe riȝt half of þe wonde
> Loude gradde þis luþer kniȝt · smiteþ alle to gronde
> …
> Anoþer kniȝt smot sein Thomas · in þulke sulue wonde
> And made him buye is face adoun · & loke toward þe gronde
> Þe þridde in þulke sulue stude · þer after smot anon
> And made him aloute al adoun · is face ope þe ston
> In þulke steode þe veor þe smot · þat þeo þer hadde er ido
> Þat þe point of his swerd brak · in þe marbre stone atwo
> …
> Roberd de Brok him bi þoȝte · and aȝen turnde anon
> And þoru þe scolle smot is swerd · deope wiþinne þe heued
> Þo was þe scole al amty · and no brain bileued. (lines 2137-44; 2153-8; 2180-2)

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[44] Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket,* 212.

[45] Delehaye, *Legends of the Saints*, 8.

Note that there are not four wounds but five in the SEL account.[46] FitzUrse strikes the first blow, hitting both Thomas and Edward Grim, a further three wounds are delivered by unnamed knights,

[46] The *Quadrilogus* likewise identifies five wounds:

Et inclinato capite secundi vulneris praestolabatur adventum. Secundo vero vulnere capiti ejus inflicto, recto corpore quasi ad orationem prostatus in terram corruit. Tertius autem plurimam testae portionem amputando vulnus praecedens horribiliter ampliavit. Quartus autem, ab uno eorum quod ferire tardaret correptus, in idem vulnus vi inani gladium vibravit, gladioque in pavimento marmoreo confracto, tam cuspidem quam gladii sui capulum reliquit ecclesiae. Satisque veritati congruum esse videtur, quod nonihil res ista potestatis adverae dejectionem veram, et trumphaturae per sanguinem martyris ecclesiae signare viedtur victoriam? Nec sufficere videbatur eidem filio Sathanae in Dei sacerdotem tantum perpetrasse flagitium, nisi, etiam, (quod dictu horribile est,) injecto in sacratissimum caput ejus gladio, jam defuncto cerebrum ejiceret, et per pavmentum crudelissime spargeret, sceleris ejusdem participibus clamans "mortuus est;" *MHTB* 4:398. This section is taken from Benedict of Peterborough's account.

[And with an inclined head he awaited the arrival of the second wound. Truly with the second wound having been inflicted upon his head, just as if with a straight body he fell to the ground prostrate in prayer. However, the third wound, excelling in its cutting, horribly spreads the many pieces of the skull. But the fourth, taken up by one of those that was slow to strike, in the same wound he dashed his sword into the hollow [of the skull] with force, with the sword having been smashed into marble pavement, so that the tip of that sword which he let go off remains in the church. And in truth it seemed to be fitting enough, because in some measure he foretold that matter. For what does that breaking of the sword of his adversaries seem to signify, except the true defeat of his powerful enemy, and the eventual victory of the church that will triumph through the blood of the martyr? Neither to that same son of Satan did it seem to suffice that such shame had been carried out upon this priest of God, except, even (which is horrible to say), with his sword injected into his most sacred head, now he expels the brain with a pouring, and he scatters it most bloodily upon the pavement, shouting to those partaking in that same crime, "he is dead."]

and the fifth wound is delivered by Ranulf de Broc. Historically, de Broc was not present and was still by the palace, and it was de Morville or a member of his retinue who scraped the brains from the skull. But it is not who, but the number, that is of primary significance to the poet of the SEL. It is not the assailants that the poet insists the audience pay attention to, but the wounds. Why, we should ask, does the poet emphasise the wounds of Becket and the number?

The poet provides two clues in this passage. Becket, immediately before his murder, exclaims: "Ac ich bidde ȝou ȝif ȝe me sleþ · in oure Louerdes name / Þat ȝe ne come ney non o þer man · harm to do ne ssame / For non oþer gulti þer nis" (lines 2125-7a). The monks who were previously around Becket flee, "ope þe weuedes for fere" (line 2146). The poet compares this to the crucifixion when "in þe gospel it is iwrite · þat oure Louerd him sulf þo sede / Wanne me smit þe ssep hurde · þe sshep wolleþ tosprede" (lines 2149-50). The poet connects the crucifixion when the disciples fled to the moment during Becket's death when his friends fled. Again, the poet provides commentary on what he believes Becket thinks about in that moment between the first and second blow, claiming that Becket was reflecting on the final moments of Jesus: "Þer on þoȝte sein Thomas · and bad for is also" (line 2152). The brief introspection serves to unite Becket and Jesus in the final moments of their lives; just as Jesus prayed that his disciples should not come to harm, Becket was concerned for the safety of his followers.

Finally, the poet concludes the martyrdom with another direct comparison to Jesus:

> As þe Giwes smite oure Louerd · to þe heorte gronde
> After is deþ wiþ a sper · and made him þe vifte wonde
> Þis luþer men alle in o stude · smite sein Thomas
> In þe scolle euene abrod · as þe croune was. (lines 2183-6)

This is the most direct comparison of Becket and Jesus the poet uses, and he does so with a simile. Unlike previous passages with allusions to scripture and other SEL-texts, the poet instructs the audience that Becket is like Jesus because of the five wounds. As Becket's skull lay empty of its blood and brain, Jesus hung on the cross with the spear being driven into his sides and blood and water pouring out.[47] Both final wounds empty the body of blood. This comparison is the most overt

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[47] John 19:34.

example in the account of Becket of the medieval preoccupation with the five wounds of Jesus and the perception of the unity of saints in emulation of Jesus. As when Gregory of Tours ignores correct Latin grammar in his definition of saintliness to assert a higher truth, so too does the poet of the SEL forego historicity in favour of a higher religious truth, emphasising the medieval notion that the saint's life serves as a medium of moral edification and that Becket is a Christ-like figure.

4.2.2 History

As Becket is a significant English historical figure, the SEL account of his life concentrates on key, defining historical moments which cemented Becket's legacy. While certain legendary aspects of his life were perpetuated in his saints' cult by his venerators, like his messianic qualities and legendary parentage, the political intrigue that catalysed Becket's martyrdom accounts for much of the narrative of his life. The narrative's portrayal of the historical encounters between Becket and Henry exhibits the poet's engagement with historiographical motifs. One of the most dramatic scenes in the Becket account narrates the debate and conflict surrounding the Constitutions of Clarendon.

The core issue that the Constitutions of Clarendon address is jurisdiction in cases involving criminous clerks. Additionally, the articles attempted to arbitrate the authorities of the Crown and Church and reflect ancestral customs enjoyed by former kings. Mulligan notes that the constitutions were intended to "reduce the jurisdictional conflict between secular and canon legal systems" and that they were intended to "restore customary practices which had fallen out of use" during the Anarchy.[48] Henry proposed, in short, "a double process, in which accused clerics should be tried in an ecclesiastical court, and, if convicted, be degraded and transferred to a secular court for sentence and punishment."[49] Becket took issue with forgoing the dignity of his order and the custody of criminous clerks. This disagreement between Henry and Becket would, in the end, result in the constitutions presented at Clarendon in 1164. In total, there were 16 constitutions addressed

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[48] Robert F. Mulligan, "The Common Law Character of English Charters: Spontaneous Order in the Constitutions of Clarendon (1164)," *Constitutional Political Economy* 16 (2005), 286.

[49] Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket,* 39.

at Clarendon, all of which discussed the powers of the Church and Crown as they related to either to judicial proceedings or property rights.

A comparison between the constitutions as they were presented at Clarendon and as they appear in the SEL reveals two insights: it reveals a considered effort by the poet to produce a historiographical text framed by a hagiographical text, and it emphasises the significance of including historical features in the poem. Because the constitutions are present in the poem, they suggest that the poet had access to the constitutions during the production of the poem. This broadens our understanding of the source material used by the poet. Not only was the poet drawing upon a historical compilation of the life of Becket, the *Quadrilogus*, he incorporated a legal document, namely a copy of the Constitutions of Clarendon. It is accepted that the *Quadrilogus* was the foundational source for the poet; however, the Constitutions of Clarendon do not make an appearance in the *Quadrilogus.* As Bolton writes: "it is an innovation."[50] The poet's innovative approach to the SEL account provides historical texts to an audience which otherwise would not have material access to the legal documentation of a significant moment of English legal history. However, what the poet provides is not actually the constitutions as they were presented in 1164, but a hybrid list of articles from two different legal documents, the first from 1164 and the second from a series of further articles drawn up in 1169.

No single extant manuscript contains the Constitutions of Clarendon, the *Clausa exilii* from 1169, and the *Quadrilogus* in the order that they are presented in the SEL.[51] This shows a considerable effort by the poet to include this list. Moreover, in the words of Bolton, "the changes are striking and seem to have been meaningful for a medieval reader."[52] The changes are twofold: first, the inclusion of both the 1164 and 1169 decrees, and second, the arrangement of the decrees in the presentation in the SEL.

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[50] William Bolton, "Early Medieval English Saints' Lives and the Law." PhD diss. (Arizona State University, 2012), 159. https://repository.asu.edu/items/14576.

[51] Bolton, "Early Medieval English Saints' Lives," 161, 162. Cf. Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket: A Textual History of His Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 40.

[52] Bolton, "Early Medieval English Saints' Lives," 156.

By including both the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 and the decrees of 1169, the poet combines and conflates two different historical sources to create a hybrid account of the legal issues pressing Becket. In so doing, the poet reconstructs a legal history for the narrative of the poem. The poet's use of the constitutions is even more significant than first is apparent. In lieu of presenting the constitutions as they were arranged in 1164, the poet divides them according to Becket's reception of them. Bolton and Duggan have both suggested that the legal opinions of Becket are misattributed opinions of Pope Alexander III, however.[53] Nevertheless, the poet first outlines which of the constitutions Becket "grantede wel vawe" before shifting to the constitutions that "dude him wel wo" (lines 543, 563). In these twenty lines, the poet provides translations for four of the conflated constitutions: that is, the two separate articles of 1164 and 1169. Historically, we know that the Church "tolerated" six of the sixteen Constitutions of Clarendon.[54] And the poet nods to this by alluding to the other two in the shift between acceptable and unacceptable articles. By presenting the constitutions in this arrangement, the poet is deemphasising the royal authority attached to them and emphasising Becket's reaction. This has two effects: it situates the audience with Becket, by aligning our reaction with his, and it provides an easily navigable list of English legal history. The poet rhetorically sets up the audience, cueing us for what to expect through the inner reflection of Becket. The poet provides emotional signals to Becket's reactions; they make him joyful or give him woe. These signal to the audience on an emotional level what they also ought to feel. Because the audience first learns about and engages with the acceptable constitutions, and are signalled to agree with them, the subsequent constitutions are rejected because of the rhetorical signal from the poet.

The poet's former deference to the source material is called into question: why would the poet suddenly alter the historical text? A look at the poet's work as translator and compiler reveals a possible motivation. Until work done by Knowles, Anne Duggan, and Brooke elucidated the

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[53] Bolton, "Early Medieval English Saints' Lives," 163. See F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, eds., *Councils & Synods with other Documents Relating to the English Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964)*,* 855.

[54] Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket*, 46.

historicity of the decrees of 1169, scholarship was unable to accept the decrees, and they were seen as even a possible forgery.[55] However, as Knowles et al. point out: "if the decrees are substantially authentic, and date from the penultimate year (1169) of the conflict, they help to strengthen considerably the case of Becket, who maintained that Henry was bidding fair to sever his English dominions from any connection with the archbishop himself and with the pope, Alexander III."[56] For the poet of the SEL, including these decrees reinforces Becket's position against authoritarian over-reach. While Bolton has suggested that "a rhetorical strategy may be difficult to discern from the list," it is clear, given the hybrid list's presence, that the poet was cueing the audience to see Henry as an "outrageous" tyrant, and Becket as a sympathetic and "reasonable" figure.[57] The poet is, in short, embracing the features of historical writing to enhance the hagiographical features of the narrative.

4.2.3 Romance

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Middle English romance is a contested genre, difficult to define, and overly broad when it is defined. There are, however, features in texts we consider to be Middle English romance that frequently appear, one of which is the "arming scene." As Brewer notes, "recognition that a description of arming is a topos guides us to a correct understanding of its literary function and meaning."[58] But what is specifically the arming of the knight, and what is its function? Brewer suggests that the "general significance of the arming is as ritual."[59] The ritualistic character of placing armour on the knight in preparation for battle is key to constructing

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[55] M. D. Knowles, Anne J. Duggan, and C. N. L. Brooke, "Henry II's Supplement to the Constitutions of Clarendon," *English Historical Review* 87, no. 345 (1972), 758.

[56] Knowles, Anne Duggan, and Brooke, "Henry II's Supplement," 758.

[57] Bolton, "Early Medieval English Saints' Lives," 164.

[58] Derek Brewer, "The Arming of the Warrior in European Literature and Chaucer," in *Essays Presented to Paul E. Beichner C.S.C.*, ed. by Edward Vasta and Zacharias P. Thundy (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 238.

[59] Brewer, "The Arming of the Warrior," 222.

the hero within a martial context and, as Liu points out, the knight's identity within a social structure. "In the romances," Liu writes, "identity is not only positional, but also as a certain type of position. The central character or characters of these texts tend to be distinguished from common humanity by being pre-eminent in the categories to which they belong."[60] Indeed, as will be illustrated in the following case study, the armour worn by the figures I will discuss establishes identity.

Brewer's interpretation and delineation of the arming topos in Middle English romances are limiting, however. As Lorraine Stock suggests, the narrowing of the definition of arming to "the description of the *process* of a warrior donning armor…eliminates from consideration many extended literary passages that describe armor."[61] Just as Stock expands the topos to include "an as yet virtually untreated medieval *topos*—arms and the *woman*," I will expand this further to include a person whom we might not initially consider as being armed at all—the priest.[62]

The notion of religious figures wearing armour is not original to the Middle Ages. There is, in fact, a scriptural basis for spiritual armour. Isaiah 59:17 mentions "justice as a breastplate" and "a helmet of salvation."[63] The author of Ephesians commands the reader to "take unto you the armour of God":

> your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit (which is the word of God).[64]

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[60] Yin Liu, "Representations of Identity in the Middle English Romances," PhD diss., (University of Alberta, 1997), 38.

[61] Lorraine Stock, "'Arms and the (Wo)man' in Medieval Romance: The Gendered Arming of Female Warriors in the 'Roman d'Eneas' and Heldris's 'Roman de Silence,'" *Arthuriana* 5 no. 4 (1995), 56.

[62] Stock, "'Arms and the (Wo)man,'" 57.

[63] Isaiah 59:17.

[64] Ephesians 6:13-17.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 instructs the reader to wear "the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."[65] Arming scenes in romance, however, invert the relationship between virtues and arms. Whereas scriptural references to armour propose the idea that Christian virtues are like certain forms of armour, Middle English romances take pieces of armour and inflect them with symbolism. Scriptural arming scenes and discussions are a precedent for their uses in a works of hagiography that share commonalities with romances. In other words, arming scenes have both a religious and romance tradition. By expanding our understanding of what an arming scene looks like, we can identify moments where "arming" takes place, even when the "arms" are not literal, but metaphorical.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, perhaps the most referenced arming scene in all of Middle English literature, Gawain's shield, emblazoned with its pentangle, signifies the five fives, with each point representing symbols of religiosity, chivalry, and martial prowess. The poet justifies this symbol on religious grounds, saying "Hit is a syngne þat Salamon set sumquyle."[66] While the *Gawain* poet's use of the armour as a signifier for religious articles of faith is relatively late within the Middle English romance tradition, its presence suggests a reverence for the topos. The arming topos is a common convention in Middle English romance, as I will show, and so its inclusion in the legend of Becket in the SEL inflects the narrative toward romance.

Bevis of Hampton circulated contemporaneously with the SEL and serves as a potential analogue for the SEL poet's interpretation of romance. As a Middle English romance, *Bevis* contains features like the arming of the knight which are characteristic of the genre. Before his fight with Bradmond, the newly dubbed knight of King Ermin, Bevis, is armed by the king's daughter Josian. The poet describes in detail each item worn:

> [She] yaue him a schilde good and sure
> With III eglis of fyne asure,
> A champ of gold wel idight,
> With lambels of siluer bright.
> And sith he girde him with Morglay,

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[65] 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

[66] J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* 2nd ed. rev. by Norman Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), line 625.

> Whiche was bothe stout and gay.
> Iosian him broght for to bere
> Hawberk, acton, I you swere.
> Beuys did on his acton;
> Hit was worthe many a town,
> And an hawberk that same day.
> Than seid alle that hit say
> That thei ne say neuer suche eny:
> Hit nas but the wight off on peny;
> Hit was iwroȝt so wel and feire,
> There myȝt nothing hit apeire.[67]

In this passage, the descriptors applied to each piece of armour and each weapon exemplify the knighthood of Bevis. Unlike the extensive itemisation provided by the *Gawain* poet, presumably not every piece of armour worn by Bevis is addressed by the poet. Instead, the poet here emphasises the shield, sword, aketon, hauberk, and banner. The ordering of the arming scene, as Brewer argues, is significant and it is worth noting that the arming of Bevis by Josian does not follow a logical order that a knight would traditionally follow when preparing for battle. Brewer does suggest that "the dubbing affects the order" and that the arming scene is "a feeble performance."[68] In the words of Stock, if this passage is tantamount to "rhetorical ornamentation" since it does not precisely fit Brewer's narrow vision of the arming paradigm, then we must ask what its rhetorical purpose is, i.e. what argument the poet makes.[69] I propose that its rhetorical function as ornamentation affirms that Bevis is a knight. His shield, for example, contains heraldic imagery, and his sword is named Morglay. The price attached to his aketon is not in silver or gold but land. Finally, it is Josian who brings his armour to him. For all these reasons, Bevis' status as a knight is affirmed through the spectacle of his arming scene. Bevis does engage in combat without the pomp of arming scenes previous to this passage. A notable difference between those previous combat encounters with other

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[67] Jennifer Fellows, ed., *Sir Bevis of Hampton,* EETS OS 349 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), lines 1072-87. In this passage from MS Naples XIII.B.29, King Ermin dubs Bevis before the arming. In Cambridge Ff.2.38, Bevis is dubbed immediately following his arming. Like the Naples MS, the Auchinleck MS has Bevis knighted prior to his arming.

[68] Brewer, "Arming of the Warrior," 236.

[69] Stock, "'Arms and the (Wo)man,'" 56.

Saracens and the boar is the intention behind the combat. Whereas Bevis' fight with the boar establishes his martial prowess, his imminent battle with Bradmond is more than just about martial ability but about conflict between cultures. King Ermin makes the claim that Bevis now, as a knight, represents a community: "Thowe shalt bere into bataile / My baner."[70] In effect, the arming passage reinforces Bevis' knightly behaviour and his new title as knight, by associating him with objects of war which connect him to a community of warriors, namely King Ermin's.

If the poet establishes Bevis' identity through armour, as Liu has convincingly argued about arming scenes for other knights, notably Roland, then this passage marks a shift in the audience's perception of Bevis. While he previously demonstrated his martial prowess in combat with his stepfather, Saracens, and the boar, his new identity as a knight reinforces those ideals but situates him within an established order: a chivalric order with clear expectations of gender roles, duty, and honour.

A more explicit rendering of identity through armour can be found in the Charlemagne romances. On arming in *Otuel and Roland*, Liu explains how the descriptions are "not merely the equipping of a man but also, and more importantly, the assembly of an ideal."[71] The poet of *Otuel and Roland* spends more lines describing the arms of Roland and those who presented them to him than does the poet of *Bevis*. Also, unlike Bevis, the order of Roland's arming follows a logic: aketon, hauberk, helmet, sword, shield, spear, spurs, saddle. The arming of Roland most closely follows the limiting definition of arming according to Brewer. There is a ritualistic tone throughout the arming, as each piece is described and presented by one of Roland's peers. Not only is each piece of armour described, but the nature of the knights' relationship to Roland is described. It is clear that the poet is attempting more than just ornamentation but is situating Roland amongst his peers. While Estre brings Roland his helmet, he is described as "lel."[72] Likewise, other knights are represented either by their titles or relationships to Roland.

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[70] Fellows, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, EETS OS 349, lines 1066-7.

[71] Liu, "Representations of Identity," 32.

[72] O'Sullivan, "Otuel and Roland," in *Firumbras and Otuel and Roland*, line 288.

The poet's work in this arming scene and the subsequent arming of Otuel are relatively formulaic. The poet uses repetitious phrases such as "As good as any man myȝt" and variations thereof in the descriptions of the arms.[73] Even Otuel's armour is spoken of in high regard; his shield in particular is considered "wel y-wrouȝt / That none myȝt bettyr be thouȝt."[74] Given the dynamics between Roland and Otuel, namely their difference in faith, the question should be raised why both knights are given an arming scene. Otuel, a Saracen knight, is given nearly the same level of detail as Roland, the Christian knight. The presence of arming scenes in these romances raises a number of questions concerning their rhetorical function. Who, for instance, is being armed and who is performing the arming, and what does this say about the role that arms play in narratives about martial pursuits?

With both Bevis and Otuel, it is a woman and a member of a conflicting belief system who provides the arms and performs the arming. This complicates the simple ornamentation of the arming passages and suggests a commentary on the entanglement between Christianity and paganism. Bevis and Otuel are not simply knights, but ambassadors, in a sense. They hold composite identities. Bevis is knighted not by a Christian king but by the Saracen king Ermin. Otuel, while already a knight, is provided armor by the Christian king Charlemagne. Josian the Saracen princess and Belisent the Christian princess both engage with the knights in the same way that the peers arm Roland. They represent the acceptance of the knight into a social order of warriors. The act of arming itself is a form of cultural entanglement between religion, gender, and social identity.

While the legend of Gilbert and Becket's Saracen mother had a long tradition, the SEL poet seems to acknowledge this motif in romance by perpetuating the legend in the SEL account of Becket. In both the Gilbert Prologue and Bevis, we see this entanglement between Christian and pagan culture. Both Gilbert and Bevis are readily accepted into the Saracen lord's presence, and both engage in complex intercultural relationships with Alisaundre and Josian. Bevis, Otuel, and

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[73] O'Sullivan, "Otuel and Roland," in *Firumbras and Otuel and Roland*, lines 299, 304, 313, 320, 331.

[74] O'Sullivan, "Otuel and Roland," in *Firumbras and Otuel and Roland*, lines 372-3.

Gilbert embrace dual identities straddling the boundaries between Christianity and paganism. The arming of Bevis and Otuel, especially, is the vehicle for this compositing, i.e., the layering of images to construct a new image. The arming passages in romance, however, are not restricted to intercultural exchange and identity construction but also variably represent composite social identity.

Becket is not the only priest who is characterised as martial. Notably, in the Charlemagne romances, Bishop Turpin is portrayed as a martial figure despite his role as religious leader. In the *Siege of Milan*, there is an extensive passage elaborately describing the arms that Bishop Turpin dons prior to his fight with the Saracens.

> The Bischopp than keste of his abytte
> And aftir armours he askede tytte;
>   For egernesse he loughe.
> A kirtill and a corsett fyne,
> Therover he keste an acton syne
>   And it to hym he droughe
> An hawbarke with a gesserante;
> His gloves weren gude and avenaunte.
>   And als blythe als birde one boughe
> He tuke his helme and sythen his brande,
> Appon a stede, a spere in hande
>   Was grete and gud ynoghe.[75]

Immediately before donning armour, Turpin performs mass, but after its conclusion he sheds his religious vestments "abytte" and proceeds to put on the armour of a knight. Turpin is not shedding his role as a religious leader, however. His shift into a martial role serves as a model for Charlemagne's knights: "The [le]wede men may se syghte / And gud ensample have" (lines 929-30). Turpin's arming scene departs from Brewer's assertion of arming as ritual, although there are elements of ritualistic behaviour given Turpin's performance of mass immediately prior.

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[75] Alan Lupack, ed. "The Siege of Milan," in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), retrieved from https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/lupack-three-middle-english-charlemagne-romances-siege-of-milan, lines 910-21.

Turpin models the holy knight. He is the vehicle through which the poet engages with social and religious expectations of priests in a society which privileges the martial hero, i.e. the romance hero. When Hopkins notes that romances "do not attempt an original or consistently realistic representation of experience, but evoke universally recognisable truths by the constant recombination of familiar motifs" she is in dialogue with medieval concerns about Christianity and violence.[76]

When Gratian "proclaimed prowess a gift of God," he was, in essence, justifying martiality within a Christian religious framework.[77] This shift in Christian attitudes towards violence provides room for religious figures donning armor in literature. The Friar Tuck motif, as it were, becomes a feature of medieval literature. So, while the poet of the *Siege of Milan* is consciously deploying the martial feature of arming passages in romance, the poet is doing so in a way that is unexpected. The warrior-hero of the story is not the knight, but the priest. Given the scriptural precedent for holy armour, the notion of an armed priest is not novel, but within the romance context, it certainly provides space for rhetorical argumentation. Such descriptions of armed priests invite the audience to question why. As with the arming of Bevis and Otuel, Turpin's arming is a matter of identity construction. Turpin embraces a composite identity of both warrior and priest. The arming scene acts as a rhetorical shift. Turpin abandons the singular identity of priest as he removes his vestments and embraces the martial characteristics when he arms. The arming scene is emblematic of this duality of character.

In the SEL account of Becket, there are at least two passages that we might consider arming scenes according to an expanded understanding of Brewer's definition. The poet of the SEL uses the arming feature in novel ways. While they might not appear to correlate with other romance arming scenes, they serve a similar purpose: they situate Becket as a hero preparing for combat, they serve as a construction of Becket's composite identity, and they are used rhetorically to cue the audience's expectations.

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[76] Hopkins, *Sinful Knights*, 2.

[77] Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 66-7.

The first description of Becket's clothing functions as a comparable analogue to an arming scene, though it more strictly speaks to the duality of Becket's character. As Becket is elevated from chancellor to archbishop,

> Þe abit of monk he nom
> And suþþe clerkes robe aboue · as to is stat bicom
> So þat he was wiþoute clerk · wiþ[inne] monk also. (lines 265b-7)

This passage does not conform to the narrow limitations of arming scenes according to Brewer. Becket is not being armed for combat. Indeed, the poet does not even describe armour. However, although this is not a conventional description of armour, Becket equips himself with new clothing for his role as chancellor. The poet describes the sartorial choices that reveal Becket's identity. Becket puts on the habit of a monk, which he then covers with the clerk's robe. As when Turpin equips himself with the armour of a warrior to battle the Saracens, Becket equips himself with the vestments of two distinct identities simultaneously. This is a deliberate conflation of his identities as both a secular politician and a priest. The poet lays the foundation for the audience to expect a double identity. While Becket might *appear* to be a secular figure, he is *actually* a religious figure. In the opening to Becket's life in the *La,* we see a similar observation about Becket:

> Thomas interpretatur abyssus, geminus vel sectus. Abyssus, id est, profundus in humiliatione, quod patet in cilicio et pedum pauperum lotione, geminus in praelatione, quia geminato praesuit, scilicet verbo et exemplo, sectus in passione.

> [Thomas means depth, or twofold, or cut down. He was profound in his humility, as is shown by his hair shirt and his washing of the poor; twofold in his office, teaching the people by word and example; and cut down in his martyrdom.][78]

Likewise, in the *Gilte Legende,* the author makes special note of Becket's sartorial choices:

> And he used not onle the hayre to his sherte but his nether clothis also of here doune to his knees, and he coueryd so suttelli hys holinesse with honest clothyng that it was not

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[78] Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea vulgo historia lombardica dicta,* ed. Th. Graesse (Lipsiae: Librariae Arnoldianae, 1850), 66; translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Reading on the Saints,* trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 59.

perceyued, for the apparaill of his clothyng outeward was conformed to the maners of eueriche.[79]

The duality of Becket, evinced through his sartorial choices, is a literary tradition which extends beyond the SEL, and this thread of duality is woven throughout the entirety of the narrative, as we will see. But while others comment on Becket's choice of clothing, the poet of the SEL deploys the martial feature of arming in romance as an avenue of exploration for the audience. The audience is to expect Becket to be a hero, even if his outward appearance complicates the simplicity of having an easily identifiable hero marked by chivalric signifiers.

Prior to his trial at Northampton, following his mass of St. Stephen, Becket prepares for his trial by getting dressed:

> Þo sein Thomas hadde is masse ido · is chesible he gan of weue
> Ac alle þe oþere vestemens · he let on him bileue
> Oþer armure nadde he non · for Holy Churche to fiȝte
> Anouwarde he caste is clerkes cope · þat fel him to riȝte
> Godes fleiss he tok and is blod · wiþ him stilleliche
> A crois he nom inis hond · and wende forþ baldeliche
> Þe vestements [were] is armure · as fel to suche kniȝte
> Þe crois was is baner · for Holy Churche to fiȝte. (lines 953-60)

This is a remarkable example of how the SEL poet is able to weave romance features into the narrative. As before, the poet is constructing an image of Becket based around his vestments, his armour. The parallel between ecclesiastical vestments and armour is deliberate. Becket is the armed knight and the cross is his banner. The deliberate use of martial language suggests to the audience that we are encountering not only an archbishop, but a battle-hardened warrior. Moreover, the poet recalls the *Banna sanctorum* and the idea of the "hardi" knight when Becket refers to himself as "hardiore" (line 969). Becket, thus, aligns himself with the pantheon of saints who shed their blood to nourish the world.

Following his arming, Becket enters the court of Henry and is immediately confronted by Bishop Foliot "þat euere was is fo" (line 969). He is, in essence, entering into combat, albeit verbal.

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[79] Richard Hamer, ed., *Gilte legende,* EETS OS 327, 328, and 339 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 61.

The notion that the trial of Northampton was a form of combat is not a novel reading of the historical legend. In this regard, the SEL poet is simply conforming to well-established perspectives. In the life of Becket by William Fitzstephen, for example, we see allusions to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, a suggestive example of attitudes towards the relationship between Becket and his antagonists.

> et cum eis Rogerus ille archiepiscopus Eboraci, qui ultimus ad curiam veniebat, ut conspectior ingrederetur, et de conslio illo regis esse non videretur; qui suam e regione anticrucem sibi præferri faciebat, quasi pila minantia pilis.

> [Among them was Roger, archbishop of York, who had come to court last so as to enter more conspicuously, and not appear to be part of the king's council. He also had his cross carried before him, though he was outside his province, like javelin threatening javelin.][80]

The image of two lances threatening each other is precisely the sort of imagery that would have been appreciated in the SEL account. Not only is Fitzstephen adopting a martial metaphor for Becket and his enemies, he does so to great effect. While this image never made it into the SEL account, it nonetheless signifies an established perspective. Becket enters combat armed.

The SEL poet presents Becket as a complex figure. Becket adopts two roles, the religious prelate and the Christian warrior. The "arming scene" is frequently used in Middle English romances: to exemplify character, in the case of Bevis, to construct composite identities in the case of both Roland and Otuel, and to blur the line between Turpin's role as model warrior and model Christian leader. So too does the SEL poet deploy the arming motif to present Becket's dual role as a Christian leader and Christian warrior. The ways in which the poet describes Becket's clothing choices make him more than just a saint but also a martial hero.

4.3 Hybrid Genre

This chapter has, so far, focused on medieval notions of hagiography, historiography, and romance. This is done so that we may dispossess ourselves of modern notions of genre and approach these medieval texts through the eyes of medieval writers and readers as best we can.

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[80] Robertson, *MHTB* 3:57-8; translation taken from Michael Staunton, ed. And trans., *The Lives of Thomas Becket* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 106.

Drawing on the works of Jerome, Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Seville, Gerald of Wales, Gratian and the multitude of unnamed medieval romance poets, we have developed a functioning lexicon of medieval approaches to genre. I have demonstrated that there are clear genre shifts used by the SEL poet in specific passages which cue audience interpretations. The poet of the SEL draws on his understanding of hagiography by paralleling the life of Becket with the life of Jesus. He also draws on historical sources to position Becket as a saviour against tyranny, weaving these two genres together to reinforce the conclusive argument: Becket is a saint worthy of veneration. The poet, however, adopts some features of romance, such as the arming of the warrior, injecting a sense of excitement and entertainment into the narrative. The text is, in short, attempting to reach the broadest audience possible, including those interested in moral edification, those interested in English history, and those who just want an entertaining story.

There is one passage which I have mentioned but not fully explored that illuminates the poet's effective use of genre as a rhetorical strategy. The poet of the SEL presents Becket as a saint worthy of veneration for his commitment to the independence of the Church, for the welfare of the common people, and for his commitment to a holy life, evidenced by his commitment to the lifestyle of a pious monk. The poet never clearly marks an argument or draws any conclusions about Becket's life. Indeed, I suggest that the poet is making this argument through genre. The passage depicting Becket's encounter with Henry at Clarendon best reveals how the poet is able to weave three disparate genres together to compose a compelling narrative which challenges genre boundaries, and which only works effectively given an audience's understanding of the genre features of hagiography, historiography, and romance.

The poet begins the passage with the date in both the regnal and calendrical year:

Þis parlement him was iholde · in þe elefþe ʒer
of þe kynges crounement · þat so muche folk broʒte þer
Enleue hondred ʒer · and in þe voure and sixti riʒt
It was after oure Louerd · þat inis moder was aliʒt. (lines 487-90)

The explicit use of the date in both the regnal and calendrical form reflects a tradition that we might expect in a chronicle or a charter. Indeed, we find that the poet borrows this precise passage from the Constitutions of Clarendon, from which he compiled the list of debated articles drawn up by Henry to assert royal authority. Following the date, the poet provides a list of names and political

and religious positions from bishops to barons. The poet dedicates 28 lines of the poem to a list of forty witnesses to the events that unfolded in Clarendon, and he states that "wel mo were þer" (line 520). This passage stands out from the rest of the narrative, and it is not entirely clear why the poet would interpolate this passage. We know that the poet must have had access to documents containing both the Constitutions of Clarendon and the articles of 1169, and indeed, we find that this list of witnesses is found in the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164.

Here we have, then, the poet engaging in the practice of historiography, but he employs this form of writing to lead the audience to the next section of the passage: his description of Becket. "Nou God helpe sein Thomas · for he was al one" (line 521). The poet is setting the stage. On one side of the stage we have a crowd of noble and religious leaders fronted by the king and his son, on the other side we find Becket. For the audience, it is clear that the odds of Becket's success in the following debate are stacked against him. Rhetorically, the poet uses ethos to establish a scene. In the scene he relies on authoritative weight of figures to create an imbalance in the narrative so that Becket's victory looks all the greater. He glosses over the fact that Becket was present with a retinue of his own colleagues and lawyers as well. He was, in fact, not alone. This is a parenthetical historical moment used to reinforce the primary rhetorical mode of hagiography. In short, the poet is oscillating between hagiographical and historical genres to assert a theme: that Becket is positioned against authoritarian and tyrannical antagonists.

But this list of names can be read in one further way: as a romance. Romance also engages in this sort of listing of participants in battle and tournaments. In *Otuel and Roland*, for example, the poet lists the knights who travelled into combat with Charlemagne:

> Ther was Rowland, and Olyuer,
> and syr Otuel, and Oger, –
> In hert ys nouȝt to huyde, –
> Esteryche of langares, and syr Turpyn,
> Archel, Etus, & syr Geryn,
> Nemes, and Syr Reyner.[81]

The poet provides a roster of the notable knights who will enter combat. The listing of participants in romance is a feature that the SEL poet mimics. This is particularly suggestive given the poet's

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[81] O'Sullivan, "Otuel and Roland," in *Firumbras and Otuel and Roland*, lines 647-52.

glossing over of Becket's retinue. I have discussed previously how the poet maneuvers around historicity to great effect in the martyrdom of Becket, and he does so once again in the lead-up to his conflict with Henry at Clarendon.

This genre hybridisation is significant because it comes at a pivotal moment in the narrative. The Constitutions of Clarendon function as the catalyst for the conflict between Becket and Henry, and the poet deploys these different genre features to capitalise on the audience's expectations of where the narrative will go. The passage is significant not just for the narrative structure but for the intended audience. There is, in short, a hook for every type of reader in this one passage. And since it functions as the catalyst for the remainder of the narrative, it cues the reader in a myriad ways.

Legendaries, according to Delehaye, are inherently historical.[82] They are based in history and coloured with embellishment. Therefore, it is not entirely inaccurate to want to read this passage as a history; it is, in fact, appropriate to do so. But the passage can be read as historical, as a romance, and as hagiographical. It is historically rooted: the poet is listing actual dates and names of historical figures recounting historical dialogue but doing so to juxtapose the hagiographical elements. It is romance: the poet is establishing teams on either side of the ensuing conflict. It is hagiographical: the poet is isolating Thomas so that his victory in the end is all the greater. By weaving features of these three genres into this one passage, the poet is demonstrating a keen articulation and understanding of medieval notions of genre. The SEL poet takes advantage of the fluidity of medieval genre and mixes and remixes existing features of different genres to occupy the minds of a broad audience with a new genre hybrid.

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[82] Delehaye, *Legends of Saints*, 7.

5. The Scribe as Reader: Genre Representations of the South English Legendaries

The conditions that determine the production of the book also determine the forms of its communication.

- Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*[1]

In this chapter, I illuminate how scribal practices visually contributed to the text to affect and inform how later readers interacted with and read the text. In many ways, the scribe functions as an intercessor between the text and the reader—between the poet and the reader—and plays a pivotal role in how we, as modern readers, experience medieval texts. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, in her introduction to *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work*, defines the professional reader as one "whose job it is to prepare a text for the reading public, someone whose job description (supervisory scribe, corrector, annotator, editor, illustrator) allows him to filter the text for presentation to the patron or reading community."[2] To Bonaventure's list, she appends those who, in addition to producing the text, make alterations to it that are not always linguistic but affect the layout of the text. She notes further that "Professional readers wielded a great deal of power, and their impact on medieval culture should never be underestimated."[3] Indeed, much can be said about these alterations to the presentation that, in a Jaussian sense, provide new horizons and new insights into the medieval practice of reading. This chapter illustrates how the materiality of the SEL Becket

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[1] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978), 70.

[2] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower* (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 2001), 8.

[3] Kerby-Fulton, *Medieval Professional Reader*, 8.

legend contributes to our understanding of both the development and reception of the SEL and the Becket legend through the lens of genre. In this chapter I contend that scribes elected to emphasise or employ strategies in their production of the SEL Becket legend, including collocation, layout, and reading apparatuses, to evoke certain reading behaviours in their readers.

5.1 Compilation and Assembly

Parkes' work on *ordinatio* and *compilatio* has been formative in manuscript studies. *Ordinatio*, according to Parkes, is a system developed to guide the reader through a textual work: "The rubricator inserted the number of the relevant *quaestio*, *distinctio*, or chapter in the margin at the appropriate point, and the stages in the argument were carefully indicated by means of *litterae notabiliores* and paraph marks."[4] Parkes' notion of *ordinatio* is bound to a scholastic form of reading: "the concern to study an argument from beginning to end, which led to the formulation of the concept of *ordinatio*."[5] *Compilatio* is essentially an extension of *ordinatio*, wherein a compiler (Parkes employs the Bonaventurian definition) imposes new *ordinatio* onto differently arranged texts.[6] The *compilatio* gave rise to a new "literary form."[7] Parkes comes to this conclusion using the *Canterbury Tales*, and especially the General Prologue, as poetical, or even rhetorical, evidence of Chaucer's acknowledgement of the role of the *compilator* in the production of literary works. Chaucer, according to Parkes, is simply drawing on the development of the structure of the book in his conceit in the telling of the pilgrims' tales. Parkes' definitions are debatable, however. In the case of *ordinatio*, the term seems to apply most strictly to the structured reading of scholastic works, and the term implies that an imitation of *ordinatio* in non-scholastic works, like the *Canterbury Tales,* does not actually constitute *ordinatio*. In their article, "Ordinatio and Compilatio," R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse take issue with use of the terms *ordinatio* and

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[4] M. B. Parkes, "Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book," in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to R. W. Hunt,* eds. J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 121.

[5] Parkes, "Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio," 123.

[6] Parkes, "Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio," 128.

[7] Parkes, "Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio," 128.

compilatio in modern scholarship: "If *ordinatio* seems to have too many meanings simultaneously, the term *compilatio* seems almost devoid of meaning in its current usage."[8]

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the SEL best represents a genre hybrid, amalgamating features of Middle English hagiography, history, and Middle English romance to reach a broad audience and inform audience perception and engagement. The SEL effectively uses genre as a rhetorical device. Because the SEL was developed and reproduced over nearly 300 years, a wide array of evidence such as collocation, layout, and paratextual apparatuses can illuminate the effectiveness of the SEL's use of genre as a rhetorical tool. In other words, scribes reinforced or altered expectations about how readers would engage with the work. As the producer of the later witnesses of the SEL, scribes were the first type of reader to engage with the SEL as an entity. Scribes functioned both as a means of production and dissemination. It is necessary to return to the manuscript evidence to see how these scribes understood the text and chose to advance the rhetorical strategies of the poet. How did the scribes of the SEL reinforce the rhetorical strategies of the poet or develop and disseminate their understanding of the SEL to new audiences?

I refer to the physical features embedded in the document and text by a scribe as the *layout* of the page, as *layout* most simply and accurately describes what I discuss. I will refrain from using *ordinatio* except in the rare circumstances where it is clear that the layout employed by a scribe is drawing on scholastic scribal practices of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. That scribes in the late Middle Ages were able to adapt and adopt different layouts is beyond question, as Parkes has suggested and which the medieval manuscripts themselves reveal. It is, however, the topic at hand—the ways in which scribes altered the layout to affect reading—which is of significance.

The diversity of the SEL as a compilation suggests that the scribes who compiled the collections had very particular expectations of what they were producing, how they were presenting, and ultimately what the legacy of the SEL would entail. Scribes continued to produce the SEL over nearly 300 years, and in this time, the SEL grew through the accretion of new legends. As the collection grew, the SEL evolved from a collection of saints' legends represented as stories of Christian warriors into a more general collection of saints' legends. We see evidence of accretion

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[8] R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, "Ordinatio and Compilatio Revisited," in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 115.

and distancing from the original metaphor of the "hardi knight" in the comparison of early and late witnesses of the SEL, like B, with its increased inclusion of papal saints.

For clarity, when discussing the SEL as a compiled collection, we must distinguish two different forms of compilation. In the first instance, drawing upon Bonaventure, the *compilator* was a scribe who copied down different texts during the book's production. The SEL, by virtue of its nature as a collection, is a compilation in the Bonaventurian sense, given relative similitude among the witnesses. However, the SEL can be understood as a compilation in another sense—in its assembly. In various ways and at different times, scribes assembled the witnesses of the SEL with other texts, resulting in compilations. So, when I argue that the SEL was a compilation, I am arguing that there are two forms of compilation: compilation as a scribal practice and assembly as an aspect of codex production. Each manuscript underwent both compilation and assembly at different stages of production. Understanding the difference between these forms of gathering and disseminating is helpful in discussing how the scribes of the SEL perceived the work, produced the collection, and ultimately disseminated the collection to a wider audience.

Since the SEL is a compilation in both senses of the term, we ought to consider the nature of its compilation, both its Bonaventurian compilation and its assembly: who is compiling, who is assembling, and when these actions are taking place. Identifying who compiles the text and who assembles the quires determines how we interpret evidence of scribal intervention. Certain SEL manuscripts bring this question to the forefront of SEL scholarship. For this study, I have examined only the 21 SEL witnesses that contain the account of Becket. By analysing which texts, both SEL-related and unrelated, circulated with the SEL account of Becket, we gain a greater insight into what the compilers, both scribes and assemblers, thought they were producing and how they interpreted the SEL account of Becket to be read and in what literary context.

This study ignores manuscripts like the Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library Eng. Poet. C. 3.). V represents what Görlach refers to as a "typical one-volume library."[9] As an example of compilation, V is extreme. Vernon's anthologising of Middle English literature served to document and record the literary milieu of Middle English and is contextually distinct from the other 20 witnesses that contain the SEL account of Becket. That is, the motive of V is to record the literary milieu and not target a specific demographic by hybridising genre. Of the 413 folios bound

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[9] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 102.

in V, only the first 104 contain the SEL. The *Northern Homily Cycle* accounts for 151 folios. The remaining pages include works like *Piers Plowman* and a variety of works by Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton. While there is a certain consistent methodology with which this volume was compiled—that is, the majority of the works are religious—the number of different works other than the SEL and their variety in V suggest more about the compilers' perceptions of the SEL as a whole than it does about Becket's account in particular. My principal interest is in perceptions of the SEL Becket legend, not in the SEL as a whole. There is little evidence to suggest that the inclusion of the SEL within V was predicated on the existence of the Becket narrative in the collection. There is, however, suggestive evidence that the SEL Becket legend was a priority for other scribes in other SEL-documents. Therefore, while V is certainly a compelling compilation of Middle English literature, its value within this study would only distract from my argument.

An examination of the compilations of the SEL, in both senses, which contain the Becket account serves two related functions: first, it records the literary context of the Becket account; and second, it records what compilers were associating with the SEL account of Becket. In the first instance, it is necessary to examine the Becket account in its historical, literary context. What was composed and what was consumed by general audiences serves as a foundation to answer how readers interpret the work. This is the Bonaventurian sense of compilation. Second, and more importantly, the texts compiled alongside the SEL Becket account suggests the scribal attitudes towards the Becket legend. In other words, what were the developed literary contexts in which the SEL Becket circulated? The following witnesses are all compilations, but some ought not to be considered in this chapter for various reasons, which I will shortly address. Of the 20 extant witnesses other than V, only 17 provide insight into medieval scribal interpretations of the work. The three remaining are leaves that lack enough material evidence to form reliable conclusions about literary contexts. Of the 17 witnesses, 11 circulated exclusively as SEL collections: ABCEGHJPSU. The period during which these 11 witnesses were produced ranged from 1300 to 1450.[10] This period covers the initial period of production but also shows the SEL at its height of production during the mid-fifteenth century. The following table shows the approximate production

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[10] The accepted date ranges from which this evidence is gathered came from Görlach's *Textual Tradition*.

date and the number of texts included in the SEL-collection witnesses containing the Becket legend.

Table 5.1. SEL-Collection Production Dates

SIGLUM	DATE OF PRODUCTION	SEL TEXTS	NON-SEL TEXTS
H	1300	74	0
C	1310-1320; 1450[11]	87	0
A	1300-1330	96	0
E	1325-1350	87	0
P	1350-1375	111	0
S	1375-1400	38	0
J	1400-1425	105	0
G	1400-1425	88	3
B	1450	143	5[12]
U	1450	64	0

Notably, the general trend of the SEL with few exceptions is that scribes modified later collections through the accretion of SEL texts and not through unrelated texts. The inclusion of the SEL account of Becket within these compilations illustrates that this narrative was a staple of the SEL from the initial composition of the SEL well into the fifteenth century.[13] B appears to be an outlier in this grouping of SEL collections, but it does share similarities with other SEL documents that include liturgical works. In other words, we might read this outlier as further evidence of the scribal perception that the SEL was primarily a liturgical collection.

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[11] The discrepancy in dates is caused by an additional hand who "was primarily interested in removing SW dialect forms." See Görlach, *Textual Tradition,* 244, n. 31.

[12] The 5 non-SEL texts include the basic liturgical texts in Middle English: *Pater, Aue, Credo, Misereatur,* and *Confiteor.*

[13] The sample of SEL manuscripts here is limited to those which contain only the SEL Becket narrative. A survey of the 72 SEL witnesses reinforces the trend of accretion amongst SEL collections.

While most SEL Becket accounts circulated with other SEL narratives, on occasion, the SEL Becket narrative was bound with other Middle English literary works. These manuscripts provide insight into certain beliefs about the nature of the SEL Becket account. The nine remaining manuscripts, which I call SEL-documents, containing the SEL account of Becket are AxBaCdDLMRVY. Non-SEL texts circulated with the Becket narrative can be classified as homiletic, devotional, historical, hagiographical, lyrical, and romance. While this array of Middle English genres seems broad, there are only two primary genre trends amongst the circulating texts: religious (liturgical, devotional, and homiletic) and romance. These broad genres and their appearance alongside the SEL are best represented in the earliest witness of the SEL, Laud Misc. 108 (L).

L has sustained scholarly attention, which focuses on developing a theory around its production.[14] As L is the first extant witness of the SEL, L has served as the basis for the very first modern edition of the SEL. It accounts for one half of the debate amongst scholars about how scribes theoretically developed the SEL. Further, it provides a unique insight into how scribes conceived of the SEL at a very early stage. L has undergone at least two stages of production. A. S. G. Edwards, in his description of the manuscript, notes that there are "two broad divisions in its present construction."[15] L can be divided into part A and part B. The division between these two parts is largely based around the division of gatherings and scribal hands.[16] Edwards also suggests that part A likely was produced initially as a series of booklets.[17] The account of Becket, for example, begins a new booklet on fol. 61r and is attached to the account of his translation.

In addition to the SEL, L contains seven devotional works, two romances, and a hagiographical work that has a complex relationship with the SEL network of associated works.

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[14] See Kimberly K. Bell and Julie Nelson Couch, eds., *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Laud Misc. 108: The Shaping of English Vernacular Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[15] A. S. G. Edwards, "Contents, Construction, and Circulation," in *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 108,* eds. Kimberly K. Bell and Julie Nelson Couch (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 25.

[16] Edwards, "Contents, Construction, and Circulation," 25.

[17] Edwards, "Contents, Construction, and Circulation," 25.

Notably, several of these shorter verse works circulated with other SEL-manuscripts: Vernon and Auchinleck. The relationship between the production units and the circulated works is relatively straightforward. In production unit A, there are no added or supplemented works that were not already associated with the SEL, as documented by other early SEL witnesses. All non-SEL narratives were added in the second stage with the addition of production unit B. The multi-stage assembly of L suggests certain scribal perceptions of the SEL. The scribes of production unit B interpreted the SEL collection as belonging to a larger literary context associated with devotional and romance works. This resulted in the marriage of explicitly religious texts like the *Sayings of St. Bernard* (DIMEV 5215) with secular romances like *King Horn* (DIMEV 312).

Despite the incongruencies posed by the initial program of constructing L, at least the SEL portions (part A), there are considerable consistencies throughout the manuscript which suggest that at a stage shortly after the initial compilation of the SEL portion a flourisher decorated the entire manuscript. Edwards observes that the "numbering of contents in Arabic numbers in red crayon in the upper margin in an early hand" is consistent and that the same flourisher "added decorated initials" throughout the document.[18] Consequently, L poses many issues for conjecturing the exact circumstances in which the codex was produced. SEL texts were compiled in the traditional sense but also assembled in at least two stages: the binding of the booklets and the addition of new texts, and the assembly and decoration. The addition of the romances *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane* suggests that connections were drawn between the SEL and Middle English romances even at the early stages of the SEL development.

For this reason, understanding the nature of compilation and assembly of the SEL provides insight into the minds of medieval scribes who were producing these collections. L is very clearly a composite manuscript, given the production dates asserted by Edwards, Liszka, Pickering, Horstmann*, et al*. More useful still is the terminology developed by Kwakkel in signifying not simply the nature of its composition, i.e. composite, but its usage as well.

L is a composite of different "production units," a term which refers to groups of quires that formed a material entity at the time of production.[19] What Kwakkel refers to as production units,

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[18] Edwards, "Contents, Construction, and Circulation," 28.

[19] Erik Kwakkel, "Towards a Terminology for the Analysis of Composite Manuscripts," *Gazette du Livre Médiéval* 41 (2002), 13.

Edwards *et al*. label Part A and Part B. More important than just identifying the units of production is demarcating them according to their usage or their "usage unit."[20] This refers not only to a production unit's material context but to its intended usage. Multiple booklets or production units may be produced simultaneously to be used simultaneously. L, for example, contains many production units or booklets, but it could be argued that it consists of two usage units, Part A and Part B. An alternative way of conceptualising the usage units is to frame them from the perspective of the reader and what the scribe expected their reader to engage with. In this case, Part A and Part B were different collections. Consequently, Parts A and B might better be described as both usage units and production units.

In his evaluation of L, Liszka proposes that the arrangement of the SEL legends and the placement of the prologue do suggest an attempt at experimenting with arrangement, and L is consequently not a manuscript that was rearranged, but "one in which the processes of collecting and arranging material were ongoing."[21] Liszka supports Horstmann's claim that L is an early attempt at the production of an SEL. Liszka points out that booklets and their arrangement demonstrate attempts at different organization techniques, but he also uses paratextual features like initials to demonstrate that there was, in fact, a compilation logic behind the arrangement.[22]

Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 3. 25 or R, produced around 1400, is one of the 25 major SEL manuscripts that Görlach identifies. The manuscript was copied in one hand, and the inconsistencies in both ink and neatness, Görlach hypothesises, are the result of "tiredness or a change of pen."[23] The text is copied in Anglicana, with little to no paratextual apparatus and only rubricated initials to mark the beginning of sections. This witness circulated with only one other non-SEL associated text, the Life of Adam and Eve (DIMEV 531), a truncated extract from the

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[20] Kwakkel, "Towards a Terminology," 14.

[21] Thomas R. Liszka, "MS Laud. Misc. 108 and the Early History of the *South English Legendary*," *Manuscripta* 33 (1989), 84.

[22] Liszka, "MS Laud. Misc. 108," 89. In the appendix to his argument, Liszka breaks down by quire the contents of L, to illustrate how there are calendrical arrangements within quires, even though the quires themselves were not arranged calendrically.

[23] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 97.

Old Testament History (DIMEV 6345).[24] If Pickering's assertions are correct, this text, which Pickering titles the *Trinity Life*, is better described as an SEL narrative. This would bring the total number of SEL narratives to 205, further highlighting the difficulties of defining what constitutes an SEL-text and of cataloguing the SEL collection. Since DIMEV 531 is in only one witness, R, and it is connected to already recognised SEL-texts, then R is an example of SEL-manuscripts containing the Becket narrative, which circulated exclusively with the SEL.

Ba, or Oxford, Bodleian Library, Addit. C.220, is an interesting example of the transmission of medieval literatures as it is a fragment of a late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century manuscript. Therefore, it is necessary to describe it in both its current fragmented form and its original construction since Ba and its siblings QQa problematise our understanding of production units and usage units. The original manuscript, which no longer exists and is not ascribed a siglum, was made up of QQaBa or British Library, Additional 10301; British Library, Additional 10626; and Bodleian Library, Additional C.220. A single scribe completed the original codex. In addition to the use of blue and red initials, there are Latin running headers. The original codex began with the *Banna sanctorum*. Despite the many losses, which in part are explained by the fragmenting of the manuscript in the 1530s previous to John Reynes' rebinding of Q,[25] the original codex shows remarkable consistency in both structure and scribal practice. Ba, the second largest of the three sibling fragments, contains in addition to several SEL narratives one other non-SEL narrative which circulated widely and which invites, like the SEL, a compelling study of genre: the *Speculum Guy Warewyke* (DIMEV 1782). In addition to circulating in Ba, this shorter poem also circulated in QzAy.

Speculum Guy Warewyke circulated in 10 witnesses and, according to Edwards, "enjoyed quite a wide-ranging appeal."[26] Its connection to the SEL, on popular appeal alone, justifies its co-circulation in three manuscripts. However, its connection to Guy of Warwick, the namesake of the

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[24] See O. S. Pickering, "The Temporale Narratives of the South English Legendary," *Anglia* 91 (1973): 425-55.

[25] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 96.

[26] A. S. G. Edwards, "The *Speculum Guy de Warwick* and Lydgate's *Guy of Warwic:* The Non-Romance Middle English Tradition," in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, eds. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer), 83.

title, suggests that the poet drew on the cultural capital of the romance hero to draw in an audience for a text which "offers vernacular didacticism of a basic expository kind reflected in a wide range of Middle English treatises of religious instruction."[27] *Speculum Guy,* in spite of its title, is not a romance. It might make sense, then, that this didactic poem that relies on the cultural capital of romance would be bound with and circulated with a religious collection of verse narratives that drew heavily on the cultural influence of romance. In Ba, *Speculum Guy* immediately precedes the Becket narrative. While the rest of the manuscript is composed in single columns, *Speculum Guy* is copied out in double columns and begins with a floriated border (f. 2v). It ends, incomplete, partway through f. 8v, where the Becket account begins. The *Speculum Guy* was not simply another work that was added to fill quire space or added after the fact as another production unit or usage unit, but it was thought to belong thematically to the collection.

Ultimately, *Speculum Guy*, with its superficial employment of romance, belongs conceptually alongside works that adopt and employ romance as a lure to attract an audience. So, while *Speculum Guy* is not like *King Horn* or *Havelok the Dane* in L, it functions like them in that they both belong to a circle of literary works that are romance or are on the periphery of the literary genre. Edwards suggests that it is "difficult to speculate with much confidence about the nature of the audience" of the *Speculum Guy*.[28] However, Edwards' examination of the poem is rooted in its relationship to the *Prick of Conscience*. By examining the shared audience of the *Speculum Guy* and the SEL, we resolve some of Edwards' concerns. Like the poet who drew on the romance of Guy to capture an audience interested in secular literature, the scribes, and in particular, the scribes of QQaQzBaAy, attached the didactic poem precisely because it employs a similar intention to the SEL: employing the romance literary tradition to expand and draw in a larger audience for religious didacticism. Edwards suggests that "such an appeal draws, however implausibly, on the figure of Guy of Warwick, seems to suggest a sense of potentiality of Guy's name and status for spiritual exhortation that is unique among English romance protagonists."[29] However, this form of appeal is not implausible but likely. As the SEL invites dialogue about the popular literature of the romance hero to discuss spiritual wellbeing, so too does *Speculum Guy* also draw on the popularity

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[27] Edwards, "*Speculum Guy,*" 83.

[28] Edwards, "*Speculum Guy,*" 86.

[29] Edwards, "*Speculum Guy,*" 86.

of the romance hero, especially in light of the second half of the romance, which attempts to make the hero into a saintly warrior. In short, there is a similarity between the representation of saints as warriors and the representation of warriors as saintly. Guy is deployed, not exclusively because of his narrative of the pursuit of holiness but also because of his reputation as a romance hero. Therefore, the scribe's reproduction of this religious poem in the same usage unit as the Becket narrative, which also draws heavily on the romance tradition, is characteristic of employing genre features as a rhetorical device to capture a wider audience.

Oxford, Bodleian Library Addit. C.38, or Y, is an early fifteenth-century collection of SEL narratives, including one non-SEL narrative, *La historie del Evangielie* (DIMEV 4970). This life of Christ is interpolated at the beginning (f. 71v) of a section of the manuscript, which contains the temporale narratives. This manuscript is the product of a single scribe and employs paraphs alternating in red and blue to demarcate sections of text. The inclusion of this verse narrative of Christ's life serves the primary function of satisfying a lacuna in this witness. Of the four extant witnesses of *La historie del Evangelie*, two are bound with the SEL, YV. This work's presence in V is best explained by V's anthologising of Middle English literature. The Y witness is described as being complete, though a textual study by Gertrude Campbell in 1915 suggests that Dulwich College MS XXII contains lines which are not included in Y. Ultimately, this illustrates that the poem was far longer or exceeded 3000 lines initially, but was condensed at a later date to the approximately 1900 lines present in Y.[30] The inclusion of the *Evangelie* in Y suggests that there was a desire to fill in the "gaps" in the liturgical year, and that the scribe had no access to an SEL exemplar.

Much like L, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 463, or D, incorporates a number of short devotional texts outside the SEL tradition. D was copied by one scribe in Anglicana and can be dated, according to Görlach, to approximately 1400. Even though it was copied by one scribe, the presence of a blank leaf suggests that the manuscript is composed of two production units (f. 137v).[31] Unlike other SEL witnesses, D is unique in that it is ruled in double columns with full-line columns running down the fore-edges of the leaves with half-line columns accounting for the centre third of the open face (see Figure 5.1). On presentation alone, this manuscript stands out for

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[30] Gertrude Campbell, "The Middle English 'Evangelie,'" *PMLA* 30 (1915), 530.

[31] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 79.

its unique layout. It is curious that the D scribe would elect to copy the texts in such a layout given that no other known witness was copied in a similar way. Further, the manuscript includes a number of other devotional texts, which also circulated with the SEL, including *In dei natalis ad altam missam* from the *Northern Homily Cycle* (DIMEV 874), which also circulated in V. This text also circulated in BP in a variant form as DIMEV 463. Likewise, the *Dialogue between St. Bernard and Virgin Mary* (DIMEV 3066) circulated in VUx and Cx in its variant form DIMEV 5020. A non-SEL hagiographical life of St. Alexis is also present in DO (DIMEV 3102) but also circulated in Tx in a variant form DIMEV 379, in Lx in a variant form DIMEV 382, and in LV in a variant form DIMEV 4923. Although this Life of St. Alexis, at least in its DO variant, breaks from the metre of the SEL (i.e. it is not written in septenary couplets but six-line stanzas), it was bound so frequently with other SEL witnesses that it might be considered to exist on the periphery of the SEL tradition. Three other short works are extant in only D, "A Vision of St. Paul" (DIMEV 4814), a short homiletic work on the ten commandments (DIMEV 377), and finally an additional hagiographical life of St. Celestin (DIMEV 352). Despite these inclusions and the number of unique texts presented in D, there are some key unifying features which might explain their inclusion in D.

In the dispute between Görlach and Boyd about the development of the SEL, we saw two different theories about the development of the SEL. Boyd argued that each text was the result of an ad hoc production. This accounts for the variant SEL-texts, arrangements, and the growing magnitude of the SEL collection. Görlach differed in his theory, believing the SEL to be a set number of "slots" in which texts could satisfy a thematic or narrative criterion. D represents the type of manuscript that both Boyd and Görlach were discussing. D is, in many ways, an ad hoc production, but the non-SEL narratives compiled with the SEL narratives suggest, especially the verse saints' lives, that the scribe was filling "slots" that the exemplar probably did not contain. In short, D represents the double-sided coin upon which both Görlach's and Boyd's arguments sit. There is evidence to suggest that both Görlach and Boyd are correct in some capacity in their theories of SEL development. Yet the explanation for why D is such a complicated SEL-manuscript rests in examining its genre markers. What was the scribe of D producing? A genre survey of the
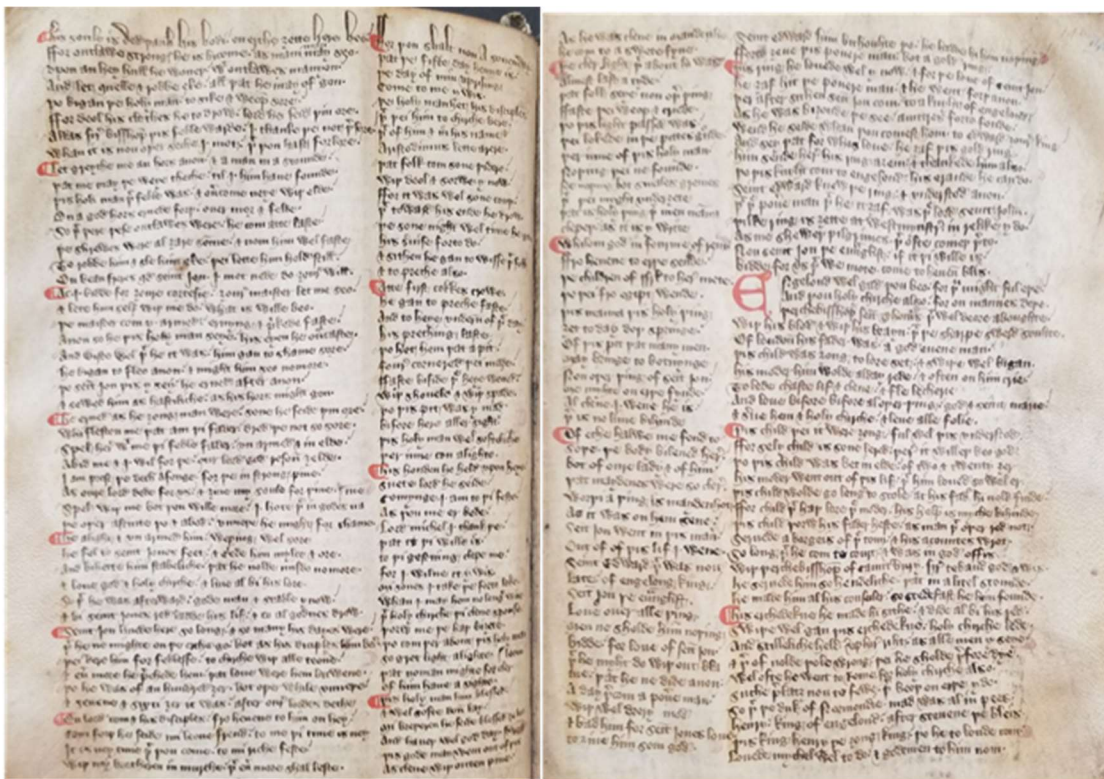

Figure 5.1. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS Laud Misc. 463, ff. 140v-141r (D). CC-BY-NC-4.0

The legend of Becket's parentage begins this witness of Becket's legend, written out in double columns.

contents of D reveals a mixture of homiletic and verse hagiography, consistent with most all other SEL manuscripts with the exceptions of L and Ax. Its unique layout sets it apart from other SEL manuscripts and suggests its ad hoc nature. That no other SEL manuscript is laid out in double columns with one column of half-lines suggests the possibility that this manuscript was ruled for a different text, or in the very least, was not based on any extant exemplars.

The two remaining volumes containing the SEL Becket narrative, AxCd, while also containing other SEL material, are early modern miscellanies that rebound medieval documents. I discuss, in Chapter 6, Cd and its connection to early modern collectors and readers. AxCd are medieval productions but are currently fragments of their original forms. I address scribal features of Ax later in this chapter, but since the original documents in which the SEL Becket account would have originated are lost, comparing the contents of these works seems to me to be a spurious exercise. Because of this, while CdAx speak to audience expectation and genre, they address a later reader's perception of genre and not necessarily a scribe's perception.

Ultimately, manuscripts containing the SEL Becket narrative fall into two categories: those designed to feature the SEL collection and ad hoc miscellanies or assemblages. These miscellanies are not necessarily fragments, as in Ax, however. Many SEL witnesses are bound with additional non-SEL material. Non-SEL texts which circulated with the SEL account of Becket gravitate towards devotional and homiletic texts with significant but anomalous exceptions, as in L. Considering that many of these witnesses were copied, compiled, and bound by a single scribe, one immediately clear conclusion that we can draw from the material evidence is that the SEL Becket was considered to be more related to devotional literature than it was to romance, or other secular genres. This is important because we see a genre shift in expectation by the second order reader, the scribe. The SEL Becket was understood by scribes and compilers to be in concert with other devotional works. Table 2 identifies SEL-manuscripts that are bound with additional works, identifying these additional works by their genre. What is important to note is that, generally, the genre makeup of these non-SEL works bound with SEL-texts is religious or didactic in some thematic capacity.

Table 5.2. Non-SEL-texts by Genre

SIGLA	TOTAL TEXTS	SEL-RELATED	UNRELATED (DIMEV)	GENRE
D	107	101	3102	hagiography
			352	hagiography
			874	scripture
			2932	homiletic
			377	homiletic
			3066	religious dialogue
L	78	65	1833	moral precept
			835	moral precept /aphorism
			779	moral precept
			270	moral precept
			6125	allegory
			4923	hagiography
			312	romance
			1795	romance
			605	religious dialogue
			4814	hagiography
			5215	moral precept
			2605	scripture
			807	scripture
Ba	7	6	1782	romance/vernacular didacticism
M	78	76	4122	moral precept
			436	prayer
R	123	121	531	scripture
			6853	scripture
Y	41	39	4970	scripture
			6853	scripture

5.2 Arrangement

While I have so far examined the manuscripts containing the SEL as a whole, I will now turn into the manuscripts to examine their arrangements and more particular features of manuscripts that elucidate scribal praxis and perceptions of the SEL and the Becket legend. When examining the residual impact that scribes had on the SEL, we find it in two aspects of the codex: the textual spaces and the visual spaces.

In Chapter 4, I discuss at some length the role of the *Banna sanctorum* as a sort of genre signal to the reader of the SEL. This time looking at only the final few lines, we read:

Hardi batailles he may hure · here þat nis no lesinge
Of apostles & martirs · þat hardy kniȝtes were

     …

     Telle ichelle bi reuwe of ham · as hare dai valþ in the ȝere

     Verst bygynneþ at Ȝeres day · for þat is þe uerste feste

     And fram on to oþer so areng · þe wile þe ȝer wol leste. (lines 62-3, 66-8)

In this passage, we see the poet indicating to the reader what to expect from the SEL: stories of apostles and martyrs, imagined as knights, in chronological order by feast day beginning on January 1st. However, there is another way to read this passage. The poet, in essence, lays out the roadmap for future contributors, both composers and compilers. Should future poets wish to contribute to the SEL, and many did, the poet of the *Banna sanctorum* provides a genre framework that ought to be followed in the construction of new SEL narratives. All new SEL narratives should be genre hybrids borrowing from both religious and secular texts. Furthermore, for future compilers, the poet of the *Banna sanctorum* outlines how future SEL manuscripts should be compiled: they ought to be arranged so that the first text following the *Banna sanctorum* is "Ȝeres Day."

The manuscript evidence does not always demonstrate scribal adherence to the poet's wishes. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that the SEL was expected to *appear* in a certain way and be *read* a certain way. Because every SEL witness varies in the legends it includes and the arrangement of those legends, it is difficult to assess the fidelity with which later scribes held to the initial intention of the SEL. This is further problematised by later fragmentation of SEL-texts in the later years of the SEL's lifespan. The *Banna sanctorum*, nevertheless, reveals itself to be not just a signal to the general reader but also a signal to a particular kind of reader: the scribe.

One SEL manuscript which best demonstrates the scribe's role as a reader is Lambeth Palace MS 223, or G. G is demonstrably a commissioned work, given the colophon. The reader of G is provided with unique insight into the scribal interpretations of the SEL intention and the authority of the scribe in delivering a collection of texts in a certain manner to a patron.

G is an early fifteenth-century witness of the SEL. Three additional texts are included in G: the fifteen signs of Doomsday, *Saint Jerome telleth in his book fifteen tokening* (DIMEV 4622), written in the same hand as the rest of the SEL; a poem on Fortune, *That noble blind Lady Fortune* (DIMEV 5164); and the first two lines of the poem "Erthe upon Erthe," *When life is most loved and death is most hated* (DIMEV 6369), the last two of which were added at a later date. Alternating red and blue paraphs denote narrative breaks in the text, while decorated initials, two lines in height, in blue and red, mark larger textual divisions. This witness is complete and has a remarkably consistent structure, likely because it was the work of a single scribe, who notes in the

colophon that the manuscript was a commission. The hand is a mix of Anglicana and Secretary in a single column. Marginal evidence and the colophon indicate a Wottoun production and Cheshire ownership. Unlike many SEL witnesses, G is uniquely situated to reveal a great deal about scribal perceptions of SEL genre hybridisation. G is also representative of the SEL and is considered one of the major 25 SEL-manuscripts.

The SEL-texts in G are arranged so that the *temporale* open the manuscript and account for the first six gatherings. The *Banna sanctorum* is the first text on the seventh gathering and marks the shift from the *temporale* to the *sanctorale.* Conceptually, this makes sense as the *Banna sanctorum* does not address the use of *temporale* in its schedule. As a prologue, the *Banna sanctorum* works best not at the beginning of the collection but as a transition between the *temporale* and the *sanctorale*. The *Banna sanctorum* engages explicitly with narratives of saints and not the *temporale* narratives also in the SEL. In this way, we might consider the *Banna sanctorum* to be a sort of interlude between the *temporale* narratives and the *sanctorale*. Nevertheless, its placement in other witnesses, its non-narrative structure, and its signal to the reader suggest it functions as a prologue. G is such an important witness of the SEL due to both the placement of the *Banna sanctorum* and an interpolated couplet included by the scribe, R. P. of Wottoun.

Unlike in other SEL witnesses, the *Banna sanctorum* in G is used, not to introduce the SEL as a collection, but to mark the different sections of the collection and guide the reader. It is, in essence, a signpost, a form of metatextual referencing to a broader literary tradition, which itself engages in a form of genre writing, namely that of romance.

> Men wilnen myche to her(e) ꞇ of batel of a kyng
> And of kny3tes þat hardy wer(e) · þᵗ myche dele is lesinge
> Of Roulond 7 of Olyu(er) · 7 of Guy of warwik
> Þat hardy wer(e) by her day · 7 fonde no wher(e) her like
> Who so wilnes myche to her(e) · 7 telle of siche þinge
> Hardy batayles men may her(e) · þᵗ is no lesinge.[32]

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[32] Lambeth Palace Library, MS 233 (G). Cf. D'Evelyn and Mills, *The South English Legendary,* EETS OS 235, "Banna sanctorum" lines 59-60, 60A-B, 61-2.

R. P. copies two lines into G that other SEL witnesses exclude.[33] And while two lines are not universal, they provide more information than might first be apparent. What is perhaps most obvious is the inclusion of three notable literary figures that circulated in Middle English romances contemporaneously with the SEL. This tells us that R. P. was cognisant of popular literary texts in circulation. It also reveals what R.P.'s patron was perhaps interested in reading, and this interpolated couplet is a nod to a commissioner's desires. But most importantly, it reveals an astute acknowledgement of the intention of the SEL as a genre hybridisation of hagiographical and romance texts.

Görlach questions the efficacy of the *Banna sanctorum* prologue as a schedule, claiming that it "does not add any programmatic points: the exclusive interest in apostles and martyrs seems to refer to an even more limited selection."[34] While he concedes that "the scorn the 'A' [*Banna sanctorum*] prologue pours on romance suggests a slightly different audience," he glosses over both the situatedness of the prologue, its role as a divider, and its collocation, which I will address shortly. Thomas Liszka has hypothesised that the *Banna sanctorum* "came to function as a prologue in 'A(2);' the 'A(1)' redactor wrote it as a transition from the *temporale* to the *sanctorale* sections."[35] In situating the *Banna sanctorum* where it is, R. P. deliberately established a horizon of expectations. Of the fourteen witnesses of the *Banna sanctorum*, only in G does it effectively divide the *temporale* and the *sanctorale* texts. In MSS DJQR, it begins the manuscripts and its effect as prologue works only insofar as these witnesses exclude the great majority of the *temporale*

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[33] Thomas R. Liszka, "The *South English Legendary*: A Critical Edition of the Prologue and the Lives of Saints Fabian, Sebastian, Gregory the Great, Mark, Quiriac, Paul, and James the Great," (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1980), 73. These witnesses include CQPYDTVR.

[34] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 7.

[35] Thomas R. Liszka, "Manuscript G (Lambeth Palace 223) and the Early South English Legendary," in *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assessment*. ed. Klaus P. Jankofsky (Tübingen: Francke, 1992), 93. Liszka further clarifies this in "The First 'A' Redaction of the *South English Legendary*: Information from the 'Prologue,'" *Modern Philology* 82.4 (1985), where he notes: "to help draw the first (movable feasts) and final (sanctorale) portions of that collection together, the redactor developed elaborately for his transition two images found among the closing lines of the section of movable feasts" (409).

texts found in other manuscripts. D, for instance, includes *Letania maior et minor* (DIMEV 3127), the "Early History" of the Cross (DIMEV 5339), and the "Invention of the Cross" (DIMEV 133) after the *Banna sanctorum*, but these account for the only three items that do not celebrate feast days. R does better by including the *temporale* texts before the *Banna sanctorum*, but still includes DIMEV 3127, 5339, and 133 as well. Both D and R are distant (geographically and chronologically) from the G redaction, and we can assume by date alone that neither of these was based on or influenced by the production of G.[36]

R. P.'s invocation of Roland, Oliver, and Guy undeniably signals to the reader an acknowledgement of a greater literary context. Indeed, it is difficult not to read the subsequent saints' lives without the imagery of romances in mind. The reader is, moreover, invited to draw connections between the holy and hardy knights. Such explicit signposting is effective in encouraging an audience to consider the relationship between these secular warriors and the Christian saints. Given that G is such an explicit rendering of the poet's initial intention, it is important to examine other
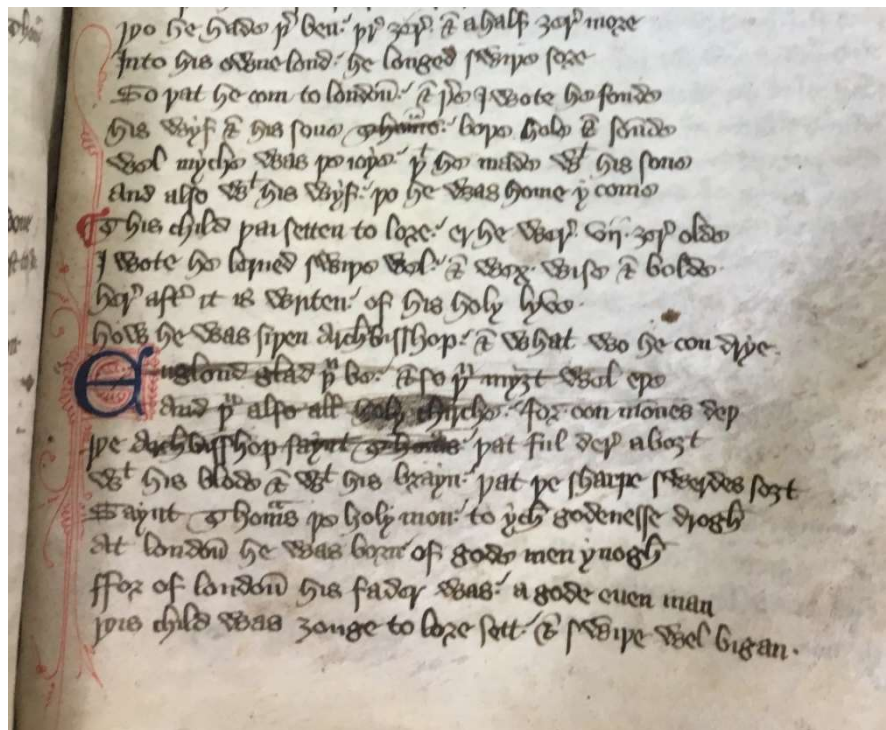

Figure 5.2. Lambeth Palace, Lambeth Palace MS 223, f. 260r (G). Image courtesy of Lambeth Palace Library.

A rubricated and floriated initial "E" begins the Becket legend. The decorated initial also provides a decorated border and emphasises the beginning of Becket's legend. A reader has crossed out the opening lines and scribbled over the words "holy churche" and "saynt Thomas," an example of Becket erasure.

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[36] While no stemma has yet been produced, Görlach's "family-tree" shows little family resemblance. Also given the dialectal variation, it can be assumed that there is no direct connection between these manuscripts.

characteristics of G, because the scribe of G aligns himself with the poet of the SEL. Because the SEL is not stanzaic, R. P. necessarily employed different symbols to differentiate between key moments in the narrative. The paraph, ¶, is used to designate smaller logical units of narrative within the poem, to denote structure in lieu of stanzaic breaks. These alternate in blue and red. R. P. employed decorated initials to signal narrative shifts in the text, primarily used to signal to the reader a new saint's life, but sometimes in the case of the legend of Becket, to signal key changes in the single life. These initials are two lines in height, inked in red and blue, and attached to a border which extends down the left margin, in some cases extending beyond the ruling into the bas-de-page (see Figure 5.2).

In total, narratives about Becket contain three such initials. Curiously, modern scholars have identified only two distinct SEL-texts associated with Thomas Becket: his life (DIMEV 6687; 1507) and his translation (DIMEV 4768). The third initial can be found at the beginning of the narrative about Becket's parents, Gilbert and Alisaundre, discussed in Chapter 4. Throughout G, decorated initials are used to signal the beginning of the different SEL-texts. Notably, R. P. uses decorated initials to also signal the different sections of the Becket legend. R.P. clearly saw the Becket legend as containing three significant narrative shifts, and these shifts can be read in relation to the genre-hybridisation of the SEL in general. The Gilbert and Alisaundre narrative appears as a romance, the life of Becket can be read generally as a history, and the translation of Becket is presented as a hagiography. Of course, as I have shown in my previous chapter, there are smaller and more significant genre shifts within these narratives, but nonetheless, the division of the Becket narratives in the SEL, especially as they are represented visually in G, signify key genre divisions.

The SEL portion of the L, ff. 1-200, was copied in a single textura hand. In addition to the SEL, L contains a history of the infancy of Christ, *In the honorance of sweet Jesu* (DIMEV 2605); the Sayings of Saint Bernard, *The blessing of heaven king* (DIMEV 5215); the Vision of St. Paul, *Seven days are that men call / The Sunday is the best of all* (DIMEV 4814); a debate poem on the body and soul, *As I lay in a winters night / In a darkening before the day* (DIMEV 605); the romance *Havelok the Dane* (DIMEV 1795); the romance *King Horn* (DIMEV 312); the poem *Somer Soneday* (DIMEV 6125); a poem on deceit, *Alas deceit that in trust is now* (DIMEV 270); a quatrain on moral precepts, *Be thou not to bold to blame / Lest thou be found the same* (DIMEV 779); a couplet, *Better is to suffer and fortune abide* (DIMEV 835); and a couplet, *He is wise and well taught / that bears a horn and blows it not* (DIMEV 1833) (see Table 5.2). Worth noting is the

second scribe's addition of the romances *Havelok* and *Horn* to the SEL and contribution of more SEL-texts to the end in what Görlach calls an "SEL appendix."[37] The location of the prologue, *All this book is I-maked of holy days and of holy mans lives* (DIMEV 392), on ff. 88-88v suggests that
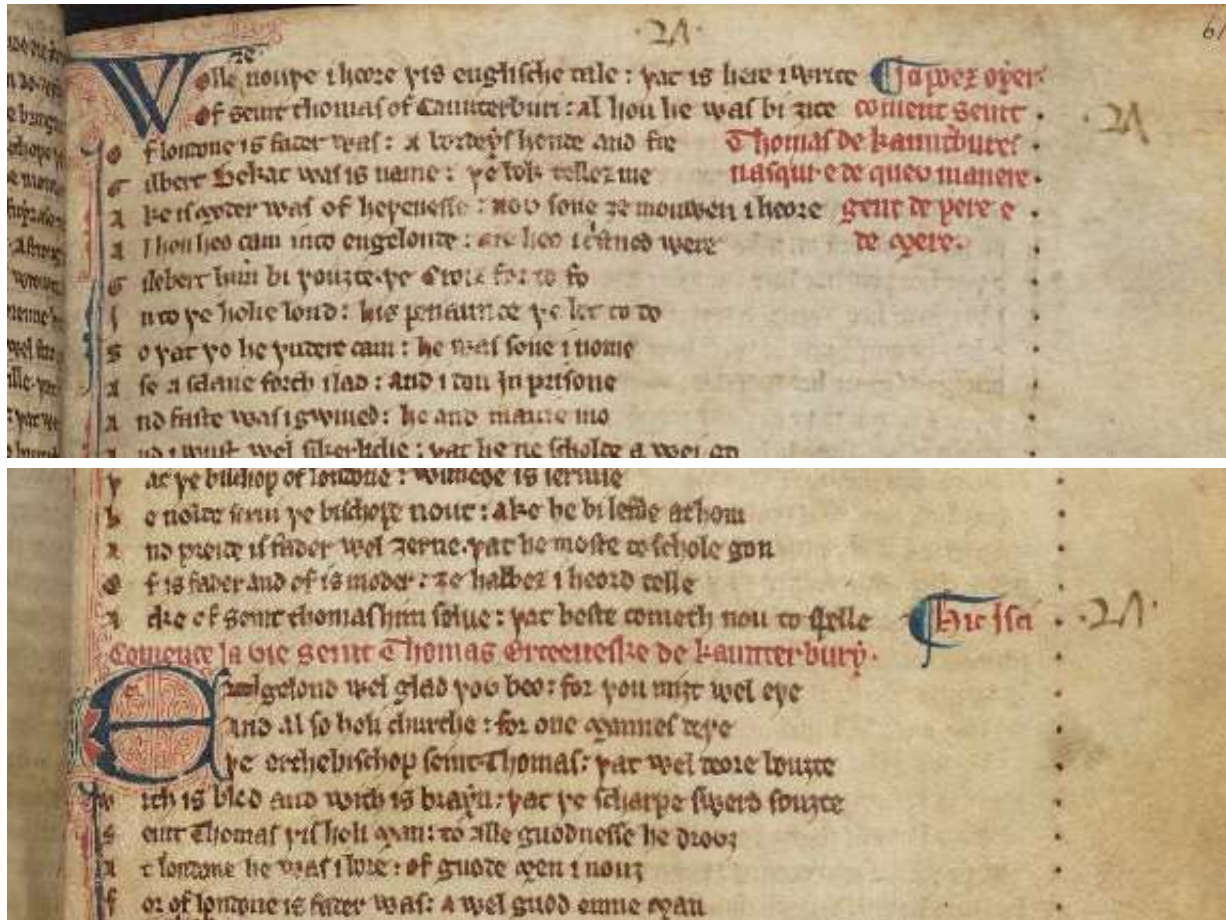

Figure 5.3. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Laud Misc. 108, detail f. 61r (L). CC-BY-NC 4.0

Top: A decorated and rubricated "w" and border begins the legend of Becket's parentage in this witness. The incipit, which introduces the legend, is written in the right margin, adjacent to the opening lines.

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Laud Misc. 108, detail f. 63r (L). CC-BY-NC 4.0

Bottom: A decorated "e" divides the legend of Becket's parentage from the legend of Becket's life and martyrdom. Like the legend of Becket's parentage, the legend of Becket includes a rubricated incipit, this time written in the main body of the text.

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[37] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 89.

this manuscript was rebound during the addition of the romances and SEL appendix and the quires were shuffled. For a full description see Görlach's *The Textual Traditions of the South English Legendary,* 1974, and Horstmann's ESEL edition in which L is used as the sole witness.

5.3 Paratexts

I have discussed both visual and textual framing devices used in the production of manuscripts. Textual framing devices, like prologues, are embedded within the primary text-blocks. Visual framing devices, like braces, are used to connect disparate information into one cohesive unit, like a rhyming couplet, or a stanza. There are framing features that transcend both textual and visual framing definitions: features like glosses, for example, which are examples of both visual and textual framing devices.

In addition to textual framing, the use of narrative or text to mark the beginning and end of a text, scribes implemented visual elements on the manuscript page to guide the reader through the text. Daniel Wakelin notes, "scribes could choose from a repertoire of markings known as 'paratexts.'"[38] *Paratext*, coined by Gérard Genette, is now used broadly as a term to cover all manner of apparatuses in medieval manuscripts, from glosses to paraphs. While the term itself is useful, it is nonetheless important to limit its use to only those apparatuses which were implemented by scribes and not by later users, though the implementation of paratexts by later users might themselves become paratexts. The boundary between what constitutes textual and visual framing blurs in instances like L, where the use of both French and rubrication mark the shift in narrative. The incipit to the Becket narrative in L, composed in a combination of French and Latin, is also rubricated, highlighting the incipit further by its colour.

Wakelin lists eight different types of scribal paratexts, of which five are prevalent in the witnesses of the SEL Becket account:

- Coloured symbols such as paraphs or pilcrows like this ⁋ for new units of sense, for instance, on quotations or what we would mark as paragraphs;
- Enlarged, coloured, or painted letters for titles and subtitles, often using or translating the Latin phrase *hic incipit* or *here begins*;
- Such letters for the first words of new works or sections;
- Running headings at the top of pages telling us which work or section we are in;

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[38] Daniel Wakelin, *Designing English*: *Early Literature on the Page* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2018), 73.

- And marginal annotations explaining or supplementing the content.[39]

As Bonnie Mak suggests, "Readers interpret text, space, and image as they are inclined, but the meanings that they formulate are predicated upon the materiality of each carefully designed page."[40] The user's interpretation of the page is a consequence of design decisions made by the scribe, and while readers may interpret the page "as they are inclined," these inclinations are predicated upon informed design decisions and influenced by established rhetorical features. More simply, the markings that scribes integrated into and surrounding the text on the page guide the reader through the codex so that meaning can be lifted from the page. These navigation tools, like headers, columns, and paraphs, affected the ways in which a reader interacted with the codex. Embedded in the codex are the tools designed to aid the reader. In short, the layout is not only the presentation of the text but also the instruction manual.

In the SEL, scribes employed several features to guide their users through the text. While the quality and detail of the extant witnesses differ, there is striking consistency amongst the witnesses in several key aspects of the layout: the use of braces, initials, columns, and headers. In many ways, the manuscripts of the SEL are so plain that they scarcely encourage exciting examinations in the way that many illuminated or illustrated manuscripts do. Illuminated manuscripts like psalters or books of hours often use images as a locus for contemplation and meditation. The lack of decorations and images in the SEL suggests that the SEL was not principally used as a contemplative text but as a source of moral narrative.

One witness, Bodleian Library, Tanner MS 17 (T) is a unique instance of an SEL-manuscript that contains several complete and incomplete marginal illustrations of saints at the beginning of each legend. While these illustrations might suggest the influence of more commonly decorated manuscripts like books of hours, any similarity to illuminated manuscripts ends with the incomplete illustrations of saints. Beyond the decorated border and illuminated initial, which appear on the opening folio of the *Banna sanctorum*, the remainder of the SEL in T aligns with the simplicity that we find in the other witnesses of the SEL. The frequently unadorned and spartan layout of the SEL invites the user to read through the text for the narrative. The simplicity of the

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[39] Wakelin, *Designing English,* 73-4; Wakelin includes pilcrows in this definition, though a pilcrow is a typographical symbol based on the scribal paraph.

[40] Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 21.

manuscripts suggests modesty, and the documents were intended to be produced quickly. The purpose of any paratext in the document is effective and efficient reading engagement.

A scribe made one major pragmatic decision in laying out a text to be copied, often predetermined at the point of ruling: the number of columns and their width on a single page. Several factors would affect this decision, including the type of text being copied and its form. According to Parkes, the practice of copying verse changed throughout the period in which the SEL was copied. He suggests that "towards the end of the fourteenth century the single column became the principal layout for verse texts."[41] The majority of the SEL witnesses were produced within this period, and those which were produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries used these earlier witnesses as copy-texts. Because of the long line and prosody of the SEL, scribes frequently included a diaeresis marked by a *punctus elevatus* following the fourth stress of the long-line septenary. Parkes, perhaps unintentionally, draws a compelling comparison to a twelfth-century poem "Poema Morale," which also included such punctuation, but "in a thirteenth-century
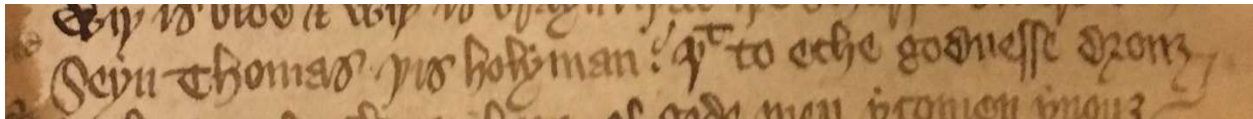

Figure 5.4. © British Library Board London, British Library, Stowe 949 f. 110v. (S).

The S scribe employs a punctus elevatus to mark the medial caesura.

copy the couplets were laid out in quatrains with the last three half-lines indented."[42] Unlike the "Poema Morale," the SEL never underwent this formal shift but continued to be copied in septenary long-lines (see Figure 5.4), except in D, which, as I have already described, was copied in two columns with the second column copied out in half-lines. The long-line saved space on the page, employing punctuation instead of line breaks to emphasise the rhythm. The scribe of D uses both the half-line and *punctus elevatus*, distinguishing it from other manuscripts. We see that the scribe employed both strategies to present the verse but did not distinguish or prioritise one method over the other.

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[41] Parkes, "Layout and Presentation of the Text," 58. As evidence, Parkes uses the SEL; see his note 20.

[42] Parkes, "Layout and Presentation of the Text," 57.

The scribe of D shows signs of experimentation and pragmatism throughout the manuscript. The initial quires oscillate between double columns of half-lines and double columns of long- and half-lines. The opening of the *Banna sanctorum*, *Ʒeresday* and the first part of *Twelþeday,* for example, are copied out in double columns of half-lines (ff. 1-2). The remainder of the quire is lost, but the subsequent quire is ruled and copied out in double columns of long- and half-lines. The present arrangement of quire two has been misbound, and Görlach suggests that the proper order is "ff. 2, 7, 3, 4, /gap of four/ 5, 6, 8, 9."[43] The combination within the first quire and the abrupt shift to the exclusive use of double columns of long- and half-lines for the remaining SEL texts in the manuscript suggest that the scribe, at least initially, began copying the text out in half-lines but stopped, considering the added amount of parchment needed to complete the collection (approximately twice as much), or, more likely, was using parchment which had already been prepared and ruled for another work. The experimentation of the D scribe is further pronounced with the copying of the life of St. Alexis beginning f. 115r which shifts to tail-rhyme with braces. Because of the double column layout, which produces a four-column effect when the manuscript is opened, the script becomes constricted and difficult to read effectively. The scribe must have known this because only a few leaves, later, on f. 110v, the scribe reverts to single columns. Upon the completion of the poem and shifting away from the *aabccb* stanzaic tail-rhyme to the septenary couplet form of the SEL, the scribe reverted once more back to the double columns of long- and half-lines on f. 124v part way through the leaf.[44]

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[43] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 79.

[44] See Wakelin, *Designing English*, 138, for a brief discussion of D and columns.

Again, the scribe alters the layout to fit the text. The scribe includes *In die natalis ad altam missam* with a ten line prologue *In princ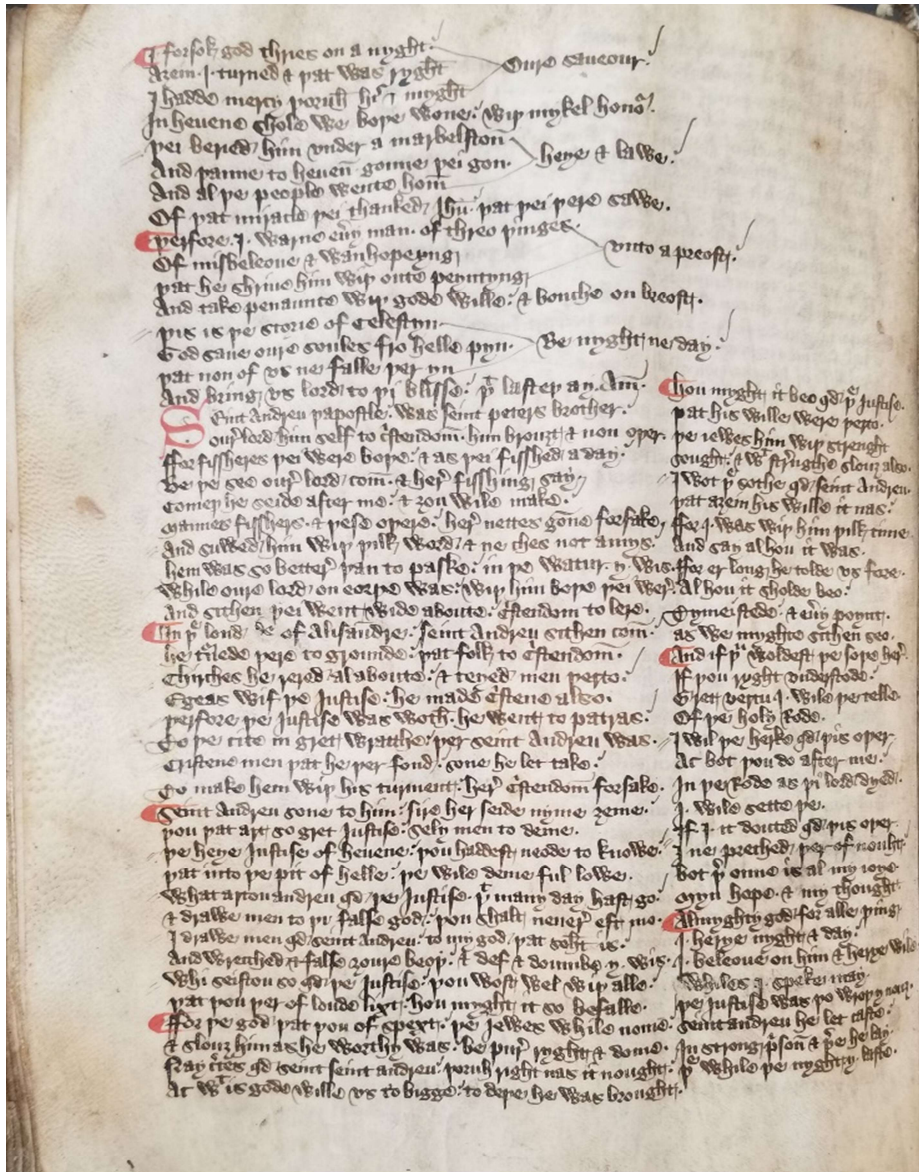ipio,* which is written in a single column. This text is given a title: *In principio erat verbum etc.* (f. 136v). The scribe again alters the layout of the page following the explicit to the SEL, "explicit legenda stor[ibus] in lingua anglicana" (f. 158rb), with the title of *Septem peccata mortalia* on f. 157rb. The scribe maintains the layout used to present the SEL, instead of presenting *Septem peccata mortalia* as we would expect, likely as a continuation of the presentation of the text upto that point. At 460 lines, *Septem peccata mortalia* approximates the average length of an SEL-text. Instead of emphasising the rhyme of *Septem peccata*

Figure 5.5. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford MS. 463, f. 124v. (D). CC-BY-NC 4.0

The D scribe transitions between the tail-rhyme of St. Alexis and the double columns with long- and half-lines beginning the legend of St. Andrew. Notably, the scribe makes the transition on the same page.

moralia, the scribe continues the layout used for the SEL. For example, the rhyme suggests the following layout:

> Jesu þat wolde for us dye
> And was boren of mayde marie
> ȝeue hem alle his blessing
> Þ(a)t wole here þus talking
> To helpe þe sely soule to liuen
> Þ(a)t j(e)su cr(i)st us haþ geuen
> Þer beo dedly sinnes seuen
> Þ(a)t letten men to com to heuen
> Þ(a)t alle þ(a)t leouen in godes lores
> of twelue wint(er) old or more
> Euerichon þei sholde knowe
> Bot to lerne þei beon to slowe.

However, the text is actually presented in long lines, severing the rhyming couplet:

> Jesu þat wolde for us dye ꞉ And was boren of mayde marie
> ȝeue hem alle his blessing ꞉ þ(a)t wole here þus talking
> To helpe the sely soule to liuen ꞉ þ(a)t j(e)su cr(i)st us haþ geuen
> Þer beo dedly sinnes seuen ꞉ þ(a)t letten men to com to heuen
> Þ(a)t alle þ(a)t leouen in godes lores ꞉ Of twelue wint(er) old or more
> Euerichon þei sholde knowe ꞉ Bot to lerne þei beon to slowe.[45]

The new layout sacrifices the presentation of the rhyme for layout consistency with the SEL in the previous folios. But because *Septem* is still copied in the two-column layout, the narrower internal column presents the rhyme, which is the opposite of the SEL. *Incipiunt decem precepta,* the second-last text in the codex, is given the same treatment as *Septem peccata mortalia*. Instead of breaking a long line into two half-lines, the scribe combines the shorter lines into one long line resulting in the fracturing of a couplet. This results in a more accurate presentation of the rhyme in the narrow column with the anomalous treatment of the text in the wide column. Finally, the scribe alters the layout of the page to present the final poem of the codex *Meditacio beati Bernadi super passione domini nostri Ihesu cristi*, on f. 159v. The scribe maintains the double column, but each column is given equal width.

While the scribe provides titles to each of the other works (except for the life of St. Alexis), the scribe provides another feature unique to this SEL witness. A table of contents is titled *Hec est*

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[45] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 463 (D), f. 156, *Septem peccata mortalia,* lines 1-6.

continentia huius libri in lingua Anglicana videlicet. The work of the D scribe is ideal for any study of the role of layout in the visual presentation of a text. The flexibility with which the D scribe altered the page's layout to accommodate varying textual forms is most evident in the abrupt changes and the obvious experimentation in the codex's early pages. Wakelin posits that a scribe's ability to reconceive layout "made [scribes] into literary critics of a hands-on sort."[46] In addition, this ability shows a level of awareness a scribe must possess to present a text effectively. To do so, the scribe must be well versed in the text and its function.

As I have shown in D, braces emphasise the layout of the text. Copying out the verse in single columns allowed the inclusion of this feature common to Middle English verse. As we saw with the D scribe, braces could be used in double columns, but to varying degrees of effectiveness. In the life of St. Alexis, the braces are chaotic and unhelpful in marking out rhyme, whereas in *Meditacio beati Bernadi super passione domini nostri Ihesu cristi,* braces are used effectively to mark out stanzas as a space-saving measure. For the SEL, by copying the verse in long lines, the scribe ostensibly emphasises the rhyme over the prosody. To further emphasise the rhyme of the verse, five scribes elected to include braces in QbSBaBU in the SEL.

Incipits and titles are provided in the earliest and latest witnesses, L and Ax, respectively. Titles themselves are each unique to the scribes and the witnesses. They appear in three languages: Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English. The earliest witness, L, includes the following incipits for the Becket narratives: "Ici poez coment seint Thomas de Kaunterbures nasqui. E de queu manere gent de pere e de mere" for the Gilbert prologue and "Hic isci commence la vie seint Thomas Erceeueske de Kanterbury" for the Becket narrative proper.[47] C provides a Latin title: "De s[anct]o Thom[am] archiepi[scopum] et ca[n]tuariens[is]."[48] B provides a title in Middle English: "Saynt Thomas of Canterbyrie."[49] Finally, Ax has another example of a Latin incipit: "Incipit vita

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[46] Wakelin, *Designing English*, 138.

[47] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108 (L), fols. 61r and 63r respectively.

[48] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145 (C), fol. 180r. "Concerning Thomas the Saint and Archbishop of Canterbury."

[49] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 779 (B), fol. 41v.

et passio s[an]c[t]I thome cantuar[iensis]."⁵⁰ Curiously, only the scribe of Ax provides some form of genre identification of the text in explicit terms: *vita* and *passio*. The scribe of Ax situates the Becket narrative squarely in the hagiographical tradition. Moreover, the Ax witness begins with the Gilbert prologue, but does not differentiate between the prologue and the legend proper. The scribe of Ax approached both texts as one cohesive textual unit, a major departure from the earliest witness in L, which differentiates between the two texts and provides unique incipits for each as though they were two different texts and to be read as such.

The separation of the Becket narratives in L is marked both with initials and with incipits which are unique to L.⁵¹ The appearance of the combined French and Latin incipits speaks to the multilingual context of thirteenth-century England. G is related to L, but unlike L, G does not contain incipits. The incipits' presence in L reflects an early understanding that these were distinct narratives to be read independently. The distinction between the obvious romance prologue and the Becket account suggests a narratological observation by the scribes. Just as R. P. enhances our understanding of genre hybridisation in G by interpolating a couplet employing romance signifiers, he uses layout and paratextual features to mark and signal textual boundaries as they relate to key genre shifts.

Of the 21 extant SEL Becket witnesses, LCHSBaRYBGMU all contain running headers throughout the narrative, but only LCBAx present the text with a title or incipit. There seems to be little correlation between the use of headers and titles. Unlike titles and incipits, which serve the primary function of identifying the start of a text, the header provides the identity of the text throughout the codex. That is, it functions as a finding aid. Eleven of the 21 extant witnesses employ some form of running header. The headers can generally be sorted into three categories: those that deal with Becket's sanctity, those that deal with his ecclesiastical position, and those that deal with his geography. Of the eleven headers, only CU are rubricated. Eight mention Becket as Thomas of Canterbury, CSBaRYBGU, further indicating that Becket was known as Thomas of

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⁵⁰ London, College of Arms, Arundel VIII (Ax), fol. 80v. "Here Begins the Life and Passion of Saint Thomas of Canterbury."

⁵¹ "Ici poez oyer coment seint Thomas de Kaunterbures nasqui. e de quev manere gent de pere e de Mere"; "Hic isci Comence la vie seint Thomas Erceeueske de Kanterbury"; see Figure 5.3.

Canterbury and not as Thomas Becket in the Middle Ages. Only two identify Becket as archbishop, SM. Finally, only one identifies Becket as a martyr, H. Nearly as many witnesses have no headers as have them. Ultimately, this suggests that this form of paratext, or visual framing, was not standardised. Scribes could choose to include a running header for the text and decide to present what they believed to be the most important identifiers of Becket. Based on the extant headers, it is clear that identifying Becket as Thomas of Canterbury was more informative than to say that he was a martyr. One possible explanation for this preference was to differentiate Becket from Thomas the apostle, another frequently included saint in the collection.[52] H is unique in that it provides two headers for Becket texts: "Gilb[e]rt p[i]us et th[o]m[as] m^a^rtirs" and "Th[o]m[as] martiris." As with LG, the scribe of H clearly intended the Gilbert prologue to be a distinct work, identifying it with its own running header. Interestingly, each running header appears on the top of each leaf, but in two witnesses, the header spans the opening, CH.

In modern typesetting, writers and editors employ indentation to offset the beginning of a block of text. Such a visual cue indicates to the reader that a new paragraph has begun. In non-stanzaic texts like the SEL, scribes employed initials and paraphs to indicate to the reader that a new section has begun. Just as they used braces that mark rhyme, and titles and headers that indicate the title of a work, scribes inserted initials to demarcate smaller units of text. Each witness of the SEL employs initials to varying degrees, but only eleven make use of paraphs. As we might expect, more precious manuscripts, which look more expensive, have a greater number of initials. V, for example, contains 125 in the Becket narrative alone. B contains 56, while S contains space for 64. The spaces left behind in the unfinished S suggest that it was intended to be more spectacular than it currently is but also that there were to be further reading tools intended to guide the reader.

5.4 Marginalia

There are, among others, two ways of explaining the visual and textual framing devices, or paratexts in manuscripts: by form or by feature. There are advantages to both; however, definition by function seems to provide a more complete understanding of the intention behind a paratext. Grindley's taxonomy of marginalia provides a useful breakdown of feature function, as opposed to

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[52] The narrative of Thomas the Apostle appears in in 27 witnesses in two variant forms, like Becket. Twenty of these witnesses appear alongside Becket's narrative.

feature form, as a method of identifying the purpose of paratexts in the SEL manuscripts. His classification of marginalia into three types immediately differentiates between marginalia that are (I) "without any identifiable context," (II) "exist within a context associated with that of the manuscript itself," and (III) "associated with the various texts that the manuscript contains."[53] At first, these descriptions seem an approximation of what can be known about reading engagement with medieval manuscripts. But as Kerby-Fulton suggests, the evidence of medieval readership can be revealed to us "by the kind of paleographical, linguistic, textual, and iconographic analysis which, however, has not been popular work, mainly because it is detailed and hard."[54] Grindley has positioned his taxonomy as a tool to identify with a degree of certainty what the functions of marginalia are without expounding upon their intention.

There are paleographical and codicological methods of analysis that make clear what is at first blurry when it comes to assessing the originality of manuscript marginalia, evidence which upon reflection seems obvious. Take, for instance, the importance of rubrication in medieval manuscripts. While it serves a greater function of highlighting the text, in some cases, it evinces the step-by-step process of manuscript production. When we see the rubrication atop the text, covering the ink of the text, it reveals the order of operations. Such features in manuscripts reveal to the reader how the scribe expected the codex to be used—in some cases read, in others handled. In this section I will focus mostly on Grindley's types II and III marginalia as they are those which were produced by the professional reader. In the following chapter, I will discuss at greater length Grindley's types I and II.

5.4.1 Enumeration

In the previous chapter, I discuss the extensive passage on the Constitutions of Clarendon, the hybrid list constructed by the poet, and the genre shift into historiographical writing for

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[53] Carl James Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations: Notes Towards the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles 1300-1641," in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 2001), 77. See Appendix, "The Grindley Taxonomy of Marginalia."

[54] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, introduction to *Medieval Professional Reader*, 7.

rhetorical effect. In a handful of the SEL manuscripts where this passage appears, we find an interesting presentation of the text established by the scribes. The presence of numerals in the margins alongside the constitutions is a navigational aid imposed onto the text by the scribes. In manuscripts ELUAx, in an identical hand to the main text, the scribe presented the constitutions in order of their discussion in the text and not according to their historical usage. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the constitutions in the SEL are a combination of two different sets of constitutions from 1164 and 1169. The order in which they appear in the SEL is not historically accurate but is narratologically significant. This is important for a number of reasons which I will shortly address. First, however, it is necessary to discuss both the enumeration's form and function before we can identify what these seemingly mundane additions to the manuscripts reveal.
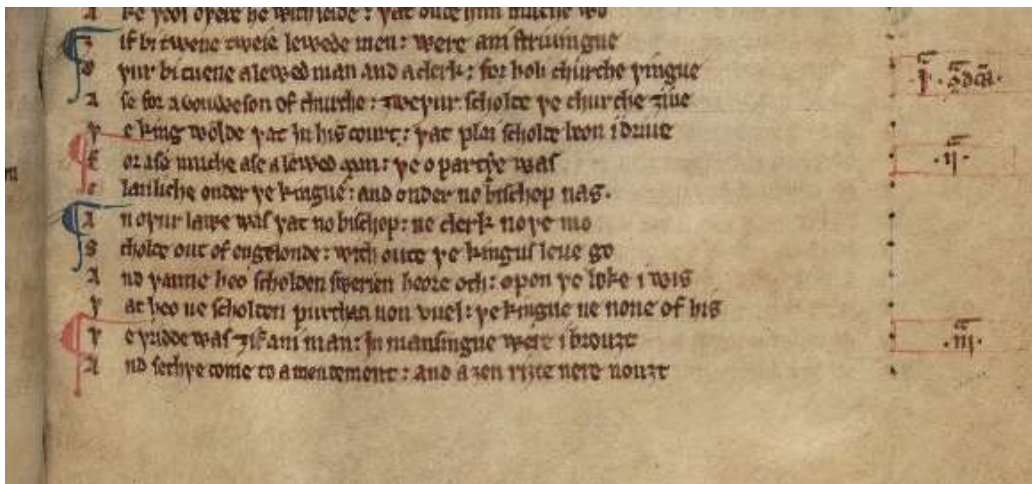

Figure 5.6. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Laud Misc. 108 (L), detail f. 67r. CC-BY-NC 4.0

The L scribe draws on the tradition of *ordinatio* in this passage concerning the constitutions of Clarendon.

In L, certain marginalia take the form of a shorthand Latin cardinal number, ·jᵃ·qᵃ dcā· (*prima quam dicta*), where each subsequent mention of a charter is presented alongside a Roman numeral (see ff. 67r-67v). These identifying marks in the margins seem out of place. Yet they were included at the same time that the primary text was copied. The scribe of L must have thought these numerals belonged to the text and were significant enough of a feature to be worthy of rubrication. They are rubricated in two fashions. Just as the first letter of each line is rubricated, the initial minim of "*prima quam dicta*" is rubricated (see Figure 5.6); second, each instance is enclosed in a rubricated box. F. 67r contains three such instances, while f. 67v contains the subsequent ten. What

is less noticeable is their relationship to the paraph marks (alternating red and blue), which denote the breaking of the text into smaller textual units—in this circumstance, the individual charters themselves. On the verso, however, it becomes clear that these enumerations only appear alongside other paraph marks. Their purpose, then, is not to demarcate the textual units commenting on the charters of Henry II. They must serve another function.

Grindley's taxonomy is useful for identifying the purpose of these marginalia. Type III-Narrative Reading Aids (III-NRA) contains a subset of types which "comprise most written elements of a manuscript's *ordinatio*, whether they be original features of the work or later additions to it."[55] This is an NRA function that is "made to suggest discrete navigations of texts."[56] Grindley divides III-NRA into eight subcategories, which scribes use to provide navigational insight to future readers. In the case of L, it was the scribe of the main text who inserted the reading aids we see alongside the Constitutions of Clarendon. Of the eight, Grindley describes the "Rhetorical Device" as markings that "outline grammatical or logical processes." [57] Given Grindley's examples from which he draws examples of his definition, he invokes Parkes' definition of *ordinatio*: "there are also other rubrics placed in the margin at certain points, sub-headings like 'prima cause,' 'secunda,' tercia,' 'obiectio,' 'responsio,' which serve to identify stages in the argument within the chapter."[58] While it is clear that a scholastic argument is not being made in the margins of L, it is worth noting that the scribes imposed *ordinatio,* in the strictest of terms, onto the SEL account of the Constitutions of Clarendon. Thus, we can classify these marginalia, not only for what they look like but for what they do: they are a Type III-NRA-RD. They guide the reader through a passage of text as if it were a scholastic document. In essence, the scribe asserts a type of reading by appropriating a form of layout connected to scholarly texts. Furthermore, we can remove the possibility that these numbers refer to items in a separate document, given that no such document exists which contain both lists of charters.

The scribe presents this passage of the text as though it were an argument, which is an insightful reading of the passage. As the passage is, in fact, a detailed argument between the poet

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[55] Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations," 82.

[56] Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations," 82.

[57] Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations," 84.

[58] Parkes, "Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio,*" 118.

and their socio-political context and an argument between Becket and Henry II within the narrative, the marginalia also assert a certain type of reading behaviour onto later readers by connecting this passage, via the marginalia, to a scholastic tradition of reading.

Like L, Ax uses marginal notation to denote the number of charters and their order within the narrative. Unlike L, however, Ax does not employ paraphs to divide textual units. In lieu of paraphs, the scribe of Ax employs what
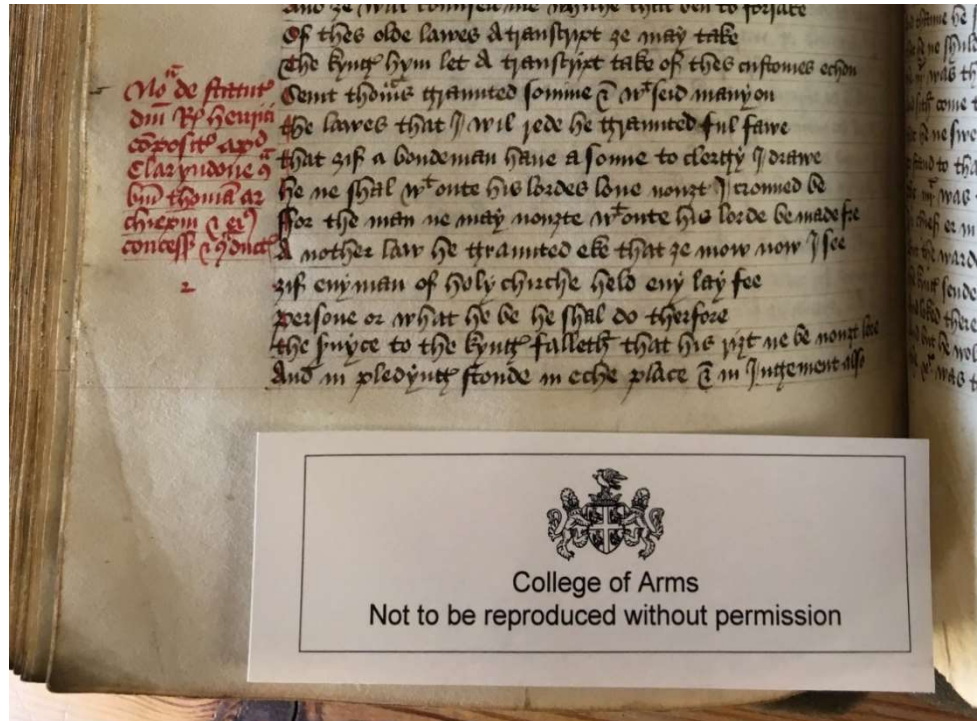

Figure 5.7. London, College of Arms, MS Arundel VIII, fol. 88v. (Ax) Reproduced by permission of the Kings, Heralds and Pursuivants of Arms.

The scribe includes Type III-NRA-SM-CO marginalia.

Grindley calls a "condensed overview," Type III-NRA-SM-CO. This is a form of summation (SM) which provides "narrative navigation of the text."[59] Unlike the former Narrative Reading Aid, this form of reading aid is intended to guide the reader using "more than two lines of text and summarised narrative."[60] The scribe, in an identical hand to that of the text but in red, writes in the margin beside the first charter: "nota de statutus dum Rex Henrici compositus apud Claryndone convenit beatum Thomam archiepiscipum et eius concessionis et conductus" [Note when King Henry composed the statutes near Clarendon and met the blessed archbishop Thomas and his concessions and conduct] (f. 88v).

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[59] Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations," 86.

[60] Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations," 87.

Subsequent instances of enumeration are rubricated and enclosed in black boxes or underlined in black. Each corresponding reference to the constitution within the text itself is underlined in red so that, for example, the text might read viii (inked in black and underlined in red), with its corresponding marginal viii (inked in red and underlined in black). Ax modifies the scheme in L by linking the marginalia to the text using colour. However, both share the same function of Type III-NRA-RD. They simply guide the reader through the text.

If L established a precedent, and the scribe of Ax adopted a similar apparatus to guide the reader but included alternative methods in addition, then U represents the skeletal effort of guiding the reader through the text with Type III-NRA-RD. The scribe of U made little effort to assist the reader through the text and merely added the enumeration as a courtesy. Neither are numerals rubricated or aligned appropriately with the text they reference. Moreover, the numerals are not all present. The first indication appears after the list has begun; the scribe does not indicate the second charter and inserts the marginalia in such a way that they is not clearly linked to a specific line of the text. In general, U is representative of the heavy use that the SEL might have endured, meaning that both trimming and years of handling have damaged the margins greatly. The presence of Type III-NRA-RD nonetheless reveals an expectation of reading practice and the participation of a tradition, however imperfectly realized. The poet's discussion of the Constitutions of Clarendon was to be read and referenced. The marginal apparatus provided a visual textual marker for the reader to quickly find and identify the significant passage within the text. The enumeration in the margins would enable a reader to quickly flip through the manuscript and find the passage, but it also enabled a sort of tokenisation, where the reader would be able to reference a specific article in the constitutions by its number.

If LUAx present the Constitutions of Clarendon employing *ordinatio,* E makes use of the *ordinatio* to make narrative arguments. The constitutions presented in the SEL account of Becket are presented as historical fiction: (1) they are a hybridised list, (2) they are arranged not in historical order but arranged according to articles which Becket consented to and those he refuted. E employs *ordinatio* like LUAx, but more closely engages with the narrative and moral structure of the text by creating not one list but two. This is a considered departure from the other manuscripts that use the same layout because it invites the reader to consider the constitutions themselves like an argument, but to consider them as Becket does in the narrative. By dividing the constitutions

into two lists (themselves introduced by two different Latin notes), the scribe asserts an interpretation of how the passage should be read and encourages the reader to consider the text in the same manner.

Introducing the Constitutions of Clarendon twice, the E scribe makes a special note of the shift in the
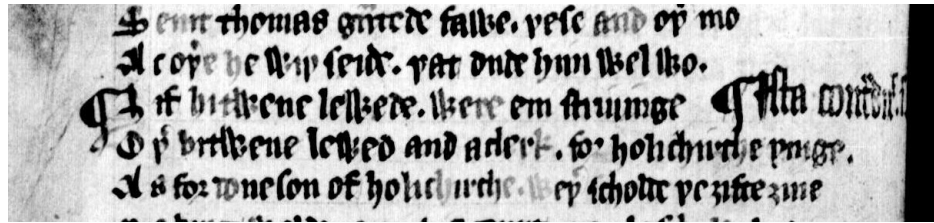

Figure 5.8. © British Library Board. London, British Library Egerton 1993 (E), detail f. 70v.

The scribe employs the from of *ordinatio* to reinforce Becket's attitude toward the constitutions of Clarendon. See also Figure 5.7.
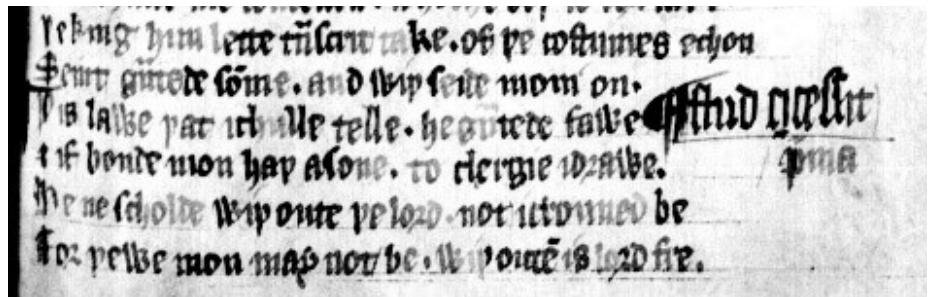

Figure 5.9. © British Library Board. London, British Library, Egerton 1993 (E), detail f. 70r.

narrative's tone and uses the *ordinatio* to reflect that shift. The scribe introduces one section of the constitutions with "istud cicessit" (see Figure 5.9). Unlike the scribes of LUAx, the E scribe always inserts the enumeration in the right margin. The marginalia often become squeezed between the text and the gutter on the versos, an example of which can be seen in Figure 5.8. The second list begins much like the first, introduced in the margins, each number introduced with a paraph, and begins "ista contra" [becomes illegible].

Narratively, the poet divides the constitutions into two lists: the constitutions that Becket approved and those he rejected. In other examples of enumerated constitutions, these constitutions are marked as one through ten. The E scribe breaks from this practice and instead echoes the narrative and creates two enumerated lists that map onto those constitutions that Becket approved and rejected. Just as the scribes of L and G use initials to divide the Becket narrative into two sections, so too does the E scribe divide the narration of the Constitutions of Clarendon for its argumentative structure.

Grindley's taxonomy provides a functional definition of what is happening in these four manuscript witnesses. He admits that the sub-type III-NRA-RD is "relatively underdeveloped." I

propose, however, that since his definition of III-NRA-RD is linked to Parkes' notion of the *ordinatio*, then elaborate marginal commentary on the "grammatical and logical processes" of a text, as he illustrates in *Piers Plowman* in MS HM 143, is not necessary. A more reasonable definition of III-NRA-RD makes reference to or directly acknowledges established medieval notions of reading apparatuses. In this way, the sub-type extends beyond Parkes' notion of *ordinatio*'s rigidity and acknowledges the idiosyncrasies with which individual scribes adopted, altered, or echoed particular established grammatical, rhetorical, or logical protocols in laying out their work. At the same time, it is clear that the numbering of the Constitutions of Clarendon in these four manuscripts all serves a similar purpose. Their presentation is not always as clearly laid out as we might expect. Nevertheless, the presence of enumerations in medieval vernacular texts like the SEL, *Piers Plowman,* or the *Prick of Conscience* acknowledges a scholastic form of reading, and an attempt to guide the reader through the work in a specific manner. In the case of the SEL, it is no coincidence that scribes imposed *ordinatio* onto a passage that reads like a legal or scholastic work and differs greatly from preceding and subsequent passages. To a great degree, the scribes are using layout to indicate the genre of this part of the text, just as the poet did, echoing the poet's shift in genre. Layout, then, like genre, is used rhetorically by the scribes.

5.4.2 Dramatis personae

In addition to the enumeration associated with the Constitutions of Clarendon, the SEL contains evidence of other types of reading beyond the scholastic reading informed by *ordinatio*. The presence of *dramatis personae* in the margins of the SEL Becket narrative suggests a complicated and evolving tradition of reading engagement. As I have done before, I turn to contemporary works in circulation alongside the SEL to provide a possible context for both form and function of the marginalia.

The York Corpus Christi cycle, extant in only British Library MS Add. 35290, is a collection of dramatic verse. Its use by the various guilds around York in the production of the cycle plays celebrating the history of the Christian faith and depicting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is significant for several reasons, primarily because it provides material evidence for live performance. As a codex, it bears many of the hallmarks of medieval insular manuscripts. Most important, however, is the scribes' use of what I call *dramatis personae,* the identification of speakers by labels in the margins. In MS Add. 35290, the identity of the speaker

appears in the margins adjacent to the lines of dialogue, often rubricated. This type of marginalia informs the reader what passages of the text are spoken by which character. Though the *dramatis personae* in medieval manuscripts is not strictly the *dramatis personae* of the Renaissance and Restoration dramatic publications, their presence alongside the dialogue and their identification of speakers in the margins of medieval manuscripts foreshadowed future presentation styles of dramatic texts. That the names of characters are rubricated suggests that they were a planned feature of the codex alongside the headers, titles, and braces. Grindley categorises these as III-NRA-DP, or Type III-Narrative Reading Aids-Dramatis Personae, which "identify the various characters within a work."[61] Common to Middle English poetry, this type of reading apparatus is seen in manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's *Troilus*, two works from which Grindley draws his definition.

Given that the primary form of reading engagement of the SEL was not within a performance setting in the same tradition as the pageant plays of the late Middle Ages, and given the inconsistency of the use of *dramatis personae* across the SEL corpus, it is likely that the *dramatis personae* in the SEL Becket narrative served a function ultimately similar to that in manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. The *dramatis personae* in the SEL likely served a similar purpose to the enumeration of the Constitutions of Clarendon. The marginalia drew inspiration from the *ordinatio.* As in scholastic works where the compiler might identify sources (III-NRA-S) or citations (III-NRA-C), the *dramatis personae* in the margin aid the reader through the contextualisation of the dialogue. In other words, they enables quicker, more discerning reading.

In a secondary, rubricated display script, in the right margins are the names of speakers adjacent to lines of dialogue (see Figure 5.10). Compared to other manuscript examples like the York Cycle, we might assume that these *dramatis personae* suggest a performative reading of the SEL. Their primary function then would identify the speaker in a performance. Yet the SEL Becket narrative lacks other performative markers. For example, the *dramatis personae* appear infrequently in the Becket witnesses, and where they do appear, only appear in moments of dialogue between Becket and Henry. While the SEL may have been read aloud, the *dramatis*

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[61] Grindley, "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations," 84.

personae lack the same function of the marginalia in MS Add. 35290, yet their form is similar. Therefore, the *dramatis personae* in the SEL must serve a different purpose.

The *dramatis personae* in the SEL account of Becket are not as common as other reading aids, but like the enumeration of the Constitutions of Clarendon, their presence invites speculation. They are present in LJAx. Less common than the more historically focused marginalia surrounding the Constitutions, they occur in approximately the same sections; that is, they mostly identify key speeches during the debate between Henry and Becket, though other bishops are identified. While the enumerations of the Constitutions of Clarendon suggest a particular reading of the passage, one focused on history, and documenting a legal heritage, *dramatis personae* suggest an altogether different form of reading: a performative reading.

Identification of sources of quotations in the margins of medieval works is common, for example, in the scholastic tradition of the text-and-gloss format. However, that so few of the extant SEL witnesses incorporate this layout and reading schema suggests that the primary focus of the *dramatis personae* was not, in fact, to record the historicity of the dialogue between the actors of the events as they unfolded but to provide a visual clue for the reader to quickly identify which parts of the text were dialogue and who was speaking. The inclusion of the *dramatis personae* in the margins suggests a form of reference reading, but given its use in early manuscripts like L and late manuscripts like Ax, we cannot discount the possibility that the purpose of these marginalia changed as reading practices also evolved.

In L, the *dramatis personae* are copied in the same primary script but outlined and rubricated. They begin "Ait Rex" (f. 65v) beginning with Henry's speech to the court: "Beav seignours the king seide · I not ȝwat ȝe habbeth iþouȝt" (line 443). On the following leaf Becket's speech is next introduced likewise by "Ait Thomas" (see Figure 5.10, f. 66r): "Sire sire quad seint Thomas ꞏ ȝif it is þi wille." In subsequent uses of the *dramatis personae*, the scribe removes the "ait," using it only twice as if to instruct the reader of its purpose: to indicate dialogue. While the first three instances of this form of reading aid within the narrative align with paraph marks, not every speech is provided with its division into a unit of meaning. That is, the scribe relies not on paraphs to break the text into manageable units but relies on the marginal indicators of characters to provide context for speech. Further, the dialogue itself is identified within the verse, suggesting that the marginalia are not the sole indicators of speech. For example, in one instance where the
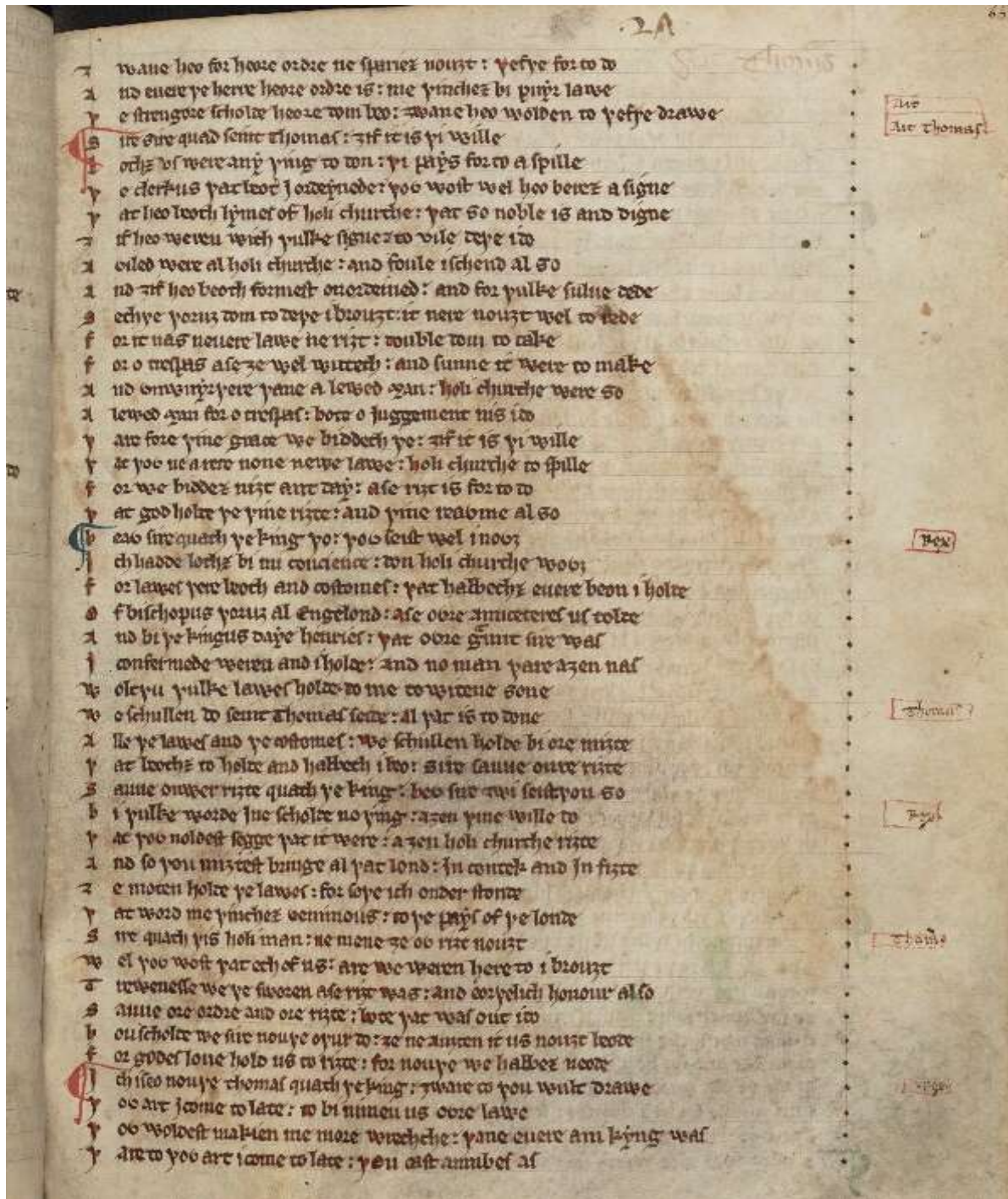
154

Figure 5.10. The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Laud Misc 108 (L), f. 65. CC-BY-NC 4.0

The scribe includes *Dramatis personae* in the right margin, indicating the speaker in the narrative. The names of Thomas and "rex" are rubricated, drawing the reader's attention to the marginalia.

dialogue is noted through *dramatis personae,* the narrative reads: "Sire quath þis holi man ꞉ ne mene ȝe ov riȝt nouȝt" (line 485). Even though the poem itself identifies who speaks, the paratext provides additional reference. A reader, therefore, would already be aware of the dialogue passages in the narrative. Consequently, the marginal identification of these passages serves another purpose.

The use of *dramatis personae* in Ax echoes that of L, but they are nestled amongst a variety of marginal notations that run the length of the work. The rubricated marginalia in Ax, in the same primary script of the scribe (but rubricated and decorated with flourished braces) provide summarising context for the reader. The scribe, in this case, anticipates a private reader.

Generally, the relationship between scribe and reader was self-reinforcing. That is, what the reader read was informed by the decisions of the scribe, and scribal practice was informed by the shifting and evolving praxis of reading. We see the dynamic relationship between the scribe and reader in manuscript culture, especially in the SEL witnesses. From aural reading to private reading, literacy and audiences grew in the late Middle Ages in England. Commenting on the evolving layout of the Chrétien romances in France during the same period as the SEL, L. C. Reis writes: "the textual and paratextual evolution delineated in these major author-based codices of Chrétien's romance indicates that the transition from an aural reception aided by public oral performances to an unaided, amateur ocular reading of Chrétien's romances moved alongside subtle yet significant changes in manuscript transmission."[62] The significance of the role of the scribe in the transmission and dissemination cannot be understated, as Reis argues: "formal and material features of manuscript transmission of vernacular literature conditioned either aural reception (through public performances) or private silent ocular reading."[63] Such an argument can be made concerning the evolution of the SEL material culture.

To understand the scribal practices which resulted in the extant witnesses, it is necessary to discuss the presumed readership of the SEL. This, however, introduces a paradox: to understand the reader, we must understand the purpose behind the material evidence, i.e. the scribal practice. To understand the scribal practices is to understand the reader's engagement. Ultimately, this

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[62] Levilson C. Reis, "From Aural Reception to Visual Paratext: The Reader in the Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes Romances," *Neophilologus* 94 (2010), 385-6.

[63] Reis, "From Aural Reception to Visual Paratext," 378.

chapter aims to highlight key features found consistently across manuscript witnesses of the SEL and contextualise the scribal practices that went into their production. The compilation and assembly of the SEL collection with other religious works, the internal organisation and structure of the collection, and the types of paratexts used to guide the reader all lead towards the conclusion that scribes held consistent attitudes towards what the SEL was and how the Becket narrative fitted within the collection. If the poet of the SEL Becket narrative and the *Banna sanctorum* attempted to produce a collection of legends that hybridised hagiographical, historical, and romance genres, then the scribes reinforced that hybridisation through accessible and formulaic layouts that prescribed particular reading habits.

Throughout this chapter, I have pointed towards scribal features of the manuscript tradition of the SEL that evince, in some capacity, the dynamic relationships between the scribe, reader, and text. While in Chapter 4 I introduced the idea that the SEL Becket legend is hybridised and contained genre features of hagiography, history, and romance, Chapter 5 more closely examines how the scribes engaged with the conceptualisation of the poet's genre hybridisation. In L, and manuscripts closely connected to it, we see the demarcation of the Becket legend into three distinct sections through the use of incipits and eventually initials. Such features, alongside their function of guiding the reader through the text, identify key narrative shifts: from prologue, to life, to miracles. Further, the addition of paratextual features, which I have defined through Grindley's taxonomy of marginalia, suggest the plurality of ways in which the legend of Becket can be read by medieval readers and interpreted according to the scribes' reading of the narrative. Through the enumeration, we see how scribes implemented and echoed *ordinatio* to assert an analytical reading of the Constitutions of Clarendon, especially as the enumeration follows the legend's arrangement of the articles and not the historical arrangement. The inclusion of these enumerations encourages the reader to contemplate these constitutions alongside Becket. Yet it is the scribes who implemented this paratextual feature, not the poet. Therefore, the enumeration of the Constitutions of Clarendon is evidence of scribal reading engagement. Likewise, the inclusion of *dramatis personae* encourages and anticipates more dramatic readings of the legend as these marginalia identify key moments of dialogue between Becket and Henry II. While the poet includes stock phrases that identify speech within the verse, the scribes additionally appended paratextual signifiers to emphasise these moments. Not only do the scribes copy the SEL for further

dissemination, they contribute their own readings which continued to impact future reading engagement.

Based on what the SEL Becket circulated with and how it was read, we see that the scribes of the Becket narrative and the SEL as a whole presented the legends as, with few exceptions, a collection of saints' legends with a particular emphasis on contextualising the collection within a broader religious context. Although some early manuscripts suggest an attempted adherence to an original poetic intention as in L and G, the majority of SEL collections conform to and reinforce the idea that the Becket narrative was strictly a religious work. While it may be the case that the original SEL poet wanted to compose hagiography framed as romance, the scribes all but ignored the significance of the metaphor in the *Banna sanctorum* and produced collections of saints' legends.

6. The User as Reader: Genre Reception of the South English Legendaries

In books I find the dead as if they were alive; in books I foresee things to come; in books warlike affairs are set forth; from books come forth the laws of peace.

- Richard de Bury, *Philobiblon*[1]

Richard de Bury waxes poetic in *Philobiblon* about the value that reading has for the reader. The subjects of his reading were vibrant to him. In this chapter I will explore how Becket maintained a vibrancy well after his martyrdom in 1170 and continued to be an engaging historical, religious, and literary icon centuries after his death. While I have focused my examination of readers on authors and scribes so far, in this chapter I turn my attention to readers like Richard who were captivated by the subjects in their books. In Chapter 4 I focused on the literary manifestations of genre, while I focused on the physical manifestations of genre in Chapter 5. In both of these chapters my attention was centred on how authors and scribes employed genre features rhetorically to encourage particular readings of the legend of Becket in the SEL. In this chapter I pursue the implications of Chapters 4 and 5. In other words, I look at how the strategies employed by the poets and scribes of the SEL Becket legend informed later reading behaviours and interpretations. In this chapter, I provide both literary and material examples of readers who engaged with the SEL Becket legend. In this way, I draw on the methods I have previously employed to demonstrate how book users interacted with the SEL in myriads of ways. In the first section of this chapter, I identify how readers interact with the SEL Becket legend, before delving into three specific readers of the SEL Becket legend: the poet known as Robert of Gloucester, John Prise, and Robert Cotton. In each section I discuss how the reader engages with the SEL Becket legend and how genre informs that

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[1] Richard de Bury, *The Love of Books: The Philobiblon*, ed. and trans. Ernest Chester (London: Alexander Moring, the de la More Press, 1903), 9.

interaction. Thus, this chapter focusses on our understanding of how the SEL changed, how genre is helpful in our analysis of historical reading behaviours, and how materiality can inform our understanding of reception.

6.1 Evidence of Reading

In *Used Books*, William H. Sherman notes that "marking [of books] was a matter, then as now, of attending to words, listening to their stories, thinking about their arguments, and heeding their lessons."[2] Indeed, as he notes, the proclivity by early modern users of books to mark up their books is evidenced by the sheer volume of medieval and early modern documents which bear readers' marks.[3] John Brinsley notes in his 1612 work *Ludus Literarius; or The Grammar Schoole*, "difficult words, or matters of special observation, they do read in any Author, be marked out; I meane all such words or things as either are hard to them in the learning of them, or which are of some special excellency or use, worthy the noting."[4] Brinsley advises students to physically alter the material to aid in the "knowledge of the thing."[5] This same practice of underlining is even seen in one witness of the SEL Becket narrative.

MS G provides insight into the practice of marking up a medieval document, likely by an early modern reader. MS G has over 120 unique instances of underlined single words and phrases.

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[2] William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 3.

[3] Sherman makes note of Huntington's STC collection in his study, noting that "just over 20 percent of the books […] contain manuscript notes by early readers," Sherman, *Used Books,* 5.

[4] John Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius; or, The Grammar Schoole,* ed. E. T. Campagnac (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1917), 46.

[5] Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius*, 46.

They are present throughout the entirety of the document and appear in one consistent ink colour. It is impossible to know for sure who performed the underlining. Ink colour and line thickness suggest that it was Thomas Whyte who signed and scribbled throughout the document (see Figure 6.1). In the margin of one leaf, he practised writing a letter naming the town Chester, which suggests that this manuscript had a connection to that place at one point. While the connection between the underlined words might not immediately be apparent, their prominence in the text reveals a great deal about the user's relationship to the text. First, the user read with a quill and ink. While this is obvious, it is no less significant. It demonstrates a myriad ways of reading and using the SEL, from its conception and initial intention of being read aloud for moral
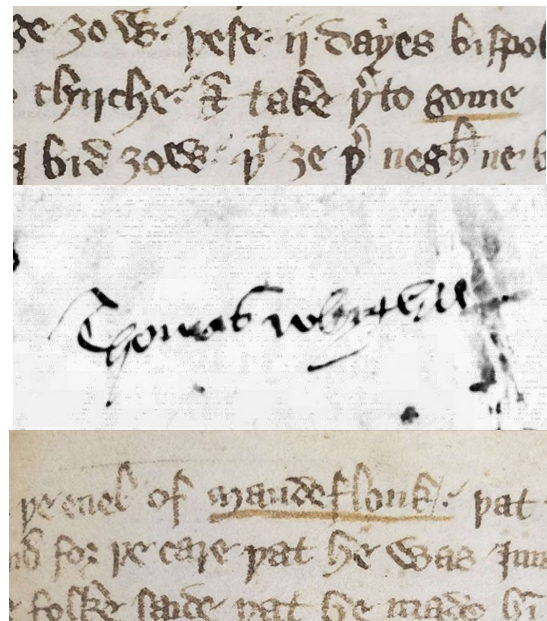

Figure 6.1. (Top) London, Lambeth Palace 223 (G), detail f. 270r, "gome"; (middle) f. 1v, signature of Thomas Whyte; (bottom) detail f. 270r, "maudeflonke." Images courtesy of Lambeth Palace Library.

instruction throughout the year to its use by a private reader who interacted with the document and made changes. Second, it reveals the language unfamiliar to the reader. Finally, it reveals what was *actually* read. By identifying precisely what *was* read, we can more closely identify or speculate about the interests and motivations of the reader.

Words that were underlined were more likely to come from Old French or Old English. At first, this does not appear to be significant. The vocabulary of a Middle English, thirteenth-century text would include words that derive from Old French and Old English. However, we must consider the reader who was underlining these words and when. It is reasonable to expect that a reader would not be able to discern the meaning of every word of a text composed centuries prior in a document that, as Görlach emphasises, is notable for its increased use of Old French and Anglo-French

vocabulary.[6] Some words we find underlined are "rokett," "gome," and "maudeflonk" (see Figure 6.1). "Maudeflonk" is an interesting example because it is a Middle English contraction of *mal-de-flanke*, an Old French term for pain in the groin or abdomen. This word has only 16 attestations in the Middle English Dictionary: medical recipes in MS Halliwell 335, Medical Society of London Library 136, Harley 372, and finally, all thirteen SEL manuscripts which contain the life of Becket. "Rokett" appears in the life of Saint Agnes and again comes from Old French. In Middle English, it came to mean a woman's overgarment, especially one of white linen. It is also the first time this word is recorded in the English language. Other words, like "gome," meaning either "attention" or "man," appear underlined multiple times throughout the text. Notably, the word "gome" cannot be attested after 1410 and was beginning to lose currency by the late Middle Ages. One unifying characteristic about these three examples is their technical or specialised uses. Later readers of the SEL who were separated from the vocabulary and culture of the late thirteenth century would not necessarily have exposure to these terms in their day-to-day lives.

The underlined words can be found in 31 texts. While the underlining appears throughout the entire document, the underlining is more pronounced in just a few of the 88 texts of MS G. The Lives of Mary Magdalene, Saint Michael part III, and Becket are three of the texts that contain a greater proportion of underlined words and phrases. These are interesting as they are not saints' lives as we might expect. Mary Magdalene, for instance, barely makes an appearance in her legend, and the St Michael part III is a pseudo-scientific treatise. These three texts indicate the poet's challenge to traditional hagiographical genre conventions. More importantly, however, this evidence of reading engagement suggests that these were the narratives in the collection that a reader read and responded to more intellectually.

Instances of underlining present in the *Banna sanctorum* in G are interesting for this study because they open up several possibilities for our understanding of the reader who was underlining words and phrases. At the time of production, R. P. of Wottoun, the scribe, interpolated a couplet into the *Banna sanctorum*:

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[6] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 83.

<div style="text-align: center;">Of Roulond 7 of Olyu(er) ⁊ 7 of Guy of Warwik</div>

<div style="text-align: center;">Þat hardy wer(e) by her day ⁊ 7 fonde no wher(e) her like[7]</div>

Although there are numerous possible reasons for the reader to underline this couplet, there are two that seem to be more likely. This reader may have been aware of the SEL textual tradition and made special note of this couplet's appearance in this copy of the SEL. However, a more likely reason is that the reader was underlining passages and words that were of interest and found references of Middle English romances embedded in the preface to a collection of saints' lives interesting.
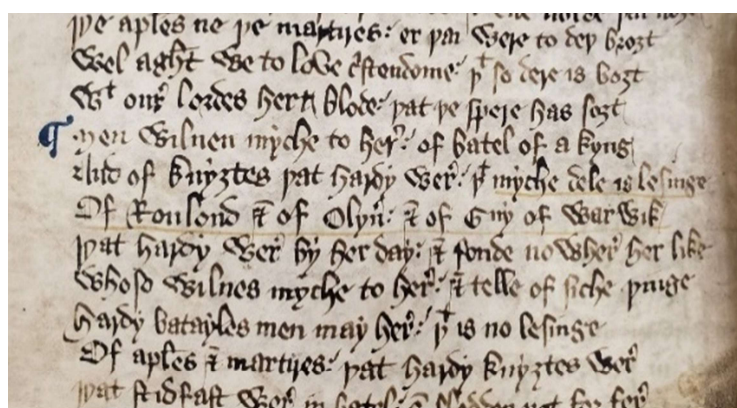
Figure 6.2. London, Lambeth Palace 223 (G), detail f. 48v. Image courtesy of Lambeth Palace Library.

The G scribe interpolated a rhyming couplet in *Banna sanctorum* referring to multiple popular romance heroes.

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[7] London, Lambeth Palace 223 (G), fol. 48v. While the scribe R. P. included this couplet, he did not compose it, as it also appears in MSs JEXPrF as well. As E predates G by at least 50 years, R. P. is merely incorporating the couplet as it aligns with the literary motif of the "hardi" knight. Nevertheless, R. P.'s inclusion of this couplet acknowledges the significance of the comparison between romance figures and saints, and the lives of saints' and romances. Whoever originally composed the couplet, either the E scribe or their source, demonstrates a keen awareness of the metaphor of the *Banna sanctorum* and the SEL rhetorical frame. See Liszka, "*South English Legendary*," 73.

The evidence of active reading in MS G exhibits the same reading strategies that Brinsley instructed in his manual. Additionally, it is also evidence of a continued and active audience for the SEL in post-Reformation England. However, not all evidence of active reading by medieval and early modern readers survives intact. Regrettably, manuscripts like British Library, Stowe MS 949 (S) indicate a wider trend of stripping evidence of prior use. Figure 6.3 shows the extensive use of commentary and the consequence of its removal. S reveals two types of readers. The first user, engaged with the text, provided commentary. The second user, distracted by the additions of the first, scraped the commentary away. Regrettably, the insights into the text by the first user remain inaccessible, while the priorities of the second user are
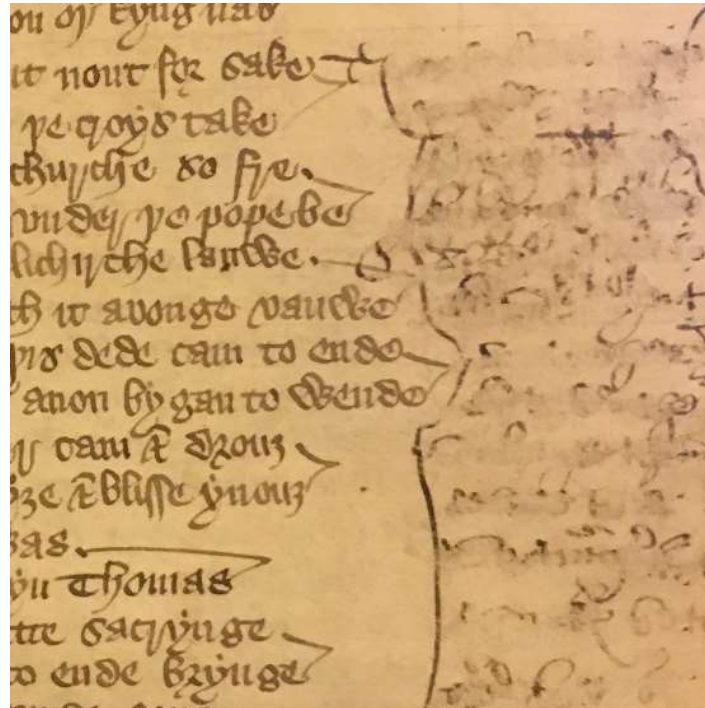
Figure 6.3. © British Library Board London, British Library, Stowe 949 (S), detail f. 114r.

A later reader erased medieval commentary.

blatant. Given that S is considered by Görlach to be one of the 25 major manuscripts of the SEL, the loss of such commentary is a setback for those interested in the everyday interpretations of the SEL Becket account. However, evidence of reading engagement, which was stripped from S, can be found in other contemporaneous witnesses. While the user of G showed particular interest in vocabulary, the remainder of this chapter will look at how readers from medieval and post-Reformation England engaged with the genre aspects of the SEL.

6.2 Medieval Readers

Gaining access to medieval interpretations of medieval works is an impossible task. To enter the mindset of a medieval reader uncompromised by the hundreds of intervening years of

history, literature, and culture is impossible. Modern readers of the SEL will inevitably consume the work with experience and understanding of modern critical theory, greater historical context, and widely different views of genre. However, in rare circumstances, medieval readers leave little doubt about how they interpreted a work. One such medieval reader is the assumed author of the *Metrical Chronicle*, Robert of Gloucester. It is through this work that we gain a greater insight into the fluidity with which medieval readers and writers perceived the idea of genre and the act of authorship.

Robert of Gloucester is only one medieval reader of the SEL Becket legend who we can identify by name, and, as an author, he participated in the traditions of composition like his contemporaries. His work, the *Metrical Chronicle*, is closely associated with the SEL, but Robert is best understood as an adapter of the SEL, taking those parts of the SEL Becket legend which lent themselves to his chosen genre, history. In this section I discuss the relationship between the SEL and the *Metrical Chronicle*, to establish their interconnectedness, before moving into a close reading of the *Metrical Chronicle* to illustrate that Robert of Gloucester's use of the SEL was not in keeping with the representation of Becket in the SEL but adapts the narrative for an audience concerned with English history. Ultimately, I will show that the genre features employed by the poets of the SEL informed Robert of Gloucester's own use of the narrative, and that he, being an author himself, was closely attuned to the importance of genre in composition.

The *Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* was first attributed to Robert of Gloucester by John Stow in 1565, and modern scholars have followed his lead.[8] The principal preoccupation with the authorship of the *RGl*, much like preoccupations with determining the authorship of the SEL, is centred on the interconnectedness between the two thirteenth-century works. In his biography of Becket, William Henry Black argues that the Becket narrative was "evidently written

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[8] William Aldis Wright, ed., preface to *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (London: HMSO, 1887), vol. 1. In the text, I refer to the *Metrical Chronicle* as *RGl*, keeping with custom.

in the time of Edward the First, and very probably by the author of the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, the style and metre of which bear a complete resemblance."[9]

Black is not at fault for his misattribution. His edition was informed by the scholarship of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and his erroneous claims highlight a key aspect of the SEL that I have addressed: the genre aspects of the Becket narrative in the SEL enable broad and disparate interpretations. It is entirely understandable why we might assume that the SEL Becket narrative was composed for historical purposes and not religious purposes. Since Black's assertions, the attribution of the Becket narrative in the SEL to Robert of Gloucester has lost credibility. Nevertheless, there is a relationship between the SEL and *RGl*. Robert of Gloucester was not, in fact, the SEL poet but an SEL reader who interpreted the SEL as an historical work and employed it in his own composition. Thus, the presence of the SEL Becket narrative in the *RGl* suggests one way in which the SEL's thirteenth-century audience read the work as a historical work.

The *RGl*, unlike the SEL, which has a complex textual history, is relatively straightforward. However, its authorship is debated. Robert of Gloucester was not the only contributing author to the chronicle. The work is attributed to Robert because he named himself: "þis isei roberd / Þat verst þis boc made."[10] Robert's contributions centre on the "continuations" or the sections of the chronicle following the reign of Stephen, including the interpolated legend of Becket.[11] *RGl* exists in three recensions: A (DIMEV 1193), which is extant in 6 witnesses; B (DIMEV 1194), which is

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[9] William Henry Black, *The Life and Martyrdom of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: T. Richards, 1845), vii-viii. Notably, this passage is quoted from an unpublished catalogue. See note viii.

[10] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle,* vol. 2, lines 11,748-9; All quotations of the *Metrical Chronicle* are taken from Wright's edition. Pickering discusses at length the textual and authorial issues presented by the *RGl* in his essay concerning the "Outspoken Poet." See Pickering, "Outspoken Style," at 134-6.

[11] Pickering, "Outspoken Style," 134-5.

extant in 7 witnesses; and C (DIMEV 1195), which is extant in a single witness.[12] The sources employed by the poet(s) of *RGl* are abundant and diverse. In his preface, Wright outlines passage by passage the sources, which, for brevity, I will not replicate here.[13] Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntington, and William of Malmesbury are the principal historical sources. For this study, what is notable is the use of the SEL as a primary source for legends of English saints, Kenelm, Athelwold, Edward, Dunstan, Alphege, Becket, and Edward the Confessor.

The interpolation of select SEL passages into *RGl*, particularly as they relate to English history, is central to understanding how certain audiences perceived the SEL in medieval England. *RGl* begins with a declarative statement on the primacy of England as a nation: "Engelonde his a wel god lond ich wene ech londe best."[14] Turville-Petre identifies this as Robert's "ringing declaration of national pride."[15] Thus, including passages of those celebrated English saints that glorify the English nation's idea is consistent with Robert's pride in his nation, especially those saints who carry with them legends of upholding English values. As the Becket controversy centred around English law, English sovereignty from Rome, and the balance of power between the Crown and Church, what is included and excluded from the *RGl* is noteworthy. In short, the aspects of the Becket narrative that Robert lifted from the SEL reveal what Robert considered worthy of historical documentation and therefore what constituted "historical writing."

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[12] Recension A: London, British Library Addit. 18631; London, British Addit. 19677; London, British Library Addit. 50848; London, British Library Cotton Caligula A.XI; London, British Library Harley 201; Glasgow University Library Hunterian 415. Recension B: Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby 205; Cambridge University Library Ee.4.31; Cambridge, Magdalene College Pepys 2014; Cambridge, Trinity College R.4.26; London, British Library Sloane 2027; London, University of London MS 278; San Marino, Huntington Library HM 126. Recension C: London, College of Arms, HDN 58.

[13] Wright, preface to *Metrical Chronicle,* at xv-xxxii.

[14] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, vol. 1, line 1.

[15] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 15.

RGl introduces Becket first as archdeacon and then as a saint, in two couplets which introduce the passages from the SEL Becket narrative:

> King henri wondede muche to abbe men in offis
> Mid him þat conseil were god & wis
> Ercedekne of kanterbury sein tomas þo was
> Þe king him made is chaunceler at is wille it nout nas.[16]

Although Wright attributes these couplets to the SEL, they are original compositions of Robert of Gloucester. Worth taking note of in this brief introduction is the ordering of titles attributed to Becket: first, his earthly title of archdeacon, then his post-mortem sanctity. Even in Robert's introduction to the narrative, the reader is shown Robert's primary concern: the historical relationship between Becket and Henry. Because of this, the legend of Becket is trimmed of its more legendary and religious elements, including the story of Becket's parents, his concern for English peasants, and his miracles.

Wright suggests in his preface that Robert of Gloucester appropriated lines 9600-725 and 9768-97 of the *RGl* from the SEL Becket narrative. However, the reality is more complicated than a direct lifting of couplets from the SEL. In practice, Robert of Gloucester's use of the SEL Becket narrative is far more surgical in its approach. Görlach posits that "the only grouping that is somewhat persistent seems to link the *RGl* excerpt with J and LSVG."[17] That is, Robert's references to SEL couplets most closely resemble early witnesses of the SEL Becket narrative. Pickering has argued that "there is a strong likelihood that Robert of Gloucester can be equated with the 'outspoken' SEL poet."[18] Pickering suggests that the "Outspoken Poet" of the SEL shares stylistic similarities to Robert. However, this does not mean that Robert composed the SEL, as not all of the SEL is written in the style of the "Outspoken Poet." The "Outspoken Poet" performed the role of redactor and editor. While the "Outspoken" style present in various SEL witnesses is clear given the "unrestrained nature of this writer's comments, which extend to sardonic mockery

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[16] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, vol. 2, lines 9600-3.

[17] Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, 54.

[18] O. S. Pickering, "'South English Legendary' Style in Robert of Gloucester's 'Chronicle'" *Medium Aevum* 70, no. 1 (2001), 13.

of characters who receive their come-uppance," Robert's borrowing of couplets from the SEL Becket narrative is strikingly mundane and even pedestrian.[19] Even if we accept Pickering's contention, the fact that Robert lifted and modified the passages that he did, with the modifications he did, suggests a type of reading preoccupied with historicity and not with the "sardonic" wit associated with the "Outspoken Poet."

What we find in *RGl* are dissections of the SEL Becket narrative which flesh out Robert's own historicising. Take, for example, Becket's introduction into the *RGl*:

> To him þe king truste mest · ne þer nas non so hey
> Þat so muche wuste is priuite · ne þat him were so ney
> So muche he truste on him · þat in is warde he let do
> Henri is eldoste sone · & is eir al so
> Þat he were his wardein · & al is ordeinour
> To is wille to wissi him · & to þe kinges honour
> Þe king wende to normandie · to soiorni þere
> & mid sien tomas dude is sone þat he is wardien were.[20]

Here Robert describes at some length the personal relationship between Henry and Becket and how that personal relationship filtered into their professional relationship, particularly when Becket assumed the trusted role of young Henry's guardian. What is notably absent in Robert's interpolation is the following couplet from the SEL: "Boþe þe uader & þe sone · mest hore heorte caste / Ope sein Thomas þe holyman · þe wile it wolde ilaste" (*Thomas Becket* lines 215-6). While lines 215 and 216a explain the relationship between Becket and Henry and young Henry, Robert is not interested in foreshadowing the fracturing of Becket's and Henry's relationship.

Robert quickly moves the narrative from Becket's guardianship of young Henry to the death of archbishop Theobald: "Þo tebaud þe erchebissop · suþþe ded was."[21] Becket is reintroduced into Robert's narrative only following the death of Theobald and only as Becket's reintroduction relates to young Henry. Missing from *RGl* between these two interpolations are scenes of Becket "arming"

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[19] Pickering, "'South English Legendary' Style," 3.

[20] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle,* vol. 2, lines 9604-11. Cf. D'Evelyn and Mills, *The South English Legendary,* EETS OS 236, "Thomas Becket," lines 207-14.

[21] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle,* vol. 2, line 9612.

himself (lines 265-8), demonstrations of his piety (lines 269-72), his concern for peasants (lines 273-4), and his vocation as an ordained priest (lines 275-8). *RGl* is preoccupied almost exclusively with Henry's movements and young Henry's wellbeing. *RGl* compresses six years of history into two couplets:

> Þo tebaud þe erchebissop · suþþe ded was
> Þe king & monekes ek · chose seint tomas
> Þo he was erchebissop · he huld ȝut in is hond
> Þat child uort þat þe king · come in to engelond.[22]

With Henry returning to England, Robert borrows again from the SEL Becket narrative, further describing the relationship between Henry and Becket (*RGl* lines 9616-21; SEL 281-2, 285-8).

The early interpolations of the SEL into *RGl* are selected passages, which, in the SEL, play minor historical roles supplementing the main character development of Becket. That Robert would take these couplets and compose a narrative around them to focus on Henry and young Henry is significant. Robert is clearly selectively reading his source material as a historical source. This reading of the SEL as a historical work is made clearer in a later interpolation: the discussion of the Constitutions of Clarendon.

As I have discussed, the SEL's account of the Constitutions of Clarendon conflates two different legal charters, and they are not present in the primary source material upon which the SEL is based. I will turn to the arrangement of the constitutions as key evidence that Robert, rather than compiling his own sources for the legal dispute between Becket and Henry, relied instead on the list produced by the SEL poet. The Constitutions of Clarendon account for the majority of the interpolated passages of the SEL into *RGl,* at 73 lines. With some poetic license and rearranging, Robert modifies the SEL opening line to adjust the rhyme for his own introduction to the topic:

SEL:

Þe king him let transcrit take · of þis costomes echon
Sein Thomas grantede somme · and wiþsede manyon (lines 541-2)

Chronicle:

Þe king drou to riȝte lawe · mani luþer costome

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[22] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, vol. 2, lines 9612-5.

> Sein Tomas hom wiþsede · & grantede some.[23]

With a little rearranging of the word order, Robert maintains the metre, sacrificing the rhyme of the original for his own introductory line. This slight variation, however, accounts for the only substantive change in the subsequent 72 lines. That Robert himself accuses Henry of constructing "luþer" laws is telling for his own interpretation of English legal history.

The last interpolated passages concern the murder of Becket in the cathedral. As I have previously argued, the SEL account of Becket's martyrdom is imbued with scriptural allusions typical of a hagiographical depiction of martyrdom. Just as with Becket's introduction in the *RGl*, Robert transfers passages from the SEL to his own chronicle in such a way that key details from the SEL narrative are stripped of their transhistorical moralising. Robert begins the martyrdom of Becket with an original couplet: "Hii wende hom vorþ to kanterburi · & in þe churche riȝt / Hii martreden sien tomas · an tiwesday at niȝt."[24] Lines 2129-32 in the SEL, which read

> And also as hi gulteles beoþ · harmles let ȝam wende
> Þis godeman sat adoun akneo · þo he say þan ende
> And forto auonge is martirdom · is heued he buide adoun
> And wel softe as some heorde · he sede þis horison.

are remixed to

> Hii wende hom vorþ to kanterburi · & in þe churche riȝt
> Hii martreden sein tomas · an tiwesday at niȝt
> Þis godeman sat adoun akne · & is heued buyede adoun
> & wel softe as some hurde · sede þis orison.[25]

Just as with other interpolated passages of the SEL Becket narrative, what is absent reveals just as much as what is present. It is notable that Robert removes Becket acknowledging his own martyrdom, and simply describes Becket bowing down prior to his death. Even though the idea of martyrdom is present in *RGl*, Robert's acknowledgement of the martyrdom is limited to providing the strict "facts," i.e. date, time, and place. That Robert manipulated the SEL verse, in lieu of simply

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[23] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, vol. 2, lines 9653-4.

[24] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle,* vol. 2, lines 9766-7.

[25] Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, vol. 2, lines 9766-9.

copying it as he did so many other times before, shows a deliberate and concerted effort to reshape the SEL narrative into his own account of the events. In short, Robert is no longer an adopter of the SEL but an active adapter.

Robert's excision of religious or hagiographical elements from the chronicle is made more clear in the subsequent description of Becket's death. Of the approximately 50 lines after Becket bows down and receives his martyrdom, Robert adopts 31 lines from the SEL, two of which are half-lines. For clarity of reference, I have copied the SEL account and bolded the similar or same lines used in the *RGl*.

> **Þis godeman sat adoun akneo** · þo he say þan ende
> And forto auonge is martirdom · **is heued he buide adoun**
> **And wel softe as some heorde · he sede þis horison**
> **Oure Louerd and seinte Marie · and seint Deonis also**
> **And alle þe auowes of þis churche · in was ore icham ido**
> **Ich bitake mi soule he sede · and Holy Churche riȝte**
> **Ȝute he bad for Holi Churche · þo he nadde oþer miȝte**
> **Sire Reynaud le Fiȝ Ours · mest sorwe of echon**
> **Forto smite þis holyman · is swerd he drou anon**
> **Ac Edward Grim þat was is clerk · of Grantebrugge ibore**
> **To helpe is louerd ȝif he miȝte · pulte is arm byuore**
> **He wonded is arm swuþe sore · þat blod orn adoun**
> **Mid þulke dunt also he smot · sein Thomas ope þe croun**
> **Þat þe blod orn bi is face adoun · in þe riȝt half of þe wonde**
> **Loude gradde þis luþer kniȝt · smiteþ alle to gronde**
> Edward Grim and al is men · þat aboute him so were
> Ourne aboute ech inis side · ope þe weuedes for fere
> As it bi oure Louerd ferde · þo þe Giwes him nome
> Is deciples flowe anon · me nuste war hi bicome
> For in þe gospel it is iwrite · þat oure Louerd him sulf þo sede
> Wanne me smit þe ssep hurde · þe ssep wolleþ tosprede
> And oure Louerd bad þat me ne ssolde · is deciples non harm do
> Þer on þoȝte sein Thomas · and bad for is also
> **Anoþer kniȝt smot sein Thomas · in þulke sulue wonde**
> **And made him buye is face adoun · & loke toward þe gronde**
> **Þe þridde in þulke sulue stude · þer after smot anon**
> **And made him aloute al adoun · is face ope þe ston**
> **In þulke steode þe veorþe smot · þat þe oþer hadde er ido**

Þat þe point of is swerd brak · in þe marbre ston atwo
Ӡute þulke point at Kanterburi · þe monekes leteþ wite
For þe honur of þe holyman · þat þerewiþ was ismite
Wiþ þulke strok he smot al of · þe scolle and eke þe croune
Þat þe brain orn abrod · in þe pauement þare doune
Þe wite brain was ymeng · wiþ þe rede blod þere
Þe colour was wel uair to se[o] · þei it rulich were
Al round it orn aboute is heued · as it were a diademe
Al round þere aboute lay · war of me tok gret ӡeme
For wanne me peint an halwe · ӡe ne seoþ noӡt bileued
Þat þer nis ipeint a round · al aboute is heued
Þat is icluped diademe · and me say þare a uair cas
B[i] þe diademe of is heued · þat he halwe was
Þo þis holyman was ded · loude hi gradde echon
Þis traitour is to deþe ibroӡt · wende we hanne anon
Siweþ us þe kynges men · and þat wiþ him beoþ
Of þis traitor we beoþ awreke · as ӡe nou iseoþ
He þoӡte be[o] herre þanne þe kyng · & binyme him is croune
And to noӡte bringe al Engelond · & nou he liþ þare doune.[26]

There is a striking similarity between the two works, despite the many accidental differences which come from both the scribal and editing processes and the few minor substantive changes in word order. The most noticeable changes occur when Robert transitions from his own verse to the SEL verse. Take, for example, line 9783 of *RGl*, "In þis sulue wounde · an oþer him smot þo," and the original line 2153 it was based on from the SEL: "Anoþer kniӡt smot sein Thomas ; in þulke sulue wonde." These transitional couplets are often altered to maintain the rhyme of *RGl* as it incorporates the SEL. Robert rhymes in this couplet "þo" with "mo" instead of the SEL's "wonde" and "gronde." These substantive changes, however, lead into the more significant changes that he makes. His change of content indicates how he interprets the SEL and refashions it for a chronicle

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[26] D'Evelyn and Mills, *The South English Legendary,* EETS OS 236, "Thomas Becket," lines 2130-76. The bolded passages come from Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle,* vol. 2, lines 9768a, 9769b-81, 9782-91, and 9792-7.

and a new audience. Notably, there are two large absences in the *RGl*'s account of Becket's martyrdom.

The first centres on the location of the martyrdom next to an altar "weuedes," which leads to a biblical reference, Matthew 26:31: "Then Jesus saith to them: All you shall be scandalized in me this night. For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be dispersed."[27] The SEL poet compares the monks in Canterbury Cathedral to the sheep, as they "were / Ourne about ech inis side" (*Thomas Becket* lines 2145-6). While this passage is clearly edifying, both in its translation of scripture and its connection between the events of Becket's martyrdom and Jesus' crucifixion, the poet puts these words into the mind and mouth of Becket: "Þer on þoȝte sein Thomas · and bad for is [disciples] also" (line 2152). For Robert, who does not use these lines, these couplets do not advance the narrative of his chronicle but speculate on the final moments of Becket's life through biblical commentary. Rather than focus on Becket's last speculative moments, Robert continues with the murder by advancing the narrative.

The second absence in the chronicle account of Becket's martyrdom, like the first, is a departure from the narrative and likely the work of Pickering's "A" redactor. In this passage, the poet vividly explores the image of blood around Becket's head and describes it colourfully as though it were from a painting of a saint. Far from the brutal aftermath of a vicious murder, the poet engages in ekphrastic composition. We expect this type of veneration of saintliness in a hagiographical text. However, it should come as no surprise that Robert would excise this passage from the *RGl*, as it does not materially contribute to the narrative of the conflict between Henry and Becket.

Ultimately, the manner in which Robert includes the murder of Becket in *RGl* is congruent with the narrativisation of English history. Becket's death was a key moment in English history and had legal and religious ramifications. It is clear from the passages that Robert included, and even more obviously from his exclusions, that Robert read the SEL as a source of historical information for his chronicle at the expense of its hagiographical purpose. Robert's subversion of the moral edification of the SEL into historical edification replaces the intention of the SEL poet

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[27] Cf. Zech. 13:7.

with his own: to produce a historical document, acknowledging the role of English saints but distilling the narrative down to its historical parts. While the poet of the SEL did not intend to produce a strictly historical work, the source material upon which it was based, the *Quadrilogus*, is explicitly framed as historical.

There is sufficient evidence in *RGl* to suggest that the SEL was being read in its earliest stages as a source of history. Although Robert is only one reader, and no generalisations can be made about how representative he was of other medieval audiences, that there was an audience reading the collection for historical information shows that the genre hybridisation of the SEL poet enabled later readers and writers to harvest historical readings for future works.

6.3 Early Modern Readers

Whereas Robert of Gloucester adapted his reading of the SEL Becket legend to fit into his chronicle, showing his use of the SEL as a historical source, early modern readers like John Prise and Robert Cotton inherited the SEL Becket legend during and following the English Reformation. That is, the religio-cultural context of their interpretation of the SEL Becket legend informed their reception of the work. In this section, I examine one manuscript which both Prise and Cotton interacted and imbued with their own interpretation of the Becket legend. While Prise left commentary on the margins of the manuscript, Cotton rebound the manuscript that contained the legend to fit into his collection. Both the commentary and the rebinding suggest that these two readers interpreted the legend as Robert of Gloucester did, as a historical source. However, in an additional shift in perception, the SEL Becket legend became itself a historical artefact of a superstitious past, and not as a source of religious edification, but as a source of historical edification. Thus, the SEL Becket legend further evolved, and the genre features embedded in the text by the poets and perpetuated by the scribes informed both Prise's and Cotton's evaluation and interpretation of the legend.

Before I delve into close examinations of how these two readers engaged with the SEL Becket legend, I lay the foundation by examining how Becket's reception and legacy evolved between his martyrdom and the Dissolution of the monasteries. I argue that understanding the cultural value of Becket and his legend is inextricably linked to the political and religious climate

of the sixteenth century. Therefore, Prise and Cotton's interpretation is simultaneously informed by the changing attitudes towards Becket and the genre features of the SEL itself. As with my discussion of Robert of Gloucester, this section corresponds to our understanding of how the SEL evolved over time and how the reception of Becket's legend evolved.

Following his martyrdom, canonisation, and translation, the cult of Becket grew. John Jenkins argues that "Becket presented a model for replication, particularly within a late-medieval English ecclesiastical context."[28] Becket's martyrdom was so influential that the veneration of other later English martyrs and saints would be modelled on Becket's own saint's cult. The "Becket model," so coined by Andre Vauchez, expanding upon the work of J. C. Russell, illustrates the process by which the religious leaders, archbishops, bishops, clerics, and prelates acquired popularity through "their fight in defence of their privileges and those of their flocks."[29] For this reason, English saints like Becket, whose popularity was largely due to their opposition to the Crown, would later become problematic during the English Reformation, the Dissolution of the monasteries, and ultimately the English Church's break from Rome.

When King Henry VIII broke away from Rome, one major issue with which he would necessarily contend was the continued popularity of England's most famous and celebrated saint, Becket. Not only was Becket associated with papal influence, but Becket's primary opponent was also named Henry. Becket's popularity and the historical significance of Becket's feud with the English Crown would have been impossible to ignore. No saint's shrine was more important in medieval England and no saint held more political or religious capital than Becket. In his account of the English Reformation, the seventeenth-century historian Gilbert Burnet writes:

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[28] John Jenkins, "Replication or Rivalry? The 'Becketization' of Pilgrimage in English Cathedrals," *Religion* 49, no. 1 (2019), 24.

[29] Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 170. See J. C. Russell, "The Canonization of Opposition to the King in Angevin England," in *Haskins Anniversary Essays in Mediaeval History,* eds. Charles Holt Taylor and John L. La Monte (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), 280.

[Becket] being a martyr for the Papacy, was more extolled than all the other Apostles or Primitive Saints had ever been. So that for 300 years, he was accounted one of the greatest Saints in Heaven, as may appear from the accounts in the Leger-books, of the offerings made to the three great Altars in Christ's Church Canterbury. The one was to Christ, the other to the Virgin, and the third to St. Thomas. In one year there was offered at Christ's Altar, 3 lib. 12 s. 6 d. To the Virgin's Altar 63 lib. 5 s. 6 d. But to Thomas's Altar 832 lib. 12 s. 3 d.[30]

Burnet adds that by the following year, offerings to the shrine of Becket grew to 953 lib. 6 s. 3 d. In comparison, Christ's altar received no offerings.[31] This reveals that there was not a dramatic increase in offerings across all three great altars, but rather a decline in offerings to altars deemed less significant than Becket's. For a saint who embodied insurrection and dissent, this level of social and economic capital was problematic for Henry VIII. Moreover, Becket had not a single feast day but two: December 29th, the date of his martyrdom, and July 7th, the date of his translation. In addition, every jubilee, or 50 years, a 15-day feast was celebrated around the feast-day of his translation. For Henry VIII, Becket signified a past conflict between Church and Crown—between papacy and English sovereignty. It was clear that Henry VIII needed to suppress Becket's popularity, thereby limiting his own exposure to comparisons. Becket would not be permitted to be a symbol of Rome and resistance against another King Henry.

In a violent act to distance himself from the Papacy, Henry had Becket's shrine in Canterbury Cathedral destroyed in September of 1538; Becket's bones were burned and buried amongst other bones to prevent their rediscovery and the further proliferation of his cult.[32] This was a dramatic conclusion to Becket's cult and vindication for Henry II. The destruction of Becket's shrine was Henry VIII's solution to end Becket's legacy as a rebel. That same year, Henry VIII composed the proclamation of November 16th, which took full control over the dissemination

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[30] Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (St. Paul's Church-yard: T. H., 1679), 244.

[31] Burnet, *History of the Reformation*, 244.

[32] Burnet, *History of the Reformation*, 244.

of religious literature in England. Seen as one of the first licensing laws, this proclamation prevented "importing, selling, or publishing English books without special license, or printing such books with annotations or prologues unless […] first examined by the Privy Council or some one appointed by the King."[33] In this same proclamation, Becket was to be razed from all liturgical books: "his pictures throughout the realm are to be plucked down and his festival shall no longer be kept, and the services in his name shall be razed out of all books."[34] Because of this injunction, we find Becket erased from religious writings: Becket erasure, a form of *damnatio memoriae.* He was, in many cases, literally scraped from the pages of history. In other circumstances, however, perceptions of his legacy were negotiated by the readers of his deeds and observers of his cult.

The SEL's legacy during the Reformation was less problematic. Readers still enjoyed its content as a collection that included the lives of many English saints, but Becket's presence in the collection was not always so well-received. While medieval copies still circulated, often in the libraries of antiquarians and collectors, few extant witnesses produced immediately prior to and following the Reformation remain. While the SEL survived the Reformation, perceptions of the collection certainly evolved due in part to the biblioclasm of the dissolution of the monasteries and shifting perceptions of the role of the Catholic saint in a Protestant belief system. Instead of a communal locus for spiritual exploration through entertainment, the SEL became a locus for interrogating the past beliefs of the English laity through its historicity.

Genre is the lens through which scholars like John Prise, Robert Cotton, and others inspected works of literature like the SEL. In a major perceptual shift, the SEL simultaneously transitioned from a hagiographical work to a memorialisation of superstition and from a common

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[33] James Gairdner, ed., "Henry VIII: November 1538 16-20," in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 13 Part 2, August-December 1538 (London: HMSO, 1893), 353-69.

[34] "Henry VIII: November 1538 16-20," 354. For further discussion, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400 – c. 1580* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), 412.

shared history to a history of the other, a history to refashion. This shift can be seen in the treatment of both the text and codex by these later readers, and it marks a fundamental shift in expectation.

Jennifer Summit suggests that "the dissolution is responsible for the effacement of the monasteries as well as for the production of original documents recording the history of the effaced monasteries,"[35] and that "it destroys religious institutions and produces memorials, becoming the means by which the medieval is both lost as an object and recovered as an object of memory."[36] So too, the displacement of the religious text into an altogether different framework supplants the original intention (indicated through its genre makeup). The SEL shifted from a vessel of religious devotion to an artifact of religious history, and as I will show, was further removed to become an historical artifact documenting its own reception history. As Heffernan suggests that a hagiographical text or *sacred biography* "becomes itself a part of the sacred tradition it serves to document,"[37] the manuscripts of the SEL document its use across generations.

Of the extant SEL witnesses containing the Becket narrative, Cotton Cleopatra MS D.IX (Cd) contains the best evidence of the treatment of the SEL during and following the Reformation. Additionally, this witness best demonstrates how the Becket narrative was critiqued and physically modified by its readers. Cd passed from its monastic library to the personal collection of John Prise to Cotton's collection. Both Prise and Cotton modified the SEL Becket narrative in ways that reveal their attitudes towards the work. However, more importantly, their engagement with the document provides insight into specific intellectual attitudes of those who had vested interests in shaping cultural opinions about English history's major figures like Becket. The survival of Becket's narrative fragments now bound in Cd implicates both Prise and Cotton in repurposing the Becket narrative. Of course, both Prise and Cotton contributed at different times, and their interventions speak to their different agendas.

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[35] Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 185.

[36] Summit, *Memory's Library*, 185.

[37] Heffernan, *Sacred Biography,* 16.

Before discussing Prise's and Cotton's interventions, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of Cd and its prominent features. Cd is a composite manuscript made up of cuttings and booklets from other medieval manuscripts. The 167-folio codex is made of both parchment and paper and measures approximately 275 x 200 mm. There are seven items in the codex: a fourteenth-century chronicle of Lichfield Cathedral, Fineshade Priory documents from the fourteenth century, the *Speculum regis Edwardi tertii* from the sixteenth century, Psalter leaves which likely originate from Royal D. 13, *Lamentationes Matheoluli,* a Life of Saint Gregory (DIMEV 365) that circulated with the SEL, and finally a fifteenth-century fragment of the SEL. Included in the SEL is the Life of St. John the Evangelist, the Becket account in full, the Life of St. Theophilus (DIMEV 5554), the Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary (DIMEV 74, 82, 83 84, 85, 2950), the Life of St. Cecilia (DIMEV 4572), and a Life of St. Gregory.[38] The SEL manuscript contains five quires: 1^{12} (1-5 lost), 2-4^{12}, 5^8 (7 blank except for owner's mark and 8 not numbered).[39] The last eight lines of the Legend of John the Evangelist begin folio 118r, making the SEL account of Becket the first full narrative in the SEL section of Cd. Given that the opening quire lost the first five leaves, it is reasonable to suggest that this was a deliberate attempt to begin the new SEL portion of Cd with the Becket narrative. The subsequent SEL texts which follow the Becket narrative account for the remainder of the quire, while the inclusion of the Life of Gregory begins at the end of the fourth quire and completes the fifth.

Who made these editorial decisions, however, cannot be known for certain, if it was John Prise, the first known post-medieval owner, or Robert Cotton, who had the fragment bound in its current form. While there are two hands in the SEL manuscript, the Becket account is copied in its entirety by one hand, with the second hand taking over on folio 149v, where there is an explicit in a third medieval hand, "explicit vita arce. de. Thom," which has been trimmed as a result of the rebinding in the seventeenth century. Blue initials are flourished in red line-work, though they end alongside the Becket account. Görlach has suggested that the date of production is approximately

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[38] This life is *Gregorius,* a later recension of DIMEV 370. In Cd, it is written in eight-line stanzas in a double column (DIMEV 365).

[39] Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 112.

1350, but the provenance is unknown until the manuscript came into the possession of Prise in the 1530s.

In an exploration of Cd as a single entity and not as a series of fragments, Hannah Kilpatrick notes how Cd "provides a ready collection of facts, impressions and resulting hypotheses–all potentially mistaken but all valuable to speculate around–of circumstances, motivations and habits of composition, and simultaneously of the treatment which the manuscripts were likely to receive at the hands of the early modern antiquarians."[40] Indeed, the composite nature of Cd invites speculation. Summit's work on Cotton's collection provides insights and attempts to respond to the types of questions Kilpatrick asks in her analysis of Cd. Kilpatrick's argument that "Cotton's assembly of [Cd] has no great psychological or historical significance" is problematic, however, because it disregards early modern approaches to medieval artefacts.[41] As I will show, Cotton's manipulation of the SEL Becket narrative, including Prise's commentary, as a medieval religious artefact that once circulated in a larger collection illustrates the shifting perspectives of genre and the lens through which late readers of the SEL approached such a work.

Sir John Prise (Sion ap Rhys) was a sixteenth-century politician and bureaucrat who "played a direct role in the dissolution of the monasteries."[42] Prise, during the Dissolution, collected an assortment of medieval manuscripts. While he maintained an interest in Welsh history and literature (having printed the Lord's Prayer, Creed, and Commandments in Welsh known as

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[40] Hannah Kilpatrick, "A Study of Cleopatra D IX: Introduction," *Mony Wylsum Way* (blog), December 18, 2009, http://ceirseach.blogspot.com/2009/12/study-of-cleopatra-d-ix-introduction.html.

[41] Kilpatrick, "A Study of Cleopatra D IX."

[42] Huw Pryce, "Prise, Sir John [Syr Siôn ap Rhys] (1501/2–1555), administrator and scholar," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 5 Aug. 2022. https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-22752.

Yny lhyvyr hynn), his collection spanned theology, classical literature, and history.[43] Ker, in his evaluation of Prise's role as collector and scholar, notes that "Prise has two merits as a collector. He did not disdain manuscripts outside his own particular subject and he did not rebind his manuscripts."[44] Because of this, evidence of his marginal comments can be found in abundance.

While Prise was preoccupied with historical works, he employed all types of works in his *Defensio* of British history against Polydore Vergil's *Anglica historia*.[45] Ker, in his study of Prise, argues that "for Prise, the old manuscripts are all in all, to be quoted exactly."[46] In other words, Prise approached history from a textual perspective. Being well-read, and collecting a variety of medieval codices, directly and materially contributed to his defence of Welsh and English history against Vergil, since he could point to evidence in documents which predate Geoffrey of Monmouth.[47] However, Prise's treatment of English history, especially as it related to the political and religious climate of sixteenth-century England, was not always positive. In fact, his criticism can be found in documents which he owned where he imposed his own worldview on historical and religious documents, reshaping those textual artefacts to reinforce the political and religious attitudes of the Reformation.

The SEL Becket narrative bound in Cd was one of those medieval works that Prise encountered and upon which Prise left his biting criticism of Becket. Prise obtained his SEL Becket account from the abbey at Cirencester in his visit.[48] In his evaluation of Prise's commentary, Ker notes it as "numerous, strongly protestant, and anti-Becket."[49] Indeed, there are 41 instances of marginal commentary throughout the SEL Becket narrative. Not all of the marginal commentary

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[43] Neil R. Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries: Studies in the Medieval Heritage* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 473.

[44] Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries*, 476.

[45] Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries*, 478.

[46] Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries*, 479.

[47] Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries*, 479.

[48] Summit, *Memory's Library*, 169.

[49] Neil R. Ker, "Sir John Prise," *The Library* 10 (1955), 21.

functions similarly, however. In certain instances, as in f. 125r, Prise corrects an error of the scribe, "As to house of religioun · wiþ þe kings leue," writing "without" in the margin on the same line (line 560). This type of marginal commentary illustrates Prise's erudition and concern with the historicity of the account, for example. Another instance of Prise's commentary is his disgust for Becket, which can be found on f. 137v, where he writes: "Yea, a stynking martyr" to the left of the passage which reads: "Icham siker ischal deie ꞅ ȝut in martyrdom / fforto riȝt in a visioun ꞅ a wonder metinge me com."[50] It is clear that Prise is making his own opinions of Becket's self-apotheosis known. He is simultaneously objecting to Becket's martyrdom but also further establishing his Protestant inclinations. In another marginal note, Prise rejects the SEL's representation of Becket, suggesting it is hypocritical in its one-sided portrayal of Becket. He notes: "What arrogance is this! Of one that had spent his tyme more in merchandise hauking and hunting than in learning."[51] Prise writes this adjacent to Becket's condemnation of Henry's customs:

> For þe bissops touore me were · to nesse as ich finde
> Hore folie ich mot nou abugge · oþer it worþ bihinde
> Ichot þer habbeþ ibe[o] biuore · costomes in Engelonde
> Ac eȝen riȝte hi beoþ and wrongfol · as ich vnderstonde. (lines 1629-32)

Becket claims here that he must atone for the folly of those bishops who came before him, while acknowledging that there were customs held by the Crown previously, though they were "eȝen riȝte" and "wrongfol." Prise's critique of Becket is centred on a belief that Becket was uneducated, or at the very least unable to match the intellectual prowess of his adversaries. While the SEL paints Becket in this passage as thoughtful and knowledgeable about the previous customs held by English kings, Prise argues that Becket's previous life as a secular bureaucrat precludes him from making these types of righteous claims.

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[50] London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra D.ix (Cd), fol. 137v. Cf. D'Evelyn and Mills, *The South English Legendary,* EETS OS 236, "Thomas Becket," lines 1581-2. The edition reads: "icham siker þat ich ssel deiȝe · in martyrdom / Fo[r] t[o] niȝt in my slep · a wonder metynge me com."

[51] London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra D.ix (Cd), fol. 138v.

Many of the marginal notes by Prise thus fall into three categories: those that correct inaccuracies in the SEL, those which are rooted in Prise's own Protestant proclivities, and those which point to a hypocritical or one-sided portrayal of Becket. Unsurprisingly, most of Prise's commentary centres on passages relating directly to Becket and Henry's conflict around the Constitutions of Clarendon and passages that involve the papacy and the French king, while Becket was in exile in France.

Prise's critique of Becket as a hypocrite is imbued with his own concern for the accurate representation of English history. Prise has high expectations and challenges Becket's memory of the past. In a rare example of Prise drawing brackets, Prise isolates 27 lines in a passage detailing a discussion between Becket and Henry in France. The SEL reads:

> Sein Thomas stod longe in þoȝte · & bigan to siche sore
> Þei ich habbe he sede ihed anuy · ȝute me is to come more
> Ȝif þe erche bissop[s] biuore me · hadde ido hore miȝte
> It nadde ibe[o] nou no neod · to contekki ne to fiȝte. (lines 1623-6)

Becket, in this passage, shifts blame for the current legal dispute between Church and Crown, suggesting that if his predecessors had been more strident in their role as religious leaders and defenders of the Church, then the debate about past customs would not have arisen. Becket reacts to Henry, who refers to, "þe wisost bissops · þat biuore him euere were" (line 1615). In short, Becket defends his intellectual position against the accusation that he is not as wise as his predecessors. Just as Henry raises issue with Becket's stance, Prise echoes these sentiments, noting in the margin: "Here, note grete arrogance that T. Becket regarded himself better and wiser than all his predecessors."[52] Given Prise's attitudes to past historical writers, their works, and the importance of documentary evidence in his *Defensio*, his accusation that Becket was not wiser than his predecessors is clearly rooted in his own preference for the wisdom of historical authorities. Moreover, Prise is defending the authority of the Crown in this debate, echoing the argument that Henry makes in the narrative.

Since the November proclamation against Becket by Henry VIII, it was not only Prise's duty as a politician and bureaucrat to uphold the values and laws put forward by the Crown but his

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[52] London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra D.ix (Cd), fol. 138v.

own interest in religious education that guided his reading of the SEL Becket narrative. Huw Pryce notes that Prise held a "deep dissatisfaction with the failure of the clergy to provide elementary religious instruction."[53] His criticism of Becket, then, should not be read as accusations against the Christian Church as a moral centre, but rather as accusations against church authorities who inadequately perform their duties to uphold Christian values.[54] There is further evidence in other books in Prise's collection, such as his commonplace book, wherein he composed an essay "on the decline of morals in his day," that Prise was a devoted religious man.[55] Prise, writes Ker, "was a fair-minded as well as a serious-minded person."[56] While Prise's commentary was biased against the Roman Catholic Becket, it notably did not condemn the Christian faith but defended "true" Christian faith.

Prise focuses his approach to the SEL Becket narrative on the historicity of the account while judging the actions of its subject, Becket. The marginal commentary is infused with sixteenth-century *damnatio memoriae* and accusations of hypocrisy. Far from the hagiography and romance of the thirteenth century, the SEL Becket narrative was subjected to early modern attitudes to historiography and, in the process, subjected to the politics of the English Reformation. We might compare Prise's attitude to Becket with that of his contemporaries. Pryce, in his brief biography, compares Prise's work to the work of John Leland.[57] Both Prise and Leland participated in the dissolution of the monasteries throughout England, and both Prise and Leland went to Bury St. Edmunds in 1539. While Leland was in the process of producing his *De uiris illustribus*, so too

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[53] Pryce, "Prise, Sir John."

[54] Prise's condemnation of Becket is clearly rooted in the anti-papist sentiment of the English Reformation, but his distaste for Becket, in particular, is grounded in his perception of him as a morally bankrupt religious leader, given Prise's concern for upholding strong Christian values. While Becket certainly stood for the Roman Catholic Church, Prise's argument here is broadly in support of the Christian Church and against those who use their positions of power for self-gain.

[55] Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries*, 482.

[56] Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries*, 483.

[57] Pryce, "Prise, Sir John."

was Prise cataloguing libraries and acquiring medieval manuscripts, having received three manuscripts from Bury St. Edmunds.[58]

In *De uiris illustribus*, Leland constructs, as James Carley calls it, "more than the grandfather of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; it is a living record of the turbulent shifts and changes in Henry VIII's reign."[59] In this catalogue of famous men, Leland introduces a short biography of Becket, which, after 1538, was suppressed. Unlike the SEL with its legendary prologue, romance-inspired characterisation of Becket, and scriptural allusions, Leland takes a more modern scholarly approach to Becket's life. His biography is short enough to reproduce here:

> Thomas Becket, son of Gilbert Becket and Matilda, was born in London. After his adolescence had passed he showed himself so skilful in the handling of affairs that, by the favour of King Henry II of England, he ascended step by step to fresh honours day by day, until at last he became the king's chancellor. At that time, although he held an ecclesiastical title, he nevertheless went beyond his calling, in that, while Henry's troops were besieging Toulouse, he himself acted as a noble warrior among the rest. Later, after he offended the king (I know not how) and after Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, had died, Thomas was deprived of the rank of chancellor, only to be appointed archbishop by the king's liberality, so that he might seem to have increased in honour rather than to have lost it. As soon as he was made archbishop, he began to be more of a burden to the king and excessively to adhere to the bishop of Rome; when Henry refused to tolerate this affront, Thomas went into exile. But after a few years, when he had been fully reconciled to the prince, he returned to his metropolitan see, where he struck at certain people with the lightning of ecclesiastical censure. A short time afterwards he himself was struck down by some nobles crossing from Normandy, and miserably slain in his own church. His life was written by John of Salisbury, Herbert of Bosham, William of Canterbury, and Alan, abbot of Tewkesbury.
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> Learned himself, he greatly favoured learned men, but was not particularly eloquent, as is apparent from his book of letters, which he wrote in exile. He was buried in the crypt of his church and on the enclosure of his tomb was placed a tablet of lead with this inscription: "Here rests Thomas, archbishop of Canterbury, primate of Britain and legate of the Apostolic See, who was slain in the cause of justice and the rights of the church on December 29th." He did not lie ingloriously for long, and the brutality of the

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[58] James P. Carley, ed. and trans., introduction to Leland, *De uiris illustribus: On Famous Men* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), xcix; cf. Ker, *Books, Collectors, and Libraries,* 484, 487. The manuscripts that Prise acquired are now Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 240, Bodley MS 297, and Laud misc. 742.

[59] Carley, introduction to Leland, *De uiris illustribus,* xii.

deed aroused considerable pity in men's hearts, so much so that after miracles had occurred he was canonised by Alexander III, bishop of Rome, and translated aloft by Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury.[60]

Leland's biography of Becket shows how views of Becket were changing in Reformation England. Having been composed prior to the November proclamation against Becket, and then subsequently suppressed, this biography, composed by one of the intellectual elite of England, illustrates the key moments in Becket's life that were deemed important for historical documentation: his rise to power, his fall from grace, and the effects of his death. Notably absent from this biography, however, is the legal dispute upon which others, like Prise, focused their gaze. Of the Latin lives, Leland identifies only four: John of Salisbury, Herbert of Bosham, William of Canterbury, and Alan of Tewkesbury. These authors, of course, are connected to the *Quadrilogus*, the source upon which the SEL is based. Like Prise, Leland downplays Becket's education, admitting that though "learned himself" Becket was "not particularly eloquent." [61] Likewise, this biography is sympathetic to the Crown, as it is Henry's "liberality" that appointed Becket to the apostolic see, not, for example, Henry's ambitions for greater control.

Prise's commentary, like Leland's biography, illustrates how Becket turned from an icon to be venerated to an historical figure to be criticised, ridiculed, and ultimately erased. Approaching the SEL as a historical document, Prise marginalised the genre intentions of the authors and scribes and imposed his own interpretation on the document. While the SEL Becket narrative is a genre hybrid, Prise does not engage with the romance at all and only addresses the hagiographical elements by rejecting the premise that Becket was saintly, giving, instead, his attention to the historical aspects of the work. What this points to, ultimately, is the evolution of the SEL Becket narrative from a work of romance and hagiography to a work of history. Prise's commentary aligns with Leland's observations in his biography which emphasise the historical role of Becket, engaging with the hagiography only as it relates to perceptions of Becket's hypocrisy. Because Prise's commentary is so closely linked to the Becket narrative, readers are exposed simultaneously

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[60] Leland, *De uiris illustribus,* trans. Carley, 351.

[61] Leland, *De uiris illustribus,* trans. Carley, 351.

to both the original narrative and Prise's attitude towards Becket. We must, therefore, acknowledge the idea that these comments also informed new readers' interpretations of the text.

Following Prise's death, Cd found its way into the collection of Sir Robert Cotton sometime around 1616.[62] The makeup of the codex which Cotton acquired is unknown due to Cotton's custom of disassembling previous owners' bindings, revealing how, in his own words, he "[cared] not for the new notts."[63] Cotton's practice of rebinding his manuscripts causes a multitude of problems for scholars interested in the transmission of medieval texts throughout early modern England. The result of Cotton's program of disassembling and rebinding manuscripts is the loss of information about where he retrieved or obtained his collection. Consequently, nothing can be known for certain about the witness of the SEL that Prise obtained from Cirencester beyond that which is extant in Cotton's rebound volume. Indeed, from a codicological standpoint Cd reveals very little about its provenance. Nonetheless, that Cd contains the SEL Becket narrative is itself revealing and worthy of discussion.

Cotton's binding, like Prise's commentary, marks another shift in the continued reception of the SEL Becket narrative and once again suggests its cultural force even after centuries of consumption. Kevin Sharpe, in his biography of Cotton, suggests that "Cotton viewed his library as a working collection and adopted an arrangement that was utilitarian rather than bibliographically correct by modern standards. He headed manuscripts with new titles, marked them with marginal notes, and bound them with other papers on the same subject."[64] Given the original intention of the SEL, the idea of a collection of vernacular saints' legends and biblical histories that were to be transmitted and read in relation to each other, Cotton's new approach of

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[62] Kilpatrick, "A Study of Cleopatra D IX."

[63] Summit, *Memory's Library,* 170. See note 144. Cf. Colin G. C. Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton* (London: British Library, 1994), 48. Tite notes that Cotton's irreverence for previous owners' reader's marks is indicative of his trimming and rebinding of gatherings. Cotton's own disregard of Prise's commentary is also evident in Cd.

[64] Kevin Sharpe*, Sir Robert Cotton, 1586-1631: History and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 68.

binding things "that were consulted together" marks a dramatic shift in *how* the SEL was actually consumed, distinct from either the poet's intentions or the scribes' practice of compilation.[65] Based on his rebinding of the SEL account with other non-SEL-texts, it is clear that Cotton did not regard the SEL as a textual unit or a larger work, but that the Becket account, which makes up most of the production unit, was to be employed in an altogether new way, as a work not to be read for its moral edification as was the intention of the poet, but as a work to be consulted for the study of history.

If, as I have suggested, this new approach to the SEL Becket narrative shifted again, even between Prise and Cotton, the SEL Becket narrative by itself reveals very little about how it was read, if it was read in relation to new texts. Cotton, then, was not just a reader of the SEL, but a new type of compiler. In the words of Summit, he "made these compilations by arranging medieval primary sources in rough groupings by chronological order, appropriating the *compilatio* techniques used by medieval chronicles and hagiographies that he collected, while adapting those techniques to produce new models of the past."[66] Because Cotton already possessed an SEL collection, J, it is likely that he felt free to unbind and recompile the SEL witness that he obtained from Prise, though there is no affirmative evidence of this. That is, it is reasonable to suppose that Cotton unbound an SEL witness to compile it in Cd, as he was wont to do with other manuscripts he came to possess. It is also possible, however, that Cotton received only the portion of the SEL that is now part of Cd. What we can know is that only a small portion of the SEL collection survives in Cd and that the Becket account makes up most of the SEL portion. A trimmed Life of St. John begins the booklet, suggesting that it was the Becket account that was the significant inclusion; the other parts of the SEL survive in Cd simply because of their physical attachment to the Becket narrative.

Cotton, then, was not simply a user of the manuscript, but a compiler. His interpretation of the text, like those of the medieval scribes who came before him, informed his compilation. In Cd, the SEL Becket narrative was no longer a saint's life but a documentary witness to the past. As

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[65] Sharpe, *Robert Cotton*, 69.

[66] Summit, *Memory's Library*, 13.

Summit remarks, "the Reformation converted medieval forms to create new objects and interpretations."[67] These later interpretations would inform future readers not only of the SEL but also of the Cotton Library. In Cotton's library, the SEL became a document of English church history. If, as Sharpe has suggested, "the English Reformation gave an impetus to the collecting of books and manuscripts," the subsequent generation of antiquarians like Cotton reframed those documents to serve a larger purpose.[68]

In her examination of Cd, Hannah Kilpatrick argues that Cotton opens the compilation with the "most valuable or useful of the book: the Fineshade collection," suggesting that the SEL manuscript, which closes the manuscript, "possibly served no other purpose in the binding [than] as scrap filler," a claim worthy of interrogating.[69] The SEL is, for example, the only hagiographical work in the compilation, the only explicitly non-historical work, and the only Middle English work. However, I argue that the SEL, by the time Cotton obtained the work for this collection, was already read by collectors, antiquarians, and scholars as an historical document, documenting both English history and English religious practices. Summit has shown, for example, that "borrowing records show that many of Cotton's contemporaries who used the library, such as William Camden, drew actively from its collection of saints' lives as historical sources."[70] While the SEL Becket account may not have been composed initially strictly as a historical work, it came to be a historical witness in the context of Cotton's compilation of Cd.

The trajectory of interpretations of the SEL is important to recall: the SEL was composed as a hybrid text which drew on the genre conventions of hagiography, romance, and history; as it was copied and disseminated by scribes, it was associated almost exclusively with other religious works, with few early exceptions; and certain readers understood the work to be of historical significance, using the text as a source of historical documentary evidence. Cotton, like Prise,

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[67] Summit, *Memory's Library*, 9.

[68] Sharpe, *Robert Cotton,* 49.

[69] Kilpatrick, "A Study of Cleopatra D IX."

[70] Summit, *Memory's Library,* 142. See 294 note 22.

belongs to this last group of readers. As the SEL was bound with other historical works in Cd, it is clear that Cotton viewed the SEL Becket account as a source of history.

This is significant because of what the Cleopatra manuscripts in Cotton's collection were. Summit convincingly argues that the Cleopatra cycle of documents "are intended as a multipart chronicle of English Reformation history, told through original sources."[71] Cd, the final manuscript in the Cleopatra D grouping, transitions between the documents of pre-Reformation England and the Cleopatra E grouping, which documents post-Reformation England. If the SEL Becket narrative is stripped of its religious use, desanctified in its post-Reformation consumption, then the expectations of genre of the work are also called into question. To experience, then, how the SEL Becket narrative was approached generically by Early Modern readers like Cotton, it is necessary to approach the work in its context in Cotton's library not as a medieval reader reading a saints' legend but as an Early Modern reader engaging with a medieval document. It is important to make this distinction, since the former suggests a reading community who participate in a shared understanding of what the work does–religious and moral edification and entertainment–while the latter suggests that there is more emphasis on what the work is, rather than what it does–document evidence of past religious beliefs.

Also bound in Cd by Cotton, as I have already mentioned, are several other historically oriented items: a chronicle of Lichfield Cathedral, various documents from Fineshade Priory, and *Speculum regis Edwardi tertii*. From an early catalogue of Cotton's library, we see how his users would experience Cd and how Cotton delineated the contents of his compilation. An index opens Cd on folio 4r in the hand of Richard James, who worked as librarian for Robert and Thomas Cotton beginning in 1625. James is known to have contributed "nearly 200 entries or sections of [tables of contents]" in the Cotton collection. [72] In his table of contents, James identifies the thirteen major works contained in the compilation, which would serve as the basis for future catalogues and, in all likelihood, the catalogue with which the users of the Cotton collection would engage.

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[71] Summit, *Memory's Library*, 149.

[72] Colin G. C. Tite, *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use* (London: British Library, 2003), 14.

Concluding their study of the dismemberment and fragmentation of Royal 13 D.1, Carley and Tite poignantly point out that "it is important to examine manuscripts as discrete booklets and that it can be altogether misleading to see the volumes owned by Cotton and other 'modern' collectors as identical in all their aspects to their medieval forebears."[73] In other words, there was a shift in the perception of manuscripts and what they contained. The works in Cd and other Cotton manuscripts were increasingly used as reference materials for scholarly study, stripping them from their original contexts. We must then look at Cotton manuscripts as a curated collection of discrete items and turn to their arrangements, as Summit argues, to investigate how these works were used.

In the Catalogue entries for Cotton's collection found in Harley MS 6018, begun by Cotton in 1621, Tite notes that Cd is described as "Chronicles; etc."[74] There is no explicit mention of saints' lives in the catalogue entry of Cd, unless we assume that these works fall under the "etc." label. Records of those who borrowed the codex, including John Selden, suggest that it was used as a historical source: "the Lichfield portion of this manuscript, was used by John Selden and listed as such in his inventory of Cotton manuscripts … in his *Historie of Tithes,* 1618."[75] By 1696, the *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Cottonianae* by Thomas Smith catalogued all of the Cotton collection into six categories: "(i) manuscripts written in Anglo-Saxon; (ii) monastic registers; (iii) books of the Bible and lives of saints and martyrs; (iv) genealogies and heraldic material; (v) histories, annals and chronicles, mainly of the British Isles; and (vi) state papers, chiefly relating to English domestic and foreign affairs."[76]

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[73] James P. Carley and Colin G. C. Tite, "Sir Robert Cotton as Collector of Manuscripts and the Question of Dismemberment: British Library MSS Royal 13 D. I and Cotton Otho D. VIII," *The Library* 6, no. 14 (1992), 99.

[74] Tite, *Early Records*, 215.

[75] Tite, *Early Records*, 215.

[76] Tite, *Manuscript Library,* 24; cf. Thomas Smith, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Cottonianae* (Oxford, at the Sheldonian Theatre, 1696), xxxi. See 142 for Smith's content description of Cd.

There are two points to be made about both James' index and Smith's catalogue description. They differentiate between the three genre types of the SEL Becket account as I have previously described: "*vita*," "*miraculus*," and "*translatione*"; and neither James' table of contents nor Smith's catalogue differentiate the Miracles of the Virgin Mary. [77] While both James and Smith acknowledge the genre types of these works, they do not attempt to impose some form of historical genre onto them, which is a curious difference between their approach to the SEL and Cotton's decision to rebind it with other historical documents. They do not explicitly acknowledge the SEL Becket account as historical, yet Cotton bound it with and employed it an historical document. In Cotton's collection, the SEL Becket account transcended its historical genre to become itself a source of history, "which Protestant historians and book collectors made into standard sources as they sought evidence concerning the early English church."[78] In other words, the Becket narrative transformed from a religious work to a historical document, from a work to be read for religious edification and enjoyment to a work read for historical edification.

The SEL enjoyed a long legacy of use well into the seventeenth century and beyond; however, there is a clear difference between its use before and after the Reformation. How the SEL Becket account was approached by readers shifted in just two generations of use. In this chapter, I have focused my attention on three different users of the SEL Becket account who broke from intended audience of the SEL. During the height of the SEL's production, it was already employed as a source of history for Robert of Gloucester in his chronicle as the collection gathered a variety of historical texts as source material. John Prise, who participated in the Dissolution of the monasteries, acquired the work and imposed his own incredulous commentary onto the pages of Cd, illustrating how a work which was accepted as historical truth just a few centuries prior had become stigmatised and challenged on its historicity. Finally, as the SEL Becket account, exemplified in Cd, entered the collections of Renaissance antiquarians like Robert Cotton, it no

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[77] Smith, *Catalogus,* 142. "10. Narratio de vita, miraculis, & translatione Thomae Cantuariensis, rhythmis Anglicanis. 11. Miracula B. Mariae virginis gloriosae, rhythmis Anglicanis."

[78] Summit, *Memory's Library*, 151.

longer functioned as a work of religious edification and entertainment but as a historical document. While Prise and Cotton approached the text in a relatively similar way, Cotton clearly approached the work differently from even Prise, from whom he acquired the document. In Cotton's collection, the work functioned as a historical artefact of the superstitious past.

The purpose of this chapter is not to deny the traditional use of the SEL in the Middle Ages as a source of religious edification but to illustrate the development of the SEL Becket account as a historical artefact. The Becket account emerged in the Renaissance as a related but ultimately different form of history than initially intended by the poet. While the SEL poet drew on historical sources, and employed motifs in historical writing, much of the historiography was closely aligned with medieval approaches to history. And while the miracles of Becket in the narrative, for example, would have been seen as historically "true" in the Middle Ages, the definition of truth evolved to the point where these aspects of the narrative were no longer deemed historical. Instead, the document itself is the historical artefact, not the narrative. While there is evidence to suggest that the SEL was widely used throughout England in the Middle Ages, evidence of reading engagement can be difficult to examine, as not every reader leaves evidence. The adoption and adaptation of Robert of Gloucester, explicit commentary of Prise, and the rebinding of Cotton are some of the clearest examples of reading engagement that remain for scholars of the SEL, and, in particular, the SEL Becket account. Due in large part to Becket's notoriety in the Reformation, it can be no coincidence that his account survives with such extreme examples of reading engagement, as he was not only a historical figure, but a symbolic one.

7. Moving Beyond the Historical

"If it is possible to speak of the image of an author implied by the text of the [*South English*] *Legendary*, we may say that it is either one of insincerity, or one of condescension to a popular audience. In either case, it is an image, not of a 'deeper clerk', but of a shallower, the study of whose discourse is less than edifying."[1] So argues Michael Robertson in his estimation of the poet of the SEL. The purpose of this project so far undertaken has been contrarian in nature: that the SEL poet(s) were far more complex than mere narratological logic might allow. That Robertson marginalises the Becket account because of its difference in length from the other SEL narratives illustrates two facts about the SEL Becket account: the SEL Becket account differed in source material and intention; and breaking down the narratives of the SEL by their plot points only serves to reinforce misconceptions of the SEL's genre. While Robertson is focused on defining the narrative trajectory of these saints' legends, he neglects to identify two major issues that my project has sought to bring to the forefront: that the SEL is more than just the work of a single poet, whose work we now read in either current *EETS* edition; and that we ought to engage with the SEL at the manuscript level, which is the work of the scribes and later users of the SEL. Editions of the SEL misrepresent their *mouvance*, and the shifting attitudes of their readers. While I have focused primarily on the hybridisation of genre in the SEL account of Becket, many of my strategies can be employed in studies of the other texts within the collection.

In her examination of community in late medieval saints' lives, Catherine Sanok correctly identifies the martial imagery in Becket's legend in the SEL, noting how the romance characterizations of Becket "bookend" the collection: Becket is an epitome of the *Banna*

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[1] Michael Robertson, "The Shallow Clerk: a Morphology of the *South English Legendary*," *Comparison* 10 (1979), 17.

sanctorum's "hardi knight."[2] The SEL, however, only adopted and proliferated Becket's martial connections. He fought in the siege of Toulouse in 1161 alongside Henry II, leading an army of 700 knights, and ultimately was given control of Quercy, where he "reduced the whole country to submission by brutal methods."[3] He was the patron of the Knights of St. Thomas of Acon, founded in 1191, around the time in which many of the earliest hagiographical documents were being produced.[4] John Leland writes in his retracted biography about Becket's connection to knighthood, combat, and martial pursuits, evidence that Becket's martial connection continued to be discussed in the sixteenth century, and notes that Becket "acted as a noble warrior."[5] Becket, it would seem, despite his piety and rejection of worldliness (as the SEL account would have us believe), never could shake off his connection to chivalry and crusading.

In reality, however, Thomas was never a knight. He was the son of a Norman merchant, who materially contributed to Henry II's military campaigns during his tenure as chancellor. There was precedent, writes John Guy, for chancellors to engage in military conflicts "despite being ordained."[6] From the early *literary* representations, venerators of Becket were treated to a legendary story of his father Gilbert, his runaway Saracen mother Alisaundre, his militaristic legal dispute with Henry II, and finally a violent murder at the hands of a small army of Henry II's knights. In short, the *literary* treatments of Becket have always been subject to genre *topoi* as much as they have been based on historical and verifiable facts. The SEL, then, in its presentation of Becket, leans heavily on genre signifiers which an audience might appreciate. These genre signifiers are shrewdly woven together to create a seamless narrative with which the poet explores the relationship between Church and Crown, scribes enjoy the opportunity to reinvent the text

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[2] Sanok, *New Legends*, 47.

[3] Robertson, *MHTB*, 3:33-4, 53-4; W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 91.

[4] Sanok, *New Legends*, 48.

[5] Leland, *De uiris illustribus*, trans. Carley, 351.

[6] John Guy, *Thomas Becket,* 107. Guy provides an excellent overview of Becket's military exploits in his biography *Thomas Becket*, dedicating an entire chapter "Warrior" to the topic.

through compilation, and later readers dig through the work looking for historical argumentation. As a genre hybrid, often blending traditional historical works, romance motifs, and hagiographical imagery, the SEL account of Becket transcends the simplifications that genre boundaries offer readers.

The study of genre, from its conception, was concerned with categorisation and classification, essentially developing boundaries and labels for those boundaries so that we might make order out of chaos. Genre, however, is not immutable, as Fowler suggests in his repudiation of genre theory sceptics: "genres are actually in a continual state of transmutation. It is by their modification, primarily, that individual works convey literary meaning."[7] Genre is not an intrinsic quality of a work of literature; it is a means by which we interpret and engage. Genre is a tool for the reader. Not only can the same work's genre change in time and place, as I have shown the SEL's to have done, but readers' interpretation of a text can change as attitudes around the subject matter change. Therefore, to see genre as a label and not as a form of interpretation is to misjudge the value of genre.

Through his idea of the "horizon of the expectable," Jauss offers a theory of *how* readers approach literature through shifting expectations. Jauss writes that "the category of the exemplary does away with the schema of rule-and-instance and makes possible a process like determination of the concept of genre in the aesthetic realm."[8] In other words, genre is determined through the exemplary and understood as a moment in a process. Such an approach, writes Jauss, "frees the development of theory from the hierarchical cosmos of a limited number of genres, sanctioned by the pattern of antiquity, that do not allow themselves to be mixed or increased."[9] Genre depends on exemplarity and expectations and involves both the author and the reader. The benefits of approaching the SEL in such a way are two-fold: we are no longer bound to develop a normative heuristic for the production of the SEL; and we are not shackled to a classificatory approach, where we are compelled to define the limits of the SEL generically. In short, we might, as Jauss suggests,

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[7] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 24.

[8] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 80.

[9] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 80.

approach texts like the SEL as members of "groups or historical families."[10] Understanding the genres of the SEL is to understand it in its relation to its contemporaries and predecessors.

To accomplish such a task, it is necessary, then, to contextualise the SEL within a literary tradition, but also to contextualise its audience. My approach to the SEL Becket narrative is guided by the three principal characterisations of Becket as a historical figure, a religious icon, and a mythological figure. If the extant written accounts of Becket signified these three types of Becket, then it is reasonable to assume that texts like the SEL Becket account, which draws upon socioreligious perceptions of Becket, might in some form continue the tradition of representing Becket in these ways. Therefore, the genre hybridisation of the SEL Becket account situates Becket's characterisations within families of medieval genres. In this project, I have explored the romance, historiographical, and hagiographical representations of Becket in the SEL to show how the poet of the SEL Becket account manipulated three medieval genres to explore Becket as a literary character.

In my examination of the SEL Becket account, I prioritised medieval, not modern, perceptions of medieval genre, and thus draw on the sources with which the poet of the SEL might have been familiar. The SEL Becket account draws heavily upon hagiographic, historiographic, and romance genre signifiers to construct a characterisation of Becket that widens the appeal of the narrative. Becket's character is deliberately constructed in such a way that the SEL might reach a large audience. The text, while edifying both religiously and historically, might also be entertaining as a lively romance. For this reason, the SEL Becket account might be regarded as "edutainment." Evidence of the success of this strategy is evinced in the number of extant witnesses of the SEL. The material evidence of genre appears in in the extant witnesses of the SEL Becket account. The scribes who produced these employed paratexts and layout formats which implicitly reveal scribal attitudes towards the text and their audiences, including how they expected the text to be used. The SEL Becket account was read, not hypothetically by an assumed audience, but by users who left their own marks on the page in the form of active reading techniques, commentaries, and compilations. Such evidence indicates the "horizons" of various audiences across not just the

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[10] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic*, 80.

centuries of the SEL's production but in subsequent centuries following the Dissolution of the monasteries, when the legacy of the SEL was relegated to superstition.

In Chapter 3, I identified three different types of readers of the SEL Becket narrative: the poet(s) who first engaged with the legends, history, and liturgy, who sought to compose a vernacular verse narrative to sit alongside a collection of saints' legends for an English speaking audience; the multitude of scribes who, while copying the collection for further dissemination, made explicit editorial and design decisions to guide users through the work, decisions informed by their own engagement with the material; and finally, the end-users, who left indelible marks on the page so that we might read over their shoulders to experience the work as they did.

The poet left genre signifiers to cue readers, and to understand the poet's approach to genre we must seek out these genre signifiers. Each of these in isolation might signal that the Becket account is either a hagiographic work, a historical work, or a Middle English romance. The images that the poet employs to evaluate Becket's messianic qualities and his sacrifice, through biblical allusions and hagiographical motifs, are intended to persuade the reader to believe in the sanctity of Becket's character. The historical moments in the Becket narrative, sourced from legal documents, compiled post-martyrdom, suggest a keen interest in providing an accurate historical account. Finally, the poet embeds elements of Middle English romance throughout the narrative as Becket frequently arms himself, not in armour, but in the vestments of his station. As Brown summarises: "the legend of Becket shows a tendency to throw a glamour of romance and sanctity about the character of Becket."[11] Within the legendary marriage of Gilbert and Alisaundre, the verbal sparring between characters, and the arming scenes, it is easy to see parallels between the Becket account and contemporaneous romances like *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*. Ultimately, this reading shows the effectiveness with which the poet blended these three genres so that any attempt at assigning a simple genre label to the Becket account is to underestimate its actual literary quality and diminish the artistic credibility of its poet.

To read the scribes is to evaluate not just the manuscript tradition but to interpret the meaning behind the layout chosen by the scribes. I draw on Kerby-Fulton's notion of the

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[11] Brown, "Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket," 259.

"professional reader" whose "professional job it is to prepare a text for the reading public."[12] Scribal practice shapes the form and function of the work of the poet in tangible ways. Drawing upon Jauss, then, we can explore the "horizon of expectations" with which these scribes interpreted the works that they so diligently worked to produce and disseminate. While, as Kerby-Fulton notes, "such horizons still remain remote," it is reasonable to evaluate what extant evidence exists so that we gain a greater insight not just into the SEL but how it was interpreted by their audiences.[13]

The SEL underwent multiple iterations and redactions. One such redactor is the "Outspoken Poet," whose interjections convey some of the most vivid imagery contained in the SEL. The voice of this poet is also found in the SEL account of Becket.[14] The Becket narrative, indeed, underwent at least two revisions resulting in two closely related versions which differ in length.[15] What the manuscripts reveal is the frequent appearance of particular reading aids, or paratextual features, incorporated into the Becket narrative by the scribes. In this project, I employ Grindley's function-based taxonomy of marginalia to explore paratextual apparatuses used throughout the SEL Becket account, including enumeration, which aids the reader in identifying major legal arguments, and *dramatis personae*, which enable the reader to recognise and attribute dialogue to characters. Parkes' work on *ordinatio* and *compilatio* is also informative in analysing the layout of the Becket account.

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[12] Kerby-Fulton, *Medieval Professional Reader*, 8

[13] Kerby-Fulton, *Medieval Professional Reader*, 8

[14] In consultation with Pickering, I discussed the likelihood that select passages depicting the martyrdom were indeed the work of the "Outspoken Poet," and while we might never be certain, the passages bear all the hallmarks of the redactor's poetic voice.

[15] A full collation of the Harley and Laud redactions would be of future benefit to scholarship, but the length of the poem and the limited scope of this project prohibited such a task. It is my desire to complete such a collation, believing that it would reveal a great deal more about the textual transmission of the Becket account, but also about the development of the SEL as a collection. I am personally interested in evaluating the role of the "Outspoken Poet" in the development of the SEL Becket narrative and will undertake this project in the near future.

More important than the paratextual elements, however, are the ideas of compilation and assembly, where scribes copy and bind disparate texts together. The manuscript evidence points towards the conclusion that the scribes saw the SEL as primarily a religious work intended for the edification of its audience. The SEL Becket account was primarily transmitted with other SEL-texts in large SEL-collections. There are a few notable exceptions, however: L, which also contains Middle English romances *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*; G, where the scribe interpolates a couplet referencing other romances heroes like *Guy* and *Roland*; and Cd, which contains other historical works. Analysing works bound with the SEL Becket account answers the question: What else were readers of the SEL Becket account reading? Understanding what other works the SEL readers encountered also enables us to discover the "horizons" of expectations.

The users of the SEL varied. The adoption and adaptation of the SEL Becket account into the *Chronicle* by Robert of Gloucester offers some of the best evidence of medieval reading engagement. The passages that Robert chose to include, and more significantly the passages he chooses to exclude in *RGl*, exhibit his preoccupations as a reader. Robert strips the text of its hagiographical and romance genre signifiers and situates it firmly in the genre of history. Commentaries, like John Prise's, enable scholars to read over the shoulder of Reformation readers as they grapple with evolving political and religious beliefs. Finally, as the SEL was rebound into new miscellanies during the Renaissance, as we see with Robert Cotton's engagement, we encounter changing attitudes towards the SEL. Cotton reframed the document, stripped it of its religious nature and turned it into a historical artefact of pre-Reformation England. All three of these readers were preoccupied with documenting history for posterity.

Rather than making assumptions about a hypothetical audience of the SEL, I have examined the evidence left by three real readers of the SEL to explore how the SEL's readership changed over time, and more importantly, how their interpretations changed. Of course, not all readers leave evidence of their engagement. Robert, Prise, and Cotton are just three readers whom we can identify by name and should not be considered as typical.

This material-focused examination of genre in medieval literature illustrates the benefit of the intersection between genre studies and manuscript studies. Where genre studies too often focus on textual analysis, a purely literary form of analysis, it is important to remember that genre is

manifested in visual forms as well. A manuscript-focused study should resituate the text and acknowledge that the text and document are subject to intervention. As I have demonstrated, the same text in the same document can be read, interpreted, and used in vastly different ways. Each type of reader engages in an individual interpretation of the material. Each type of reading is rooted in an understanding of genre, and each interpretation can differ dramatically. The SEL Becket account was conceived as a romance, disseminated as a hagiography, and used as history. The text lends itself to these disparate interpretations as it is a work built upon a variety of sources: literary, hagiographical, liturgical, and historical. The continual production and development of the SEL through the Reformation, and continued scholarly interest in the collection, are due in part to the remarkable cultural awareness and literary prowess of the SEL poet.

The purpose of this project is to destabilise the current scholarly discourse on the SEL and Becket, shift the current narrative of the primacy of poet and text, and shift the interpretive power away from the scholar and onto the medieval and early modern user so that we might come closer to understanding the significance of a work like the SEL. To understand what the SEL is, we must understand how it was used.

Genre is not a classificatory tool but a diagnostic tool of reading reception. There have been many valuable studies of genre in medieval texts, which attempt to classify or provide definitions of what constitutes a certain genre. Throughout this project, I examine three: hagiography, history, and romance.

Scholars situate the SEL among other collections of saints' legends. Indeed, the SEL participates in a tradition of veneration of saints and edification of the laity, but it also hybridises genre in compelling ways. What happens to the saint when the saint is represented as a knight? What does this portrayal suggest about attitudes towards knights and saints? This genre hybridisation exhibits medieval attitudes towards genre but also speaks to the sophisticated ways authors and readers engaged in literary traditions like hagiography, history, and romance. Figures like Becket, who is multifaceted, lend themselves to narratives which hybridise genre. Complex characterisations introduce a conundrum for the audience. How can the same story be told in different ways? How does this inform an audience's interpretation? By considering genre as a diagnostic tool and not a classification tool, we can re-evaluate how to best interpret works of

literature that elude simple genre classification like the SEL. In addition to its hagiographic elements, the SEL poet includes genre elements of history and Middle English romance, complicating our understanding of the SEL and its audience.

As a historical work, the SEL makes arguments about English legal history and presents an account of the relationship between Becket and Henry. The inclusion of extraneous details like names of barons, bishops, and legal articles in the narrative enables the audience to understand significant historical moments, but it also suggests that the audience should interpret the narrative as a historical source. As I have demonstrated, the SEL shifted to become, in at least one instance, a historical document and religious history artefact in Robert Cotton's library. Such a shift is indicative, along with its adoption and adaptation into the *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, of its use of genre markers of historical writing. The SEL Becket account's source material is derived from hagiographical and historical writing practices of twelfth-century England. To read the SEL exclusively as a hagiographical text is to marginalise the historical lens through which the text was not only conceived but was ultimately interpreted. While attitudes towards the events changed through the centuries, a core interpretive framework with which users of the document engaged was historical. The poet who compiled historical sources, the scribes who emphasised those sources through paratexts, and the readers whose commentary is concerned with the veracity of the narrative, indicate the central role of history as a genre.

As a romance, the SEL compares the deeds and motivations of Becket, drawing on the canon of romance heroes. The *Banna sanctorum* encourages the reader to identify saints as "hardi" knights, and the entire collection is bookended with the most significant English saint, Becket. As a genre term, romance has been scrutinised as a label with little utility. I have suggested that romance might be defined as a text narrating the actions of a central hero, typically a martial hero, and their participation in a conflict that challenges their values. Such a definition might seem broad, but the heterogeneity of Middle English romance necessitates flexibility. If the romance genre, which is generally secular, is employed in the SEL, we should examine the contemporaneous Middle English romances to reveal traces of influence in the Becket account. While there has always been the suggestion that hagiography and romance share common tropes and narrative structure, no such in-depth study has been completed on the Becket account until this project. The

poet's depiction of Becket as knightly, in addition to saintly, is best evinced in his conflict with Henry, through his clothing, and in his preparations for spiritual battle. The poet of the SEL conceived of the SEL as a companion or even an alternative to other sources of entertainment; therefore, we should read the SEL with romance as a key interpretive framework.

When evaluating works of literature, medieval and early modern, which exist in manuscript form, it is necessary to approach the work through the manuscripts as much as possible, because they reveal more about the text than a modern edition can. They reveal the form, paratexts, and reception of the text which are hidden behind the editorial practices of modern editions. It is through these marginalised aspects of a work's materiality that we come closest to appreciating these works of literature as their initial audiences might have.

The materiality of a work is more influential than we might first consider. I have illustrated that the original material context influenced and guided the reading process and interpretation through my analysis of the reading guides implemented by scribal practice in the development of the SEL. Such paratextual features have been left out of modern editions, but where the modern editions suggest the SEL as a monolithic corpus, the manuscript tradition demonstrates the fragmentary nature of the SEL and is evidence of the SEL as a living, evolving work. Therefore, to address the genre aspects of the text, we might recover aspects of the materiality hidden behind the editorial process. Kathryn Starkey notes that "proponents of the New Philology recognise the unique qualities of individual manuscripts and exploit these for what they can tell us about medieval readership, scribal patterns, and cultural context."[16] By returning to these manuscripts, we engage with the scribes as readers whom we exploit, in the words of Starkey, for what they tell us about *their* readers. Stephen Nichols' article "The New Philology" captures succinctly my impulse to discuss the manuscript tradition of the SEL beyond its textual development:

> The medieval folio was not raw material for text editors and art historians working separately. It contained the work of different artists or artisans—poet, scribe, illuminator, rubricator, commentator—who projected collective social attitudes as well as interartistic rivalries onto the parchment. The manuscript folio contains different systems of representation: poetic or narrative text, the highly individual and distinctive scribal

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[16] Kathryn Starkey, *Reading the Medieval Book: Word, Image, and Performance in Wolfram Von Eschenbach's Willehalm* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 5.

hand(s) that inscribe glosses or commentaries in the margins or interpolated in the text. Each system is a unit independent of the others and yet calls attention to them; each tries to convey something about the other while to some extent substituting for it.[17]

The SEL is a product of literary engagement; it implies broad genre literacy, adept cultural awareness, and complex literary function. The SEL's genre hybridisation, therefore, is a key to understanding medieval attitudes towards literature, genre, saints, biblical history, literacy, manuscript production, and more. However, in order to gain insight into these, we should dispense with the notion that there is an "ideal" SEL text that both Horstmann's and D'Evelyn and Mill's editions suggest. It is in the materiality of the SEL that we find answers.

However, returning to manuscripts for studies of medieval literature is a privileged stance to take. Access to archives and to material is not always easily accessible, often obstructed by the walls of bureaucracy. With better access to the manuscript witnesses of the SEL, scholars could fully transcribe and collate the collection. Even though this would be a gargantuan task, the number of questions we could ask would be just as substantial. We would be able to re-evaluate Görlach's study of the textual tradition, peel away the layers of scribe's dialects, more closely examine paratextual features, and, more importantly, produce editions befitting a classroom environment to enable student engagement with popular literature of the thirteenth century. A digital variorum would enable scholars to compare the variation between texts more immediately to connect the works with the localised audience. Stylometric analysis on the collection might finally identify, for example, the impact of the "Outspoken Poet" on the SEL as we have come to experience it. Finally, digitised and transcribed witnesses would enable access for a global audience so that those unable to travel might still experience these works of literature unblemished by editorial decisions, in all their unique forms. Even throughout this project, I have run into issues having quality access to material that would benefit both my argument and scholarship on Becket and the SEL. There is opportunity for further research, but access is a limiting factor.

The SEL has been derided by scholars for its low literary value, due in part to its popularity; it has been described as popular but of little no literary value to the English "canon." While the idea of an English literary "canon" is subject to interrogation, conceptions of the SEL as a

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[17] Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture," 7.

predecessor to significant literary works are evidenced in its treatment in surveys of English literature. I contend that the SEL should not be considered as a predecessor to the English literature of the fourteenth century, but as valuable in its own right, both as influential for its use of genre, and significant as a cultural artefact of thirteenth-century literary sensibilities.

Recent work on the SEL by Thompson, and contributors to *Rethinking the South English Legendaries*, demonstrates persistent interest in the SEL as a collection of medieval texts of scholarly value. While my work builds on the work of Thompson, Pickering, and Liszka, Mills, *et al.*, this project has revealed the need to revisit the work of Horstmann, Boyd, and especially Görlach, in order to gain a greater insight into the development of the SEL as a text. There has not yet been a large-scale attempt at collating the extant witnesses of the SEL, with the exception of a proposed project by William Bolton, the *Digital SEL*, which might elucidate the many textual issues present in the SEL. To gain a firmer understanding on the relationship between the extant witnesses, we should re-examine the role of scribes and redactors like the "Outspoken Poet" so that we gain a greater insight into their role in the development of the SEL. A "new" philological approach to the SEL does not reject the value of collating the different SEL witnesses; rather, it circumvents the notion that there is an original and complete SEL, which is the inevitable assumption of Görlach's comprehensive study of the textual tradition of the SEL. Ultimately, a comprehensive archive or digital edition which emphasises the network of manuscripts might best represent the historical reality of the dissemination and consumption of the material, and not a critical edition of a few witnesses, as the SEL is currently presented in its *EETS* editions.

The poets and scribes involved in the production and dissemination of the SEL contributed a great deal to English literature, and although the works themselves are not believed to have the same literary value as the works of Chaucer, Langland, and Gower, the SEL's influence must be reconsidered as a cultural force.

Scholarly interest, with few exceptions, has situated Becket as a predominantly historical figure. By stepping away from the primacy of his historical impact, I have suggested his cultural value as a literary figure to re-evaluate the foundations upon which we base scholarly discourses on the archbishop-turned-saint. The character of Becket has long been debated, often hotly, amongst scholars and the public. The variety of attitudes concerning Becket, as Nederman and

Bollermann have suggested, are informed by "the complexity of his character;" and the possibility that he "simply makes it too difficult to draw final conclusions."[18] However, the primary impulse of scholars investigating the life and death of Becket revolves around the historicity of the events, how they unfolded, and their consequences. The most recent biography of Becket, *An Intimate Portrait*, concludes by suggesting that Becket may have believed that his own martyrdom would advance his cause more than his life would have: "perhaps Becket reasonably figured that his murder should have some greater purpose."[19] We might never know what Becket actually said or thought in his last days. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect scholarship on Thomas to transcend the purely historical and enter into the literary discourse, as it is in the literary discourse that his memory has been perpetuated. Staunton has argued that the work of the early biographers might be considered not solely as a source of historical fact, but as a form of literature. In these final pages I echo Staunton. It is not in the pages of history that Becket garnered fame, but through the cultural forces that perpetuated his saint's cult: the authors who continued to compose new works and translate the early lives, and the venerators who celebrated the masses and made pilgrimages to Canterbury.

In the *Canterbury Interlude* we find several of Chaucer's pilgrims arguing over interpretations of stained-glass windows in Canterbury Cathedral:

> The Pardoner and the Miller and other lewde sotes
> Sought hemselff in the chirch, right as lewd gotes,
> Pyred fast and poured highe oppon the glase,
> Counterfeting gentilmen, the armes for to blase,
> Diskyveryng fast the peyntour, and for the story mourned
> And ared also–right as rammes horned!
>   "He bereth a balstaff," quod the toon, "and els a rakes ende."
>   "Thow faillest," quod the Miller, "thowe hast nat wel thy mynde.
> It is a spere, yf thowe canst se, with a prik tofore
> To bussh adown his enmy and thurh the sholder bore."[20]

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[18] Nederman and Bollermann, *Thomas Becket*, 124.

[19] Nederman and Bollermann, *Thomas Becket*, 125.

[20] John M. Bowers, ed., *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), lines 147-56.

In this passage, several laymen argue and discuss the portrayal of Adam digging. Whether or not the object in Adam's hand is a spear, rake, or staff is inconsequential. The poet suggests that pilgrims are ignorant as the host interrupts their discussion with "Pese!" and "Let stond the window glased."[21] There is another observation made in this short passage, that interpretation of art, either stained glass or literature, is participatory. Each pilgrim, in turn, provides his own interpretation of the same object with his own justification. This passage illustrates the participatory nature of medieval literature.

With its creative and effective hybridisation of genre, the SEL's exploration of Becket demonstrates creative impulses and a willingness to participate in cultural production. Therefore, to examine works like the SEL and only focus on the religious, historical, or literary qualities of the character of Becket is to misunderstand the cultural value of the saint, as his symbolic characterisation demonstrably evolves with his audience. Rather, scholars and audiences alike should acknowledge the vibrant and multifaceted cultural force of Thomas Becket, whose legacy lives on through continued reimagining, and whose cultural value is improved by his inherently participatory legacy.

Throughout this project, I draw on four different areas to illuminate the interconnectedness and the plurality of importance that different fields offer the study of Becket and the SEL. I demonstrate that a greater understanding of how Becket is preserved in medieval literature informs our perception of his cultural value. Our understanding of what the SEL is, and how it was used informs our attitudes towards saints, whose legends were disseminated through the collection. I emphasise the value that a material approach to the manuscript culture and textual tradition of the SEL has on our understanding of its reception. Finally, I argue that genre is manifested textually and visually and informs our understanding of both Becket and the SEL. All four areas connect to the idea that reading reception is subject to genre. While this study has focused on Becket and the SEL, its methodological approaches—genre studies and manuscript studies—point towards the participation of readers in meaning-making and why the reader matters.

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[21] Bowers, ed., *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations*, line 157.

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Appendix: Grindley's Taxonomy of Marginalia

The following list represents Carl James Grindley's taxonomy of marginalia presented in his article "Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations: Notes toward the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles 1300-1641." I have represented the following breakdown of the 3 TYPES and subcategories of marginalia, each drawn from his explanations. Where there are unclear demarcations between categories, I have discussed the case in the main text of this dissertation. But for the reader I supply the classifications below with reference to their shortened form when possible, expanding only to clarify. Grindley's taxonomy does not define marginalia by form, but rather by function.

TYPE I: Marginalia that are without any identifiable context

- o **OWNERSHIP MARKS (I-OM)** Genealogical details or names; booksellers' marks, price codes and historical and contemporary shelf-marks.
- o **DOODLES (I-DO)** Simple drawings which are clearly the work of non-professional artists.
- o **PEN TRIALS (I-PT)** Except when they attempt to replicate a specific hand (TYPE II).
- o **SAMPLE TEXTS (I-ST)** Short works, in either poetry or prose, which were added in an unplanned if not haphazard manner to a non-related existing text.

TYPE II: Marginalia that exist within a context associated with that of the manuscript itself

- o **COPIED LETTERFORMS (II-CL)** Imitations by a later reader to recreate the hand presented in the text.

- **COPIED ILLUMINATIONS (II-CI)** Pen outlines of existing illuminations; added pen tracings made directly on existing illuminations; details copied from decorations.
- **COPIED PASSAGES (II-CP)** Text copied from the work into the margins in the same or different hand.
- **ADDITIONAL TEXTS (II-AT)** Go beyond offering thematic echoes or a text and may actually offer complex comment. Related to TYPE III.
- **MARKS OF ATTRIBUTION (II-MA)** Understanding of a text's origins; correct or blatantly false.
- **TABLES OF CONTENTS (II-TC)** Common added features in late Tudor times; divide unitary works into numerous sub-sections, while others collect divergent works into a single section.
- **INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS (II-IM)** Appear as suggested titles; brief descriptive notes identifying the main theme or subject of a work.
- **CONSTRUCTION MARKS (II-CM)** Marks which persist from the manuscript's initial period of production.

TYPE III: Marginalia associated with the various texts that the manuscript contains

- **NARRATIVE READING AIDS (III-NRA)** Comprise most written elements of a manuscript's *ordinatio*, whether they be original features of the work or later additions to it; made to suggest discrete navigations of texts.
  - **TOPIC (III-NRA-T)** Indicates the general theme or basic subject matter of a small block of text.
  - **SOURCE (III-NRA-S)** Indicates the source of a passage or quotation.
  - **CITATION (III-NRA-C)** Provides direct quotations from authorities or other texts.
  - **DRAMATIS PERSONAE (III-NRA-DP)** Identifies the various characters within a work.

- **RHETORICAL DEVICE (III-NRA-RD)** Outline grammatical or logical processes.
- **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (III-NRA-AI)** Purport to provide additional information, not from recognised authorities, but from the scribes themselves.
- **TRANSLATION (III-NRA-TR)** Provides translation or a passage.
- **SUMMATION (III-NRA-SM)** Reveal purpose and content; concerned with creating a narrative navigation of the text.
  - **TEXTUALLY GLEANED MARGINAL RUBRICS (III-NRA-SM-TGMR)** Citing a passage's general topic and listing its contents directly.
  - **PARAPHRASED MARGINAL RUBRICS (III-NRA-SM-PMR)** Citing a passage's general topic and listing its contents indirectly.
  - **CONDENSED OVERVIEWS (III-NRA-SM-CO)** More than two lines of text and summarised narrative.
  - **TEXTUAL EXTRAPOLATIONS (III-NRA-SM-TE)** Summations carried over two lines of text and which condense topics rather than narratives.
- **ETHICAL POINTERS (III-EP)** Direct demonstrations of ethical positions, as based on a medieval classification of literary modes.
  - **PERCEPTIVE POINTS (III-EP-PP)** Modus preceptivus.
  - **EXEMPLIFICATIONS (III-EP-EXP)** Modus historicus and exemplificativus.
  - **EXHORTATIONS (III-EP-EXH)** Modus exhortivus.
  - **REVELATORY ANNOTATIONS (III-EP-REV**) Modus revelativus.
  - **ORATIVE ANNOTATIONS (III-EP-OR)** Modus orativus.
  - **DISPUTATIVE ANNOTATIONS (III-EP-DM)** Modus disputativus.
- **POLEMICAL RESPONSES (III-PR)** Anchored to social or political issues raised in the text.
  - **SOCIAL COMMENT (III-PR-SC)** Comment on contemporary social issues.
  - **ECCLESIASTICAL COMMENT (III-PR-EC)** Comment on contemporary issues related to the Church.

- POLITICAL COMMENT (III-PR-PC) Comment on contemporary political issues.

- LITERARY RESPONSES (III-LR)
  - READER PARTICIPATION (III-LR-RP) When the reader enters into dialogue with the text.
  - HUMOUR AND IRONY (III-LR-HI) Annotations which comment on, rather than merely identify (as in Rhetorical Device annotations), humorous or ironical passages.
  - ALLEGORY AND IMAGERY (III-LR-AI) Annotations which comment on allegorical, metaphorical, or other "poetic" elements of the text.
  - LANGUAGE ISSUES (III-LR-LI) Translations from an older language into the reader's own tongue.

- GRAPHICAL RESPONSES (III-GR) Grindley admits to this category being the least developed but provides the following preliminary breakdown.
  - ILLUMINATIONS (III-GR-ILM) No clear definition provided.
  - INITIALS (III-GR-INT) No clear definition provided.
  - PUNCTUATION (III-GR-PUN) Placement of paraph marks, caesura, virgules, double virgules, etc.
  - ICONOGRAPHY (III-GR-ICON) Any systemised form of graphic shorthand, e.g., manicules.