



DEMONS AND SARACENS

Otherness in Richard Coer de Lyon



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1. Introduction

Chivalric romances generally focus on an ideal heroic character, who conquers his enemies with exceptionally sound morals and complete compliance with the chivalric code. One subset in this genre is the crusader romance. This subgenre places the hero – who is often based on a historical figure – somewhere in the crusading era, around the twelfth and thirteenth century. This is the case for *Richard Coer de Lyon*, a crusader romance from the early fourteenth century by an unknown author, based on an older Anglo-Norman text that is now lost. The romance follows King Richard I of England (1157-1199), also known as Richard the Lionheart, during the events leading up to and during the Third Crusade (1189-1192).

While *Richard Coer de Lyon* is clearly a chivalric romance, its protagonist is anything but a traditional romance hero. As Peter Larkin writes in the introduction to his edition of *Richard Coer de Lyon*: “While the violent, fearless, and aggressive warrior found in the poem frequently resembles the historical figure, on a number of occasions, *Richard* presents the king as uncourtly and unchivalric, and it frequently identifies him as a devil” (Larkin). It is this association of King Richard with the devil and demonic forces that makes this romance so interesting. When the hero in this genre normally represents the chivalric ideal, a depiction of an influential historical king as having demon-like qualities, merely a century after his death, is striking. Despite this, or possibly because of this, *Richard Coer de Lyon* was among the most popular Middle English romances (Larkin introduction). This thesis seeks to explore the way in which this demonic Otherness, meaning his demonic tendencies and constant comparisons to the devil, functions in Richard and in the narrative, and how he attempts to exorcise his inner demon by fighting another representation of the Other in the form of the Saracen enemy in the crusade.

1.1 The Other

“Otherness” and “Other” are vital concepts in reading the text within the context of examining the demonic nature of Richard and the way the Saracens are used and described in the story. Leona F. Cordery, in an exploration of Saracens in Middle English literature through a lens of otherness, explains this by stating “not only does the term define something or someone who is different, but it is an essential mechanism in creating ‘my own’ identity” (87). This can also be defined as the “Other” versus the “Self”. Therefore, seeing what the

Other is not, might be more important than what they are, as the difference is what separates Self and Other.

The most obvious example of an “Other” in the *Richard* is Saladin’s army of Saracens, that serves as the enemy for Richard and his allies. There is no easy definition for what makes a person a Saracen, since descriptions have varied greatly, even within *Richard* itself. Still, the main point of their Otherness is the idea that they are definitely not Christian, going back to the idea of the Other being more not-something than to be something specific. Yet the majority of the time, they would be Muslim. The problems of defining Saracens will be addressed in greater detail in 3.2.

The crusade in this text has been called primarily to achieve two goals: Retrieving the lost cross Jesus Christ was crucified on, and freeing the holy land from the Saracen influence. These Saracen are wholly undeserving of mercy, not only their soldiers but also their civilians. The only possible exception is when they convert to the correct faith of Christianity and abandon their gods. Any other qualities the Saracens may possess or any allowances of mercy on the grounds of individual merit are not worthy of consideration within this narrative. They are not Christian, and therefore worthless. Apart from not being Christian, they are also not white, and not European.

If they are the Other in this tale, Richard should represent the kind of person the Saracens differ from, and he clearly is a Christian, white, European man. In that aspect he seems very fitting for this “Self”. Yet, his behaviour varies greatly from assumed Christian morals, and European values. While Richard is able to behave like a proper Christian crusader king at most times, he has moments of unchivalrous, cruel or even cannibalistic behaviour. This is where his demon nature comes into play, as this is implied to be the cause of these un-Christian actions. This will be explored in more detail in chapter 3.

Richard gives the origins of the King’s Otherness by replacing his historical mother with a demonic creature, that seduced the king and gave him two sons and a daughter. The creature fled when she was forced to witness a Christian ceremony. In *Richard*, both the royal bloodline from his father King Henry II and the demonic blood from his mother come together. In the context of Otherness, Richard here has fallen in between the status quo and the Otherness of for instance the Saracens.

In this context, Richard battling the Saracen Others in the crusade has some interesting implications. His demon tendencies come out most strongly when battling or otherwise facing these Others, hinting that his Otherness is linked with their Otherness. There are several morally ambiguous moments before he leaves for the Crusade, but Richard’s

cruelty and violence increases dramatically when facing Saracens. As will be explored in chapter 3, Richard in a narrative of exorcism, might be trying to face his inner Other by facing a physical Other in the form of an enemy.

1.2 Academic Debate

Since the latest translation of *Richard* was published only last year, it is useful to look at the sources referenced in this particular translation to get a reliable grip on current and relevant debate surrounding this text. Peter Larkin, in the lengthy introduction to his edition of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, refers to several scholars who have examined this particular text in reference to Saracens and Otherness before. Three in particular were very useful for this thesis. The first is Geraldine Heng, who published a work on cannibalism, the first crusade and the beginnings of Medieval romance in 2003. Herein, she gives a historical context for the cannibalism and its occurrences in the historical First Crusade. The second scholar is Nicola McDonald. She explores the theme of eating and cannibalism in medieval literature, and discusses the taboo surrounding cannibalism in western culture, she links this in particular to *Richard Coer de Lyon*. While the cannibalism will not be the main focus, the inspiration for this thesis is derived from a statement within McDonald's chapter: "*Richard*, much like *Sir Gowther*, is in effect a narrative of exorcism: an account of how Richard successfully purges himself of his devilish inheritance" (140), not through a traditional form of exorcism by priest, but more so through fulfilling divine action. McDonald touches on this but does not expand on it much further, which is the niche this thesis will attempt to fill. The third work was mentioned earlier, but due to its usefulness should be listed here as well. It concerns Leona F. Cordery and her work, as it takes a broader look at Saracens in Middle English literature, and offers a great variety of interesting insights into the Otherness of Saracens as viewed by invading crusader forces. Her work in particular has been a great help in grasping and conceptualising the idea of Otherness in this context.

2. The History of *Richard Coer de Lyon*

In order to properly analyse the contents of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, it is important to stress the two different ways in which the narrative has been preserved. In total, seven manuscripts written somewhere between the early fourteenth and late fifteenth century and two printings from 1509 and 1528 have survived. A list with the names of these manuscripts can be found in Larkin's introduction. Within this collection however, there is a clear divide in the exact contents of these surviving works, namely a division into groups A and B. The deciding difference between these groups is that the A group has a longer text (precise number of words or lines vary per manuscript, even within groups A and B) with more fantastical or romance elements added to it, while the B group contains a shorter text with a more historically accurate basis. In terms of age, the B group is the older version and A consists of newer manuscripts and printings. The most fruitful way to illustrate the difference is to provide a brief summary of the A version and afterwards to highlight those portions of *Richard* that were not in the B version, or were changed in some way.

2.1 The A Version

The A version sets off by placing this narrative in the history of other stories about historical kings and warriors, varying from Charlemagne and Arthur to Hector and Achilles. This is followed by the claim that King Richard I, who was blessed with "grace and vycторыe" (Richard 2) should have his story told as well. The text then gives a history for his birth, revealing that he is the offspring of King Henry II and a demonic creature disguised as King Antioch's daughter Cassodorien. After she has given birth to Richard, a brother and a sister, an earl asks Henry why his wife never witnesses the Holy Mass. They decide to force her to witness the Holy Sacrament, at which point she reveals herself to be a demon and flees the church by flying through the roof of the church, never to be seen or mentioned again.

Richard becomes king at fifteen when his father dies, and hosts a tournament in which he hopes to find his best fighters. He himself partakes anonymously in order to prevent other contestants from withholding blows for fear of harming the king, and to truly see them at their best. During the tournament the knights often use devil imagery to refer to the anonymous knight, unaware that it is the king: "This is a devyl and no man that our folke felles and sleth" (500-501). This kind of imagery is repeated throughout most of the text, by friend and foe. When the winners of the tournament are chosen, Richard reveals his identity

and proclaims he will take these two knights with him on an exploratory journey to the East, disguised as pilgrims to avoid suspicion.

The text briefly mentions all the places they visit, and more actively re-joins them upon their journey back to England. When they travel through Germany they are betrayed by a minstrel and then arrested and held captive by a German king named Modard, on the suspicion that they were spying on him and his country. During their captivity, Richard is challenged to an exchange of blows with Modard's son, where the son is eventually killed by Richard. This, in combination with his seduction of the King's daughter, greatly angers Modard. He seeks to punish Richard by forcing him to duel a lion, hoping this will kill him. During this duel however, Richard manages to kill the lion and pulls his heart out through his throat. He eats this heart, which in this text grants him the name of Lionheart. The German king, out of desperation, allows the English church to pay for his release and Richard is allowed to return home.

When Richard returns, he soon summons his army to join him on the Pope's Third Crusade to liberate the Holy Land from the Saracens, and to retrieve the lost cross that was used to crucify Christ. On his journey back to the East he passes by Modard's castle, where they make peace. The German king, being too old to join them himself, gives Richard his ransom back, along with a large number of soldiers and two magical rings to help him in the Crusade.

Upon his arrival in Messina, Richard has a brief struggle with King Philip of France which he eventually wins by capturing Messina from Philip, forcing his surrender. They then sail on to Acre, where Richard destroys a great chain blocking their way with his axe. Finding Acre in its seventh year of a siege to reconquer the city for Christians, Richard sets to work to find a way to end it.

During the siege, he falls ill and it is here that he first commits an act of cannibalism. He requests pork, but as there is no pork to be found in the Saracen-controlled area the cook is forced to improvise. He orders a young and fat Saracen to be slain and flayed, then cooked and served to the king without telling him he is not eating pork. Richard recovers after this meal, and fights vigorously on the following day. Fearing the illness will return, he asks for the head of the pig to be cooked for him to make a full recovery. When the cook offers him the head of the Saracen, Richard laughs, eats the head, and applauds this ideal solution to the problem of feeding his army.

When the Saracens realise they are being defeated, they offer Richard control of Syria, Acre and Jerusalem if he would only stop fighting. He agrees to let them leave the city,

but captures them anyway when they are all outside of the city gates. The Saracen leader, Saladin, sends messengers to offer him ransom if he releases the prisoners. Richard offers to give the messengers food; after which he'll give them a message for Saladin. During this feast he serves them the heads of Saracen nobles to shock them. The messengers, horrified, compare him to the devil: "This is the develys brothir that sles oure men and thus hem eetes!" (3484-3485). Richard, in response, tells them they can return to Saladin with the message that he will not be able to stop him and his army by blocking their food supply, as he has plenty of Saracens to eat. He adds that he will not leave until he has eaten all Saracens.

Saladin makes another offer: If Richard will accept Apollo as his God, Saladin will give him all lands from Syria to Egypt. Richard refuses and demands the cross be returned to Christian hands. When the Saracens admit they do not know what happened to it, Richard slaughters 60,000 of them. Right after this slaughter, spring arrives and the land grows rich with flora and fauna.

Richard then goes on to conquer several other cities, until he meets Saladin's army on the way to Caiphaz. Richard manages to cause the army to flee, and then takes his army and allies ahead to Palestine, where they wait for provisions to arrive. Saladin takes advantage of this rest and attacks several cities. Richard then battles Saladin one to one, wounding the sultan in the process of his attempt to flee.

Saladin challenges Richard to another duel, and presents him with a horse to ride on. An angel warns Richard that this horse is a demon, summoned to make him lose the duel. The angel tells him how to control the horse, and using these instructions Richard wins, and his army captures the town. They then go forward to Jerusalem, but Philip and Richard cannot agree who will rule the city once it has been conquered. Both leave the city unconquered, Philip heads for France and Richard returns to Jaffa to secure it and rebuild its walls. Once this is done he proceeds to conquer three more cities, one of which has all its inhabitants convert to Christianity, for which they are spared.

A while later, Richard hears that his brother John is trying to take over the English crown. He is forced to return home, and offers Saladin a truce of three years to allow him to retake his crown. Saladin agrees and Richard travels back to England. In a rather abrupt ending, Richard does not make it back to the East, as he is shot and killed in his effort to retake the crown. The bowman was an English soldier in support of John in trying to retake his crown.

The text ends by proclaiming him a conqueror, and asking God to "gyve his soule

moche honour!’ (7234)

2.2 The B Version

The most obvious and noteworthy changes between the two versions of *Richard* mostly concern fictitious, nearly fantastical additions to the older B version, into the A version. This older version is considerably more historically orientated than A. For instance, one of the earliest differences between the two groups is the identity of Richard’s mother. While Richard in the A version has the fantastical demonic creature named Cassodorien as mother, B gives the king his historical mother in its narrative, by name of Eleanor of Aquitaine. This woman was of French origin, but this provides a completely different variety of Otherness than the demonic one in A. The change affects the entire character of Richard as told by these versions, as B lacks the demonic origin for Richard that is so often referenced in the A version. This is to say, B lacks the ‘severity’ of Otherness originating from Richard’s birth by a demonic mother in A, making this a characteristic solely in the A version. B is much less a work about Richard’s inner Otherness confronting the Saracen Others, and much more of an ‘us versus them’ narrative. Therefore, using the A version in this research gives much more interesting results when looking at it through a lens of Otherness, and this is why this version will be used here.

All of the events that occur before Richard prepares to depart on the Third crusade were most likely additions, not to the B version but to the original Anglo-Norman text. Those events also occur in most B version manuscripts. These events involve the three-day tournament, where the character of Richard is shown anonymously participating, with his three different outfits bearing symbols indicating him to be a religious fighter, determined to rid the East of heathens. The third outfit resembles that of a Templar. The exploratory journey to the East with the two best fighters, and the subsequent capture by king Modard were most likely added to B as well. These events all have a feel of adventure to them, before they go on to more technical and somewhat more repetitive combat-based missions during the Third Crusade. These added events do not change the course or outcome of the crusades as such. Yet these also involve some actions on Richard’s part that are not particularly fitting for a Christian crusader king, such as the seducing of Modard’s daughter. This is of course in conflict with the expectation of waiting until marriage for both the King and the daughter.

The additions and revisions that solely appear in the A version texts, like replacing

Eleanor of Aquitaine with the demon, are the ones that have a more noticeable impact on the story and carry implications throughout the narrative. Other changes in A are the two acts of cannibalism in Acre, which influences the reader's perception of the character of Richard quite a bit compared to B. These cannibalistic episodes are easily the most shocking parts of all versions, and intended to be that way. The Saracens, for instance, are shocked greatly by this gruesome act, shown by their skin changing colour out of fear and disgust (3470-3475), and it stands to reason that English audiences would have been just as horrified. Lastly, the text describes fictional crusade events that negatively reflect on King Philip of France, and others that place the two knights Richard brought with him further to the foreground of the narrative.

John Finlayson argues that the additions of A change the entire genre of the text. While A "sways the tenor of the Richard story quite firmly into the ethos of the romance of adventure" (160), the shorter and earlier version of *Richard* more closely resembles an historical epic. This other genre does still manage to make an appearance in the A version, for instance in the specific names mentioned in the introduction of the text (1-35). The figures of Charlemagne, Hector and Achilles are all more strongly connected to historical epics than to romances, while Arthur and Gawain are clearly linked to romances. However, Finlayson suggests that this could be a reference "to their reputation in the chronicles, rather than in courtly romance" (161), which would fit easily in a list of historical epics. This would indeed make the list more consistent in the types of heroes it lists, and seems therefore to be a sound interpretation.

In creating a demonically influenced, crueller and more uncourtly Richard, A provides an unlikely hero, perhaps even an anti-hero for the epic-turned-romance thus created, which adds a new layer to the narrative. Where B was mainly about the great King Richard the Lionheart and his successes in the Third Crusade, A offers a narrative of exorcism for Richard. This provides him with a character arc throughout the story, from demonic Other to Christian crusader king. This also makes him a more compelling character than a king who is excellent at everything he does and has nothing to overcome, making the Richard in the A version a much more rounded character. This element of Otherness is mirrored and paralleled with the Saracens, with him overcoming the temptations and urges of his parentage as a triumph clearly rewarded by the narrative.

3. Otherness and Exorcism in *Richard Coer de Lyon*

In essence, the crusades are inherently a battle of the Self versus the Other. The entire purpose of these missions to the east was to rid the holy lands of Saracens, “whose practices and physical presence had been described by Pope Urban II and the Chroniclers, as polluting the holy places of Jerusalem” (Heng 26-27). Heng suggests that their Otherness was so dangerous that their presence alone was enough to endanger the sanctity of the city, and reason enough to start a holy war. The Others in the city were not only to be driven out, “the point was either to annihilate Saracens by converting or killing them” (Cordery 91). The privilege of mercy was not applicable to the Saracens, who were in the eyes of the Crusaders an unworthy, inferior and ugly people. The only exception to this fate was if the Saracens converted to Christianity and renounced their ‘Other’ god (or in some cases, gods). They would then shed their Otherness and join the Self, and no longer pollute the land. If they did not convert, however, none of them were to be spared.

Crusader romances like *Richard Coer de Lyon* defend this merciless slaughter by giving several references to divine justification or describing angelic beings aiding them in their battles. When the crusaders are preparing to behead 60,000 Saracens, an angel speaks to them “Seygnours, tues, tues, spares hem nought – behedith these!” (3749-3750). The slaying of the enemy is thus portrayed as a noble and divine mission. In the context of Richard and his struggle with his demonic nature, the crusade offers an excellent way to redeem himself as a Christian king and expel this cruel side from himself. In the first 34 lines of the romance, Richard is placed in the context of other crusading knights, or other historical or mythical heroes, “Such as Roland, Oliver, Alexander, Charlemagne, Arthur, Gawain, Turpin, Ogier le Danois, Hector and Achilles” (Finlayson 161). This list includes several heroes that fought against an Eastern enemy Other, if not specifically against Saracens. Achilles and Hector for instance, fought the army in Troy, situated on the western shores of the East. This shows purposeful writing to place Richard as a king on his way to become a crusader hero, to be counted among this list of idealised warriors.

Apart from this divine mission, the crusades had several other, more practical and worldly purposes to fulfil. For one, they would help unite the warring nobles of Europe in a common cause against a common enemy (Cordery 88). Additionally, conquering the holy land would give the victor the opportunity to establish trade posts and gain a new source of income. In combination with the divine mission, winning the holy war would therefore be extremely beneficial to any noble participating in the crusades. This also means that the

crusader romances often show the Christian side as the victor, even when this is historically inaccurate. In the case of *Richard*, this is done by glossing over the fact that the crusaders did not manage to successfully recapture Jerusalem by giving both King Richard and King Philip a reason for not being able to move forward with the crusade. The text of course gives Richard a more honourable reason than Philip, portraying him as even better than the French king. This Frenchness could even be interpreted as another form of Otherness in comparison with the English king, giving another reason for the portrayal of King Philip in *Richard* as less honourable.

If the Saracens being so different makes them unworthy to live in the Holy Land (or to live at all), it does seem striking that Richard is not questioned about this in the slightest. Despite his very un-Christian birthmother, his right to be king or his credibility as a crusading warrior is never questioned. What, then, causes this distinction of him being worthy of a tale of exorcism where the Saracens are not?

3.1 Richard the Other

If being Christian is the ‘right way to be’, Richard already has an advantage over the Saracen forces: he is only half corrupted by an Other force. While his mother was indeed a demon, his father in this text remained the Christian King Henry II. For all the implications a demon mother might have, Richard or any of his followers never again refer to it in the narrative. Despite this, he is still near-constantly compared to the devil in all sorts of ways, and by a large variety of people. His fellow knights call him a “wode schrewe” (Larkin 574), a “qued” (522), and a “devyl” (500) when he partakes in the tournament anonymously, but this is completely forgotten by Richard and the knights after the king has revealed his identity. This is, in a way, very representative of most other comparisons to the devil in *Richard*. The ones that are either victim or opponent to Richard see him as a devil while the people on his side celebrate him and his actions. This change of heart in the knights follows their change of ‘side’. While being excessively violent during a tournament might not exactly be a sin, Richard later performs several other actions where his violent, cruel tendencies resurface. The comparisons with the demon following these actions link them to the Otherness within Richard. The allies, then, excuse his Other tendencies when it benefits them to, or find a way for him to express his Other violence without it having negative implications on his reputation as Christian King.

After the tournament, the following Other action happens when Richard is challenged to the exchange of blows by his captor King Modard's son. He allows the son to strike him, but in preparation for his return blow he covers his hand in wax, in order to be able to deliver a more painful blow (775-784). This is a very unchivalrous act of cheating, and allows Richard to break his opponent's cheekbone in two and kill him (797-798). After this, Richard disgraces King Modard's daughter as well, by seducing her. In this way he 'ruins' both the King's mentioned heirs. Yet when, after the duel with the lion, the clergy in England are asked to pay for his ransom, they in no way have moral issues to provide the money for him. The disgrace he has caused for Modard's daughter, nor his cheating during the exchange of blows are ever again brought up, though it is possible no one had found this out. When Richard returns to Modard for aid in the crusade, Modard is even willing to forgive him, give him back his ransom money and send along soldiers, to be on the 'good' side of the crusade. Here again, any of Richard's allies or anyone that profits of him being on their side, are willing to excuse his violent, dishonourable, and Other-like behaviour.

The only time in the narrative when Richard feels insulted by being compared to a demonic creature, is when he and his English army are referred to as "dogges, with your tayle (1830). This is also the only time when he is insulted as such without provocation. Any other comparison to the devil or to demons is made after he committed an act of extreme violence or cruelty. He sees this as slander, and he attacks the French to defend his and his people's honour: "Slee downe every Frensshe cowarde and ken them in bataylles that ye have no tayles!" (1958-1960). Afterwards, he disciplines two officials who insult him to his face as "taylarde" (2006). He warns them that this will teach them to slander their superiors, and that they should share this lesson with their French king (2020-2022). In this way, Richard does try to protect his reputation as a Christian king, as slander by allies is more likely to cause damage to it than being called a devil by his enemies, which is not too odd in a war situation.

Any comparison to the devil hereafter is followed by a cruel or questionable act on Richard's part, and these all take place against Saracen opponents. The first of these occurs when he encounters a ship and finds out all on board are Saracens. Upon this discovery, he exclaims "Ther schal no Sarezyn me ascape!" (2528). A rather horrifying description of how he killed the Saracens followed, with him and his axe cleaving through all armour and causing some of them to jump into the water. It is after this that surviving Saracens 'seyden he was a devyl of helle' (2580). Of course, from this point forward all violence is justified in the eyes of the crusaders, and rewarded by the narrative. They were there on a divine mission to save the Holy Land from the Saracens, and they were not to spare any of them. Richard's

cruelty now only affects those that the crusaders oppose, and again having him on their side is enough for them to excuse his behaviour. Immediately after they capture the ship, the text mentions “Goddes help” (2806) in this victory. This assures the reader that the crusaders do indeed have the support of God in this mission, and that He seems to approve of the action against the Saracens.

Still, the beliefs and morals of his allies are challenged when Richard is seriously, even happily considering cannibalism a second time, after he discovered he unknowingly ate Saracen in the siege of Acre. This is justified in the eyes of Richard, as the Saracens can serve as food for the crusader army, and solve the difficulty of feeding such a large army during a siege. This takes some effort for his allies to understand or accept, as shown by the cook who initially serves him his first Saracen meal due to lack of pork. When he has to show the Saracen head to Richard and reveal the origin of the meat, he “fel on knees and made a cry” (3209) for mercy. When Richard laughs and compliments the brilliance of this food source, the cook is surprised, but afterwards is perfectly willing to prepare the Saracen nobles to shock Saladin’s messengers at the feast. Historically, this is quite odd, as discussed by Geraldine Heng when discussing cannibalism in the First Crusade. She tells of eyewitness reports from the First Crusade that do seem to describe acts of cannibalism on the crusader’s side. However, in these cases it is never glorified by the witnesses. Rather, “all three chronicles are immediately driven to defend the cannibalism by invoking extreme famine as exigent explanation” (Heng 22). It is no wonder that the Saracens, when confronted with the heads of their nobles, react in complete shock. When they tell Saladin of this feast, he responds with “It is a devyl, withouten fayle” (3664). Even the heathen Others are shocked by his horrible display, and according to Heng the cannibalism was never condoned by any church member before. The fact that Richard is not challenged about this horrifying act of cannibalism by his allies, again points to the excusing of his demonic, Other tendencies when it benefits them.

After this feast, Richard is commanded by God to behead 60,000 Saracens, and after they fulfilled this command, Richard and his men thank God (3752). The next paragraph, the season suddenly turns to spring, and all is happy: “Merye is the tyme of May, whenne foules syng in here lay” (3759-3760). Richard holds another feast, not with Saracen on the menu this time, and happily gives out gift of “gold and sylvyr and precyouse stones” (3776). This jarring change in mood after such an impactful act of violence with so many casualties, shows the celebration that the narrative wishes this text to be for Richard. The delightful description of spring and feast celebrate their victory over the Saracens, and reinforces the

idea that Richard has done a good thing by killing them.

While Richard's Other, un-Christian cruelty stands out in the first part of the text, when his opponents are other Christians like Modard and Philip, it later serves the purpose of ridding the crusaders of more Saracens. His cruelty is useful for the crusade, and it blends in with general crusader violence. In terms of his narrative of exorcism, Richard does not necessarily have to rid himself of his violent tendencies to be a good Christian, or show any kind of remorse, he merely has to direct them towards a good, Christian cause. For this, the narrative requires a clear 'evil' to be eradicated by Richard to reclaim his true Christian status. This means creating an Other in the Saracens that is so thoroughly alien and inhuman that they are unworthy of being granted any mercy, so Richard can still be at his most violent without sacrificing the Christian ideal he is meant to embody. It is clear from how the Saracens are described within the narrative, and how they are treated by it, that the Saracen Other is only created to serve as an object for Richard to fight and conquer.

3.2 The Saracen Other

In analysing how *Richard* goes out of its way to show the Saracens as Others, a definition of what makes a character a Saracen would be a good starting point. However, defining the Saracen identity in Middle English romances proves more challenging than it might first appear. This issue has come up the research of several scholars, for instance in the research of Peter H. Goodrich into Saracens in Malory. To avoid any issues of wrongly reading characters as Saracens when they were not intended to be read as such, he applied a very strict definition: "Limiting the scope to Saracen figures in Malory who are clearly labelled as (not merely associated with) such, by extension assuming their participation in the Islamic faith, and acknowledging the indeterminacy of reference for the term where necessary" (Goodrich 10). While this approach certainly has merit in looking at Saracens in particular, the purpose of this thesis is not to define Saracens as precisely as possible within the context of *Richard*, but to explore the Otherness in the portrayal of these enemies. With this purpose in mind, the view of Robert Rouse would be more appropriate. He researched the depiction of Saracen Others in Middle English romance, in which he describes the Saracens as follows: "As the antithesis of the Christian West, the image of the Saracen provides a powerful racial, cultural and religious Other during the later Middle Ages" (127), emphasising what they are not instead of what they are, to define Saracens. Donald L. Hoffman approaches the issue in a focused study of Saracens in Malory's *Morte Darthur* by

placing the focus on the idea that it is not in the least important to discern where they are meant to have come from, stating “whoever they are, they are quintessentially Other even if that Otherness is always determinate” (43). This focus on the Otherness above the actual defining characteristics matches well with Cordery’s approach. She writes (from the crusader perspective): “It was a question of us and the rest, resulting in a unity of purpose. (...) The terms become interchangeable because the name of the enemy is unimportant; it is only necessary to know that all those who are not like us are the non-believing enemy” (90).

The Saracens in *Richard* will be approached using a combination of the descriptions of Cordery and Hoffman, by seeing the Saracens as quintessentially Other, and that it is more relevant to their purpose in the narrative to put emphasis on how different they are than to stress what they ‘are’ of their own accord. This approach explains a number of inconsistencies in how the Saracens are described in the text and what would logically have been the case during the actual Third Crusade. These inconsistencies might not have been out of ignorance; most likely they were a somewhat conscious decision in order to portray the Saracens as a people very hard to identify or sympathise with. Most likely, the crusades and the church benefitted from Christians feeling hatred or contempt for Saracens, to limit sympathy or mercy. (Jones 203). While it is difficult to determine whether this was an active choice on the author’s part or a result of church influence, it might further explain the carelessness in keeping the descriptions at least somewhat consistent with historical fact.

One of the biggest differences between the actual Muslim crusader enemies and the Saracens in *Richard* is the way the text portrays their faith. While Islam holds a single deity with prophets, *Richard* very frequently mentions the Saracens praying to different gods. In particular, they seem to worship Mohammed as a God, not a prophet, and never mention Allah, which is more fitting. In this text, they also seem to worship Greek and Roman gods. Especially Jupiter and Apollo are referenced very regularly: before the Saracens battle Richard and his army, they prepare “and made there here sacrefyse to Mahoun and to Jubiterre” (4450-4451). Later, when the crusader army manages to kill a large number of Saracens, the text describes it as “many Sarezyn hadden here fyn, and wenten to Mahoun and Appolyn” (5029-5030). This is paralleled with the crusaders who, upon passing away “wenten to Cryst,oure Saveoure” (5032). In this parallel in particular, the divide is very clearly meant to be ‘us versus them’, or in terms of Otherness ‘the Other versus the Self’. For the purpose of *Richard* and this parallel in particular, it is irrelevant what the Saracens would actually worship, or the fact that they only worship one god. Complete ignorance is not to be assumed, however, as the text does show some understanding of Islam faith, in that the

narrative references that the Saracens are forbidden to eat pork. Yet this is only needed in the narrative to explain why Richard's cook could not find this meat when Richard wanted it for his illness in Acre (3083). This further proves the point that the only factor in deciding how to depict their Islam faith is to describe them as utterly Other, not to paint an accurate picture.

This same principle applies in terms of the language of Saracens. Where the Muslim faith in actuality consists of very different peoples with a large variety of languages, in *Richard* they all only speak one language. This is merely described as “the Sarezynes cryyd in here langage” (6069), meaning ‘their language’. That this language is different to ones from Europe may be clear, but it creates no issues for Richard and his allies, as the first Saracens he encounters on his way to the Holy Lands happen to have a translator with them (2505-2512). Cordery addresses the relative lack of language barriers by stating “These questions, unfortunately, remain open, but this was clearly not seen to be a problem for either author or audience” (91). Most likely, the author of *Richard* would see no use to dwell upon what this language barrier would mean for the crusaders. Again, the only purpose their different language has to serve is to establish them even more as Others. Even when a few words of ‘their language’ do actually appear in the text, they are no more than Arabic gibberish: “Malcan staran nair arbru; lor fermoir toir me moru” (6815-6816). While this is of itself meaningless, *Richard* provides a ‘translation’ two lines later: “The Englyssche devyl (=King Richard) icome is; yif he us mete, we schal deye! Flee we faste out of hys weye!” (6818-6820). The only instance of Saracen language to appear in the text is only there to show the Saracen's fear of Richard, to further illustrate his might and show the inferiority of the Saracens.

Yet another strategy applied by *Richard* to persuade the reader to see the Saracens as inferior Others is to dehumanise them. By describing the large, faceless masses of Saracens that attack Richard and his army, rather than dwell on too many individuals, an evocation of sympathy is nearly out of the question. These dehumanising descriptions mostly occur during the battles between Richard and the Saracens, and particularly when listing the resulting casualties. At several points in the narrative, the text refers to the exact number of 60,000 Saracen casualties, like “syxty thousand there were slawe, Saraynys of hethene lawe” (5150-5151). The sheer number of 60,000 bodies is very challenging to imagine for a reader, and it is even harder to think of all the individuals that make up those bodies. The text immediately parallels their losses with that of the Christian army: “And of Crystene but ten score: Blyssyd be Jhesu Cryst therefore!” (5153-5154). Apart from depicting the Christians as the clear winners in this battle, 200 bodies are far easier to conceptualise than the unfathomably large

number of 60,000. This helped humanise the Christian crusaders and in turn dehumanise the Saracens. This does not stop at this point either, as less than 100 lines later another 60,000 Saracens are killed, and this number resurfaces at several later moments in *Richard*. The already unfathomable number is rendered completely meaningless by the frequent repetition, numbing the reader entirely to the losses on the side of Saracen fighters.

When the text does pay attention to Saracen individuals, the purpose is not to humanise them. The individuals involved either show how horrible Saracens seem to be or send a message to Christian readers about the value of Christian faith. The most prominent Saracen individual is Saladin, who differs greatly in *Richard* from his historical counterpart. Interestingly, he is portrayed in a worse light than was common in the West, as Western depictions of the Third Crusade often showed him to be a shrewd and humane adversary, noting that Saladin's capture of Jerusalem did not have a single victim or looted building. He even freed the Christian prisoners (Larkins Introduction to *Richard*). Yet one of the first actions *Richard* describes Saladin with performing is poisoning the wells with the bodies "of the men and of the hors" (2750) of the crusader army. While this is not necessarily a bad war strategy, it is decidedly crueller than what was normally associated with Saladin. Later in the text, Saladin sends his army to level (and not conquer) numerous castles (4923-4944). The duel between Richard and Saladin (beginning at line 5479) serves as the best example of the denigration of Saladin's character within *Richard*. In yet another incorrect representation of Islam faith, Richard asks "Whether is of more power, Jhesu or Jubyter?" (5499-5500), at which point Saladin offers Richard a horse for their duel. Of course, Saladin had summoned this horse through demonic ritual, and it was meant to work in his favour during the duel. This is one of the few instances in *Richard* where Saracens blatantly use dark magic against Richard, which of course makes them look as even more Other and un-Christian. Yet during the duel, Saladin bears upon his shield a symbol of a serpent, which evokes strong Christian imagery associated with the fall of man. For the Christian reader, this would probably have been a clear sign of Saladin as the heathen enemy, and as leader of all Saracens this would reflect on the entire people as such. In this way, Richard's victory over Saladin is a victory of Christianity over Islam, or a victory against the Others.

Other individuals who appear on the opposite side of Richard's army are ex-Christians that either converted to Islam or that simply changed sides for a prospect of power, money or lands. Early on, the text relates that "thorwgh tresoun of the Eerl Roys" (1311), the Holy Cross was lost. As this is one of the main reasons the Third Crusade was called in the text, it implies that someone who committed treason against Christianity, in some way caused

the Third Crusade. In Acre, Richard is told by Saracen messengers from Saladin that Markes Feraunt is to remain king of Syria, but that he can have several other cities. Richard rejects immediately, making Feraunt out to be “becomen a Sarezyn” (3261) for bribing Saladin to become the King of Syria. The implication being that if someone chooses not to fight the Saracens, he is no better than them. The same applies for King Philip of France, who accepts ransom from the Saracen citizens of two cities after they “cryde mercy, and fylle on knees” (4682). Richard is furious with him, and together they go back to the cities to destroy them after all. The Saracens call them out for breaking their agreement, but since they are heathens a promise to them has little meaning. Richard’s is clear: No Saracens shall have mercy unless they convert. Any who spare them are not true Christians. After Philip helped him destroy the cities after all, Richard forgives him, but warns him not to repeat his mistake: “Thee be forgiven the fyrste gylt” (4785), adding, “Beware, though thou gold coveyte: in this land, do us no dysseyte!” (4791-4792).

If the reader were to pay close attention to the depiction of Saracens, they might come to the conclusion that the Saracens were not as bad as Richard in terms of cruelty or demonic tendencies. Yet, because of the efforts *Richard* puts into dehumanising the Saracens, all this is moved to the background. The only characteristic that should be apparent to the reader is the fact that these Saracens are Other, and that alone is enough to judge them unworthy to live or even consider as full human beings. Them being not white, not European, and above all not Christian is in this text enough reason to slaughter them. This means that they are the perfect faceless Other for Richard to fight in order to exorcise his own Otherness.

3.3 Exorcising Richard’s Other

As Nicola McDonald poses: “*Richard*, (...) is in effect a narrative of exorcism: an account of how Richard successfully purges himself of his devilish inheritance” (140). Yet it might not be the case that he is purely a demonic Other. In fact, he might be closer to a hybrid of Christian and Saracen nature. Hybridity is briefly mentioned in Siobhain Bly Calkin’s work in Saracens and English identity within *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. This is in context of Postcolonialism, and therefore uses language of the colonised and the coloniser, yet the idea is still very fitting for Richard’s character. Calkin writes: “Hybridity displays the intermingling of two cultures rather than the superimposition of one dominant culture upon the other” (28). While this intermingling between Christianity and Otherness (if not

specifically Saracen) occurs within Richard himself, and not in an entire culture, it remains an interesting way to view his struggle between the two cultures of his parents. In particular, a later passage in Calkin can easily be a metaphor for Richard's situation pre-exorcism: "Both colonisers and colonised wish to disavow the interweaving that has occurred and claim purity in their group's identity, but they cannot erase the fact of their connection and intermingling" (28). It is interesting then, that Richard does indeed seem to manage splitting the unwanted Other side from his desired Self. In that case, the narrative of exorcism might be even stronger, as it seeks to avoid Richard becoming (or perhaps remaining) a hybrid between the two cultures and religions.

Signs of this narrative can be spotted as early as the tale of Richard's demonic birthmother. This divergence from history sets Richard on a different path than would initially be expected, with entirely new motivations to join the Third Crusade. Not only does he go and fight the Saracens to defend and spread Christianity, he also seeks to redeem himself as a true Christian king. This aspiration to become a true Christian king is symbolised during the tournament in England. Here, he shows himself to be a valiant fighter, but more importantly, his three outfits symbolise the transition he will make from demonically influenced brutish king to a truly enlightened Christian king during his time in the Crusade. In fact, the three outfits are very representative of three phases in Richard's journey towards exorcism and true Christianity throughout the narrative, as each corresponds to a change in character.

For his first appearance at the tournament, Richard arrives (anonymously, as in all three outfits) on a deep black horse, his attire is described as "orgulous" (272), which Larkin translates as "arrogantly splendid". His crest bears the symbol of a raven, and he wears a bell around his neck. The text explains the bell to be a symbol for the religious obligation "with holy chyrche to dwell, and them to noy and greve, that be not in the right byleve" (282-285). This would imply that if the outfits do indeed represent the transition Richard wishes to make, that this would be his current personality. He shows himself to be somewhat arrogant, but does display his intention to stay with the church, and harm and harass those that are not of the Christian faith. At this point in the narrative he has not truly been exposed to Saracen Others yet, so there is no real violent imagery in this attire. This first outfit corresponds to the first phase of Richard's journey, including the tournament itself, his capture by Modard and his return to England to rally his forces for the Third Crusade. In this time, he has outbursts of odd, un-Christian behaviour, such as the murder of Modard's son and the disgracing of his daughter by bedding her, but he does not yet seem to be excessively cruel or violent. The

clergy are more than willing to pay for his ransom without any moral objections.

The second outfit shows far more violent imagery. He rides “upon a stede rede as blode” (333), wearing red armour. His crest bears “a rede hounde: the tayle henge to the grounde” (337-338). The implied meaning for this hound is described in *Richard* as “the hethen folke to brynge downe, them to slee for Goddes love, and Crysten men to brynge above” (339-341). Here, the harming and harassing symbolised by the bell has turned into bringing down and slaying the heathen folk. Furthermore, the hound brings up striking parallels with the way Richard and his people are often described as tailed dogs by several enemy forces, namely the French (“Englysshe Taylardedes” (1776)) and the Saracens (“Ynglyssche dogge” (4353)). Even his own knights, under the impression that Richard is an unknown knight, compare this outfit to the devil “hys hors and hys atyr was red; hym semyd weel to ben a qued” (521-522). Therefore, while this outfit is described as one to symbolise the desire to slay Christianity’s enemies, for those observing or partaking in the tournament this is not quite clear. This blurring of his inner Christian and Demon identities is paralleled in the corresponding phase of Richard’s journey in the narrative, starting at the arrival in the East for the Third Crusade up to his beheading of 60,000 Saracens (around line 3739). This phase features Richard at his most shockingly violent, and includes the two episodes of cannibalism. Notably, his fellow Englishmen are not as comfortable with this cannibalism as he seems to be, as shown by the cook’s fear when forced to reveal the Saracen head to Richard (3210). This would seem to indicate that he has not fully adopted the Christian values expected of him. This second tournament outfit represents the phase where he has to discover what approach would make him a true Christian king, and how he should go about the purging of the Holy Land from Saracen influence. Here, Richard’s inner demon and Christian are in conflict.

This conflict is resolved when he beheads the 60,000 Saracens on the orders of an Angel. This last phase of redemption and exorcism is represented in his third and final outfit in the tournament. He arrives in “atyre whyte as mylke” (387), with a “crosse rede” (389) on his shoulder. On his head he carries the symbol of a “dove whyte” (393). This white dove is named by the text as a representation of the “Holy Spyryte” (394). This is a drastically different, much more Christian association than the one carried by the crest bearing the red hound in the previous outfit. This is further stressed by the resemblance the white outfit with the red cross has to a Templar’s attire. When his knights see him in this outfit they mention how he stood “with wraththe strong and egre mayn” (571), translated by Larkin as “with a strong rage and fierce strength”. In this last outfit then, he has taken up the role of a Christian

Crusader King, a pious warrior against God's enemies. This particular role starts in the narrative as, after his first major slaughter, the Crusade moves quickly from city to city, slaying Saracens as they go. Richard here discovered the essence of crusading: quickly and efficiently killing all Saracens they encounter. At one point, the reader is reminded of the third Templar-like outfit of the tournament in a vision Richard receives from Christ. In it he sees Saint George, wearing "armes whyte as the flour with a croys of red colour" (4889-4890), while he delivers fell strokes to his enemies. This vision inspires Richard to fight the same way against the Saracens. This direct parallel shows very clearly how far he has come during the Crusade, from comparisons to the devil to being compared to a Saint. His aspiration to become a true Christian king has been fulfilled, and he seems to have fully rid himself of his Otherness in fighting the Saracens. Not only is he a Christian king, he has earned the privilege to symbolise the entirety of the Christian faith. The duel between Richard and Saladin (5721 onward) places the leaders of the Saracen and Christian forces opposite one another. Richard, having earned his position as the uncontested true Christian king, manages to win the duel.

The exorcism of Richard's Otherness might not even be the only one in the narrative, even though it is definitely the most prominent. In essence, his exorcism mirrors the exorcism of the Holy Land in its entirety. The purging of the Holy Land from Saracen influence may well be read as the exorcism and separation of the two religions. Relating to the concept of hybridity, Islamic and Christian faith are depicted as thinking themselves unable to be combined in a form of hybrid society, or to form a sense of coexistence. Both sides fight hard to rid themselves of the influence of the other religion, in this case the crusaders as the invaders, and Saracens as the invaded. In the eyes of the Christians, the only way the Saracens should be allowed to live, is if they convert to the Christian faith. Only in this scenario can the groups coexist, if one completely adapts to the other.

Even though, in the end, Richard does not manage to recapture Jerusalem, the text stresses that he fully intended to return to Jerusalem to finish the Crusade. Philip of France is described as going home because he fell ill, and would not heal unless he returned to France (5911-5914). This angers Richard, since Philip goes home before they finish their divine duty, but Philip leaves all the same. Richard, then, also has to return home to secure his crown from his brother, but agrees on a truce of "three yer, three monethis and thre dawes" (7162). Therefore, when he is eventually killed in England, the fact that Jerusalem did remain unconquered can, as far as the narrative is concerned, in no way be blamed on Richard. The crusaders also never managed to recapture the Holy Cross, as the Saracens claim to have lost

it (3732), which is outside of Richard's power to resolve. This explanation allows him to be remembered as a Crusader Hero to be counted among the greats, while conveniently underplaying the fact that he did not complete his divine mission. The exorcism of his inner Other is complete, and he has presumably joined God in heaven.

4. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to explore in what way the concept of Otherness is manifested in both King Richard and the Saracen enemy within *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, and to what degree Richard can be said to have a narrative of exorcising this Otherness within this work. This idea came about when reading Nicola McDonald's work on the eating and cannibalism within *Richard*, and was further developed upon reading Peter Larkin's newly released edition of the narrative and Leona F. Cordery's work on Saracens in Middle English Literature.

The Otherness in both the Saracens and Richard is comparable in where it stems from. The Self being a 'white, Christian, European man', an Other would be anyone who does not match up to this description. The Saracens are blatantly other in this regard, since they are not white, not Christian and not European. Yet what they actually are, of their own regard, is not important. This explains why their description is very inconsistent in comparison to their historical counterpart: it did not need to be clear what they were, just that they were different and therefore inferior. Not having a clear identity also helped *Richard* in dehumanizing them as much as possible, so the reader would be sure to acknowledge Richard as being on the right side of this war. In a way, the Saracens have been 'othered' so strongly within the text, it is hard to find a consistent Self, even when attentively looking for one.

For Richard this Otherness is more internal. Externally he is a white, Christian, European man, but his struggle with Otherness concerns his mother's demonic nature, which is in contest with the Christian prerequisite of being a Self in this narrative. This is why he is allowed a narrative of exorcising his Otherness, when the Saracens are usually not given this chance unless they convert: he is still externally a representation of the Self, but is merely in conflict with his parentage. In this narrative, he seems to symbolise the struggle between a Self and an Other in a very striking way, in particular how he attempts and eventually succeeds to solve this struggle. In order to fight his demonic inner Other, he makes no real attempt to better his own behaviour per say. More so, he chooses to direct the cruelty and violence that stems from this at an enemy that physically embodies the Other in this context. The purposefully shocking cannibalism episodes within the text precede the more systematic slaughter of Saracens and capture of the cities. This cannibalism shows his initial attempts to redirect his Otherness towards a more Christian goal, and the shift to a more acceptable and less shocking way to fight wars and scare enemies shows his adapting to Christian ideology, while at the same time maintaining his violent nature.

His allies are more than willing to accept this excessive violence since it benefits them, and is in actuality not far from the Crusader Warrior ideal. *Richard* even features angels telling him to continue the beheading and slaughter of the Saracens, so there can be no doubt that this is a good, Christian form of expressing his violence, and therefore does not endanger his aspiration to be a true Christian king.

If the actions of Richard were to be placed opposite the actions of the Saracens, it becomes clear that Richard was a lot crueller than the Saracens in his warring tactics. The idealisation of his merciless slaughter, near sadistic pleasure in showing the Saracens the decapitated heads of their nobles at a feast and very violent behaviour in battle as characteristics of a good Christian might seem very strange to the modern reader. However, the reader was never meant to make this comparison, as the two groups are not meant to be on any equal level. The Saracens are so inferior by being Other, that they are not even worthy of being compared to these valiant Christian crusaders.

While it indeed can be said that Richard has a narrative of exorcism, it is striking to see how little it had actually earned the king in the end, in terms of an actual, final victory. He did not manage to recapture Jerusalem or the Holy Cross, and he did not kill the leader of Saracens, Saladin. Even his death was not a particularly honourable one, fighting for God and the Christian faith in the East. On the contrary, he was killed rather dishonourably by an English soldier under his brother John's command. The end of the text seems fairly abrupt, especially after slaying so many Saracens, conquering so many cities, and beating Saladin in a duel. It almost seems anticlimactic, for Richard to lose his crown and his life after earning his status, but that might be a mere flaw of modern perspective. The greatest reward for a Christian Crusader King would most likely be a place beside God in heaven, as a martyr for the Christian faith, which is exactly what the narrative offers him. After being laid to rest next to his Christian father Henry II, he is praised for his conquering. "Kynge Rycharde was a conquerour, God gyve his soule moche honour!" (7233-7234). In the end, Richard conquered not only cities in the Holy Land, he also conquered his own struggle against Otherness, and all it took was violently slaughtering thousands upon thousands of Saracens in the name of Christ.

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Abstract

After Peter Larkin released a new edition of the Middle English text *Richard Coer de Lyon*, academic discourse on this work was revitalised. This thesis adds to this discourse by analysing the narrative in terms of the postcolonial concept of Otherness, as applied to both the protagonist, the English king Richard the Lionheart, and to the Saracen (Muslim) enemy in the Third Crusade, during which the narrative largely takes place. In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the king is described as having a demonic mother and king Henry II as a Christian father, which results in a struggle between Richard's demonic self and his Christian self. This is analysed as a struggle between the Other and the Self, and contrasted with the clear Othering of the Saracens through making them seem as different as possible to the Christian ideal. This thesis also explores the possibility of *Richard* experiencing a narrative of exorcism throughout the crusade, in battling his inner demonic Otherness by slaying the Saracens as representations of complete Otherness. *Richard* goes to great lengths to make the Otherness of the Saracens very apparent through dehumanising them in various ways, thereby giving a morally unambiguous way for Richard to slaughter them in excessively violent ways. In the end, Richard can be said to have achieved exorcism through transforming himself from a violent and cruel demonic king to a true crusader king: only violent towards those that are not worthy of mercy.

Keywords

Other, Otherness, Demons, Saracens, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Middle English Romance

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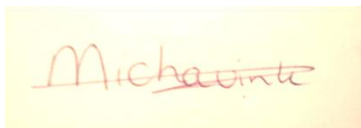
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