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THE MAKING OF POST-TRUTH IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES

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THE MAKING OF POST-TRUTH IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES

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POST-TRUTH'UN İNŞASI: SÖYLEM VE ORTA ÇAĞ İNGİLİZ ROMANSLARI

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ÖZET

Bu tez, post-truth anlatıların iki Ortaçağ İngiliz romansı olan *Richard Coeur de Lion* ve *The King of Tars*'taki yansımalarını, kasıtlı çarpıtmaları; manipülasyonları ve stratejik ihmalleri yakından irdelemektedir. Haçlı Seferleri'nin arka planında yer alan bu anlatılar, kendine özgü İngiliz ulusal kimliğinin inşasına ve İslami ötekinin şeytanlaştırılmasına etkin bir şekilde hizmet etmektedir. *Richard Coeur de Lion*, Kral I. Richard'ın tasvirini ve Haçlı Seferleri'ni çevreleyen olayları, dönemin hakim sosyo-politik iklimi ve ideolojik zorunluluklarıyla örtüşecek şekilde yeniden şekillendirmeye yönelik hesaplı bir çabayı sergilemektedir. Anlatı, Fransız etkilerini dışlarken stratejik olarak I. Richard'a yeni bir soy uydurmakta ve İngiliz askeri gücünü yücelterek bir ulusal İngiliz kimliğinin inşasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, romansın İslam'ı yanlış temsil etmesi, yeni İslami tanrılar icat ederek İslami uygulamaları Roma çok tanrıcılığıyla birleştirmesi, Müslüman ötekinin çarpıtılmış imajını sürdürerek hem korkuyu körüklemekte hem de şiddeti meşrulaştırmaktadır. Öte yandan *The King of Tars*, Hıristiyanlığın İslam dünyası üzerindeki doğal üstünlüğünü savunmak için bedensel imgeleri, İslami inanç ve uygulamaların sembolik çarpıtmalarını ve dramatik gösterileri kullanmaktadır. Bedensel değişimlere olan saplantı ile ırk ve din kimliklerinin iç içe geçmesi, dönemin sınırlar, farklılık ve melezleşme konusundaki kaygılarını yansıtmaktadır. Bu romans, korkuyu uyandırmak ve önyargıları haklı çıkarmak için tasarlanmış sansasyonel kurgular aracılığıyla, dini ve kültürel ötekilerin basit ve bölücü bir tasvirini inşa etmektedir. Bu tez, bu karmaşık manipülasyon örüntülerini çözerek, edebiyatın belirli ideolojik gündemlere hizmet etmek için kullanılabileceği incelikli mekanizmalara ışık tutmakta ve bize anlatıların algıları şekillendirmek ve kültürel kimlikleri biçimlendirmek üzerindeki kalıcı gücünü göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Post-Truth, Ortaçağ İngiltere'si, Romans, Ötekilik, Kimlik

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the manifestation of post-truth narratives in two Middle English romances, *Richard Coeur de Lion* and *The King of Tars*, through a close analysis of their deliberate distortions, manipulations, and strategic omissions. Set against the backdrop of the Crusades, these narratives actively participate in the construction of distinct English national identities and the demonisation of the Islamic other. *Richard Coeur de Lion* exemplifies a calculated effort to reshape the portrayal of King Richard I and the events surrounding the Crusades, aligning with the prevailing socio-political climate and ideological imperatives of the time. The narrative strategically excludes French influences, fabricates alternative lineages, and exalts English military prowess, contributing to the construction of a distinctly English national identity. Additionally, the romance's misrepresentation of Islam, through the invention of deities and the conflation of Islamic practices with Roman polytheism, perpetuates a distorted image of the Muslim other, fuelling fear and justifying violence. *The King of Tars*, on the other hand, employs visceral imagery, symbolic distortions of Islamic beliefs and practices, and emotional spectacle to assert Christianity's inherent supremacy over the Islamic world. The obsession with bodily transformations and the conflation of racial and religious identities reflects the era's anxieties surrounding boundaries, differences, and miscegenation. Through sensationalistic fiction designed to elicit fear and justify prejudices, the romance constructs a simplistic, divisive portrayal of religious and cultural others. By unravelling these intricate webs of manipulation, this thesis sheds light on the nuanced mechanisms through which literature can be leveraged to serve specific ideological agendas, reminding us of the enduring power of narratives to mould perceptions and shape cultural identities.

Keywords: Post-Truth, Medieval England, Romance, Otherness, Identity

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INTRODUCTION

"Kill them all. For the Lord knows those that are his own."[1] This command, attributed to a papal legate during the early 13th-century Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229), exemplifies the potential for religious doctrine to be twisted into justifications for brutal violence. The Crusades provide a backdrop for the depictions of Christian-Muslim conflict in various medieval literary narratives, with the romance genre being particularly notable. Notable examples include *Richard Coeur de Lion* and *The King of Tars* (henceforth *RCL* and *KT*), both found within the Auchinleck manuscript and dated to the early 14th century.[2] This manuscript, one of the oldest and most comprehensive collections of Middle English romances, provides valuable insights into the literary and cultural milieu of 14th-century England.[3] These romances, in turn, played a role in shaping perceptions of the Crusades, reinforcing those same distorted ideologies in a cycle of mutual influence. In *RCL,* an angel instructs, "Seygnyours, tues, tues, / Spares hem nought — behedith these!"[4] These lines translate to "Sirs, kill, kill, / Spare none — behead these!" in which an angel is urging King Richard to the brutal slaughter of sixty thousand Saracen prisoners in Acre. While it is a heavenly voice delivering the command, this scene demonstrates how religious concepts could be warped to justify horrific

[1] Peter of les Vaux-de-Cernay, *The History of the Albigensian Crusade: Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay's `Historia Albigensis'*, trans. W. A. Sibly and M. D. Sibly (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 292.
[2] Peter Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), 1; John Henry Chandler, *The King of Tars*, New edition (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), 1.
[3] Susanna Fein, ed., *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2016), 1.
[4] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 3749–3750.

violence, a pattern that repeats throughout the romances examined in this thesis.

The Crusades are a complex historical event marked by religious fervour, political ambition, and devastating brutality. While popular medieval romances often reduce this struggle to a simplistic narrative of good versus evil, they are not merely escapist entertainment. These romances, consumed within court circles, have the power to reflect societal anxieties, promote specific ideologies, and influence how audiences understand the world around them. In the context of the Crusades, these narratives frequently embrace what is now labelled as post-truth strategies. Rather than aiming for historical accuracy, such stories intentionally distort complex realities to shape perceptions, solidify prejudices, and garner support for further military campaigns.

This thesis argues that the Middle English romances *RCL* and *KT* perpetuate a harmful post-truth narrative that manipulates representations of Islam, demonises Muslims, and reinforces Christian superiority within a context of religious conflict. Post-truth approaches rely on appealing to emotion rather than reason, prioritising the creation of a compelling story over factual accuracy. Through distorted portrayals of figures like Saladin, invented deities, and exaggerated accounts of Muslim barbarity, these romances contribute to a nationalistic worldview that constructs Muslims as the other. This othering then serves to justify violence and construct a Christian-centric worldview.

RCL and *KT* are significant case studies because they showcase how popular narratives could reinforce the othering of Muslims and contribute to a climate of fear and violence. By examining specific distortions and their implications, this thesis reveals the enduring power of storytelling and highlights how post-truth strategies persist in shaping perceptions, identities, and even real-world actions. The first chapter outlines the key elements of post-truth, demonstrating that while the term itself is modern, the strategies of manipulating information and prioritising persuasion over accuracy have been present throughout history. The chapter delves into how this strategy manipulates emotions, prioritises storytelling over facts, and the potential consequences when applied to religious and cultural conflict narratives. Setting the groundwork for analysis, it will also examine how post-truth elements remain pervasive in shaping perceptions and identities long after the medieval era. The second chapter applies this post-truth framework to *RCL*. The analysis will dissect how historical figures like Richard I and his adversary Saladin

are manipulated into archetypes of Christian hero and demonic other. Specific textual examples will demonstrate how religious practices, from the depiction of Muslim prayer to Richard's interaction with a divine voice, are strategically distorted to fuel a narrative of Christian dominance. This chapter argues that these distortions are not merely historical inaccuracies but deliberate tools of demonisation designed to evoke fear and justify violence in the romance. Chapter three shifts focus to *KT*, revealing how it manipulates theology, conversion narratives, and violence to establish a narrative of Christian supremacy. Central to this analysis is the invention of false deities like Termagaunt and Mahoun, demonstrating how a complete misunderstanding of Islam is exploited to portray it as inherently demonic and idolatrous. The chapter will examine how the narrative's emphasis on conversion, tied to notions of physical cleansing, reinforces the idea that only Christianity possesses the truth, justifying any means necessary to achieve religious dominance.

This thesis will examine two such romances, *RCL* and *KT,* to delve into specific distortions and their implications. Their manipulations reveal the enduring power of storytelling and serve as a potent reminder of how post-truth strategies continue to be used to shape perceptions, identities, and even real-world actions. The analysis of these romances begins with a review of existing literature that examines the portrayal of Saracens in Middle English romances and introduces the concept of post-truth as the analytical framework.

CHAPTER ONE

SARACENS, MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES AND POST-TRUTH

The manipulation of truth for political, social, or religious agendas is by no means a modern invention. Throughout history, propaganda campaigns and calculated narratives have been wielded to shape public opinion and justify actions. This same dynamic of distortion and us vs. them narratives manifest in the fictionalised representations found in Middle English romances like *RCL* and *KT*. The seemingly straightforward description of the Saracen Sultan's baptism in *KT* – "His hide, þat blac & loþely was, /Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras, / & clere wiþouten blame" – encapsulates a deeply manipulative post-truth tactic of deliberately distorting perceptions of Saracens and Islam to justify the Crusades and reinforce a sense of Christian superiority.[5]

Building on scholarship arguing the apocryphal elements served a propagandistic purpose, this chapter adopts a post-truth framework to examine the manipulative techniques employed in these romances. By analysing their distortions of historical figures, demonisation of religious beliefs, and calculated appeals to emotion, it aims to uncover how audiences were likely primed to support the Crusades and an emerging English nationalist identity contrasted against other European Christian powers.

In a time marked by a growing struggle against a flood of false information, examining these medieval narratives uncovers the profound historical origins of post-truth tactics.

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[5] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 922–924.

Just as social media amplifies modern echo chambers, these romances reinforce existing prejudices through their fictionalised representations. Ultimately, this analysis endeavours to illustrate how such medieval post-truth propaganda served the ideological agendas of their time.

1.1. The Saracen Other: Scholarship and Context

Middle English romances employed a range of post-truth tactics to construct the Saracen other. These depictions, deliberately monstrous and distorted, aimed to dehumanise the Saracen, generating fear, disgust, and a sense of moral superiority in the Christian audience. This demonisation served as a potent justification for the Crusades and the broader project of Christian dominance.

Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, tackles the very foundation of how the other is constructed. He notes: "The construction of identity…involves establishing opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. Each age and society re-creates its 'Others'…"[6] This highlights that the creation of the threatening Saracen is not an accident but a deliberate, ongoing process designed to serve specific political and social ends within a Christian context. Katharine Scarfe Beckett reveals how the construction of the Saracen other is embedded within the language itself. The word Saracen, while of uncertain origin, acquired negative connotations early in its Latinate usage. This was further amplified through a Christian misappropriation, as she explains: "The creation and dissemination by Christian patristic authors of their own etymology for the word 'Saracen' was perhaps the most significant development in the history of western literary perceptions of the Arabs."[7] This false etymology linked Saracens to Hagar and Ishmael, falsely painting them as illegitimate heirs. Crucially, Scarfe Beckett demonstrates that while this specific etymology was later understood as incorrect, the underlying prejudice persisted, evolving into secular forms of demonisation.[8]

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[6] Edward Wadie Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin, 2003), 332.
[7] Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 94.
[8] Katharine Scarfe Beckett, 'Persisting Theories About Saracens in Post-Conquest England', in *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 221.

Middle English romances, particularly those with Crusade themes, become critical tools in the identity-forming project of constructing the Saracen other. Geraldine Heng's analysis of *KT* reveals how this focus on otherness extends to the physical realm. Heng points out that the Saracen's skin colour is highlighted not as an individual trait but as a collective racial characteristic that defines and distinguishes the group.[9] This deliberate emphasis on physical differences reinforces the Saracen as the existential other, both dangerous and easy to justify violence against. This portrayal reveals subtle contradictions. As Leona Cordery notes, the romances face the challenge of depicting Saracens as formidable foes while simultaneously justifying their defeat: "The authors are faced with a slight problem here, they cannot present a Saracen army as being weaker than the Christian one…"[10] *KT* illustrates this tension. Initially, the Saracen forces are overwhelmingly powerful, inflicting heavy losses on the Christians: "Ther hewe houndes on Cristen men/And feld hem doun bi nighen and ten."[11] Lengthy battles and the acknowledgement of potential Saracen valour are tactics employed to highlight their threat further. Despite their strength, the Saracens do not achieve a decisive win, settling for a truce. This passage underscores how the Saracen other is meticulously constructed—formidable enough to pose a threat, yet never truly triumphant, serving the ultimate ideological purpose. Furthermore, this portrayal of Saracen strength frames the conflict as one that necessitates a large-scale Christian military campaign or future Crusade, underscoring a broader agenda of establishing military and religious Christian dominance.

This deeply ingrained fear is strategically exploited in romances like *KT*. Saracens are frequently described with grotesque physical features, reinforcing the message to the audience that these beings are less than human and inherently deserving of violence. As Suzanne Conklin Akbari notes, physical differences were often seen as indicators of inner moral and spiritual corruption, influenced by the idea that one's outward appearance reflected their inner nature.[12] This perspective, deeply rooted in medieval thought,

[9] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 230.
[10] Leona Cordery, 'The Saracens in Middle English Literature: A Definition of Otherness', *Al-Masāq* 14, no. 2 (1 September 2002): 94.
[11] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 169–170.
[12] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 4.

supported the portrayal of Saracens as not only physically different but also morally and spiritually deviant. Furthermore, John Finlayson's work on homilies reveals that such monstrous depictions of Saracens were not confined to romances but were also disseminated through religious sermons. Finlayson explains that these narratives' marvellous elements are subordinated to the realities of the Christian supernatural, integrating improbable occurrences into a Providential scheme. This integration of the marvellous into a Christian framework not only validated the possibility of these events within the narrative but also reinforced the portrayal of Saracens as inherently opposed to the Christian faith, thus justifying violence against them.[13] Timothy Guard expands on this by explaining that these sermons combined crusader role models, behavioural standards, and Lenten-time instructions, creating a didactic impact similar to that of popular literary depictions of crusade warfare.[14] He also notes that the church's promotion of crusade ideology relied heavily on these stock images and stories, alongside periodic papal calls to preach the Cross.[15] Reaching a wider audience than romances, these sermons also employed potent, fear-laden imagery to shape popular perceptions, ensuring that the negative portrayal of Saracens permeated various aspects of medieval culture. By embedding such imagery in both religious and literary contexts, these narratives and sermons collectively reinforced a worldview that justified violence against the Saracen other as both a moral and spiritual necessity.

Said emphasises the political implications of this manufactured image, noting that Europeans viewed the Orient through a lens of racism, imperialism, and ethnocentrism.[16] The monstrous other created in these works served to justify the Crusades project itself, making violence seem not just necessary but morally righteous. The deliberate distortion of Islam within Middle English romances played a crucial role in shaping medieval European perceptions of the Muslim world. These manipulated portrayals became potent propaganda tools, justifying the Crusades, reinforcing Christian self-identity, and supporting broader European ambitions. Despite scholarly awareness of Islam's

[13] John Finlayson, 'The Marvellous in Middle English Romance', *The Chaucer Review* 33, no. 4 (1999): 381.
[14] Timothy Guard, 'Pulpit and Cross: Preaching the Crusade in Fourteenth-Century England', *The English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (1 December 2014): 1342.
[15] Guard, 1342–43.
[16] Said, *Orientalism*, 204.

monotheistic nature, Middle English romances deliberately engaged in several strategies of distortion. One significant strategy was the portrayal of Muslims as idolaters. Norman Daniel notes that there was "a literary convention to that effect," with Saracens frequently depicted worshipping gods with names like "Mahomet, Tervagan, Apolin, and Jupiter."[17] This misrepresentation went beyond simple idolatry, embedding a broader narrative of spiritual corruption. Such portrayals served multiple purposes. They dehumanised Muslims, framing them as fundamentally opposed to Christian values and, therefore, deserving of both fear and contempt. This dehumanisation was crucial in justifying the violence of the Crusades, as it cast the conflict in starkly moralistic terms. The idea of a righteous battle against infidels became a compelling narrative that unified and motivated European Christians. Additionally, these distorted images reinforced existing prejudices and ignorance, making it easier for Crusade propagandists to garner widespread support. This distortion extended even to the Prophet Muhammad, with James Aloysius Kritzeck noting instances of his portrayal as a "drunkard, an epileptic, and a pupil of a heretical monk," designed to discredit his legitimacy as a religious leader and fuel Crusades-era violence.[18] Such characterisations served to vilify Islam further and legitimise the Crusades by presenting Muhammad as a false prophet leading a corrupt religion.

Moreover, some works deliberately portrayed the monotheistic Islamic faith as a polytheistic pagan religion. This portrayal was not simply a literary convention or born out of ignorance but a deliberate strategy to undermine the legitimacy of Islam and promote Christian dominance. As Ali Belenli argues, romances demonised the Saracen other while asserting Christian superiority, potentially serving broader political aims beyond immediate calls for warfare.[19] By presenting Muslims as idolaters, these narratives reinforced the notion that Islam was a false and corrupt religion, inherently inferior to Christianity. This portrayal served to dehumanise Muslims, framing them as enemies not just of the Christian faith but of civilisation itself. It provided a moral justification for the Crusades, portraying them as a holy mission to reclaim sacred lands

[17] Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, 3rd Edition, Revised (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1980), 309.
[18] James Aloysius Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 18.
[19] Ali Belenli, 'Orientalist Representation of the Saracens and the East in Middle English Romances' (Ph.D., Ankara, Hacettepe University, 2018), 66.

and protect the Christian world from a barbaric and heretical foe. Furthermore, these depictions of idolatry were strategically designed to appeal to the deeply held religious beliefs of medieval European audiences. By emphasising the supposed paganism of the Saracens, the narratives tapped into existing fears and prejudices, making the call to arms more compelling. The image of the Saracen worshipping false gods stood in stark contrast to the Christian worship of the one true God, thereby highlighting the perceived purity and righteousness of the Christian cause. This misrepresentation went beyond religious doctrine and seeped into cultural and social spheres. By associating Islam with idolatry and other negative traits, these romances contributed to a broader cultural narrative that depicted Muslims as fundamentally other, dangerous, and deserving of conquest. This cultural narrative was not static but evolved over time, adapting to the changing political and social needs of European powers. As Jessie Crosland notes, the evolving portrayals of Saracen gods in literature indicate a shift in propaganda aims, reflecting broader strategies to manipulate different audiences.[20]

Additionally, scholars like Norman Housley argue that these literary distortions were not mere conventions but were purposefully crafted to support European expansionist ambitions. They provided a flexible tool that could be adapted to justify various forms of aggression and domination, from outright military conquest to more subtle forms of political and economic control.[21] The portrayal of Muslims as idolaters thus served a dual purpose: it justified immediate military actions during the Crusades and supported long-term strategies for maintaining Christian dominance in the region. This strategic use of literature to shape perceptions and justify actions underscores the power of narrative in medieval society. By embedding these distortions into widely read and shared stories, the authors of Middle English romances ensured that their messages reached a broad audience, reinforcing existing prejudices and shaping public opinion in favour of the Crusades.

In addition to depicting Muslims as idolaters, some medieval texts, such as those described by John Tolan, went further by depicting Islam as a distorted and dangerous

[20] Jessie Crosland, *The Old French Epic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951), 141.
[21] Belenli, 'Orientalist Representation of the Saracens and the East in Middle English Romances', 31; Norman Housley, 'The Crusades and Islam', *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 2 (2007): 197.

Christian heresy. Tolan notes that while the image of the Saracen idolater flourished in twelfth-century Europe, another image developed concurrently: the Saracen as a heretic, blindly following the arch-heresiarch Muhammad. This portrayal, present in various texts, depicted Muhammad as a corrupted figure, leading his followers astray and further fuelling a sense of superiority among Christian audiences. These distortions often described Muhammad in terms of *insanity*, *impiety*, and *blasphemy*, as seen in the annotations by Peter of Cluny, who described Muhammad and the Quran in ways designed to shock and appal Christian readers.[22] Additionally, Saracens were frequently depicted as engaging in practices that were outlandish or incomprehensible to Western audiences. For example, Embrico of Mainz's *Life of Muhammad (Vita Mahumeti)* portrayed Muhammad as a heretic "driven by lust and worldly ambition, leading his people into a depraved cult."[23] This text, likely intended for a clerical audience, was part of a broader effort to demonise Islam during the Crusades by portraying its prophet as morally corrupt and deceitful.[24] This emphasis on cultural differences contributed to a deepening sense of their inherent otherness and stoked fear and misunderstanding among European Christians. The depiction of Islam in these narratives shifted between presenting it as a polytheistic other and a corrupted heresy. Portraying Islam as polytheistic tapped into existing Christian prejudices against paganism, making it easier to depict Muslims as barbaric and uncivilised. On the other hand, depicting Islam as a heresy emphasised its threat to Christian orthodoxy, presenting it as a dangerous deviation from true faith that needed to be corrected or eradicated. Both types of distortions served a common purpose: to emphasise the exotic and alien nature of the East while reinforcing a sense of European cultural and religious superiority. This othering could serve various goals, such as justifying territorial expansion, limiting Islamic influence, and managing internal European power struggles. By portraying Islam in such negative terms, these narratives bolstered the ideological framework that supported the Crusades and other forms of aggression against Muslim territories.

[22] John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 136–37, 156.
[23] John Victor Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 2.
[24] Tolan, 2–3.

These distortions must be understood as potent propaganda tools. As Tolan states, during the Crusades era, they "helped glorify the enterprise of the crusade and put it solidly in the context of Christian history, of the divine plan."[25] This religious demonisation extended beyond the Crusades' context. Housley argues that "Islam as a genuine religion scarcely features in crusading sources, and in no respect is this clearer than in the constant Christian stigmatisation of Muslims as idolatrous polytheists. This misunderstanding was both remarkable and persistent."[26] Housley's argument highlights how these negative portrayals perpetuated long-standing prejudices and misconceptions. By emphasising such distortions, these narratives reinforced the ideological framework that justified the Crusades and supported European power ambitions.

The romances strategically construct Saracens as an exotic other, blending allure and fear in a calculated way that serves a crucial post-truth function. This manufactured otherness is designed to both fascinate and frighten the Christian audience, simultaneously attracting their gaze while justifying confrontation and dominance. As Said argues, these depictions distort the Islamic world by exaggerating differences to reinforce a sense of Western superiority.[27] Topolski highlights the deliberate use of exoticism within this constructed image, showcasing how Saracen portrayals often blend descriptions of riches and refinement with underlying connotations of threat and unfamiliarity.[28] This duality is further evident in narratives like *KT*, where, as Cichon and Purdie discuss, baptism becomes a tool to civilise the Saracen, physically transforming him from a monstrous foe into an idealised Christian.[29] However, this transformation rarely erases all traces of exotic difference, highlighting an underlying suspicion of the other that lingers even in scenes of conversion.

This deliberate ambiguity serves a key purpose within the romances' post-truth framework. The allure of the exotic, even in the context of violence, keeps the audience

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[25] John Victor Tolan, 'Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade', in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 1999), 99.
[26] Housley, 'The Crusades and Islam', 197.
[27] Said, *Orientalism*, 332.
[28] Anya Topolski, 'The King of Tars: A Medieval Rendition of Replacement Theories', in *The Politics of Replacement* (Routledge, 2023), 274–78.
[29] Michael Staveley Cichon and Rhiannon Purdie, *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2011), 108.

engaged and receptive to the narrative's core message. Meanwhile, the underlying threat and suspicion justify continued hostility toward the Islamic world, maintaining a sense of urgency and justification for continued Crusades-era conflicts. To effectively analyse these depictions, it is crucial to address the concept of post-truth.

1.2. Defining Post-Truth and Historical Roots

In today's world, where misinformation spreads rapidly through social media and online platforms, the concept of post-truth feels all too familiar. Social media and the digital landscape have amplified the power of manipulative narratives. From sensationalised headlines to online echo chambers, facts and emotions become blurred. The last decade has witnessed momentous events such as Brexit, the presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have been marked by the dissemination of misleading information to the public. However, the manipulation of truth for political, social, or religious purposes is hardly a modern invention. Medieval audiences were also targeted by narratives crafted to distort the truth for political and religious gain. Propaganda campaigns and the calculated use of narratives have been wielded throughout history to shape public opinion and justify actions. For example, in his call for the First Crusade, Pope Urban II, as recounted by Robert the Monk and translated by Dana Carleton Munro, demonised Muslims with evocative language and false accusations of desecrating Christian sites.[30] This manipulative framing of the Crusades as a righteous defence of Christianity against a monstrous enemy played a crucial role in rallying support and shaping the ideological underpinnings of these conflicts. By depicting Muslims as a direct threat to Christian sanctity, Urban II's narrative justified the Crusades and galvanised European Christians into action. The Crusades offer a stark historical example of how narratives can be manipulated to serve those in power. In the modern era, social media has amplified this dynamic, with online echo chambers isolating users and reinforcing existing beliefs.[31] These post-truth strategies may seem distinctly modern, but how does this dynamic manifest in fictionalised representations of figures like *RCL* within Middle English romances?

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[30] Dana Carleton Munro, ed., 'Urban and the Crusaders', in *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. 1:2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1895), 5–6.
[31] Carlos Alberto Ávila Araújo, 'The Phenomenon of Post-Truth: A Literature Review on Its Causes, Characteristics and Consequences', 2020, 15.

While Middle English romances frequently offer captivating tales of adventure and valour, a closer examination reveals their complex engagement with the political and religious tensions of their era. These tensions often shaped their portrayals of the Islamic world, creating narratives where historical accuracy could be sacrificed in favour of emotional impact. This manipulation of the truth for emotional resonance underscores the importance of understanding the concept of post-truth in analysing these depictions.

The prominence of the term, as highlighted by its selection as the Oxford Dictionaries, underscores its relevance in today's world. While the dictionary definition — "[r]elating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" — provides a foundation, the complexities demand a nuanced investigation.[32] Scholars like Jason Stanley emphasise that throughout history, successful persuasion has often relied on flawed ideologies that render certain groups' perspectives unworthy of consideration.[33] This aligns with how the romances construct the Muslim other. Furthermore, as E.L. Reinhoud observes, key components of post-truth include "a selective use of information and an apathetic disregard towards evident lies."[34]

This tactical distortion of truth echoes modern concerns raised by scholars like Araújo, who highlights "the gigantic dissemination of false information, which is acting to shape people's decision-making in different spheres (in politics, in the economy, in health education, in religion.)"[35] Middle English romances, particularly *RCL* and *KT*, provide a rich context to explore the mechanisms of post-truth in a medieval setting. These texts manipulate information and prioritise emotional appeals to achieve specific ideological aims – namely, erroneous depictions of Islamic practices, demonised Saracen characters, and the omission or fabrication of historical figures. This strategic use of narrative aligns with post-truth tendencies, reflecting an enduring pattern of manipulating truth to rally audiences and consolidate power.

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[32] 'Post-Truth', in *Oxford Languages* (Oxford University Press, 2016), https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/.
[33] Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 210.
[34] Eline Reinhoud, 'The Post-Truth Era: Crises of Truth in (Post-)Postmodern Literature' (Master Thesis, Utrecht, 2019), 9.
[35] Araújo, 'The Phenomenon of Post-Truth', 39.

While political philosopher Hannah Arendt was not focused on Middle English romances, her emphasis on the dangers of blurring fact and opinion highlights the importance of examining how these texts manipulate information to promote a worldview. Arendt cautions against using factual distortions to blur the lines between fact, opinion, and interpretation, emphasising the need for clarity and truth in public discourse.[36] This manipulation of information is not a new phenomenon. Historian Yuval Noah Harari emphasises this enduring power of narrative over fact by stating, "Humans have always lived in the age of post-truth…our power depends on creating and believing fictions."[37] While Arendt and Harari were writing in different contexts, their insights on the power of narrative and the dangers of distorting truth are particularly relevant to the study of medieval romances and their role in shaping perceptions of the Crusades. While the widespread use of the term post-truth is recent, the circumstances fostering this environment have always existed.

While the nature and scale differed vastly from today, medieval audiences likely faced challenges in sorting through multiple, sometimes conflicting sources of information and grappling with scepticism toward certain institutions or authorities. Additionally, these romances were composed in an atmosphere of intense political and religious conflict, mirroring the kind of polarisation Yael Brahms associates with the rise of post-truth.[38] This suggests that creators of romances likely employed manipulative tactics – such as demonising language, selective portrayals, and the deliberate omission of historical context – to simplify complex realities and rally audiences against a constructed enemy. Scholars like Jonathan Riley-Smith and Susanna A. Throop note that the crusades were driven not merely by religious fervour but by a complex intertwining of "political, economic, and spiritual" self-interest.[39] This historical context further illuminates how narratives like *RCL* could distort events to mobilise audiences toward a specific agenda. This selective presentation of information, designed to demonise the other, exemplifies

[36] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 238.
[37] Yuval Noah Harari, 'Yuval Noah Harari Extract: "Humans Are a Post-Truth Species"', *The Observer*, 5 August 2018, sec. Culture, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/aug/05/yuval-noah-harari-extract-fake-news-sapiens-homo-deus.
[38] Yael Brahms, 'Philosophy of Post-Truth' (Institute for National Security Studies, 2020), 16.
[39] Jonathan Riley-Smith and Susanna A. Throop, *The Crusades: A History*, Fourth Edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 232.

Michel Foucault's concept of how power shapes knowledge: "Power produces knowledge… that power and knowledge directly imply one another."[40] This suggests that the demonised depictions of Muslims were not merely simplistic or inaccurate but served a specific purpose – to reinforce existing power structures that justified crusading violence and maintained Christian dominance.

Consider, for example, Pope Urban's rhetoric in his speech at the Council of Clermont, where he falsely alleges that Muslims "circumcise the Christians, and with the blood of the circumcision they either spread upon the altars or pour into the vases of the baptismal font."[41] This fabricated act, invoking both violence and sacrilege, aims to vilify Islamic practices and incite a horrified religious response among his Christian audience. Such deliberate distortions contribute to the demonising portrayals found in romances like *RCL* and *KT.*

Despite the wider availability of texts offering more nuanced views of Islam, as Akbari observes, popular depictions frequently resorted to stereotypes of Muslims as idolaters. This suggests "the popular depiction … was not the product of ignorance, but was instead deliberately constructed."[42] This deliberate construction of the Saracen other is evident even in texts that offer more nuanced perspectives, such as the *Chronicle of the Third Crusade* (*Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*), which includes passages where Saladin is shown negotiating peace or acting with surprising generosity. He sanctions "an inviolable peace between Christians and Saracens" and ensures that pilgrims may access "the Lord's Holy Sepulchre without exactions."[43] These glimpses of a more complex figure are completely ignored in romances, which instead paint all Muslims with the same villainous brushstroke.

[40] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 27.
[41] Munro, 'Urban and the Crusaders', 6.
[42] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'Imagining Islam: The Role of Images in Medieval Depictions of Muslims', *Scripta Mediterranea*, 1998, 26.
[43] Helen Jane Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 371.

This contrast between romance and historical accounts becomes even more apparent when examining specific events. For example, consider the contrasting portrayals of Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem in *RCL* and historical accounts of the Third Crusade:

> *Jerusalem and the Croys is lorn,*
> *And Bethleem, there Jhesu Cryst was born,*
> *The Crystene knyghtes ben hangyd and drawe;*
> *The Sarezynys have hem now islawe,*
> *Crystene men, children, wyf, and grome.*[44]

This image of indiscriminate violence reinforces the Saracen other as inherently cruel and perpetuates a sense of righteous Christian victimhood that would fuel the crusader mindset. The language used, including phrases such as *hangyd and drawe*, *islawe*, and the sweeping generalisation *Crystene men, children, wyf, and grome,* is intentionally evocative, portraying the Saracens as monstrous and subhuman to incite horror and outrage in the audience. Romance narratives often rely on stark moral polarities—clear-cut distinctions between good and evil, Christian and Saracen—and easily identifiable villains. This simplification caters to audience expectations for the genre, making its ideological influence even more potent.

Historical accounts, however, present a drastically different picture. For instance, Jill N. Claster highlights Saladin's efforts to ensure his troops behaved respectfully upon entering Jerusalem.[45] This contrast between the romance's depiction and historical records underscores the manipulative intent behind such portrayals. *RCL* exaggerates Saracen brutality, simplifying a complex event, stoking emotional outrage, and justifying the need for a violent Christian response. This selective use of facts to support one's position while ignoring contradictory evidence is a defining characteristic of the post-truth era, as noted by Lee C. McIntyre.[46] The romance deliberately omits Saladin's acts of restraint, focusing solely on portraying the Saracens as monstrous to bolster the crusader cause. This

[44] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 1359–1363.
[45] Jill Claster, *Sacred Violence: The European Crusades to the Middle East, 1095-1396*, Illustrated edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Higher Education Division, 2009), 194.
[46] Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 34.

selective presentation of information, even at the expense of historical accuracy, serves a specific ideological agenda.

Furthermore, this distorted portrayal likely resonated deeply with medieval audiences. As McIntyre observes, our minds have built-in biases that make us susceptible to falsehoods, especially when they confirm existing beliefs.[47] Christian readers, likely already harbouring negative views of Muslims, would readily accept these demonised portrayals. This cognitive bias reinforces the emotional impact of the romance and solidifies the post-truth notion that Saracens were inherently villainous, justifying the violence of the Crusades. However, it is important to note that while audience susceptibility played a role, it still does not excuse the deliberate manipulation employed by the romance's creators. This distortion highlights a calculated intent to shape perception and reinforce existing power structures.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "post-truth is an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."[48] While the term often focuses on the social media age, its essence, as Steve Tesich argues, is much older:

> *We are rapidly becoming prototypes of a people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams. All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world.*[49]

Tesich makes a concerning argument about societies voluntarily embracing a mindset that diminishes the importance of objective facts in favour of emotional appeals and personal beliefs. He contends that by devaluing verifiable truth and instead prioritising subjective narratives driven by feelings and individual convictions, societies are effectively rendering themselves susceptible to manipulation and control without the need for overt authoritarian oppression historically employed by totalitarian regimes. Tesich suggests

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[47] McIntyre, 45.
[48] 'Oxford Word of the Year 2016 | Oxford Languages', 2016, https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/.
[49] Steve Tesich, 'A Government of Lies', *The Nation* 254, no. 1 (1992): 13.

that this willing rejection of objective reality and embracing emotion-driven narratives over facts is a dangerous mechanism that strips truth of its significance. He posits that such a phenomenon could potentially lead to the erosion of critical thinking and the proliferation of ideologically motivated narratives that distort reality. Tesich's observation serves as a stark warning about the inherent perils of a society that consciously undermines the role of objective truth in shaping public opinion and discourse. He implies that by prioritising personal beliefs and emotional appeals over verifiable facts, societies may inadvertently create an environment ripe for manipulation and control without the need for overtly oppressive tactics.

Tesich's observation underscores the inherent dangers of a society that willingly undermines the significance of objective truth. By emphasising emotion and personal belief over verifiable facts, societies can become susceptible to manipulation and control without the overt oppression historically employed by totalitarian regimes. This notion is particularly relevant when examining the historical manipulation of narratives, such as those found in medieval romances. These texts often distorted reality to serve specific ideological purposes, much like modern post-truth tactics.

Tesich suggests that audiences may become complicit in accepting emotionally charged narratives over factual truth.[50] This willingness to embrace comforting falsehoods is precisely what romances like *RCL* and *KT* capitalise on, crafting tales that demonise Saracens and uphold Christian dominance to serve their ideological agendas. Tesich's critique of a post-truth world reveals a troubling societal trend: the diminishing importance of objective truth. He argues that facts and evidence are losing ground to personal beliefs and the convenience of desired narratives. This vulnerability to the power of storytelling is what these romances exploit to serve their political and religious agendas. While Tesich may overemphasise the element of conscious societal choice, his words highlight how easily audiences can become complicit in accepting comforting narratives, a vulnerability the romances exploit.

This thesis focuses on how *RCL* and *KT* function as instruments of post-truth influence. Their fabrication of events, historical revisionism, demonisation of religious others, and

[50] Tesich, 13.

exaggerated heroism speak to an audience likely more receptive to subjective narratives than factual accuracy. This willingness to accept distorted narratives resonates with Tesich's observations of a post-truth world. With restricted access to reliable information about Islam, medieval European audiences were particularly vulnerable to the biased depictions presented in romances like *RCL* and *KT*. While a rudimentary understanding of Islam as a monotheistic religion likely existed in medieval Europe due to religious texts, travel accounts, translations, and contact with Muslim communities, the nuances of its practices and beliefs were often misinterpreted or ignored to serve particular agendas. Furthermore, with religious institutions holding immense influence over knowledge and interpretation, these romances could leverage existing biases and beliefs to shape public perception. While the fluidity of truth within oral and manuscript culture in the medieval period differs from the deliberate disregard for facts in the modern era, it indicates a societal context where the malleability of truth was commonplace, potentially making audiences more susceptible to narratives manipulated to serve specific agendas.

1.3. Mechanisms of Post-Truth in the Middle English Romances

In the post-truth era, manipulating which information receives attention becomes a potent weapon to shape narratives and sway public opinion. As Reinhoud observes, this era is characterised by a specific attitude involving two key components: the selective use of information and an indifferent attitude towards obvious falsehoods.[51] Tactics such as cherry-picking facts, manipulating context and symbols, and outright exaggeration and distortion are employed to craft biased narratives that support specific agendas.

The selective use of facts, often referred to as cherry-picking, is a prominent tactic in post-truth discourse. Post-truth operators isolate specific facts or statistics that support their desired narrative while deliberately ignoring or downplaying information that contradicts it. Historically, this same strategy has been used to misrepresent and denigrate religious beliefs and practices. For example, in his critique of Islam, Ramon Martí selectively focuses on the practice of polygamy, which is permitted within specific parameters in Islam. Martí emphasises accusations of sexual excess and likely ignores positive aspects of Muhammad's life or comparable practices in other faiths.[52] As Tolan

[51] Reinhoud, 'The Post-Truth Era', 7.
[52] Tolan, *Saracens*, 237.

notes, Marti relies on "the familiar litany of Muhammad's polygamy" to portray Islam as inherently immoral.[53] This tactic aims to provoke an emotional response in the audience, bypassing nuanced religious debate and reinforcing existing anti-Islamic prejudices.

Another way information can be selectively used for post-truth purposes is through manipulating context. Facts, even accurate, can be manipulated through their presentation. Out of context, information can be framed to convey a misleading impression. Within anti-religious polemics, historical events, symbols, and practices are often deliberately isolated from their broader context to demonise a faith or paint it as inherently flawed. One example of manipulating context within anti-religious polemics can be seen in discussions about the Islamic Golden Age. This era, spanning roughly the 8th to 13th centuries, witnessed significant Islamic contributions to science, philosophy, and the arts. However, some anti-Muslim polemicists selectively focus on the decline of scientific innovation in the Islamic world after the Golden Age, ignoring the complex factors that contributed to this shift, such as political instability, Mongol invasions, and the rise of new intellectual centres in other regions.[54] This distorted presentation aims to imply that Islam is inherently incompatible with progress, fuelling prejudice.[55] Medieval romances like *RCL* and *KT* exploited similar biases about Islam, perpetuating misrepresentations prevalent in their historical context.

To further understand how medieval romances perpetuated these biases, one can examine the role of medieval colour symbolism. As Heng notes, there existed a "colour line…in which the desirability of whiteness as a central, defining category of group identity is in the ascendant."[56] This is exemplified in *KT*, where the text establishes a stark contrast between the Princess's *as white as fether of swan* beauty, and the Sultan's *blac and lothely* skin.[57] Along with reinforcing a Eurocentric beauty ideal, the Princess's whiteness functions as a visual embodiment of Christian salvation. This positions the Sultan, by contrast, further outside the possibility of divine favour. The Sultan's miraculous skin-

[53] Tolan, 237.
[54] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 151–53.
[55] Lewis, 156.
[56] Geraldine Heng, 'Jews, Saracens, "Black Men", Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), 261.
[57] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 12, 922.

whitening upon conversion aligns with Bruce Wood Holsinger's concept of whiteness as representing the colour of salvation, resonating with the Christian martyrdom and Marian intercession.[58] The romance implies that to be fully accepted by God, even in a spiritual sense, one must visually align with European standards.

Similar distortions were prevalent in *RCL*, where Saladin's actions are often framed to undermine the perception of his capabilities, making the Christian victory appear both divinely ordained and effortless. This is evident in the episode where he gifts Richard an enchanted horse meant to betray him.[59] Saladin's reliance on sorcery rather than military strategy or leadership subtly reinforces the idea that he is fundamentally incapable of matching Richard's divinely sanctioned might. This diminishes the complexity of the Crusades and hinders a reader's understanding of the significant challenges Muslim forces, who were often portrayed as only dangerous via trickery, posed to the Crusaders throughout this historical period. By repeatedly portraying Muslim forces as reliant on trickery or demonic assistance, as opposed to strategic brilliance, the romance reinforces the post-truth notion of Christian dominance as both natural and righteous.

These examples show how historical events and symbolism can be selectively framed to serve a particular post-truth agenda, both in contemporary discourse and in medieval literature. By manipulating context and distorting symbols, these romances promote a biased and simplistic view of Islam, fostering prejudice and potentially contributing to a justification for violence. Just as the romances downplayed Muslim achievements, modern Islamophobic rhetoric often distorts history to paint Islam as static and incompatible with progress. This manipulation of history echoes the post-truth strategies used by medieval romances like *RCL* and *KT*, demonstrating the enduring appeal of narratives that reinforce existing biases.

Beyond selective use and manipulation, post-truth tactics can also involve outright exaggeration and distortion. Post-truth tactics can escalate beyond selectivity into outright distortion. Minor incidents can be blown out of proportion, and figures can be

[58] Bruce Wood Holsinger, 'The Color of Salvation: Desire, Death, and the Second Crusade in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs', in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 156–86.
[59] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 5479–5890.

misrepresented to create a false sense of urgency or crisis. These distortions can range from subtle embellishments to complete fabrications. The Islamic faith was also often misrepresented in medieval European literature. Muslims were sometimes portrayed as "worshipers of false idols" or as "followers of a false prophet."[60] For instance, depictions of the Prophet Muhammad as a sorcerer or deceiver were not merely misunderstandings but deliberate distortions aimed at demonising him and justifying hostility towards Islam. These representations reflect a deep-seated animosity that employed falsehoods to shape the audience's perception of an entire faith.

1.4. The Power of Narrative Manipulation

Selective portrayals of historical events or cultures can reinforce existing prejudices and stereotypes, just as modern post-truth distortions can. As Reinhoud observes, today's post-truth phenomenon operates on both "a selective use of information and an apathetic disregard towards evident lies."[61] When historical narratives are manipulated to fit certain agendas or beliefs, they can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and distortions that fuel societal divisions. For example, in the context of the Western imagination of Islam during the Middle Ages, romanticised portrayals of Islamic culture as exotic and decadent could reinforce stereotypes of Muslims as other and contribute to a distorted view of Islamic civilisation. These portrayals may ignore the complexity and diversity of Islamic societies, instead presenting a simplistic and often inaccurate depiction that reinforces prejudices. Similarly, selective portrayals of national identities or cultural practices can also fuel divisions by promoting a narrow or distorted view of history. By highlighting certain aspects of a culture or history while ignoring others, as seen in depictions of *RCL*, selective portrayals can create a false sense of superiority or victimhood, which exacerbates tensions between different groups. Overall, the manipulation of historical narratives for romanticised or ideological purposes has lasting effects on societal perceptions and divisions. It is important to critically examine historical portrayals and narratives to ensure a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the past.

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[60] Tolan, 'Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade', 97–117; Gloria Allaire, 'Noble Saracen or Muslim Enemy? The Changing Image of the Saracen in Late Medieval Italian Literature', in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 1999), 175.
[61] Reinhoud, 'The Post-Truth Era', 7.

Literature serves as a powerful lens through which to examine the mechanisms of post-truth. Literature offers critical insights into how facts are constructed and contested by depicting the manipulation of truth for social control and subversive counter-narratives that resist these distortions. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* employs biting satire against corrupt authority figures, particularly within the Church. The diverse pilgrim voices offer multiple perspectives on social issues, destabilising the idea of a single, unquestionable truth. For instance, the Pardoner in the *Pardoner's Prologue* candidly reveals his deceitful practices: "For myn entente is nat but for to wynne / And nothyng for correccioun of synne."[62] This admission highlights the hypocrisy and manipulation within the Church, as the Pardoner exploits religious faith for personal gain. The Host's reaction to the Pardoner's tale, expressing disbelief and outrage, further underscores the disillusionment with clerical authority. This multifaceted portrayal of characters and their tales challenges monolithic interpretations of truth and morality. Similarly, William Langland's *Piers Plowman* uses allegorical dream visions to critique the widespread corruption plaguing religious and secular institutions.[63] In the text, the protagonist Will witnesses friars from various orders: "Preaching to people to make a fat profit, / Construing the Gospel to suit themselves. / Giving it meanings to go with their greed."[64] This depiction illustrates the moral decay among those meant to be spiritual guides. Langland uses the allegory of a corrupted tree to symbolise the Church's role in societal decay, as Anima quotes John Chrysostomus:

> *If the priesthood is pure, the whole Church prospers,*
> *But corruption rots and wrecks people's faith.*
> *If the priesthood sins, the whole people will sin.*
> *When a tree starts to rot, it is rotten at the root,*
> *So the priesthood is wrong if the people act wrongly.*[65]

Through these allegories, Langland exposes the far-reaching impact of ecclesiastical corruption on all societal levels. These medieval works expose mechanisms of truth

[62] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor, 2nd ed, Broadview Editions (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2012), ll. 403–404.
[63] Nicolette Zeeman, *The Arts of Disruption: Allegory and Piers Plowman* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 76.
[64] William Langland and Peter Sutton, *Piers Plowman: A Modern Verse Translation* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), 23.
[65] Langland and Sutton, 179.

manipulation that can also be analysed in historical romances like *RCL* and *KT*. These texts reveal the complex interplay of power and narrative, even within fictional contexts. For instance, *RCL* portrays Muslims in a highly negative light, exaggerating their brutality to justify Christian violence. This selective use of information mirrors the post-truth tactic of cherry-picking facts to support a specific narrative while ignoring or distorting inconvenient truths. One significant way literature illuminates post-truth is by highlighting the subjective nature of truth. This is particularly evident in works like *KT*, where religious and cultural biases shape the narrative. The text manipulates historical events to present Christians as morally superior to Muslims, thereby reinforcing contemporary prejudices. By offering these manipulated narratives, the romances destabilise the idea of a single true version of history, emphasising the role of individual experience and interpretation in shaping our understanding of the past. By examining these narratives, we gain a deeper understanding of how truth can be manipulated and contested across different historical and literary contexts.

Additionally, literature can serve as a tool to expose the power dynamics that influence the construction and perception of truth. Authors have the ability to reveal how those in positions of authority may manipulate narratives to serve their own interests, potentially suppressing marginalised voices and alternative viewpoints. While not all authors engage in such manipulation, influential texts that reach wide audiences hold significant power in shaping societal narratives and what is accepted as truth. This raises important questions about the origins of widely held beliefs: are they rooted in objective reality or the agendas of those in power? This potential for the manipulation of truth underscores how societal perceptions of what is true are often shaped by forces of power rather than neutral objectivity. Literary and cultural theorist Hayden White argues that historical narratives, by the very act of selecting, ordering, and presenting events in a particular way, are inevitably shaped by the author's ideology and perspective.[66] This suggests that the construction of historical accounts, even those that claim objectivity, involves conscious and unconscious choices by the author about what to include, emphasise, or omit – choices driven by the author's worldview, biases, and intentions. White's perspective reveals how the presentation of history in texts, including fictionalised works

[66] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 21.

like medieval romances, can profoundly influence how readers understand not only past events but also their own present context and role in society. The ideological lenses through which histories are told shape the perceived truths derived from those narratives, potentially reinforcing existing power structures or challenging them.

Moreover, literature can be a potent tool of resistance, particularly in genres like historical romance. Here, marginalised voices or hidden histories might be given a platform. By using symbolism, allegory, and other storytelling techniques, authors can present alternative narratives that challenge dominant discourses, disrupting the status quo and encouraging critical engagement with the information presented. This subversive power underscores literature's potential to promote critical thinking and media literacy. In the case of *RCL* and *KT*, a post-truth analysis will reveal how these romances, in their own way, manipulate narratives for specific purposes. A close examination of literary devices, such as characterisation, symbolism, and narrative framing, will offer insights into whether the texts reinforce existing power structures or subtly challenge them. Ultimately, analysing these romances through the lens of post-truth will expose how historical narratives in literature have the potential to both perpetuate and resist dominant ideologies.

Manipulations of truth within Middle English romances like *RCL* and *KT* have far-reaching consequences. These distortions, crafted for religious and political ends, perpetuate harmful stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. By presenting Muslims as monstrously other and Christianity as inherently superior, these romances fuel a legacy of misunderstanding that shapes later literature and historical narratives. Such portrayals directly shaped contemporary views of the Crusades, reinforcing the false notion of a religiously justified clash of civilisations. As Edward Said observes, a distorted European perspective on Islam was constructed, framing it as the antithesis of Christian virtue. Depicting Muslims as the ultimate enemy rationalised violence and colonialist ventures in the name of faith.[67]

Furthermore, these manipulations raise questions about the very nature of historical and literary representation. They expose how narratives can be weaponised to support specific

[67] Said, *Orientalism*, 62.

agendas and uphold existing power structures. The deliberate crafting of these romances to demonise Muslims and glorify Christian crusaders exemplifies how literature can be employed to manipulate societal perceptions and reinforce hegemonic ideologies. This phenomenon underscores the importance of critically analysing such texts to understand the underlying intentions and the broader socio-political context in which they were created.

Studying the distortions in *RCL* and *KT* reveals the mechanisms by which historical narratives are constructed and contested. These works highlight the power of storytelling in shaping collective memory and identity, illustrating how historical representation is often a battleground for competing truths. By critically engaging with these medieval texts, scholars can uncover the ways in which historical narratives have been manipulated to serve specific interests, thereby influencing our understanding of the past and its bearing on the present. This analysis not only sheds light on the historical context of these romances but also offers insights into the ongoing processes of narrative construction and the importance of questioning seemingly authoritative accounts of history.

This analysis demonstrates how Middle English romances like *RCL* and *KT* function as potent tools of post-truth propaganda. By distorting the figure of the Saracen, exaggerating Islamic practices, and selectively omitting historical facts, they cultivate a perception of the Muslim world as inherently threatening. This justifies both the Crusades and broader Christian supremacist ideology. The romances' manipulative tactics, fuelled by the political and religious conflicts of their era, created distortions of Muslim otherness with a legacy of misunderstanding that shapes perceptions of historical conflicts to this day. Understanding these distortions is crucial, as history shows how easily manipulated narratives can be used to promote hatred and justify violence. While these romances are fictional, they wielded narratives to shape perceptions, reinforce prejudices, and endorse specific actions. This highlights literature's potential to both uphold and challenge power, underscoring the necessity of critical examination. This exploration goes beyond analysing medieval texts, inviting us to consider how narratives in all forms influence societal beliefs, emphasising the enduring importance of understanding the complexities of truth and representation in shaping our collective understanding of history.

CHAPTER TWO

A POST-TRUTH READING: *RICHARD COEUR DE LION*

The Middle English romance *RCL* presents a reimagined version of the historical English monarch Richard I, blending fact and fiction, history and legend, chronicle and romance to create a compelling tale. Central to this narrative is an exceptional Richard whose qualities exceed those typically associated with heroism. This literary representation contrasts sharply with the historical Richard I, a prince and king who spent minimal time in England and primarily communicated in French.[68] However, within the literary context of *RCL*, this historical figure is transformed into an idealised English hero, characterised by his unmatched martial prowess, unwavering courage, and strategic brilliance. This literary Richard stands distinct from his French, German, and Greek counterparts, as well as the Saracens, embodying an idealised archetype of English martial heroism.

Scholarship on *RCL* often focuses on its use of cannibalism as a tool for constructing a powerful English national identity during the Crusades. Heather Blurton states how the romance transforms the othering trope of Saracen cannibals into a marker of Englishness, with King Richard's insistence on Saracen flesh as the most nourishing food.[69] Heng interprets this act as a symbol of England's "nascent, overarching impulse toward the

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[68] Leila K. Norako, 'Richard Coer de Lion', Robbins Library Digital Projects: The Crusades Project: Medieval Insular Literature, accessed 19 November 2023, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/crusades/text/richard-coer-de-lion.

[69] Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11, https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-137-11579-9.

formation of the medieval nation" through "aggressive territorial ambitions."[70] Similarly, Nicola McDonald argues that cannibalism provides the audience "with a convenient focus for its own fantasies of religious supremacy, political dominion, nationalism and a good meal."[71]

This focus on national identity is not without its complexities. As Blurton notes, the romance's portrayal of English cannibalism creates an "ambivalence towards the incipient politics of English nationalism."[72] Alan Ambrisco argues that the text *forgets* traditional distinctions between Christian and Saracen barbarity, revealing anxieties about defining national identity.[73] Neil Cartlidge suggests that the cannibalism represents a "damning autophagy of Christendom," highlighting the internal conflicts that plagued the crusades.[74]

While these analyses offer valuable insights, this thesis adopts a post-truth lens to reveal deeper manipulative mechanisms at play. This thesis argues that the romance's distortions of historical fact, along with its visceral depictions of violence, participate in a broader post-truth environment of the period. This post-truth environment fuelled nationalist fervour by constructing a deliberately deceptive narrative designed to bolster Christian supremacy and justify violence against the Saracen other. The romance's focus on English identity, specifically through the distortion of Richard's image and the cannibalism trope, both reflects and reinforces this nationalistic aspect of the post-truth crusader atmosphere.

The reimagining of Richard's character in *RCL* strategically unfolds against the backdrop of the Hundred Years' War, a period characterised by ongoing geopolitical tensions between England and France.[75] This narrative deftly incorporates the intricate political dynamics of the time, emphasising a deliberate effort to shape a distinctive English

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[70] Geraldine Heng, 'The Romance of England: Richard Coer De Lyon, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2000), 137.
[71] Nicola McDonald, 'Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of Richard Coeur De Lion', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 143.
[72] Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, 131.
[73] Alan Ambrisco, 'Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 3 (1999): 522.
[74] Neil Cartlidge, ed., *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, Studies in Medieval Romance (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 176.
[75] Ambrisco, 'Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion', 512, 515.

literary culture amidst the prevailing conflict. The romance not only emphasises English centrality in the ongoing crusades but also contributes to the era's anti-French propaganda.[76] Through selective narrative choices, including the substitution of historical figures, the introduction of fictional events, and the omission of certain historical details, the poet purposefully deviates from strict historical accuracy. These nuanced adjustments not only underscore the narrative's focus on English exceptionalism, particularly in contrast to French, German, and Greek influences but also contribute to establishing a cultural hierarchy within the storytelling framework.

Simultaneously, the deliberate misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam within the narrative can be contextualised within the historical backdrop of the rising threat posed by the Seljuks and, later, the Ottomans.[77] This intentional distortion aligns with the broader concept of post-truth dynamics prevalent during the period. By crafting a narrative that selectively shapes historical events, the text responds to external challenges, presenting a version of history that reinforces English exceptionalism. Thus, the misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam operates as a tool within the narrative to construct a specific worldview in response to geopolitical tensions, contributing to the broader post-truth environment in England and Europe at the time.

Like many Middle English romances that draw on historical events, *RCL* bases many of its verses on historical events, yet it distinguishes itself by deliberately distorting history to address the prevalent cultural concerns of its time.[78] The manipulation of historical events within the narrative responds to the broader post-truth discourse, especially relevant in the context of medieval depictions of the Muslim other. As this thesis explores, this manipulation process is a fundamental aspect of post-truth discourse. The narrative deviates from historical accuracy through said fabrications, replacements, introductions, and omissions, involving the manipulation of historical figures and events and the deliberate exclusion of Saladin's victories over Richard. These alterations operate within

[76] Alan Ambrisco, 'Medieval Man-Eaters: Cannibalism and Community in Middle English Literature' (Ph.D., Indiana, Indiana University, 1999), 50.
[77] Claster, *Sacred Violence*, xv; Claster, 3; Anthony Bale, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108672832.
[78] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, 1; John Finlayson, '"Richard, Coer de Lyon": Romance, History or Something in Between?', *Studies in Philology* 87, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 159.

a system that both erases and iterates, shaping and ranking the cultures portrayed within the romance.[79] Notably, the narrative meticulously removes aspects of Richard's French heritage to establish him as a distinctly English hero. This thesis explores how *RCL* intentionally manipulates historical facts and shapes narratives. Focusing on the false representation of Islam and Muslims, this thesis also delves into the nationalistic agenda within the romance. By examining both aspects, this thesis aims to uncover the complex interplay between fact and fiction in medieval texts, shedding light on the evolving concept of post-truth. This Middle English romance serves as a significant case study, revealing insights into how these narratives contribute to the construction of distorted cultural and nationalistic perspectives. This analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the cultural and ideological forces shaping such narratives, highlighting the intricate relationship between post-truth, nationalism, and historical representation.

RCL belongs to the crusade romance sub-genre, one of the several specialised categories that fall under the broader medieval romance genre. As Amanda M. Ewoldt notes, romances encompass "a wide array of issues" and can be further delineated into sub-genres like Arthurian romances, crusade romances, and others, each potentially having its own distinct aims and conventions.[80] Crusade romances are characterised by their focus on Christian military actions in foreign lands during the Crusades. In medieval literary terminology, romance originally signified works written in vernacular languages (as opposed to Latin), yet, over time, it came to denote a genre that recounted the chivalric and sometimes amorous adventures of noble characters in distant or legendary settings.[81] However, the definition of romance is still not in consensus. Finlayson notes that the term romance has developed a wide range of meanings over time, contributing to present-day confusion. He explains that while many Middle English poems self-identify as romances, they often share little in common beyond featuring aristocratic protagonists and elements of adventure or courtly love.[82] This broad categorisation highlights how the concept of

[79] Leila Kate Norako, 'The Crusading Imaginary of Late Medieval England' (Ph.D., New York, University of Rochester, 2012), 138–66.
[80] Amanda Ewoldt, 'Conversion and Crusade: The Image of the Saracen in Middle English Romance', *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Louisiana, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2018), 5, 11.
[81] Edward Stevens Sheldon, 'Romance and Romanic', *Studies in Philology* 17, no. 1 (1920): 88; Tom McArthur, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 872.
[82] John Finlayson, 'Definitions of Middle English Romance', *The Chaucer Review* 15, no. 1 (1980): 45–46.

romance has evolved and varied significantly, encompassing a diverse array of narratives and themes.

The term Crusade romance hints at the central theme of these narratives – the Christian struggle against non-Christian invaders in foreign lands, often set in the Middle East.[83] On Crusade romances, Mary Hamel writes: "There are a small number of poems about crusades in Middle English—poems, that is, in which a Christian military power, because it is Christian, is called upon to confront and overcome in battle a non-Christian invader or usurper in another country because it is not Christian."[84]

The historical grounding of *RCL* among Crusade romances is noteworthy, particularly in its earlier *b* version, which predates the later *a* version and is often considered more historically accurate.[85] While both versions contribute to the broader understanding of Richard's portrayal in medieval literature, this thesis will focus on the *a* version, which more fully embraces the fantastical and propagandistic elements aligning with the concept of post-truth. The *a* version, as explored in this thesis, represents *a* later development incorporating additional romance elements, legends, and folk motifs into the original narrative.[86] These additions, including non-historical crusade adventures and episodes disparaging the French king, lead to a more embellished and potentially less historically accurate portrayal of Richard. Thematically, the romance aligns with the French genre of chanson de geste, known for its focus on heroic deeds. The distinction between the *chanson de geste* and romance genres was less pronounced in England than in France. *RCL* employs the terms *jeste* and *romaunce* interchangeably, drawing from both the *chanson de geste* tradition and chronicles, and featuring familiar characters such as Roland, Alexander, Charlemagne, Arthur, and Achilles. By examining the *a* version, this

[83] Ewoldt, 'Conversion and Crusade', 13.
[84] Mary Hamel, 'The Siege of Jerusalem as a Crusading Poem', in *Journeys Toward God: Pilgrimage and Crusade*, SMC 30 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1992), 177.
[85] Laura Hibbard Loomis, *Mediaeval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), 148–51.
[86] Karl Brunner, ed., *Der Mittelenglische Versroman Über Richard Löwenherz: Kristische Ausg. Nach Allen Handschriften Mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen Und Deutscher Übersetzung von Karl Brunner* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1913), 51–70; Roger Sherman Loomis, 'Richard Cœur de Lion and the Pas Saladin in Medieval Art', *PMLA* 30, no. 3 (1915): 510; Roger Sherman Loomis, 'Review of Der Mittelenglische Versroman Über Richard Löwenherz, Vol. XLII', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 15, no. 3 (1916): 457–63.

thesis aims to explore how the romance's embellishments and deviations from historical accuracy contribute to the construction of a post-truth narrative that serves specific ideological and political purposes. This analysis highlights the ways literature can manipulate historical events and figures, influencing perceptions of the past and present.

Middle English romances, including *RCL*, held a prominent position in the literary landscape of the Middle Ages, captivating a diverse audience that spanned the nobility and literate members of the urban and mercantile classes. In the socio-political context of the time, the latter group, often aspiring to social mobility and increasingly influenced by chivalric ideals, would have found particular resonance with the themes of heroism and national identity depicted in these romances. *RCL* offers a detailed depiction of crusade politics and leadership, subtly highlighting national distinctions and promoting a sense of English exceptionalism. Within a post-truth context, where narratives often transcend strict historical accuracy to achieve ideological or political goals, *RCL* delivers a perspective that may have been more impactful on its audience than objective facts. This broad audience likely contributed to the romance's enduring popularity, as evidenced by its publication by Wynkyn de Worde in 1509 and 1528 and the continued circulation of its manuscripts well into the sixteenth century.[87]

The *a* version introduces the invented characters Sir Fulk D'Oilly and Sir Thomas Multoun, who emerge as pre-eminent from Richard's tournament at Salisbury and lead divisions of Richard's army. While no knights by these names appear in the historical records of Richard's campaigns, these names connect the romance to the D'Oyly and Multon families of Lincolnshire, significant baronial families in the 14th century. The families were connected to each other and other high-ranking families, including that of the earls of Warwick, who were associated with William Longespee, Earl of Salisbury, a hero of the Fourth Crusade and a figure that also appears in the romance.[88]

RCL frequently references a French source, emphasising its connection to the French literary tradition. Phrases like "In Frenssche bookys this rym is wrought" highlight the

[87] Brunner, *Der Mittelenglische Versroman Über Richard Löwenherz*, 7; Ronald Crane, *The Vogue of Medieval Chivalric Romance During the English Renaissance* (Wisconsin: George Banta, 1919), 7; Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 110, 357.
[88] John Finlayson, 'Legendary Ancestors and the Expansion of Romance in Richard, Coer De Lyon', *English Studies* 79, no. 4 (1 July 1998): 302–4.

romance's French origins; "The Frenssche says he slowgh an hundrid" indicates parallel narratives in French sources crediting Richard with slaying a hundred; and "As it is in Frensch ifounde" underscores the French source of details regarding the loss of sixty thousand Saracens.[89] These references suggest the poet's familiarity with historical chronicles that recount Richard's role in the crusade, such as Ambroise's *The History of the Holy War (Estoire de la Guerre Sainte)*, Roger of Howden's *Chronicles of Master Roger of Howden (Chronica magistri Rogeri de Hoveden)*, and Richard de Templo's *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade (Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi)*. Several episodes in the romance, even when they appear fantastical, can be traced back to these chronicles. For instance, the narrative of Richard and his fleet encountering and sinking an immense Saracen supply ship on their way to Acre is based on the chronicles, albeit with an exaggerated portrayal of Richard's role in the battle. In addition to historical sources, *RCL* incorporates a body of legends that had grown around Richard and his family by the 13th century. These legends enrich the narrative, offering a blend of historical events, chronicle accounts, and legendary material.

In delving into the close reading of *RCL*, it becomes apparent that the intricacies of the narrative extend beyond mere literary embellishments. Within this Middle English romance, historical truths undergo selective manipulation, characters are either omitted or introduced, and events experience transformative reinterpretation. This deliberate manipulation of historical events reveals a purposeful crafting of a post-truth narrative that aligns with the prevailing atmosphere of the time. The Crusades, a response to the rise of Seljuks, served as a crucible for forging a distinct English identity. King Richard's image as a crusader king exemplifies this.[90] However, in such a charged atmosphere, historical narratives about these events could become malleable. Stories might be shaped to emphasise English heroism and to downplay internal divisions, all to serve the broader ideological agenda of an English nation. This close reading seeks to unravel these manipulative strategies, offering a lens through which to understand the post-truth dynamics permeating the medieval English literary landscape.

[89] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 21; 5098; 7008.
[90] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122.

Richard's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, a prominent figure in medieval history, is enshrouded in controversy, which stretches across her tumultuous life and marriages. These controversies are found in various historical sources spanning the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Eleanor's early life was notably defined by her marriage to King Louis VII of France, a union far from harmonious, culminating in an 1152 annulment primarily rooted in consanguinity. However, the absence of a male heir likely played a significant role. This divorce stirred controversy, triggering rumours about Eleanor's activities during the unsuccessful Second Crusade, where she accompanied King Louis. Notably, John of Salisbury's account in *Memoirs of the Papal Court (Historia Pontificalis)* raised suspicions about her relationship with her uncle, Raymond, Prince of Antioch, ultimately leading to her forced departure.[91] Walter Map's *Courtiers' Trifles* (*De Nugis Curialium)* from the late twelfth century added fuel to the controversy, proposing that Eleanor might have engaged in an affair with Geoffrey, the father of her second husband, Henry, Duke of Normandy. This alleged infidelity was believed to have cast doubt on the legitimacy of their offspring.[92] In *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea (Historia Rerum in Partibus Transmarinis Gestarum),* William of Tyre compounded this controversial narrative by accusing Eleanor of plotting against Louis and having designs to be with Henry even before their marriage.[93] Furthermore, Gerald of Wales' account in *On the Instruction of Princes (De Principis Instructione)* implies that Eleanor's attraction to Saladin during the Second Crusade stemmed from her husband's perceived weakness, suggesting her willingness to renounce her faith and become Saladin's lover, which reflects negatively on her character.[94] This web of controversies and accusations paints a complex picture of Eleanor of Aquitaine, with an array of tumultuous marriages, and alleged infidelity revealing this influential medieval queen's multifaceted and often enigmatic character.

[91] Marjorie Chibnall, 'Orderic Vitalis on Castles', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, 1989, 52–53.
[92] Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 475–77.
[93] William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and A.C. Krey, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 179–81; 196.
[94] Joseph Stevenson, *The Church Historians of England*, Pre-Reformation Series (London: Seeleys, 1858), 223–24.

The poet of *RCL* might be impliedly mentioning Eleanor of Aquitaine in the following lines:

> *When he was twenty wyntyr olde,*
> *He was a kyng swythe bolde.*
> *He wolde no wyf, I understonde,*
> *With gret tresore though he here fonde.*[95]

These lines depict a king who refuses a wealthy female suitor despite the potential political advantages of such a match. Given that Henry II historically married Eleanor of Aquitaine at the age of 19, the romance's description of a 20-year-old king without a wife could be interpreted as a subtle reference to Eleanor's rejection, suggesting the poet did not view her as a suitable match for Henry. This deliberate deviation from historical fact is further emphasised in the subsequent introduction of Cassodorien of Antioch as Henry II's queen:

> *Thenne askyd he that lady bryght,*
> *"What hyghtest you, my swete wyght?"*
> *"Cassodorien, withouten lesyng."*
> *Thus answeryd sche the kyng.*
> *"Damysele," he seyde, "bryght and schene,*
> *Wylt thou dwelle and be my qwene?"*[96]

By replacing Eleanor with Cassodorien, a character specifically crafted with non-French origins, the poet strategically reshapes the narrative to align with the evolving English identity of the time. This intentional manipulation of character backgrounds highlights a post-truth dimension within the narrative, demonstrating a conscious departure from established historical realities in favour of a selectively shaped storyline that resonates with the prevailing ideologies and imaginative landscapes of the era. The poet's decision to marry Henry II to Cassodorien instead of Eleanor serves a dual purpose. First, it distances the narrative from any perceived French influence associated with Eleanor, aligning it more closely with an emerging English identity. Second, it creates a more exotic and romantic storyline, befitting the conventions of medieval romance. This deliberate blurring of historical lines, underscored by the post-truth narrative, transcends

[95] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, 43–46.
[96] Larkin, ll. 171–176.

conventional storytelling and becomes a reflection of the intricate interplay between history, identity construction, and the ideological undercurrents characterising the period. By crafting a narrative that resonates with the desired national identity, the poet engages in a form of post-truth storytelling, where historical accuracy is secondary to the creation of a compelling and ideologically resonant narrative. This manipulation of historical truth serves to reinforce the desired image of English exceptionalism and distance the narrative from any potentially undesirable foreign influences.

> *And whene the belle began to ryng,*
> *The preest scholde make the sakeryng*
> *Out of the kyrke sche wolde away.*
> *...*
> *Out of the rofe she gan her dyght,*
> *Openly, before all theyr syght.*
> *...*
> *And with her doughter she fled her waye,*
> *That never after she was isey.*[97]

The passage vividly portrays Cassodorien's hasty departure from the church during the Mass. As the bell rings for the consecration of the Eucharist, Cassodorien attempts to leave, but the earl insists she stays. Defiantly, she takes her daughter and, despite the earl's resistance, escapes through the roof. During her escape, her son Johan falls and breaks his thigh, but she successfully flees with her daughter, never to be seen again. The dramatic depiction of Cassodorien's flight from the church firmly establishes her as a demonic mother figure within this romance. Her actions directly contradict expected religious and maternal behaviours, aligning her with the supernatural and the monstrous. Firstly, her aversion to the holiest moment of the Mass, the consecration of the Eucharist *(the sakeryng)*, signifies a deep anti-Christian sentiment. This rejection of the central Christian sacrament positions her as an outsider, potentially with a demonic nature, as McDonald notes that communion serves to unite Christians into a harmonious community of faith.[98] Her escape through the roof of the church further emphasises her otherness and

[97] Larkin, ll. 221–234.
[98] McDonald, 'Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of Richard Coeur De Lion', 141.

could imply supernatural powers. This dramatic exit, a clear defiance of conventional physical limitations, strengthens her connection to the demonic.

On the one hand, the unveiling of Cassodorien as a fairy queen may signify the poet's inclination toward distancing the narrative from French influences. On the other hand, it could be a precursor to justifying Richard's forthcoming revelation of supernatural power and the infamous anthropophagic acts. As discussed, within the post-truth environment influenced by the narrative objectives of the time, there was a discernible effort to minimise French influence. As Ernest Renan aptly states, "Forgetting … is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation," highlighting the deliberate act of selective forgetting as an integral element in generating national momentum.[99] In this context, the targeted forgetting is directed at Richard's French ancestry, creating a new, albeit exotic, and even demonic lineage in its place. The poet now paints a "Richard whose alien nature is not French, but Oriental."[100]

The author strives to distinguish the characters of English origin from those of French descent. Particularly through the character of Philip, the French king, they are depicted as deceitful, mirroring someone who, despite being part of the inner circle, betrays the protagonist. This dynamic is similar to the relationships between Antipater and Alisaunder, Mordred and Arthur, and Philip and Richard. Linking Richard's mother to the traitor of the hero would reduce Richard's semi-monstrous nature and emphasise his connections to France. Therefore, Eleanor is absent from the romance. Cassodorien serves a dual purpose: being female, she maintains Richard's patrilineal attachment to England, and her Eastern ancestry dilutes any hint of French blood.[101]

Referencing Pope Urban II, associated with the call for the First Crusade, in a narrative set during the Third Crusade, is a notable divergence from historical accuracy, and this choice serves a specific narrative purpose. By invoking the memory of Pope Urban II, the poet taps into the successful and unifying legacy of the First Crusade, which was a pivotal

[99] Ernest Renan, 'What Is a Nation?', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 11.
[100] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'The Hunger for National Identity in Richard Coer De Lion', in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 205.
[101] Kari Elizabeth Maaren, 'Darkness Inside: The Role of the Half-Monster Hero in the Middle English Romance Tradition' (Thesis, Toronto, University of Toronto, 2008), 210.

moment in Christian history marked by a sense of victory and unity against a common enemy. This historical backdrop is leveraged to imbue the Third Crusade and Richard's role in it with a heightened sense of divine purpose and legitimacy:

> *An holy pope that hyghte Urban,*
> *Sente to eche a Crystene man,*
> *And asoylyd hem of here synne.*
> *And gaf hem paradys to wynne,*
> *Alle that wolde thedyr gon,*
> *To wreke Jhesu of his foon.*[102]

These lines directly invoke the memory of Pope Urban II's call to arms during the First Crusade, portraying it as a unifying moment when Christians were absolved from their sins and granted the chance to go to paradise by taking up the sacred mission to avenge Jesus against the enemies of the faith. By transplanting Urban II's rhetoric into the Third Crusade context, the poet is able to tap into the powerful imagery and symbolism of the First Crusade's perceived divine mandate and spiritual rewards. This allows Richard's later crusading efforts to be bathed in that same aura of holy justification and promise of eternal glory despite the different historical circumstances.

This strategic historical displacement aligns with post-truth tactics, where the truth is shaped to suit a particular narrative. In *RCL*, the poet manipulates historical facts to construct a narrative that amplifies the heroism and sanctity of Richard's crusade. Using Pope Urban II as a symbol of crusading success instead of the contemporary Pope Gregory VII shows a deliberate effort to recast the Third Crusade in a more glorified light. This manipulation serves to reinforce the themes of English valour and religious fervour, presenting Richard and his forces as the embodiment of a divinely sanctioned mission. Consequently, the anachronistic mention of Pope Urban II in the romance serves as a glaring exemplification of how historical narratives can be manipulated and modified to advance specific ideological objectives, highlighting the formidable influence of storytelling in moulding perspectives and collective memory.

[102] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 1323–1328.

The poet's decision to reference Pope Urban II in a context set during the Third Crusade serves as a backdrop to the portrayal of the fall of Jerusalem in the romance, emphasising a skewed historical perspective tailored to suit the narrative's ideological goals. This manipulation of history extends to the depiction of Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem, as seen in the lines:

> *Jerusalem and the Croys is lorn,*
> *And Bethleem, there Jhesu Cryst was born,*
> *The Crystene knyghtes ben hangyd and drawe;*
> *The Sarezynys have hem now islawe,*
> *Crystene men, children, wyf, and grome.*[103]

The poet of *RCL* deliberately distorts the historical reality of Jerusalem's fall under Saladin. Word choices like *lorn*, *hangyd and drawe,* and *islawe* evoke images of widespread suffering and barbaric violence. The graphic nature of these words, particularly *hangyd and drawe*, suggests indiscriminate slaughter rather than disciplined military actions. While Claster emphasises Saladin's efforts to avoid a massacre and even preserve Christian holy sites, the romance creates a fictionalised portrayal of utter devastation.[104] This embellishment serves a similar purpose as the anachronistic reference to Pope Urban II: to reinforce themes of religious fervour and heroism while casting the Saracen enemy in a merciless light.

The emotional weight of the loss is further heightened by the use of religious symbols such as *Croys (cross)* and *Bethleem (Bethlehem)*, situating the tragedy within the sacred geography of Christianity. This portrayal diverges from the more nuanced historical narrative of Saladin's rule, which was characterised by efforts to maintain social and religious harmony.[105] Such a binary opposition between the Christian knights and the Saracen enemy, with the former depicted as wholly victimised, effectively aligns with the post-truth theme where emotional appeal and personal belief overshadow factual accuracy.

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[103] Larkin, ll. 1539–1363.
[104] Claster, *Sacred Violence*, 194.
[105] Hülya Taflı Düzgün, 'Paiens Unt Dreit? Reversed Dichotomy and the East in Boeve de Haumtone and Bevis of Hampton', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 4 (7 August 2020): 566; Claster, *Sacred Violence*, 194.

The narrative technique in these lines is both concise and emotive, designed to convey a sense of tragedy and injustice, similar to the way the reference to Pope Urban II was employed to legitimise and glorify Richard's crusade. The poet's manipulation of historical facts and figures throughout the romance shows a deliberate effort to craft a narrative that not only glorifies the English and their crusading efforts but also serves to shape the collective memory of these events in a manner that aligns with specific ideological ends. The author's treatment of *RCL* extends beyond mere historical recontextualisation, venturing into the realms of deliberate cultural reengineering. This is not just an act of removing Eleanor of Aquitaine and the pertinent Papal figures to anglicise Richard's lineage and allegiance. It is, more critically, an exercise in narrative sovereignty, where the English identity is meticulously crafted to overshadow its European counterparts.

In this reimagined historical tapestry, the English are not just juxtaposed with the French, Germans, and Greeks; they are placed in a position of unequivocal superiority. The selective portrayal of the French, Germans, and Griffons is significant in this context. Their depiction as subservient or secondary to the English reflects a conscious effort to align the narrative with contemporary notions of English dominance. This alignment is not merely coincidental; it is a calculated move to reinforce the prevailing socio-political ideologies of the time. In doing so, the text serves as a vehicle for the propagation of a certain worldview, one that places England at the centre of the European narrative.

The poet's technique is subtle yet profound; it weaves a story where the prowess of the English is naturalised, their dominance a foregone conclusion. This is not merely historical distortion but an act of cultural assertion. The encounter with Kyng Modard is a striking example:

> *Kyng Modard on knees hym sette,*
> *There Kyng Richard ful fayre he grette,*
> *And sayde, "Sere, I am at thy wille."*
> *Sayde Rychard, "I wole nought but skylle.*
> *With so thou yelde agayn my tresore,*
> *I schal thee love for everemore,*

Love thee and be thy frende."[106]

The act of kneeling carried a potent symbolic meaning of submission and deference in the homage ritual. As François Louis Ganshof states, the vassal would kneel bareheaded and weaponless before placing their hands between the lord's - a posture signifying the vassal's subordinate status.[107] Bisson notes that while kneeling was common practice, it held particular significance when performed by a vassal before a lord of high estate.[108] The fact that the romance depicts King Modard, presumably a powerful ruler himself, kneeling before King Richard suggests a deliberate symbolic portrayal of Richard's authority and supremacy over other monarchs. By having King Modard literally lower himself and kneel, the romance employs the ceremonial act's symbolic meaning of submission to elevate Richard's standing and dominance. Modard's kneeling posture is an overt visual representation of his deference to Richard's exalted lordship and superior power.

This symbolic gesture of a ruler submitting to King Richard exemplifies the narrative strategy of elevating English supremacy, reinforcing the narrative's depiction of Richard's exceptional, unrivalled status. The poet's deliberate use of the homage ritual underscores a broader strategy of cultural and historical manipulation. By embedding these potent symbols within the narrative, the romance not only entertains but also reinforces ideological constructs of power and identity, aligning with the concept of post-truth by prioritising a constructed cultural narrative over historical facts. The act of having a foreign king kneel before Richard is not merely a reflection of individual power dynamics but a broader assertion of English superiority.

This portrayal of Richard's dominance is a crucial aspect of the narrative's post-truth construction. The romance manipulates historical and cultural symbols to construct an idealised version of English history, where Richard's supremacy is portrayed as natural and unquestionable. This narrative choice supports the poet's aim of reinforcing nationalistic pride and validating English dominance, even at the expense of historical accuracy. The emphasis on Richard's unmatched authority through such symbolic acts

[106] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 1599–1605.
[107] François Louis Ganshof, *Feudalism*, trans. Philip Grierson (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), 94.
[108] Thomas Noel Bisson, 'Medieval Lordship', *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 748.

serves to bolster the English identity and pride during a time when such narratives were essential for socio-political cohesion and nationalistic fervour.

Furthermore, the naming of Modard, evocative of the traitorous Mordred from Arthurian legend, intertwines cultural mythology with the historical narrative, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. This intertextual reference, rather than mere literary allusion, serves a strategic purpose. The deliberate association with Mordred transcends historical accuracy for emotional and ideological resonance, glorifying Richard and implicitly vilifying Modard, casting him in a light similar to that of the notorious betrayer in Arthurian tales. In a post-truth context, such a narrative strategy prioritises the creation of a compelling story over factual precision. The manipulation of names and historical parallels serves a clear purpose: it establishes a simplistic moral dichotomy, aligning with the black-and-white portrayals often found within post-truth narratives. This approach reflects the broader method employed in *RCL*, where the emotional engagement of the audience and the reinforcement of specific cultural or ideological views take precedence over nuanced historical truth. Similar strategies can be found in other medieval literature, where mythmaking and legendary narratives were often employed to shape collective memory and national identity, serving the political and ideological agendas of the period.[109]

The interactions between Richard and the leaders of these other nations are particularly telling. They are not depicted as encounters between equals but as inevitable submissions to the overwhelming might and righteousness of the English. The French, Germans, and Greeks, in their deference to Richard, are not just acknowledging his personal valour or the military strength of his forces; they are conceding to a larger narrative of English supremacy. In the scene involving the French king, the narrative goes:

> *The kynge of Fraunce came pryckynge*
> *Ayenst Rycharde, our kynge,*
> *And fell on knees downe of his hors*
> *And bad mercy, for Goddes corps,*
> *For the crowne and for the love*
> *Of Jhesu Cryste, kynge above,*

[109] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 336; Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, 124.

And for the vyage and for the crose,
He should be in gree, and take lose;
And he wolde one hande take,
They sholde amende all the wrake
They that had hym or his
Ony thynge done amys.[110]

The depiction of the French king, a historical rival of England, is strikingly submissive. He dismounts, falls to his knees, and begs Richard for mercy – not only for himself but in the name of their shared religious cause. This desperate plea for reconciliation and the offer of reparations emphasise his weakened position and lack of agency. This portrayal manipulates the historical tension between England and France, casting the French king as utterly powerless before Richard. Rather than an encounter between equals, it reinforces a narrative of English supremacy embedded throughout *RCL*. Within a post-truth framework, this hyperbolic scene shapes audience perceptions: England is not simply militarily strong but the naturally superior force, even when dealing with historical rivals. The French king's desperate concessions, including pledges of reparations, bolstered this image of English dominance and exceptionalism.

The representation of Muslims in medieval Christian literature predates Pope Urban II's call for the First Crusade. Rather than originating with his speech, which included unfounded accusations against Muslims, this depiction has deeper historical roots in the works of various Christian polemicists. With the rise of Islam, Christian theologians engaged in extensive research to comprehend its origins and forged "clever and coherent—although inaccurate—polemics."[111] They debated whether Islam was a sect of Christianity, a heresy, or an entirely distinct religion, leading to diverse interpretations.

While this topic is not the central focus of this thesis, it is important to emphasise that the portrayal of Muslims in romances like *RCL* is not merely a result of poetic license. Instead, it reflects a systematic approach. As Norman Daniel notes, the approaches and goals of medieval writers were quite different from those of theologians. Unlike theologians, poets could not use detailed scholarly analysis without fundamentally

[110] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, 1961–72.
[111] Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 14.

altering their stories and losing the interest of their audience, which was not composed of theological scholars. This freedom from strict analysis often led poets to be indifferent to factual accuracy.[112] This comment underlines the distinction between the scholarly pursuits of theologians and the more narrative-focused, albeit less factual, approach of poets and storytellers.

In the Iberian Peninsula, controlled by Muslims since the eighth century, when the Muslim governors were treated as legitimate rulers, and later reclaimed in the Reconquista, a certain degree of mutual understanding developed between the Spanish and the Muslim Moors.[113] However, in neighbouring France, the chanson de geste genre and the subsequent Middle English romances, which drew inspiration from these French narratives, depicted Muslims in a manner completely at odds with their actual religious practices. This phenomenon may be understood through the lens of post-truth, a concept suggesting that these narratives were shaped more by appeal to emotion and personal belief than by factual accuracy.

In *RCL*, as a Crusade romance, the focus is on the Third Crusade, illustrating the period's ideological and religious fervour. Christopher Tyerman explains the Crusades' fundamental nature, asserting,

> *"There was no strategic reason for Western knights and soldiers to be laboring about in the Judean hills in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. They were there for essentially ideological religious reasons … If you wanted to make a profit, you did not go on Crusade."*[114]

This insight underscores the Crusades as endeavours driven more by spiritual and ideological motives than by material gain. Faced with the substantial economic, social, and political demands of these extensive military campaigns, the Popes had to craft a compelling justification for initiating the Crusades. Central to this rationale was the portrayal of Islam as an adversary in a religiously framed struggle against Christianity. The aim was not merely to reclaim the Holy Land for Christian dominion but to frame

[112] Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de Geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 125.
[113] Olivia Remie Constable, ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 29.
[114] Christopher Tyerman, A New Examination of the Crusades, interview by Sheilah Kast, NPR, 27 February 2005, https://www.npr.org/2005/02/27/4515068/a-new-examination-of-the-crusades.

this endeavour within a broader religious context. Robert the Monk's account of Pope Urban II's call for the First Crusade exemplifies this approach.

> *From the confines of Jerusalem … a horrible tale has gone forth … an accursed race … has invaded the lands of those Christians …. They destroy the altars … circumcise the Christians, and the blood of the circumcision they either spread upon the altars or pour into the vases of the baptismal font. … On whom therefore is the labour of avenging these wrongs … incumbent, if not upon you? … Let the holy sepulchre of the Lord our Saviour, … possessed by unclean nations, … and irreverently polluted with their filthiness.*[115]

In this excerpt, Pope Urban II's speech exemplifies post-truth manipulation by dehumanising Muslims with phrases like *accursed race* and *utterly alienated from God*, effectively demonising them as existential threats to Christianity. This contrasts sharply with historical accounts that highlight the tolerance extended to Christians within Islamic territories.[116] Pope Urban II's graphic descriptions of desecration and sacrilege, while highly exaggerated, strategically played upon deep-seated religious fears to incite outrage and solidify a sense of righteous purpose among his Christian audience.[117] By invoking such inflammatory imagery, Pope Urban II not only sought to unify Christians against a common enemy but also to legitimise the Crusades as a divinely sanctioned mission. This speech is a powerful example of how historical and religious narratives were manipulated to mobilise support for the Crusades, shaping perceptions of the conflict in a way that justified violence and aggression. This aligns with the broader themes in *RCL*, where historical accuracy is often sacrificed to construct an idealised narrative that reinforces notions of English martial and religious superiority. The romance, like Urban II's speech, uses selective and exaggerated portrayals to create a compelling story that serves specific ideological purposes, illustrating the enduring power of post-truth tactics in shaping historical and cultural narratives.

Urban II's speech vividly portrays Islam and Muslims in a light that aligns with the post-truth tactics of the era—using emotionally charged and evocative language to craft a

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[115] Munro, 'Urban and the Crusaders', 5–6.
[116] Ameer Ali Syed, *A Short History of the Saracens: Being a Concise Account of the Rise and Decline of the Saracenic Power and of the Economic, Social and Intellectual Development of the Arab Nation from the Earliest Times to the Destruction of Bagdad, and the Expulsion of the Moors from Spain* (London: Macmillan, 1916), 321–22.
[117] Rollin Stely Armour, *Islam, Christianity, and the West: A Troubled History* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 64.

narrative that goes beyond factual representation. This depiction served to rally support for the Crusades by framing them as a sacred duty, a defence of Christian lands and sanctities against a demonised enemy. Such narratives in the context of the Crusades, as reflected in *RCL*, played a crucial role in shaping the religious and ideological underpinnings of these historical events.

In examining the text of *RCL*, the portrayal of Muslims demonstrates a significant deviation from historical and theological accuracy, particularly in its depiction of Islamic beliefs. This divergence is manifested in the repeated reference to the fictitious deity Termagaunt, a construct with no roots in Islamic theology. These references, embedded within the narrative, are emblematic of the era's post-truth approach, wherein emotionally charged and propagandistic elements overshadow factual representation.

The invocation of Termagaunt occurs in various contexts throughout the romance, each serving to reinforce the erroneous depiction of Muslims as polytheists. The first instance is found in the words of the Archbishop of Pisa, who disparagingly mentions Markes Manferaunt's alleged belief in "Mahoun and Termagaunt."[118] This associates Islam with fabricated polytheism, a tactic likely aimed at discrediting the Markes by aligning him with perceived religious falsehoods. Sir Galabre, a Saracen emir, exclaims, "… 'Creaunt, /For Mahoun and Termagaunt!" during a battle.[119] This cry, ostensibly in the face of defeat, further perpetuates the fallacy of Muslim idolatry, portraying a Saracen warrior invoking a non-existent deity alongside Muhammad. The third instance is found in Richard's sceptical response to a Saracen informing him about a caravan, "So as thou bylevest on Termagaunt,/Tel me now what folk it is,/I wene it is but al feyntys."[120] This retort not only casts doubt on the Saracen's words but also implicitly questions the validity of his religious beliefs, equating them with deceit. Finally, the portrayal culminates in a scene where, upon Richard's attack, "There aros no blysseful song, /But to Termagaunt and Mahoun/They cryede faste, and to Plotoun."[121] This amalgamation of deities, including a Roman god, further distorts the Islamic doctrine of monotheism.

[118] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, l. 2714.
[119] Larkin, ll. 5359–5360.
[120] Larkin, ll. 6387–6390.
[121] Larkin, ll. 6474–6476.

The depiction of Islam as a polytheistic and morally corrupt faith aligns with broader narrative strategies of the Crusades, aimed at vilifying the religion to justify the Christian cause. These portrayals, though fictional and historically inaccurate, significantly influenced Christian perceptions of Muslims, mirroring the rhetoric of Pope Urban II. The narrative, entrenched in the post-truth tactics of the era, manipulates these distortions to support the Crusader agenda, thereby demonstrating the profound impact of storytelling on public opinion and historical narratives.

Historically, Christian doctrine provided a framework for warfare through the concept of *just war*, as outlined by Augustine. This required a just cause, legitimate authority, and a goal of righting a wrong.[122] However, the Crusades mark a significant departure from this doctrine. To justify these campaigns, the church constructed post-truth narratives, demonising Islam as a heretical faith and framing the conflict in terms of divine authority. These contentious images of Muhammad, as both an idol and an impostor, have been pivotal in European narratives about Islam, shaping perceptions well beyond the medieval period. Tolan articulates this phenomenon:

> *Muhammad has always been at the centre of European discourse on Islam. For medieval crusade chroniclers, he was either a golden idol that the "Saracens" adored or a shrewd heresiarch… both these depictions made him the root of Saracen error and implicitly justified the crusade to wrest the Holy Land from Saracen control.*[123]

This distortion of religious figures mirrors accusations Pope Urban II levelled against the Seljuks, branding them as an "accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God." St. Bernard of Clairvaux furthered this rhetoric with disturbing declarations that "a Christian glories in the death of a pagan (i.e. Muslim) because Christ is glorified."[124]

In *RCL*, the portrayal of Muhammad diverges starkly from Islamic teachings, where he is revered as a prophet, not divine. One of the five pillars of Islam is shahada, the declaration of one's faith. It translates into "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."[125] This misrepresentation reflects the larger narrative strategy of the

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[122] Armour, *Islam, Christianity, and the West*, 67.
[123] John Victor Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 2.
[124] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 113.
[125] David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 320.

Crusades, where such distortions of Islamic figures were instrumental in rallying support for the Christian cause. By examining the depiction of Muhammad as a deity in the text, the analysis uncovers another facet of the narrative's distortion, shedding light on how these misrepresentations influenced perceptions of Islam and contributed to the historical narrative of the Crusades.

The narrative weaves in various instances where Muhammad is depicted not as the prophet of Islam but as a deity, a profound deviation from Islamic monotheism. In one scene, the destruction of the temple of Apollo and the burning of an idol of Mahoun, symbolise a conflation of Islamic and pagan figures, misrepresenting Islamic faith.[126] This theme continues with the siege of Ebedy, where a Chief Emir's conditional surrender hinges on forsaking their god, *Mahoun*.[127] This dialogue falsely elevates Muhammad to divine status, framing the acceptance of Christianity as renouncing a fabricated polytheistic belief.

The text further perpetuates distortions by depicting Emir's fighters making sacrifices to *Mahoun and to Jubiterre*, an act that starkly contradicts Islamic teachings and furthers the narrative of religious antagonism.[128] At Arsuf, the text contrasts the destinies of Christian and Saracen soldiers, with fallen Saracens said to join *Mahoun and Appolyn* while Christian casualties ascend to Christ.[129] This portrayal perpetuates the notion of Islam as akin to ancient paganism.

The text continues to misrepresent Islam through descriptions of Richard's actions at Saladin's pavilion as defiance towards their god *Mahoun*, and by having the Saracens, after capturing Gatrys, identify their only lord as "Mahoun, here god, and Appolyn."[130] In a climactic battle scene, a king's defeat is noted with the remark, "that hym halp nought hys God, Mahoun."[131]

These repeated portrayals in *RCL* demonstrate significant distortion of Islamic theology and serve a broader ideological purpose within the Crusades. By depicting Muhammad

[126] Larkin, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ll. 4060–4061.
[127] Larkin, ll. 4421–4425.
[128] Larkin, l. 4451.
[129] Larkin, ll. 5029–5032.
[130] Larkin, ll. 5126, 6252.
[131] Larkin, l. 6484.

as a deity, the text effectively supports the Crusader cause. It exemplifies how storytelling can be weaponised to shape public opinion and historical narratives, often at the expense of religious truth and understanding.

Alongside the depiction of the fictitious deity Termagaunt and the erroneous portrayal of Muhammad as a god, there is a notable inclusion of deities from the Roman Pantheon, presented in contexts implying their worship by Muslim characters. This represents a further layer of the text's distortion of Islamic beliefs, reinforcing the narrative strategy of the Crusades that sought to portray Islam as a polytheistic and culturally alien religion.

The narrative features several instances where figures like Apollo, a deity from Roman mythology, are inappropriately associated with Islamic practices. For instance, when Saladin invites Richard to convert to Islam, and there is uncertainty about the True Cross, Richard orders a mass execution of Saracens in Acre, proclaiming a defiant intention to inform Saladin of his allegiance to Appolyn.[132] This scene not only highlights the brutal reality of the Crusades but also demonstrates a deliberate conflation of Islamic and pagan figures, furthering the narrative of Islam as akin to ancient paganism. Similarly, in Sudan Tully, the text describes Richard taking over the *temple of Appolyn*, a portrayal that falsely aligns Islamic worship with the veneration of a Roman god.[133] This conflation serves to deepen the perceived religious and cultural divide between Christianity and Islam. In Nineveh, messengers question the power of Jhesu versus Jubyter in Saladin's message, suggesting a comparison between Christian and purported Islamic deities, further entrenching the narrative of religious antagonism.[134] Another instance occurs when Richard sends a message to Saladin, disrespectfully referring to Appolyn as Saladin's god.[135] This misrepresentation not only distorts Islamic beliefs but also serves as a tool of defiance and psychological warfare.

RCL deliberately misrepresents Islamic beliefs in three ways: inventing the deity Termagaunt, depicting Muhammad (Mahoun) as a god, and including figures from the Greek and Roman pantheon. This creates a false image of Islam as polytheistic and

[132] Larkin, ll. 3743–3744.
[133] Larkin, l. 4060.
[134] Larkin, ll. 5499–5500.
[135] Larkin, ll. 6919–6921.

barbaric. This strategy, which can be called infobesity, aims to confuse the audience, making it hard to distinguish facts from the romance's distortions. In the post-truth environment of the Crusades, these distortions serve to justify brutal actions and shape public perception to support the war effort. For example, after ordering captured prisoners to be executed, Richard taunts Saladin with a reference to the pagan god Apollo, falsely implying that Islam is a similarly false religion. The introduction of Termagaunt as a fictitious deity illustrates the first level of this narrative distortion. This entirely fabricated figure is a strategic invention, serving to vilify the Muslim other by portraying them as idolatrous, in stark contrast to Christian monotheism. The second layer of distortion is the depiction of Mahoun, a distorted version of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, misrepresented as a deity. This misrepresentation is not only a gross inaccuracy in terms of Islamic theology but also serves to deepen the perceived religious and cultural divide between Christianity and Islam. Finally, the inclusion of the Greek and Roman pantheon adds a third dimension to this narrative strategy, further entrenching the image of Islam as akin to ancient paganism and far removed from Christian religious practices.

Tolan asserts that "The idolatrous other is an essential foil for Christian virtue. If the image of idolatry comes in part from the reading of the ancients, perhaps it also stems from a projection of Christian practice onto the imagined enemy."[136] Tolan's analysis suggests that the portrayal of Muslims in *RCL* is less about accurate representation and more about constructing a convenient foil to Christian righteousness. The narrative's construction of Muslim characters, steeped in a complex web of infobesity, reflects the post-truth tactics of the era, where the emotional impact and persuasive power of the story take precedence over factual accuracy. The use of infobesity in *RCL* creates a narrative environment where the truth is overwhelmed by the volume of misinformation. This approach not only perpetuates misunderstandings about Islamic beliefs but also aligns with the medieval audience's existing biases, thus reinforcing the justification for the Crusades. The text's employment of post-truth tactics through these three categories of religious distortion demonstrates a calculated effort to shape the narrative in line with contemporary socio-political narratives.

[136] Tolan, *Saracens*, 156.

RCL offers a compelling case study for examining the interplay between post-truth narratives, nationalism, and historical representation in medieval literature. Through an analysis of the text, this chapter has unveiled the complex tapestry of distortions, manipulations, and strategic omissions woven throughout the narrative. The text's departure from historical accuracy emerges as a calculated endeavour driven by the prevailing socio-political climate and ideological imperatives of the time. By selectively reshaping the portrayal of King Richard I and the events surrounding the Crusades, the narrative actively participates in the construction of a distinctly English national identity. This process involves the deliberate exclusion of French influences, the fabrication of alternative lineages, and the exaltation of English military prowess over rival European powers.

Furthermore, the romance's portrayal of Muslims and Islam exemplifies the era's reliance on post-truth tactics to justify the Crusades. Through the invention of deities like Termagaunt, the misrepresentation of the Prophet Muhammad as a pagan idol, and the conflation of Islamic practices with Roman polytheism, the narrative crafts a distorted image of the Muslim other. This strategic distortion, facilitated by a phenomenon termed infobesity, enabled the dissemination of misinformation on a massive scale, shaping public perceptions and bolstering support for the Crusades. Ultimately, *RCL* stands as a testament to the profound influence of storytelling in shaping historical narratives and collective memory. By unravelling the intricate web of manipulations and distortions woven throughout the text, this analysis sheds light on the nuanced mechanisms through which literature can be leveraged to serve specific ideological agendas, reminding us of the enduring power of narratives to mould perceptions and shape cultural identities.

CHAPTER THREE

A POST-TRUTH READING: *THE KING OF TARS*

KT, a relatively concise Middle English romance of 1241 lines, reflects the complex social, religious, and cultural landscape of the early 14th century. Written during the ongoing conflict of the Crusades, *KT* constructs a fictional realm deeply influenced by the tensions between Christendom and the Islamic world.[137] Themes of forced conversion, racialised depictions of Muslims, and the use of religious spectacle to manipulate perception are central to the narrative. *KT* presents a marriage between a Christian princess and a Muslim Sultan, their child born as a lump of flesh. This image becomes a metaphor for the clash of faiths and their perceived incompatibility, with the emphasis placed on reinforcing the supposed superiority of Christianity. The romance portrays Christian beliefs about baptism's miraculous power, suggesting that it is a force capable of enacting transformations that defy logic, a spectacle employed to bolster claims of religious dominance. Through this lens, the romance arguably reflects how the European Christian audience likely grappled with the otherness of Islam, their perceptions shaped by a blend of limited theological understanding, stereotypes reflecting the anxieties of the period, and ultimately, a narrative asserting Christian supremacy.

KT has been the subject of significant scholarly attention in recent decades, with many critics exploring its representation of religious and racial identities. The central focus has

[137] Lilian Herlands Hornstein, 'The Historical Background of the King of Tars', *Speculum* 16, no. 4 (1941): 405–6.

been the text's own depiction of the conversion of the Saracen Sultan of Damascus to Christianity, which is accompanied by a miraculous change in his skin colour from black to white, as described in these lines: "His hide that blac and lothely was / Al white bicom thurth Godes gras."[138] Scholars have analysed how this episode projects an essentialised link between religious affiliation and biological markers of identity. Suzanne Conklin Akbari notes that the Sultan's "newly whitened flesh" represents the efficacy of his conversion, strengthening his belief in Christianity.[139] Similarly, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen sees it as "a striking example of the inextricable bodily link between Saracen race and Saracen masculinity."[140]

However, Siobhain Calkin argues persuasively that the text takes a more nuanced and complicated approach to the categorization and discernment of individuals' group affiliations.[141] The apparent ease with which the Sultan's conversion is signalled by his bodily transformation is undercut by the earlier depiction of the formless, indeterminate lump born to the Christian princess and the Sultan before his conversion – "a shapeless lump of flesh with neither 'blood' nor 'bone' nor 'limbs.'"[142] This birth represents a radical integration of Christian and Saracen that problematises clear distinctions between the two groups.[143]

Heng sees the text as articulating "a theory that an essence resides within Christianity that has the power to trump ordinary human biology."[144] The romance thus imagines religion as operating in an "interzonal space in which culture and biology overlap."[145] From this perspective, the tale can be read as "an anxious response to the perceived threats posed by the indeterminacy and undifferentiation represented by the birth of the 'lump.'"[146]

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[138] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 922–923.
[139] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 190.
[140] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1 January 2001): 121.
[141] Siobhain Bly Calkin, 'Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization, and the King of Tars', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104, no. 2 (1 April 2005): 220.
[142] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 228.
[143] Calkin, 'Marking Religion on the Body', 226–30.
[144] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 229.
[145] Heng, 229.
[146] Heng, 229.

Building on these insights, this thesis argues that *KT* exemplifies what could be termed a post-truth dynamic with regard to identity categories and group distinctions. While initially "problematis[ing] the relationship between categorization and physical appearance," the text ultimately promotes "a fantasy of easy religious categorization according to biology."[147] This shifting, self-contradictory perspective resonates with contemporary post-truth narratives subjectively reconstructing facts to create comforting fictions buttressing in-group solidarity.

This thesis explores how *KT* speaks to our current era of heightened polarisation and the deployment of misinformation/disinformation in reinforcing oppositional group identities. The romance's anxious attempts to stabilise identitarian boundaries and hierarchies through religious essentialism could be contextualised in relation to modern far-right discourses around white/Christian supremacy and the racialisation of the Muslim other.[148]

Significantly, this Middle English work's ambivalent, contradictory approach to making sense of identities and differences reveals the historical roots of post-truth strategies and the enduring anxieties about unstable boundaries that continue to shape today's political and cultural landscape. As Heng perceptively argues, the indeterminate nature of the lump child born to the Christian princess and Muslim sultan threatens to undermine the opposition between Christian and Saracen identities upon which Christian self-definition relies, and the text ultimately seeks to reassert clear distinctions.[149] A post-truth reading thus allows scholars to re-engage critically with how *KT* both challenges and reinscribes the racialisation of religious difference across history.

The composition of *KT* in the early 14th century places it within the complex legacy of the Crusades. This centuries-long conflict waned during this period, with the loss of the Holy Land and the gradual collapse of the Crusader States. Riley-Smith and Throop observe that this loss caused "real grief… within various Christian communities," hinting at a deep and complex emotional wound within the European psyche.[150] Building on

[147] Calkin, 'Marking Religion on the Body', 231.
[148] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 230.
[149] Heng, 228–29.
[150] Riley-Smith and Throop, *The Crusades*, 282.

Edward Said's notion of Islam as a lasting trauma for Europe following the Crusades, *KT* utilises the symbolism of conflict and religious conversion over realistic depictions of battles to offer a comforting narrative that addresses this trauma.[151] This narrative likely resonated with a European audience aware of Christendom's internal power struggles. By portraying a clear and simple victory over a demonised enemy, *KT* might serve to reinforce a sense of Christian unity and the righteousness of those in power. Through post-truth elements, the romance reinforces a sense of Christian superiority and justifies past violence. It demonises Muslims, simplifies the conflict, and presents a fantastical vision of complete victory through conversion. This selective portrayal shapes audience perceptions of the Islamic world through emotional appeals and ideological victories rather than nuanced portrayals of history.

While religious fervour undeniably fuelled the Crusades, viewing them solely as a battle of faith would be a simplification. Political ambition, territorial expansion, and the desire for wealth were deeply intertwined with religious motivations. Riley-Smith and Throop point out that the Crusades not only united Christians against a common foe but also fuelled competition for dominance within Europe. Many monarchs leveraged crusading ambitions to solidify national identities and bolster their own power.[152] European leaders sought to control trade routes and expand their kingdoms, while Muslim rulers aimed to consolidate power in the region. This underlying power struggle led to devastating brutality on both sides. Towns were besieged and razed, civilians were massacred, and prisoners were tortured or sold into slavery. Housley offers a chilling example from the period. He describes both the brutal Mamluk capture of Acre in 1291 and King Charles II's destruction of the Muslim community of Lucera in 1300, an act motivated by political aims and the desire to appease the Pope even more than purely religious animosity.[153] It is within this context of complex motivations and brutal warfare that texts like *KT* emerge. The romance does not entirely omit the violence against the Saracens, as evidenced by the following lines:

> *Thritti thousende ther were take*
> *Of Sarrains bothe blo and blac*

[151] Said, *Orientalism*, 59.
[152] Riley-Smith and Throop, *The Crusades*, 283.
[153] Housley, 'The Crusades and Islam', 190–91.

And don in his prisoun.

…

And thai that wald be cristned nought,

Into a stede thai weren ybrought

A mile withouten the toun

And Cristen men withouten wene

Striken off her hevedes al bidene.[154]

While the romance clearly acknowledges violence, it frames the slaughter as an act of religious duty, even a pious one. The swiftness of the beheadings *(al bidene)* and the lack of hesitation on those committing the acts *(withouten wene)* suggest that these killings are viewed as both necessary and morally justified. The language used in these lines frames the slaughter as a necessary and righteous act of religious duty. The swift and decisive nature of the executions is underscored by phrases such as al bidene *(all at once)* and withouten wene *(without hesitation)*. These expressions convey a sense of moral clarity and urgency, suggesting that the killings are justified and required by divine mandate. There is no exploration of the humanity of the victims or any acknowledgement of the ethical complexities involved. This selective portrayal promotes the idea that violence against those who refuse Christian conversion is righteous, obscuring the brutal reality of forced religious change. In this sense, *KT* functions as a post-truth text, as it manipulates the narrative to reinforce a particular ideological stance, presenting a selective and skewed version of events that supports a narrative of Christian superiority and justified violence. This strategic shaping of perceptions aligns with the broader goals of crusading propaganda, which sought to rally support and legitimise the Christian cause by demonising the enemy and glorifying their own actions.

"[The Pope] preached a sermon that almost certainly emphasized Christ's sacrifice on the cross and explained how a crusader would follow Christ and serve and repay Him through his efforts on earth."[155] This type of church-sanctioned propaganda was instrumental in fuelling the Crusades, framing the conflict as one driven by religious zeal and righteous action. Housley argues that this emphasis on demonising Muslims and portraying them as an existential threat was a calculated strategy: "… a belief in a demonic and

[154] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 1219–1229.
[155] Jonathan Phillips, *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 2009), 167.

dehumanised Islamic identity shaped perceptions and conduct towards the Muslims…"[156] It downplayed the complex, self-serving actions of Christian leaders with a focus on portraying their struggle as a divinely sanctioned battle against evil. While Christian voices at times question the true piety of those involved, as illustrated by the quote, "For God's sake, good people, pray to our Lord, beg him to give the commanders of this host their hearts back…," the overarching narrative of Crusade propaganda served to justify violence and garner support for a holy conflict.[157] This manipulation of public perception demonstrates a core element of post-truth: shaping opinion through emotional appeals and a simplified, fear-mongering image of the other rather than a balanced understanding of the conflict.

During the early 14th century, the Muslim world remained shrouded in mystery for most Europeans. Limited contact, hazardous travel, and restricted cultural exchange meant the average person rarely interacted with Muslims directly. Consequently, European understanding of Islam was heavily shaped by biased sources and preconceptions. The Church played a dominant role, filtering information through doctrinal lenses that emphasised the heretical nature of Islam. Tolan argues that, far from mere ignorance, these portrayals were often deliberate strategies for constructing Islam as fundamentally incompatible with Christian belief. Travellers' tales, often embellished for dramatic effect, painted the Islamic world as exotic, mysterious, and even threatening. Tolan notes that even authors who possessed some knowledge of Islamic sources still used distorted depictions, emphasising a conscious effort at demonisation rather than simply a lack of information.[158] This heavily manipulated information fuelled a potent sense of otherness, justifying both fear and aggression towards Muslims. Analysing *KT* through a post-truth lens exposes a romance deeply influenced by these prevailing biases. The narrative likely presents a warped image of Islamic beliefs and practices designed to serve specific goals within the context of Europe's ongoing religious and political conflicts.

The limited European understanding of Islam during the Crusades was not merely a product of ignorance but was often fuelled by a deliberate misrepresentation of core

[156] Norman Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, Contesting the Past (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 37.
[157] Phillips, *Holy Warriors*, 247.
[158] Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 37.

Islamic beliefs. Fundamental tenets were misunderstood or intentionally twisted to demonise Muslims and bolster Christian dominance. One striking example is the slur *Mahoun*, a derogatory term for the Prophet Muhammad. This insult not only disrespected a central figure of Islam but also promoted a false image of Muslims as polytheistic idol-worshippers – a cardinal sin from a Christian perspective. Despite Islam's emphasis on one God (Allah), Europeans frequently misrepresented it as a form of idolatry. As Akbari observes, accusations of idolatry aimed to represent [Muslims] as polytheists who worship idols… allow[ing] them to be lumped together with the heathens and pagans of Biblical and classical literature.[159] This misunderstanding, whether intentional or not, delegitimised Islam and widened the perceived theological gulf between the two faiths. Tolan adds that this distortion served the Crusade's agenda, as portraying Muslims as pagans offered a convenient justification for violence.[160] Religious teachings and propaganda amplified aspects of Islam that seemed most different from Christianity, selectively exaggerating or misrepresenting dietary restrictions, prayer practices, and social customs. This emphasis on otherness manufactured fear and prejudice, aligning with the core tenet of post-truth: manipulating information to demonise a rival group and justify violence in the name of supposed religious superiority.

The limited and often biased understanding of Islam in Europe during the Crusades was further complicated by the use of the term Saracen. Initially, specific to certain Arabic peoples, it became a catch-all label for Muslim opponents in the Crusades. As Akbari notes, this broad application dehumanised a diverse population and erased cultural and regional distinctions within the Islamic world, fostering a perception of a monolithic enemy.[161] By grouping Arabs, Turks, Persians, and others under the Saracen label together, Europeans obscured the rich tapestry of Islamic civilisation, contributing to the process of othering. This deliberate simplification made Muslims seem fundamentally different, even alien. As Tolan observes, this portrayal aligned with the Crusade's agenda, as demonising a pagan other helped justify religious violence.[162]

[159] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 206.
[160] Tolan, *Saracens*, 110.
[161] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 171.
[162] Tolan, *Saracens*, 110.

While *KT* falls within the romance genre, romances during this period were not simply a form of escapist entertainment. They often reflected the anxieties, social concerns, and political realities of the times, particularly for audiences within courtly circles. These romances could uphold power structures, promote specific ideologies, or even subtly critique the existing order. It is important to recognise that literature, including the romances, actively shapes perceptions of the world rather than merely reflecting it. During the medieval period, stories played an especially significant role in shaping how audiences understood themselves and the world around them. For those less travelled or with limited education about other cultures, narratives like *KT* might form a primary source of knowledge about the Islamic world and Muslims. This has significant implications when we consider the post-truth elements the romance might contain.

This perspective challenges simplistic views like R.W. Southern's Age of Ignorance notion, demonstrating that even entertaining tales could instil harmful misconceptions about Islam and its adherents. Southern argues that the early Western understanding of Islam was profoundly limited due to a lack of direct contact, reliance on Biblical interpretations, and the influence of fear in those under Muslim rule. He claims, "They knew virtually nothing of Islam as a religion."[163] He highlights how scholars drew on the figure of Ishmael to cast Saracens in opposition to Christianity and how some Spanish writers interpreted Islam in apocalyptic terms.[164] While acknowledging the limitations faced by early scholars, it's crucial to recognise the post-truth dynamic within popular narratives that actively shaped negative stereotypes.

Highlighting a key limitation of Southern's notion, Akbari notes that even popular forms engaged in distortion: "The main thing that sets [Muslims] apart is their religion… [T]he Muslims of the chansons de geste are polytheistic idolaters."[165] This deliberate misrepresentation, also highlighted by Tolan, served to demonise: "[They] present Muhammad as an object of derision: magician, astrologer, and sex maniac who uses bogus miracles to hoodwink his people into cleaving to a depraved and ridiculous cult."[166]

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[163] Richard William Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 14.
[164] Southern, 16–26.
[165] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 206.
[166] Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 37.

This manipulation of information within entertaining tales could mould worldviews, solidify prejudices, and justify actions based on falsehoods.

Middle English romances were characterised by their use of spectacle, conflict, and the potential for miraculous events. These aspects were intended to elicit a powerful emotional reaction from readers, often emphasising sentiment over analytical thought. This trend can be observed in the development of *KT*. The comparison between the earlier *Reimchronik* version and the expanded Middle English romance version exemplifies how the later English adaptation transforms the original story into a more overtly religious and propagandistic narrative designed to elicit emotional responses and reinforce ideological biases. The *Reimchronik* version is shorter, containing only 255 lines, and centred on the main storyline of conversion. It focuses on the pagan king marrying a Christian princess, the birth of their strange child, and the child's baptism leading to the king's conversion. This straightforward narrative emphasises the core theme of religious conversion without much embellishment.[167] In contrast, the Middle English romance greatly expands and embellishes the story, adding elements designed to evoke strong emotional responses and reinforce a sense of Christian piety. This version stretches the narrative to over 1200 lines, adding numerous expansions and notable changes aimed at turning it into "a pietistic romance."[168] It plays up miraculous divine interventions, portrays Muslims solely as antagonists, and promotes Christian supremacy. The Middle English romance functions as ideological propaganda by amplifying certain plot points, characters, and themes compared to the earlier version. Its literary embellishments provoke visceral reactions from readers, solidifying an us-versus-them mentality that legitimises violence against the subjugated Muslim other. This transformation aligns with the power of romances to shape perceptions and solidify biases. By portraying Muslims solely as antagonists and divine intervention as always favouring the Christian side, romances like *KT* could reinforce a simplistic worldview that justified violence and demonised the other. This selective portrayal not only distorts historical realities but also manipulates emotional responses to serve specific ideological purposes.

[167] Loomis, *Mediaeval Romance In England*, 45.
[168] Loomis, 45.

The Middle English romance *KT* frames the conflict between a Christian king, his daughter, and a Muslim sultan as a battle of irreconcilable religious differences. The romance strategically amplifies this divide, using inflammatory rhetoric and emotionally charged language to portray Islam negatively. This portrayal is a prime example of post-truth manipulation, characteristic of Crusades-era storytelling. *KT* distorts religious beliefs, simplifies complex conflicts, and prioritises emotional impact over historical accuracy. By demonising Muslim characters, the romance constructs a monstrous antagonist, justifying violence and reinforcing Christian unity. Examining these manipulations exposes how the text contributes to a broader discourse shaped by Crusade-era anxieties.

Thai seyd, "Sir, the king of Tars
Of wicked wordes is nought scars.
'Hethen hounde' he gan thee calle;
And ar he give his douhter thee tille,
Thine hert blod he will spille,
And thine barouns alle."
When the soudan this wordes herd
Also a wilde bore he ferd.
His robe he rent adoun;
…
His here he rent of heved and berd;
He schuld venge him with his swerd,
He swore bi Seyn Mahoun.[169]

This scene reinforces the romance's biased portrayal of Muslims as inherently violent and prone to irrational anger. Instead of measured diplomacy or seeking clarification, the Sultan's reaction is immediate and purely emotional. His tearing of clothes and hair symbolizes an inability to contain his rage, depicting him as almost animalistic in response to a perceived insult. Interestingly, the Sultan's oath invokes Saint Mahoun, a European misunderstanding of the prophet Muhammad. This detail highlights how the romance distorts the Muslim faith for the Christian audience. It subtly associates Islam with paganism to solidify the otherness of the Sultan for the Christian audience. The passage serves a clear propagandistic function within the text, justifying Christian

[169] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 91–102.

violence as a righteous response to the easily provoked, barbaric Saracen. This aligns with the crude stereotypes of Muslims presented in Western popular literature, as noted by Dorothee Metlitzki, who points out that the lack of direct contact with Islamic cultures fuelled reliance on such tropes.[170] The use of religious oaths underscores the religious tension and conflict between Christians and Muslims in the text.

The medieval romance *KT* exemplifies post-truth manipulation, perpetuating harmful stereotypes of Muslims and constructing them as an existential threat. This manipulation is evident in the false insult attributed to the Christian King of Tars and the calculated amplification of the Sultan's rage in response. These distortions strategically align with contemporary anxieties surrounding the Crusades and function as what Metlitzki terms "propaganda and psychological warfare."[171] The romance deliberately fabricates an insult from *KT*, who peacefully rejects the Sultan's conversion proposal, providing a false pretext for aggression and reinforcing negative stereotypes of Muslims as inherently hostile. This aligns with a post-truth framework, where the audience is manipulated to perceive even peaceful interactions as signs of inherent Muslim aggression. Given the audience's limited knowledge of Islam, the romance fuels fear and constructs the Muslim other as a threat based on the fabricated insult delivered by the messengers. The portrayal of the Sultan's uncontrollable rage further amplifies the stereotype of Muslims as irrational and prone to violence, implicitly justifying violence against them. The following lines, in which the Princess rejects the Sultan, present a one-sided historical and cultural narrative central to post-truth manipulation:

> *Right be the self messangers*
> *That com fro the soudan fers*
> *This wordes he him sent:*
> *That sche leved nought on his maners,*
> *Sche nold nought leten hir preiers*
> *To God omnipotent.*
> *He bad him tak another thought,*
> *For of his douhter no tit him nought*

[170] Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 167.
[171] Metlitzki, 188.

For tresore no for rent.[172]

This sequence demonstrates the power of post-truth narratives in two ways. First, it manipulates the audience to view the Muslim Sultan as irrationally violent. Second, it strategically invents a pretext for hostility and amplifies emotional responses to portray Muslims as inherently dangerous. In a Crusade-era context, this would justify a Christian response for the audience. The majority of readers likely lacked personal experience with Muslims. By depicting them as violent and demonised Saracens, the romance reinforces harmful stereotypes, potentially influencing support for Crusade-era conflicts. In essence, this type of writing frames Muslims as an existential threat, thus making the audience susceptible to the rhetoric justifying the violent defence of the Christian world.[173]

That blac hounde hir was folweing.
Thurth might of Jhesu, Heven king,
Spac to hir in manhede
In white clothes als a knight,
And seyd to hir, 'Mi swete wight,
No tharf thee nothing drede
Of Ternagaunt no of Mahoun.
Thi Lord that suffred passioun
Schal help thee at thi nede.'
And when the maiden was awaked,
For drede of that, wel sore sche quaked,
For love of her swevening.[174]

The dream sequence exemplifies a manipulative portrayal of Christianity as the sole source of comfort and safety against a demonised other – Islam. This strategy reflects the prevailing negative views of Islam during the Middle English period, fuelled by the Crusades and limited cross-cultural understanding. The terrifying *blac hounde* representing Islam stands in stark contrast to the benevolent Christ figure, reinforcing a stark division between the Christian and Islamic worlds.[175] However, as Chandler notes,

[172] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 73–81.
[173] Norman Daniel, 'Crusade Propaganda', in *A History of the Crusades. Volume 6: The Impact of the Crusades on Europe*, ed. Harry W. Hazard et al. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 39–97.
[174] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 445–456.
[175] Jamie Friedman, 'Making Whiteness Matter: The King of Tars', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (April 2015): 57–58.

there is an element of hope strategically woven into this fearmongering. The hound's transformation, while incomplete, foreshadows the possibility of redemption through conversion.[176] This reinforces the Christian worldview and the belief in Christianity's absolute superiority for the Medieval audience, further manipulating them into supporting efforts like the Crusades. This nuanced manipulation demonstrates a key aspect of post-truth narratives. While the romance outwardly demonises Islam, the dream hints at a path to resolution through conversion. This reinforces a belief in Christianity's dominance, but also offers a sense of control for the audience – even the most monstrous representations of Islam can be contained and shaped by the power of Christian faith.

The invention of Ternagaunt as a false deity and distorted portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad as Mahoun perpetuate a distorted us vs. them mentality typical in medieval Western discourse. As Svetlana Loutchitskaja observes, chroniclers frequently equated Islam with paganism as a means of othering Muslims and justifying Christian dominance: "The world is divided for Western authors into two parts: on one side, the enemies of Christ, the unbelievers, and the infidels; on the other, and representing a praiseworthy public, the soldiers of Christ and the faithful."[177] The text vilifies Islam not through direct description but by positioning its symbols in opposition to those of Christianity. Peter Hugoe Matthews' comments on Saussure highlights the mechanism at work: negative meanings are generated by emphasising differences from the symbolic norm – in this case, Christianity's associations of goodness, light, et cetera. This strategy works even if the audience has little firsthand knowledge of Islam, as it relies on internal contrasts within the text's own symbolic system.[178]

The Princess's fear of these invented figures, juxtaposed with the comfort Jesus offers in the dream, manipulates the reader's emotions. It suggests that even conversion to Islam cannot guarantee safety or peace, implicitly promoting Christianity as the superior religion. Furthermore, the portrayal of Christianity as the sole source of comfort plays on

[176] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, 62.
[177] Svetlana Loutchitskaja, 'L'image des musulmans dans les chroniques des croisades', *Le Moyen Age* CV, no. 3 (1999): 721–22. ("Le monde est divisé pour les auteurs occidentaux en deux parties : d'un côté les inimici Christi, increduli et infideles ; de l'autre les Christi milites et fideles constituant un laudabilis populus.")
[178] Peter Hugoe Matthews, *A Short History of Structural Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

the anxieties of the lewed audience.[179] By suggesting that true peace is unattainable outside of Christianity, the text reinforces the idea of Islam as a threatening other, capitalising on the anxieties of the audience, much like the *lewed* audience of *RCL*, who were similarly susceptible to such manipulation.

> *Than seyd the soudan to that may,*
> *"Thou most bileve opon mi lay*
> *And knele now here adoun*
> *And forsake thi fals lay*
> *That thou hast leved on mani a day,*
> *And anour Seyn Mahoun!*
> *And certes, bot thou wilt anon,*
> *Thi fader Y schal with wer slon*
> *Bi Jovin and Plotoun!*
> *And bi Mahoun and Ternagant*
> *Ther schal no man ben his waraunt*
> *Empour no king with croun."*[180]

The Sultan's demand that the princess abandon her fals lay in Christianity and worship Seyn Mahoun and other pagan gods underscores the coercive pressure she faces and serves as a prime example of the romance's manipulative portrayal of Islam. His demeaning language, labelling her faith as false, immediately establishes a hostile, biased perspective that demonises her religious identity. This reflects the negative stereotypes of Islam prevalent during this period across much of Christian Europe.

Furthermore, the demand to forsake is not simply about belief; it targets the Princess's entire Christian identity. This mirrors how propaganda manipulates identities within historical conflicts, aiming to replace the enemy's values with those of the dominant power structure. The act of kneeling signifies submission, forcing the Princess into a performance of conversion. This visual manipulation aims to convince the audience of her transformation into a Saracen, even if her inner beliefs remain unchanged.

The deliberate reference to Seyn Mahoun aligns with Tolan's analysis of how authors of this period misrepresented Islam to reinforce its vilification.[181] This scene exemplifies

[179] Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, 167.
[180] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 466–477.
[181] Tolan, *Saracens*, 111.

manipulative tactics common across propaganda. By establishing Islam as other, false, and threatening, *KT* fuels fear and subtly justifies future conflict or aggression in the name of Christian dominance.

The distortion relies on reducing complex Islamic monotheism to a set of easily vilified idols. This portrayal sets the stage for the princess's forced actions, where she is coerced into the performative act of kissing the idols. The princess's forced performance highlights the manipulative power of the post-truth atmosphere. While her inner beliefs remain ambiguous, as Daniel suggests, authors prioritised shaping a desired narrative over genuine representation. In this scene, the outward performance of conversion, however coerced, becomes the truth that shapes the audience's impression, reinforcing the Sultan's power and the romance's demonising agenda.

This deliberate misrepresentation of Islam, with its focus on the performative act of kissing the idols, exploits the audience's limited knowledge and reinforces the narrative of Islam as a barbaric and idolatrous religion antithetical to Christianity:

> *... an author who knew the facts and respected them might feel that he could not pretend that an idol of Muhammad stood in the mosque, but he could still speak of 'the idol of abomination, that is, the mosque of Muhammad', thus avoiding any false statements while maintaining the traditional attitude.*[182]

Daniel notes that some authors may have deliberately employed ambiguous or misleading language to reinforce negative stereotypes about Islam. By perpetuating stereotypes and half-truths, authors could sway public opinion and garner support for their endeavours. This tactic of using language to shape perceptions aligns with the manipulative portrayal of Islam in *KT*, where distorted representations of Islamic beliefs and practices serve to demonise the religion and its followers. This manipulation of language and imagery underscores a broader theme of narrative distortion and the construction of a post-truth narrative that reinforces existing biases and misconceptions.

The romance continues with visceral imagery of the deformed lump child born to the Christian princess and Muslim sultan- "For lim no hadde it non, / Bot as a rond of flesche

[182] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 310.

yschore… / Withouten blod and bon."[183] Scholars have focused on how *KT* uses the body to explore anxieties about religious integration and difference. Calkin argues that the monstrous lump-child represents a disturbing lack of differentiation, forcing readers to confront a body that blurs Christian and Saracen identity. This threat of blurred boundaries, she contends, ultimately prompts the forceful reassertion of religious divisions through the Sultan's dramatic conversion. While Cord Whitaker critiques Calkin's claim of the Sultan's complete erasure, both agree that the text prioritises visibly distinct religious identities.[184] Calkin and Whitaker's analyses align with Heng's theory that the romance creates a space where religion and biology intersect. Christianity functions here not simply as a belief system but as a force claiming power over the body itself. This is evidenced by the lump's miraculous bodily transformation through baptism, reasserting what Heng identifies as Christianity's essentialist power to create a fair, spiritually legible body.[185]

However, the text swiftly resolves this unsettling ambiguity through the transformative power of Christian baptism. The lump regains corporeal integrity after being christened, suddenly rendered "Feirer child might non be bore."[186] Siobhain Calkin interprets this sudden resolution as fostering the notion of straightforward religious categorisation based on biology. The ambiguous form, symbolising a threatened integration of Christian and Saracen identities, is effectively removed and replaced by a body distinctly marked as Christian.[187]

This motif culminates in the sultan's own striking bodily transformation after converting: "His hide that blac and lothely was/Al white bicom thurth Godes gras."[188] His *newly whitened flesh* quite literally represents the stripping away of the sultan's Saracen race and Saracen masculinity - his racial and religious identity is overwritten by his spiritual rebirth.[189] Heng suggests such imagery exists within an interzonal space where medieval

[183] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, ll. 576–579.
[184] Cord Whitaker, 'Black Metaphors in the King of Tars', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, no. 2 (2013): 188–89; Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 114–22.
[185] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 228–29.
[186] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, l. 775.
[187] Calkin, 'Marking Religion on the Body', 228–31.
[188] Chandler, *The King of Tars*, 922–23.
[189] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 198; Cohen, 'On Saracen Enjoyment', 121.

Europeans continuously blurred "culture and biology" in their conceptions of identity.[190] The text's obsessive marking of religious differences through biological changes allows it to re-inscribe firm boundaries where the indeterminate lump had momentarily threatened ambiguity.

Such visceral imagery exemplifies a core post-truth strategy of using fantastical, emotionally manipulative spectacle to simplistically assert the supremacy of Christian truth over Muslim falsehood. Rather than nuanced theological engagement, the romance opts for sensationalistic bodily horrors and miraculous transformations. This thesis argues that to reducing Saracen masculinity to a racial category that Christian truth can redeem and conquer, perpetuating the Orientalist vision outlined by Edward Said of Islamic cultures as a degenerate, effeminised other requiring salvation by European civilisation.[191] By staging this dramatic baptism as its climactic turning point, *KT* likely possessed tremendous post-truth power to shape English popular views about religious differences through lurid spectacle rather than fact.

This focus on bodily transformation and religious supremacy served to intensify anti-Muslim sentiments and prejudices among the original audience of the romance. The viscerally depicted threat of the lump may have stoked fears of Islamic invasion and contamination of the Christian realm. Conversely, the spectacle of the sultan's radical bodily rebirth through baptism could have fuelled beliefs in Christianity's innate spiritual superiority and just domination over Muslim societies. Such symbolically charged imagery aligning religious truth with biological racial markers potentially lent emissions to religious persecution, expulsions, or even the ongoing violence of the Crusades by dehumanising Muslims as pagan, racially inferior Other. While impacting actual events is difficult to determine, the symbolic power of such lurid post-truth narratives to manipulate English popular opinion cannot be ignored. *KT* aligns with the era's theological attitude of interfaith unions. The princess's forced conversion before marriage emphasises the anxiety surrounding the mixing of religious essences. Overall, these themes of faith manipulation and interfaith conflict demonstrate the romance's complex narrative strategy. It portrays Islam as inherently flawed, fuelling prejudice and

[190] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 229–30.
[191] Said, *Orientalism*, 58–59.

simplifying theological differences. The depiction of religious conflict in *KT* sheds light on the medieval understanding of faith and the complexities of interfaith relations during the Crusades.

KT exemplifies how medieval romances could function as powerful vehicles for post-truth narratives that manipulated audience perceptions of religious and cultural others. Through visceral imagery, symbolic distortions of Islamic beliefs and practices, and emotional spectacle, the romance constructs a simplistic, divisive portrayal of Christianity's inherent supremacy over the Islamic world. Its obsession with bodily transformations and the conflation of racial and religious identities reflects the era's anxieties surrounding boundaries, difference, and racial miscegenation.

Rather than nuanced engagement with complex theological and cultural distinctions, the text opts for sensationalistic fictions designed to elicit fear and justify prejudices. Its depiction of the monstrous lump child embodies the perceived threat of interfaith mixing, while the Sultan's miraculous re-embodiment through baptism asserts Christianity's power to conquer and redeem the Muslim other. Such fantastical post-truth strategies likely resonated deeply with medieval audiences and shaped real-world attitudes toward Muslim communities. The scholarly analyses explored highlight how this romance exemplified wider tendencies to essentialise and racialise religious differences in service of bolstering in-group solidarity against a vilified, dehumanised Islamic enemy. Ultimately, *KT* reveals the deep historical roots of modern post-truth narratives trafficking in misinformation and spectacle to manufacture polarising identities and cultural hostilities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has offered a detailed examination of how the medieval English romances *RCL* and *KT* engage in post-truth manipulations to construct deeply distorted portrayals of Islam, and the Muslim other. Through close textual analysis, historical contextualisation, and critical engagement with post-truth theory, a multifaceted picture has emerged. Here, it is clear that these Middle English narratives are not simply works of entertainment or expressions of artistic license. Instead, they function as powerful vehicles for the creation and perpetuation of a simplistic, biased, and often demonising view of the Islamic world. This thesis posits that these romances, particularly through their depiction of historical conflicts, embody a profound post-truth dynamic that prioritises emotional manipulation and ideological consolidation over factual accuracy or nuanced portrayals of cultural differences.

RCL proves a particularly compelling case study of how literary works can serve the agendas of their time. The text exploits anxieties fuelled by the complex and violent realities of the Crusades, deliberately distorting Muslim beliefs, practices, and figures like Saladin. These distortions serve a clear propagandistic function: to depict the conflict as a simple struggle between Christianity and a barbaric, heretical other. By crafting a narrative that minimises French influence and magnifies English prowess on the battlefield, the romance subtly advances the goal of national unity, bolstering support for Richard and positioning England as a natural leader within Christendom. The elevation of Richard himself, through omissions, exaggerations, and the depiction of events with

dubious historical basis, constructs a heroic archetype. This image serves to legitimise his rule and authority, rallying support while deflecting potential criticism.

While *RCL* focuses on a specific historical event, *KT* employs a more allegorical lens, offering a complex exploration of how the medieval English imagination grappled with questions of religious difference. Yet, it, too, falls back on post-truth strategies. Its depiction of Islam and Muslim characters relies on gross misrepresentations, fabrications of deities like Termagaunt, and distortions of theological beliefs. This calculated manipulation reinforces a sense of Christian superiority, while fuelling fear and prejudice. Notably, the text's use of spectacle, featuring monstrous imagery and miraculous bodily transformations, serves to manipulate the audience's emotions rather than engage them intellectually. These fantastical elements reinforce the narrative that Christianity holds absolute power over Islam, even at the biological level. The romance's portrayal of religious conflict, while more fictional in nature, reflects the anxieties of its era and likely contributed to shaping perceptions of the Muslim world.

The romances' emphasis on emotion, spectacle, and vilification exemplifies a hallmark of post-truth discourse: the use of narratives designed to stir up outrage, fear, or disgust. By tapping into audience biases and anxieties, these texts seek to shape perceptions and solidify a sense of in-group unity defined in opposition to a demonised other. This process operates at both an individual level, influencing how readers might understand the world, and potentially at a societal level, fostering a climate of prejudice conducive to the support of aggressive policies and actions related to the Crusades.

Importantly, the post-truth strategies employed in these romances do not simply reflect ignorance about Islamic culture or the Crusades. Instead, they reflect calculated choices to prioritise ideological goals over historical accuracy. As modern critical theory elucidates, narratives operate as a form of social power. They not only reflect existing anxieties and power structures but also serve to actively shape those realities. These texts are complicit in constructing an imagined Orient that bears little basis in the complex realities of the diverse Islamic world. This distortion reinforces a binary us vs. them mentality that facilitates othering, dehumanisation, and ultimately, violence.

The manipulative strategies analysed throughout this thesis reveal how these romances function as potent propaganda tools, even if audiences in the period did not consciously identify them as such. By demonising the Muslim other, they implicitly justify the Crusades and the violence they entailed. Furthermore, these narratives create a self-fulfilling prophecy. By constructing a distorted image of a barbaric, deceitful Muslim enemy, they contribute to a climate in which aggressive actions seem logical or even morally necessary. In this way, literature plays an insidious role in exacerbating real-world conflicts.

The post-truth elements at work in *RCL* and *KT* serve as disturbing reminders that historical narratives are neither neutral nor objective. The Crusades were a complex, brutal, and multifaceted event, with motivations far exceeding simplistic religious fervour. Yet, these romances reduce the conflict to a stark good versus evil dichotomy, obscuring the complex political dynamics and power struggles that played a significant role. This selective retelling of history aligns with the post-truth agenda, which prioritises the crafting of a compelling, emotionally resonant story over factual accuracy.

A critical post-truth analysis of these romances offers several key insights into the manipulative power of narratives in shaping perceptions of historical events and cultural identities. First, it emphasises the importance of examining how emotions are weaponised to manipulate audiences. Second, it reveals the enduring power of spectacle, particularly in narratives surrounding conflict, to override critical thought and solidify simplistic, often damaging, perspectives. Finally, it highlights the danger of prioritising ideological victories over nuanced portrayals and genuine understanding. This tendency can exacerbate existing prejudices, legitimise violence, and contribute to a climate of intolerance and conflict.

This thesis does not suggest that all medieval English romances are inherently propagandist, nor does it undermine their literary value. However, it is essential to acknowledge that such works exist within specific historical contexts and are shaped by the ideologies of their time. Even narratives that present themselves as pure entertainment can serve subtle and sometimes insidious agendas. By deconstructing their manipulative strategies, scholars not only gain a deeper understanding of these texts but also cultivate the critical skills needed to analyse how information, misinformation, and disinformation

are deployed within modern narratives, whether overtly fictional or those claiming to be based on fact.

Significantly, the manipulative strategies identified in these medieval romances resonate with contemporary anxieties and prejudices. The demonisation of the Muslim other, the propagation of fear-mongering narratives, and the use of spectacle to bypass critical engagement remain disturbingly relevant in a world struggling with rising Islamophobia and a proliferation of online disinformation campaigns. This enduring legacy underscores the importance of studying historical examples of post-truth dynamics. By understanding how such narratives function to manipulate audiences, construct harmful stereotypes, and ultimately lay the groundwork for violence, we can become better equipped to resist similar strategies in the present. It also highlights the crucial ethical dimension of storytelling. Authors of both fiction and non-fiction possess a tremendous power to shape perceptions and influence how people understand the world around them. This responsibility demands a commitment to nuanced portrayals, a refusal to exploit existing prejudices, and a prioritisation of accuracy and empathy over sensationalism and ideological manipulation.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates the enduring power of narratives to shape collective memory, influence worldviews, and galvanise action. It underscores the urgent need for continued critical analysis of how literary narratives are constructed, how they manipulate emotions, and how they impact real-world attitudes and behaviours. By delving into the post-truth elements within *RCL* and *KT*, this thesis offers a potent reminder that even historical narratives can harbour insidious agendas that warrant careful scrutiny and resistance.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The Summary of *Richard Coeur de Lion*

The story begins with Richard's birth, the child of King Henry II and Cassodorien, King Corbaryng of Antioch's daughter. Guided by a prophetic dream, Cassodorien weds Henry, and they are blessed with three offspring: Richard, John, and Topyas. An intriguing twist in the A-versions of the tale is Cassodorien's enigmatic vanishing while attending a church ceremony with Topyas. King Henry II declares Richard his heir, leading to Richard's ascension to the throne at the age of fifteen.

The young king holds a tournament to identify his best fighters. He participates in three disguises, with each representing his intentions in the Holy Land. He is impressed by Sir Thomas Multon and Sir Fulk Doyly, who are unafraid of him and later join him on a mission to the Holy Land.

Their covert mission faces a setback when a troubadour accidentally exposes them to the King of Almayn, resulting in their capture. During his confinement, Richard engages in a punching exchange with the king's son, Ardour, tragically ending Ardour's life. After this incident, Richard unexpectedly garners the attention of the king's daughter, Margery. When the burgeoning relationship between them is discovered, the King of Almayn schemes to kill Richard by setting a hungry lion loose in a room with him. Demonstrating extraordinary bravery, Richard overpowers the lion using only his physical strength, consumes its heart in a bold display before the royal audience, and consequently earns his freedom. This incident earns him his moniker, *RCL*.

Richard returns to England and prepares to embark on a crusade due to the deteriorating situation in the Holy Land. He assembles a fleet of ships, equips them, and sets out on his journey. Upon his arrival in Messina, he meets King Phillip of France and overcomes tensions between their forces. They face challenges from the Cypriot king, and Richard eventually arrives in the Holy Land.

During the siege of Acre, the gravely sick Richard is healed by consuming Saracens' flesh. The city of Acre surrenders, but not before Richard employs beehives to harass the Saracens. When his offers are rejected, Saladin responds by executing Christian prisoners.

Richard's army, in its conquest of various cities, shows no mercy to those who resist conversion.

Saladin challenges Richard to a tourney, but an angel's warning helps Richard control a demon horse sent by Saladin. Richard defeats Saladin, eventually leading to the siege of Jerusalem. Phillip leaves for France, and Richard fortifies Jaffa before engaging in further conquests.

As Richard approaches his objective, he learns about his brother John's treachery, Phillip's attack on Normandy, and the urgency to go back to England. He also has to face Saladin, who initiates a siege on Jaffa. Following a tough fight, Richard offers a peace agreement, which Saladin agrees to, permitting pilgrims to travel to the Holy Land. The romance ends by referencing Richard's demise.

Appendix 2. The Summary of *The King of Tars*

The medieval romance *KT* begins with the Sultan of Damascus, a powerful Muslim ruler, captivated by a beautiful Christian princess. However, she refuses his marriage proposal, unwilling to abandon her faith. This rejection sparks a brutal war, with the Sultan's forces depicted as merciless and driven by a desire to conquer and destroy. Faced with the suffering of her people, the Princess makes a heart-wrenching sacrifice: she agrees to marry the Sultan to end the bloodshed.

Despite their union, religious tensions remain unresolved. Their child is born as a lump of flesh, which the Sultan perceives as divine punishment for his wife's continued Christian devotion. In a desperate bid to prove the power of her faith, the Princess proposes a test: if the child is baptised, it should be transformed. Miraculously, the child takes on a beautiful human form after the Christian rite, a spectacle that compels the Sultan's conversion. His physical appearance changes from black skin to white, a symbol of both his inner transformation and the supposed purity of Christianity.

Now a fervent Christian, the Sultan imposes his newfound faith upon his subjects, demanding mass conversion. Those who refuse face execution, fuelling further conflict as neighbouring pagan kings declare war against the Sultan's forces. The narrative glorifies the ensuing climactic battle, where the Christian forces, led by the Sultan and the Princess's father, claim a decisive victory. With the kingdom fully converted, the Princess is celebrated for her unwavering faith and her role in orchestrating this religious transformation.

However, *KT* goes beyond a tale of personal salvation. It highlights medieval Christian attitudes toward non-believers, emphasising the use of dramatic spectacle to reinforce faith and justify acts of violence in the name of religion. It serves as a chilling example of how literature can be wielded as a powerful manipulation tool in the service of religious dominance.

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