

## CONSTRUCTING THE POST-TRUTH IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

## Orta Çağ İngiliz Romansında Post-Truthu İnşa Etmek

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## ÖZET

Gerçek ötesi (post-truth) kavramı, tarihin derinlerine kadar uzanarak zaman ve yer sınırlarını aşmış ve modern çağımızın belirleyici bir özelliği haline almıştır. Dijital Çağ, genellikle gerçek ötesi ile ilişkilendirilir çünkü burada bilginin bolca yayılması ve gerçeğin esnekliği, duygusal çağrılar ve ideolojinin nesnel doğruluktan önce geldiği bir atmosfer teşvik edilir. Bununla birlikte, gerçek ötesinin kökleri daha derinlerde ve yüzyıllar boyunca süren karmaşık bir anlatıya sahip gibi görünmektedir. Bu makale, özellikle *Richard Coeur de Lion* (Aslan Yürekli Richard) ile Orta Çağ İngiliz romans anlatıcılığına gerçek ötesi perspektifinden bakmaktadır. Uzmanlar, şövalyelik, saraylı usulü aşk ve kahramanlığın Orta Çağ İngiliz romanslarında Sarazenlerin nasıl tasvir edildiğini uzun süredir araştırmaktadır. Bu edebi anlatılar, Orta Çağdaki Hristiyan-Müslüman etkileşimlerini anlamak için temaları, sembolleri ve karakterleri karmaşık bir şekilde harmanlamaktadır. Bununla birlikte, bu temsiller, özellikle İslam ve Müslümanlar ile ilgili olanlar, gerçekçi olmayan bir bakış açısından sıklıkla göz ardı edilmektedir. Sarazenlerin tasviri sadece bir anlatı tercihi değil, aynı zamanda Orta Çağ İngiliz romanslarının temelini oluşturan kültürel ve tarihsel çevrenin bir yansımasıdır. Bu makale, Orta Çağ İngiliz romansı *Richard Coeur de Lion*'da İslam ve Müslümanların nasıl temsil edildiğini, özellikle Sarazenlerin gerçek ötesi dinamikleri bağlamında incelemektedir. Orta Çağda geçen bu romans, siyasi ve ideolojik nedenlerle gerçeği stratejik olarak manipüle eden bir toplumu tasvir eder. *Richard Coeur de Lion*, tarihi ve teolojik gerçekleri kasıtlı olarak çarpıtarak duygusal tepkiler uyandırır, Hristiyan inancını güçlendirir ve Sarazeni doğası gereği öteki olarak konumlandırır. Bu çalışma, romansın uyarlanabilir yapısı ve gerçeklerden ziyade duygusal tepkilere öncelik veren anlatım tarzını inceleyerek gerçek ötesi stratejilerinin Orta Çağ'a ait örneklerini ortaya çıkarır. Bu makale, *Richard Coeur de Lion* gibi Orta Çağ anlatılarının ahlaki rehberliği kasıtlı çarpıtmalarla karıştırarak gerçeklik algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve Sarazenlerin Haçlı Seferleri bağlamında temsiline nasıl etki ettiğini incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Orta Çağ, Gerçek Ötesi, Romans, Richard Coeur de Lion, Sarazen

## ABSTRACT

The concept of post-truth extends deep into history, transcending the boundaries of time and place, and is a defining characteristic of our modern age. The digital age is often associated with post-truth because it fosters an atmosphere where the abundant dissemination of information and the flexibility of truth take precedence over objective accuracy, driven by emotional appeals and ideology. However, the roots of post-truth seem to lie deeper and possess a complex narrative that has spanned centuries. This article examines medieval English romance, notably *Richard Coeur de Lion*, through the lens of post-truth. Experts have long studied how chivalry, noble love, and heroism are depicted in medieval English romances. These literary narratives intricately blend themes, symbols, and characters to illuminate the complex interactions between Christians and Muslims during the Middle Ages. However, these representations, especially those related to Islam and Muslims, are often overlooked from a realistic perspective. The depiction of Saracens is not just a narrative choice but also a reflection of the cultural and historical context that forms the foundation of medieval English romances. This article examines how Islam and Muslims are represented in the medieval English romance *Richard Coeur de Lion*, particularly in the context of post-truth dynamics regarding Saracens. This medieval romance depicts a society that strategically manipulates the truth for political and ideological reasons. *Richard Coeur de Lion* deliberately distorts historical and theological truths to evoke emotional responses, strengthen Christian faith, and position the Saracen as the inherent other. This study uncovers medieval examples of post-truth strategies by examining the adaptable structure of the romance and its narrative style that prioritizes emotional responses over facts. This article discusses how the moral guidance of medieval narratives, such as those featuring *Richard Coeur de Lion*, influences perceptions of reality by deliberately incorporating distortions and how it affects the representation of Saracens within the context of the Crusades.

**Keywords:** Middle Ages, Post-Truth, Romance, Richard Coeur de Lion, Saracen

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT / GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

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doğrulukta önce geldiği bir iklimi teşvik eder. Bununla birlikte, Gerçek ötesinin kökleri daha derinlere iniyor gibi görünmekte ve yüzyıllar boyunca ilerleyen karmaşık bir anlatıyı takip etmektedir. Bu makale, Orta Çağ'ın keşfedilmemiş topraklarına dalarak, özellikle *Richard Coeur de Lion* olmak üzere, Orta Çağ İngiliz romansçılık dünyasına gerçek ötesi merceğini uygulamaktadır. Orta Çağ İngiliz romanslarında, şövalyelik, saraya ait aşk ve kahramanlığın hüküm sürdüğü, akademisyenlerce uzun zamandır Sarazenlerin nasıl tasvir edildiğini incelenmektedir. Bu edebi anlatılar, Orta Çağ'da Hristiyan-Müslüman etkileşimlerini keşfetmek için temaları, sembolleri ve karakterleri karmaşık bir şekilde harmanlamaktadır. Ancak, bu temsiller, özellikle İslam ve Müslümanlar hakkında olanlar, genellikle gerçek ötesi perspektifinden göz ardı edilmektedir. Sarazenlerin tasviri sadece bir anlatı tercihi değil, aynı zamanda Orta Çağ İngiliz romanslarının temelini oluşturan tarihsel ve kültürel ortamın bir yansımasıdır. Saraylıların temsiline dikkatle bakarak, bu makalenin amacı, Orta Çağ'da Hristiyan-Müslüman dinamiklerinin nasıl işlediğini ve bu romansların bu ilişkinin hem aynası hem de şekillendirici araçları olarak nasıl hizmet ettiğini keşfetmektir. Günümüzde, gerçeklerin ve bilgilerin manipülasyonu belirli ideolojik veya politik amaçlara hizmet etmektedir. Ancak, bu tür manipülasyon dijital çağa özgü değildir; tarihi örnekler daha önceki dönemlerde de bulunabilir. Orta Çağ'da da, belirli inanç ve çıkarlarla uyumlu hale getirilmek üzere bilgi, anlatılar ve hatta gerçeklerin stratejik olarak değiştirildiği bir post-truth senaryosu yaygındır. Gerçek ötesi, algıları çarpıtabilecek hatalı ideolojiler aracılığıyla açıkladığı gibi, duyguların ve öznel inançların nesnel gerçeklerden daha fazla etkiye sahip olduğu durumları ifade eder. Benzer şekilde, siyasi söylemde nesnel gerçeğin gerekliliğini ve gerçeklerin görüşle iç içe geçtiğinde ortaya çıkan riskleri vurgular. Tarih boyunca, ikna edici stratejiler genellikle belirli grupların görüşlerini göz ardı eden veya çarpıtıcı fikirlere dayanmıştır, bu da Orta Çağ romanslarının Müslüman Öteki'yi nasıl tasvir ettiğini yansıtır. Bilginin seçici kullanımı ve doğruluğun göz ardı edilmesi, bu bağlamda gerçek ötesinin ana bileşenleridir ve modern yanlış bilgilendirme gibi, kararları ve inançları şekillendiren kasıtlı çarpıtmalar yaratır. *Richard Coeur de Lion*, Orta Çağ ortamında gerçek ötesinin işleyişini keşfetmek için bir çerçeve sunarak, anlatıların algıları etkilemek ve eylemleri haklı çıkarmak için nasıl oluşturulduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu makale, gerçek ötesi anlatılarının Orta Çağ İngiliz romansı *Richard Coeur de Lion*'da kasıtlı olarak yapılan atlamalar, manipülasyonlar ve çarpıtmalar yoluyla nasıl tezahür ettiğini incelemektedir. Bu romansa odaklanarak, çalışma gerçeğin manipülasyonunun o dönemin siyasi ve ideolojik gündemleriyle nasıl örtüşen bir anlatı oluşturduğunu araştırmaktadır. *Richard Coeur de Lion*, duygusal çekiciliği önceliklendirir, izleyicileri büyüleyen karmaşık duygusal deneyimler yaratır. Bu çağrılar aracılığıyla, romans dinliyecilerini / okuyucularını meşgul eder, merak ve korkudan ahlaki öfkeye kadar uzanan tepkiler uyandırarak, romansın ideolojik hedefleri doğrultusunda algıları şekillendirir. Gerçek ötesinin karmaşıklıkları Orta Çağ döneminde ortaya çıkarken, Orta Çağ İngiliz romansları, bazen istenen sonuçlara ulaşmak için yalan ve aldatmacanın haklı görüldüğü bir çağda ilginç bir yanıt sunar. Böyle karmaşıklıklar, dönemin ahlaki ve etik belirsizliklerini aşan anlatılar oluşturuyor gibi görünmekte ve izleyiciye rahatlatıcı bir vizyon sunmaktadır. Bu vizyonda, adalet, sevgi ve erdem sıklıkla aldatma ve sahtekarlığın üstesinden gelir. Bu tür anlatılar, sadece eğlence kaynakları olarak değil, aynı zamanda gerçeğin manipülasyonu ile işaretlenmiş bir dünyada ahlaki pusulalar olarak da hizmet eder. Sarazenlerin düşmanca figürler olarak tasvir edilmesi, Orta Çağ İngiliz romanslarında Doğu ve Batı arasındaki köklü ayrımcılığın kökenlerini bulur. Doğu ve Batı arasındaki bu ayrım, bu anlatılardaki Sarazen stereo-tiplerini şekillendirmede önemli bir rol oynar. Sarazenler genellikle Hristiyan değerlerinin zıttı olarak, kaotik ve tehditkar bir güç olarak tasvir edilir. Bu tasvir, post-truth kavramıyla ilişkilendirilmektedir. Gerçek ötesi bir toplumda, gerçekler ve nesnel gerçeklik sıklıkla siyasi ve ideolojik amaçlar için çarpıtılır. Bu makalede Orta Çağ İngiliz romansı olan *Richard Coeur de Lion*'da Sarazenlerin nasıl ustalıkla manipüle edilerek uygun düşmanlar olarak kullanıldığı ve Hristiyan ideolojisinin ön plana çıkarıldığı incelenmektedir.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of post-truth, a defining feature of the contemporary era in which we live, extends beyond temporal and spatial confines, stretching into the depths of history. It is frequently linked to the digital age, where the abundant dissemination of information and the flexibility of truth foster a climate in which emotional appeals and ideology often take precedence over factual accuracy. Nevertheless, the roots of post-truth seem to run deeper, tracing a complex narrative that spans centuries. This article ventures into the uncharted territory of the Middle Ages, applying the lens of post-truth to the world of Middle English romances, notably *Richard Coeur de Lion*. Scholars have long examined how Saracens are depicted in Middle English romances, where chivalry, courtly love, and heroism prevail.<sup>1</sup> These literary narratives intricately blend themes, symbols, and characters to explore Christian-Muslim interactions during the Middle Ages. However, these representations, particularly concerning Islam and Muslims, have usually been overlooked through the lens of post-truth. The portrayal of Saracens is not merely a narrative choice, but a reflection of the historical and cultural milieu that underpins the Middle English romances. By scrutinizing the representation of Saracens, this paper's primary concern is to explore how nuanced Christian-Muslim dynamics operated in the Middle Ages and how these romances served as both mirrors and shaping tools of this relationship.

Nowadays, manipulating facts and information serves specific ideological or political purposes. Yet, such manipulation is not unique to the digital age; historical precedents can be found in earlier eras. In the Middle Ages, post-truth scenarios were also prevalent, where information, narratives, and facts were strategically altered to conform to specific beliefs and interests. Post-truth refers to situations where emotions and subjective beliefs impact public opinion more than objective facts, as Stanley explains through flawed ideologies that can distort perceptions (2015: 210). Similarly, Arendt emphasizes the necessity of factual truth in political discourse and the risks posed when facts are entangled with opinion (1968: 238). Throughout history, persuasive strategies have often relied on ideas that dismiss or distort the views of groups, a phenomenon that mirrors how medieval romances depict the Muslim "Other." In this context, the selective use of knowledge and disregard for accuracy are key components of post-truth, creating intentional distortions that, like modern misinformation, shape decisions and beliefs. *Richard Coeur de Lion* provides a framework for exploring the workings of post-truth in a medieval setting, revealing how narratives were crafted to influence perceptions and justify actions.

This paper examines how post-truth narratives manifest in the Middle English romance *Richard Coeur de Lion* through purposeful omissions, manipulations, and distortions. By focusing on this romance, the study explores how the manipulation of truth creates a narrative that aligns with the political and ideological agendas of the time. *Richard Coeur de Lion* prioritizes emotional appeal, crafting intricate emotional experiences that captivate audiences. Through these appeals, the romance engages readers, evoking responses ranging from curiosity and fear to moral outrage, thereby shaping perceptions in line with the romance's ideological goals. As the complexities of the post-truth are uncovered in the medieval period, Middle English romances offer an intriguing response in an era where falsehood and deceit are sometimes justified to achieve desired outcomes. Such complexities seem to craft narratives that navigate the moral and ethical ambiguities of the time, providing the audience with a comforting vision. In this vision, justice, love, and virtue often triumph over deceit and falsehood. Such narratives serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as moral compasses in a world where the manipulation of truth is prevalent.

### 1. Post-Truth Dynamics: *Richard Coeur de Lion*

The portrayal of Saracens as antagonistic figures finds its roots in the deep-seated dichotomy between the Orient and the Occident in Middle English romances. As elucidated by Akbari, this schism between the East and the West plays

<sup>1</sup> For foundational studies on this subject, see Geraldine Heng, "The Romance of England: Richard Coeur de Lion, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation," on race and nation in *Richard Coeur de Lion*; Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "From Due East to True North" and *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450*, on Orientalist perspectives; Margaret Jubb, "The Crusaders' Perceptions of Their Opponents," on Crusader attitudes; and C. Meredith Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste," on the conventional Saracen figure in medieval European literature.

a pivotal role in shaping the Saracen stereotypes in these narratives (2000: 20). Saracens are often depicted as the antithesis of Christian values, representing a chaotic and menacing force. This portrayal can be linked to the post-truth concept, as discussed by McIntyre in Post-truth. In a post-truth society, facts and objective realities are frequently subverted for political and ideological purposes (2018: 13). In Middle English romances, the Saracens are adroitly manipulated to serve as convenient antagonists, reinforcing the concept of the Other and justifying the Christian perspective. This manipulation of truth and facts for narrative convenience is aligned with post-truth tendencies, wherein emotional appeals and ideological agendas take precedence over factual accuracy. *Richard Coeur de Lion* refers to the enmity of the Saracens during the Third Crusade (1189-1192), and Richard's role in it, with a heightened sense of divine purpose and legitimacy:

A holy pope that hyghte Urban,  
Sente to eche a Crystene man,  
And asoyld hem of here synne.  
And gaf hem paradys to wynne,  
Alle that wolde thedyr gon,  
To wreke Jhesu of his foon  
(Larkin, 2005: ll. 1323–1328)

This deliberate historical dislocation is consistent with post-truth strategies, in which the facts are manipulated to fit a specific storyline. The poet embellishes historical details in *Richard Coeur de Lion* to create a story that emphasizes the holiness and valour of Richard's campaign. Pope Urban II (c.1035-1099), rather than the more recent Pope Gregory VII (c.1015-1085), a symbol of crusading success, indicates a conscious attempt to elevate the Third Crusade. This deception portrays Richard and his army as the embodiment of a mission endorsed by God, reinforcing the themes of religious fervor and English valor. As such, the anachronistic reference to Pope Urban II in the romance highlights the power of storytelling in shaping perspectives and collective memory, serving as a stark example of how historical narratives can be distorted and manipulated to further particular ideological goals.

In addition to the Orient and Occident dichotomy, Saracens are frequently subjected to misconceptions and stereotypes in Middle English romances. Al-Olaqi's exploration of English literary representations of the Arabs highlights how these narratives perpetuated stereotypes not grounded in factual accuracy (2012: 1767–69). The portrayal of Saracens as malevolent figures can be seen as an example of how narrative convenience and emotional appeals often overshadow historical veracity.

Saracens are presented in a manner that aligns with the prevalent sentiments towards Muslims during the Crusades. The emotional portrayal of Saracens as the other in these romances reflects the post-truth elements of manipulating public sentiment to serve specific agendas. While Saracens are frequently depicted as antagonists in Middle English romances, there exist instances where these narratives present more nuanced and complex portrayals. These instances challenge one-dimensional stereotypes and contribute to a profound understanding of the relationships between Christian and Islamic societies during the Middle Ages. The nuanced portrayals of Saracens challenge the stereotypes associated with these characters. Speed suggests these narratives draw upon the chanson de geste tradition, offering multifaceted depictions of Saracen characters (1990: 593). This complexity challenges the one-sided view of Saracens as antagonists and exemplifies the willingness of these romances to engage with a more intricate understanding of Christian-Muslim interactions. Within the post-truth context, the portrayal of Saracens as complex characters reflects the notion that not all narrative elements are as straightforward as they may initially appear. The willingness to deviate from stereotypes demonstrates narrative flexibility that aligns with post-truth storytelling, where emotional appeals and complex characterizations may be prioritized over one-dimensional and straightforward representations.

To further comprehend the complexity of Saracen portrayals, it is essential to consider the historical context in which these narratives were produced. In "Lex Mahometi", Tischler examines how early Christian scholars, particularly during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, used polemical strategies to frame Islam as a distorted form of religious law. By coining the term "Lex Mahometi" (meaning "the law of Muhammad"), Christian writers depicted Islam as

an imitation of legitimate religious systems, contrasting it with Christian “divine law” and casting Muhammad as a false prophet or even an Antichrist figure (Tischler, 2015: 4–5). This narrative aimed to discredit Islam by reframing it through a Christian theological lens, associating it with heretical influences. For example, in the *Indiculus Luminosus*, Paul Albarus portrays Muhammad as demonically influenced and falsely claiming divine authority, reinforcing this polemical framing (Tischler, 2015: 4–5). According to Tischler, this rhetoric not only delegitimized Islam but also served to consolidate Christian identity by establishing a strict opposition to Islamic “legalism” and “false” revelation. This strategy aligned with the broader Latin-Christian agenda to present Christian law as the sole, universally valid, divinely ordained system, casting Saracen laws as deceptive and potentially dangerous (Tischler, 2015: 10–11).

When analysing *Richard Coeur de Lion*, it becomes clear that the portrayal of Muslims deviates significantly from historical and theological truth, especially regarding their beliefs. The frequent mention of the imaginary god Termagaunt, a concept without any basis in Islamic theology, demonstrates these discrepancies. These allusions represent the post-truth movement, emphasizing propaganda and emotions over accuracy. *Richard Coeur de Lion* misrepresents the Saracens’ beliefs by creating the god Termagaunt, portraying Muhammad as a god, and giving the misleading impression that Islam is barbaric and polytheistic. The goal of this tactic, which we can refer to as infobesity, is to perplex the audience and make it difficult to discern between the romance’s distortions and the facts. These lies helped legitimize cruel deeds and sway public opinion in favour of the war effort during the post-truth period of the Crusades. This technique aims to disorient the audience, blurring the line between truth and distortion in the poem to legitimize cruel deeds and sway public opinion in favour of the war effort during the post-truth period of the Crusades.

The portrayal of Saracens in Middle English romances is significantly shaped by propagandistic needs to justify the Crusades and reinforce Christian values. Cordery highlights how these narratives manipulate representations of the Saracens to serve political and ideological agendas, portraying them as the ultimate “Other” and a direct threat to Christian identity. This depiction not only reinforces a sense of Christian superiority but also fosters a xenophobic outlook towards the Saracens, framing them as antagonistic figures whose existence threatens both the spiritual and physical well-being of Christendom (Cordery, 2002: 88). By constructing the Saracens as inherently opposed to Christian values, these romances align with post-truth dynamics, whereby facts are subordinated to emotional and ideological appeals designed to unify and mobilise Christian society against a common enemy.

The manipulation of truth and facts aligns with the post-truth concept, where narrative convenience and the need to justify specific actions often take precedence over objective accuracy in these narratives. Saracens as the “other” exemplify post-truth elements, where the emotional appeal of the narrative serves broader ideological purposes. Another dimension of Saracens, as explored by Rouse, discusses how these narratives construct the idea of the Saracen “other” by highlighting the discrepancy between the characters’ expectations of the East and their actual experiences when encountering Saracens (2000: 127–28). This contrast reflects the evolving and often antagonistic relationship between Christian and Islamic societies during the Middle Ages. Within a post-truth context, such emphasis on the emotional and experiential aspects of encounters with Saracens reinforces the notion that factual accuracy may be secondary to the narrative’s emotional impact. As Rouse illustrates, the portrayal of Saracens often caters to medieval Christian audiences’ perspectives, where Saracens are seen as irredeemable foes; “the only good Saracen is a dead Saracen” (2000: 139). *Richard Coeur de Lion* similarly prioritizes the emotional appeal of the “other” to evoke specific sentiments in the audience, aligning with post-truth storytelling, where emotional appeals often supersede objective truth. Examining Saracen portrayals through the lens of post-truth offers insights into the narratological strategies and their connections to the broader cultural, political, and emotional landscape of the Middle Ages.

The concept of post-truth suggests that narratives prioritize emotional appeals over factual content, a dynamic McIntyre describes as one where “facts are less important than feelings in shaping our beliefs about empirical matters” (2018: xv). In Middle English romances, the portrayal of Saracens often exemplifies this prioritization of emotional appeals. The narratives manipulate the portrayal of Saracens to evoke specific emotions—fear, fascination,

or moral outrage—rather than providing an accurate representation of the complex interactions between Christian and Islamic societies. This focus on emotional resonance aligns with McIntyre’s assertion that post-truth practices involve the “selective use of facts” to support a particular agenda, which often disregards objectivity in favour of an emotionally charged narrative (2018: 32).

While studies highlight the complexities and nuances regarding the portrayal of the Saracens, there is no single definition of Saracens. Truth, like the portrayal of Saracens in *Richard Coeur de Lion*, resists easy categorization and reflects this intricate interplay between literature and the malleable nature of truth. Before embarking on an assessment of *Richard Coeur de Lion* as a product of a post-truth society, it is paramount to clearly define post-truth and outline its key attributes related to literature and storytelling. In contemporary discourse, the concept of post-truth encompasses several factors that contribute to its manifestation. Brahms outlines four vital contributors to the post-truth phenomenon in the modern world: the information explosion, disruptive technology, waning trust in institutions and truth-tellers, and the influence of postmodernist ideas (2020: 16). While Brahms primarily examines modern society, her framework serves as a valuable foundation for discerning how post-truth elements may manifest in *Richard Coeur de Lion*.

One central facet of post-truth narratives is the deliberate manipulation of truth to fulfil political and ideological purposes. Kim discusses how medieval European literature, such as *Richard Coeur de Lion*, employs racialized depictions of non-Christian “others” to construct narratives that legitimize colonialism and imperialism, thus supporting frameworks of white supremacy (2021: 5). This theme of manipulating truth for political and ideological ends has roots in the Middle Ages. Jones argues that the songs of geste crafted a demonized portrayal of the Saracen to incite religious fervour, promote Christian superiority, and justify Crusader campaigns. Although medieval Europe had extensive contact with the Islamic world, these narratives constructed a distorted image of Muslims, illustrating how literature served as a tool for reinforcing cultural and religious dominance (1942: 203). While the concept of post-truth is absent in the Middle Ages, it is essential to adapt this framework to comprehend the narrative structure of *Richard Coeur de Lion*. Contemporary perspectives on post-truth reveal insights into the strategic manipulation of truth, especially for political and ideological purposes. McIntyre suggests that post-truth arises from a sense of crisis regarding the erosion of facts in the political sphere, highlighting that this is more than mere propaganda; it represents a deeper ideological effort to challenge objective reality (2018: xiv–xv). In addition, McIntyre underscores that post-truth relies on prioritizing feelings over facts, subordinating empirical evidence to political agendas (2018: xv). Stanley further contextualizes this manipulation within flawed ideological frameworks, noting that propaganda thrives on ideologies that exclude specific perspectives, thus making irrational policies appear reasonable in a democracy (2015: 210). These views highlight how post-truth operates as an ideological tool for reinforcing power through the selective manipulation of truth. These works draw parallels with the post-truth tendencies found in *Richard Coeur de Lion*. The post-truth characteristics underscore the prioritization of emotional appeals and personal beliefs over objective facts, a concept vital to exploring how *Richard Coeur de Lion* may have manipulated ‘truth’ for political and ideological objectives.

Such a historical perspective draws us back to the Middle Ages, exploring how Richard Cœur de Lion could be seen as a product of a post-truth society. One hallmark of post-truth narratives is the manipulation of historical facts and the use of rhetoric. Munro emphasizes how biased depictions of Islam and Muslims in Western sources were instrumental in justifying the Crusades and promoting anti-Muslim sentiment, framing Muslims as idolatrous and barbaric threats to Christian values (1931: 330). Rajabzadeh’s analysis of the Saracen as “other” in Middle English romances illustrates how these narratives perpetuate misinformation and bias, fostering a stark dichotomy between Christian heroes and Muslim villains, which reinforces Christian superiority and serves as a political tool for dehumanization (2019: 3–4). Tolan’s work further reveals how these depictions of Muslims were deliberately crafted to serve Christian ideological, political, and religious agendas, presenting Middle English romances as texts that manipulate truth to align with Christian interests (2008, 16). Tolan’s insights into the ideological underpinnings behind the false depictions of Saracens in these romances suggest that these narratives are constructed as post-truth to serve agendas. These combined insights suggest that *Richard Coeur de Lion* exemplifies features of post-truth narratives, revealing the ideological underpinnings behind the constructed depictions of Saracens to fulfil broader

social agendas.

Narrative ambiguity is a defining characteristic of post-truth narratives in medieval literature. Classen presents various scholarly perspectives on the blending of truth, fiction, and ideology in medieval contexts, offering insights into how Middle English romances utilize ambiguity to present competing ‘truths’ aligned with specific agendas (2016: 153–63). Middle English romances often employ narrative ambiguity to craft distinct versions of ‘truth’ that resonate with different audiences or serve specific political motives. Ottewill-Soulsby highlights how this strategy amplifies emotional appeals in these romances, particularly through Charlemagne’s campaigns, where ambiguity enhances religious fervour and frames conflicts as moral crusades (2016: 1–7). In *Richard Coeur de Lion*, such manipulation of narratives is evident, as Tolan’s analysis of Muslim representations shows. Medieval European depictions of Islam frequently relied on polemical views to justify Christian hegemony. Embrico of Mainz’s portrayal of Muhammad as a heresiarch, driven by ambition and deceit, characterizes him as both a false prophet and a political threat, reinforcing Christian dominance and denigrating Islam (Tolan, 2008: 2–3). By presenting Muhammad as a depraved figure who manipulates his followers through bogus miracles and unfounded claims of holiness, these texts serve to legitimize religious warfare and support the Reconquista (Tolan, 2008: 37–38, 133–34). Thus, narrative ambiguity in these romances allows for the presentation of ‘truths’ that justify conquest, bolster Christian superiority, and manipulate public perception in favour of religious and political agendas.

The role of jongleurs in constructing post-truth narratives is pivotal, as they shape perceptions and cultivate ideological agendas. Cohen’s analysis highlights how the Saracen is built through a network of fantasies that Western audiences consumed, enjoying the exoticized otherness of the Saracen’s body and culture (2001: 114). Jongleurs in Middle English romances not only perpetuate these constructions but also enhance post-truth elements by presenting a racialized and demonized “other” to galvanize Christian identity. This storytelling aligns with McIntyre’s exploration of social media and other platforms as modern-day disseminators of post-truth narratives, suggesting a continuum in using narrative to manipulate perceptions. Furthermore, Stanley’s work on propaganda examines how storytelling manipulates language and ideology to render unreasonable policies appear rational within flawed ideologies. This observation resonates with the post-truth aspects of these medieval texts (Stanley, 2015: 210). Akbari similarly discusses the storytellers’ role in employing historical “facts” and classical rhetoric to construct and reinforce identities, with texts such as *Richard Coeur de Lion* intertwining English and Saracen identities while simultaneously positioning them as ideological adversaries (2005: 198–201). Together, these insights underscore how storytellers in Middle English romances used narrative techniques to craft post-truth elements that manipulated perceptions, reinforced cultural divides, and legitimized Christian hegemony.

*Richard Coeur de Lion* can indeed be viewed as a product of a post-truth society, where truth is malleable and manipulated to serve political and ideological objectives. This narrative illustrates the manipulation of truth, narrative ambiguity, and the role of storytellers in constructing post-truth narratives, aligning with contemporary characteristics of post-truth discourse. Although Middle English romances predate the formal concept, they exhibit a cultural and literary landscape in which truth is shaped to fit various agendas, particularly in their portrayals of Saracens. The text presents multiple, often contradictory representations of Saracens that resist simple categorization. For instance, the Sultan’s necromancer embodies both religious authority as a “noble clerk” and supernatural power as a maystyr nigromacien, demonstrating how Saracen identity fluctuates between learned wisdom and demonic association (Larkin, 2015: l. 5529, 5530). This complexity extends to the construction of truth itself - the passage presents multiple competing truth systems, from Saracen necromancy “Thorwgh the feendes craft of helle” to Christian divine intervention, suggesting that truth, like Saracen identity, resists fixed definition (Larkin, 2015: l. 5532).

The romance’s emotional resonance emerges through carefully constructed narrative techniques that engage readers’ fears, hopes, and religious sensibilities. The text builds emotional investment through dramatic irony - readers know the Sultan’s deceptive plan to use demon-horses “Twoo stronge feendes of the eyr / In lyknesse of twoo stedes feyr” to destroy Richard, creating tension and anxiety (Larkin, 2015: ll. 5533–5534). This anxiety is then relieved through divine intervention, as an angel warns Richard of the trap, “Awake thou, Goddes knyght!” (Larkin, 2015, l. 5550), allowing readers to experience both the threat to their hero and his divine protection. The detailed description of the

supernatural horses “That on was a mere lyke, / That other, a colt, a noble stede” and the angel’s specific instructions for Richard’s defence “Purveye a tree, styf and strong, / Though it be fourty foote long, / And trusse it ovyrthwert his mane” create vivid mental images that heighten emotional engagement (Larkin, 2015: ll. 5538–5539, 5557–5559). Through these narrative strategies, the text not only tells a story but also constructs an emotional experience that reinforces its ideological message about Christian triumph over Saracen deception.

In one episode, Saladin challenges King Richard to single combat, proposing a duel to determine which deity possesses greater power. He boldly presents this as a test of divine might:

Thou sayst thy God is full of myght:  
Wylt thou graunte with spere and scheelde,  
To deraye the ryght in the felde,  
With helme, hawberk, and brondes bryght,  
On strong stedes, goode and lyght,  
Whether it is of more power,  
Jhesu or Jubyter?  
(Larkin, 2015: ll. 5494–5500)

This challenge, followed by an oath that if Richard were to slay Saladin, he would gain dominion over Babylon and Macedonia, amplifies the stakes, constructing a fictional encounter that never occurred historically but serves to stoke Christian fervour against the Saracen “other.” The suggestion of a cosmic test through combat not only elevates the conflict to a divine level but also reinforces the Christian-Muslim antagonism by pitting their deities directly against each other. Such dramatic narrative embellishments reveal how the romance uses imaginative retellings to inspire zeal and shape perception, embedding post-truth elements that reinforce the ideological divides of the time. This manipulation of events to portray a religious and cultural superiority exemplifies how post-truth elements are deeply interwoven into medieval storytelling, tailoring ‘truth’ to support the narrative’s intended impact.

These portrayals often prioritize emotional impact over factual accuracy, framing Saracens as fearsome and demonic figures meant to reinforce Christian unity and justify the Crusades. For instance, Jubb notes that depictions of Saracens as idol-worshipping pagans, a gross misrepresentation of Islamic monotheism, were common despite firsthand knowledge of Islam’s actual beliefs. This narrative choice catered to readers’ preconceptions and intensified their engagement by amplifying fear and animosity toward non-Christians (2005: 228–31). Menache, meanwhile, examines the emotional landscape of the Crusades and its influence on the portrayal of Muslims. Her analysis reveals how emotions such as anger and hatred, fuelled by religious zeal, were integral to shaping medieval Christian perceptions of Muslims. Menache discusses how these intense feelings, continuously stoked by ecclesiastical propaganda, served as a “sine qua non” of the Crusades, reinforcing a worldview in which Muslims were framed as existential threats (2010: 15–19). This ideological framing found its way into literature, where Muslims were depicted through emotionally loaded language that highlighted their supposed cruelty and savagery, thereby justifying the Christian mission and further cementing these narratives in the cultural consciousness. For instance, in *Richard Coeur de Lion*, Muslims are portrayed as ruthless and deceitful enemies, as seen when the Sultan employs dark magic to summon demonic steeds as part of his plot to defeat Richard. This supernatural and sinister portrayal not only amplifies the fearsome image of Muslims but also reinforces the narrative of Christian moral superiority, casting the conflict as a righteous struggle against forces of evil. Such depictions leverage heightened language and exaggeration to evoke a strong emotional response from readers, aligning with the ideological goals of these texts by shaping perceptions and justifying crusading zeal. These emotional elements in both Jubb’s and Menache’s analyses underscore how Middle English romances, such as *Richard Coeur de Lion*, employ such portrayals not only to evoke emotional responses but also to construct a post-truth narrative that aligns with the ideological goals of the period, merging literary embellishment with political purpose.

Tolan explores the emotional impact and appeals prevalent in *Richard Coeur de Lion*, noting that emotions serve as powerful storytelling tools that reinforce ideological messages and resonate deeply with readers (2002: 95). He emphasizes that these appeals are not limited to character portrayals but extend to the construction of moral dilemmas

and ethical choices, fostering a narrative framework in which emotions shape readers' perceptions of right and wrong within a Christian-Muslim dichotomy (2002: 106). For example, Sultan's summoning of demonic steeds through dark magic amplifies the fearsome and supernatural depiction of Muslims, framing them as a morally corrupt and sinister enemy. This portrayal is intended to evoke strong emotional responses, enhancing the narrative's underlying message of Christian superiority and justifying the Crusades.

Akbari further analyses how *Richard Coeur de Lion* contributes to the dichotomy between the Orient and Occident, where the East is depicted as exotic, dangerous, and morally othered (2000: 20). This binary construction not only heightens curiosity and animosity toward the Muslim 'other' but also reinforces the ideological framework of the Crusades by presenting the East as an existential threat. Such emotional appeals, as seen in the supernatural and morally charged portrayal of the Sultan and his followers, prioritize ideological alignment over factual accuracy. This approach in Middle English romances exemplifies how emotional responses are instrumental in conveying complex political and religious agendas, aligning with the ideological goals of the period.

Seifert emphasizes the importance of understanding how cognitive processes for detecting and processing misinformation are compromised in the post-truth era, as misinformation infiltrates technological and social frameworks, eroding source credibility and factual distinctions (2017: 397–400). This concept is particularly relevant to *Richard Coeur de Lion*, where emotional manipulation becomes a primary vehicle for delivering a specific agenda. For instance, the narrative evokes intense emotions by depicting the Saracens through an idolatrous trinity, comprised of Mahoun, Termagaunt, and Appolyn—a fabrication meant to construct Muslims as irrational idolaters, fundamentally opposed to Christian beliefs (Strickland, 2003: 166; Larkin, 2015: ll. 2714, 3744). This constructed idolatry reflects a strategy of "Othering" that aims to instill fear and moral superiority within Christian audiences, ultimately justifying Crusade efforts by depicting the Muslim enemy as inherently villainous and sacrilegious.

Focusing on Saracen portrayals and the emotional fabric of the Crusades, Strickland and Sumberg suggest that Middle English romances, such as those featuring *Richard Coeur de Lion*, often prioritize emotional resonance over factual content (2003:166; 1959: 225–34). Such narratives, shaped by the era's prevailing sentiments, draw on intense and morally charged depictions—such as the accounts of the Tafurs' supposed acts of cannibalism—to emphasize the barbarity of Muslims, feeding into a sense of urgency and righteousness among Christian audiences (Sumberg, 1959: 225–34). The emotional appeals, including constructed moral dilemmas and the desire for conquest, are thus foregrounded, reinforcing the idea that emotions, rather than facts, are pivotal to the narrative's influence.

Building on extensive scholarship on Saracens and the varied interpretations they evoke, it becomes clear that a singular, fixed definition of the Saracen figure remains elusive. The Middle Ages—a complex tapestry of political intrigue, religious fervour, and constant power struggles—provided an ideal backdrop for the development of Middle English romances. These texts often prioritize the allure of the exotic and the mystique of adventure over strict factual accuracy. Middle English romances frequently employ exaggeration and deceit to justify desired outcomes in response to the medieval period's post-truth dynamics. For example, in *Richard Coeur de Lion*, Richard's miraculous recovery after consuming Saracen flesh is not only presented as a means of survival but celebrated as a revelation of divine providence. Richard's exclamation, "What? Is Sarezynys flesch thus good, / And nevere erst I nought wyste?" encapsulates the text's use of grotesque exaggeration to reinforce Christian superiority and justify extreme actions (Larkin, 2015: ll. 3216–3217). Here, falsehood and narrative distortion serve to glorify the hero while dehumanizing the Saracen, underscoring how these romances deploy deceit as a tool for ideological ends.

Mayrhofer examines how *Richard Coeur de Lion* manipulates extreme elements, such as cannibalism, to evoke strong emotional responses that align with the text's political and ideological aims. In a key scene, Richard unknowingly consumes Saracen flesh as a remedy, only to later adopt cannibalism publicly as a deliberate act of terror during peace negotiations (Mayrhofer, 2013: 75, 86). This grotesque depiction of cannibalism serves to dehumanize Saracens while portraying Richard as a brutal, unwavering leader, emphasizing the moral and cultural divide between Christians and Muslims. Through "mock hospitality," the narrative frames Richard's actions as both shocking and justified, creating a stark contrast that reinforces a sense of Christian superiority (Mayrhofer, 2013: 75). Rajabzadeh

discusses how Middle English romances like *Richard Coeur de Lion* embed biases and distortions in their depictions of Saracens, portraying them as inherently threatening and morally corrupt. These misrepresentations align with the concept of “justifiable falsehoods,” where vilifying the Saracen “other” legitimizes extreme violence as morally sanctioned within the Christian worldview (Rajabzadeh, 2019, 4). This framing strategy distorts truth and appeals to readers’ emotions, resonating with post-truth dynamics by prioritizing ideological alignment over factual representation. Sumberg’s analysis of the Tafurs—a group of merciless Crusaders renowned for their extreme violence—illustrates the romance’s thematic use of brutality as a necessary evil in pursuing a righteous cause. In *Richard Coeur de Lion*, such acts are framed as essential to achieving divine justice, blurring moral boundaries, and justifying deceit and savagery as means to a virtuous end (Sumberg, 1959: 225). This narrative strategy leverages emotional appeal to shape readers’ perceptions, aligning them with the cultural and political values of the period. Together, these elements in *Richard Coeur de Lion* underscore how the romance blends fact and fiction, constructing a morally charged narrative that champions Christian virtue and justifies violence against a dehumanized enemy.

*Richard Coeur de Lion* exemplifies a medieval approach to storytelling, where the boundaries between historical fact and creative invention are purposefully blurred, serving political and ideological purposes. The romance introduces fictional characters, such as Fulk D’Oilly and Thomas Multoun, who are presented as central to Richard’s campaigns. These figures, who emerge as his trusted knights and companions on a journey through lands like Brindisi, Cyprus, and Famagusta, are portrayed as instrumental in Richard’s military exploits, despite having no historical basis (Larkin, 2015: ll. 615–656). By associating these fictional characters with real English families, such as the D’Oillys and Multons, the text amplifies the social standing of influential families, effectively framing them as part of a noble and divinely sanctioned mission. The romance introduces fictional characters presented as central to Richard’s campaigns, aligning them with notable families and enhancing their prestige. By crafting legendary figures with invented crusading credentials, the text constructs a compelling narrative that enhances the social standing of influential families, portraying them as part of a noble and divinely sanctioned mission. This fabrication reflects a post-truth dynamic in which emotional appeal and ideological goals take precedence over historical accuracy. This deliberate fabrication reflects a post-truth dynamic in which emotional appeal and ideological goals take precedence over historical accuracy. For instance, in a symbolic and exaggerated display of valour, Richard defeats a lion with his bare hands. He consumes its heart, thereby solidifying his reputation as a fearsome and divinely favoured Christian hero:

Kyng Rychard bethoughte hym that tyde,  
What it was best, and to hym sterte.  
In at hys throte hys arme he gerte,  
Rente out the herte with hys hand,  
Lungges and lyvere, and all that he fand.  
The lyoun fel ded to the grounde.  
(Larkin, 2015: ll. 1090–1095)

*Richard Coeur de Lion* reinforces a sense of Christian virtue and collective identity, presenting an inspiring vision of English heroism that comforts and motivates its readers. This construction of identity takes particularly stark form in the text’s deliberate misrepresentation of Muslim opponents, reflecting what Metlitzki describes as the “lewed” approach to portraying Islam in medieval literature (Metlitzki, 1977: 167). Such misrepresentations served both literary and ideological functions, as Heng demonstrates in her analysis of the romance’s infamous cannibalism episodes, where Richard declares that “Ther is no flesch so norysshaunt, / Unto an Ynglyssche Crysten man, /... / As is the flessh of a Saryzyne!” (2000: 140; Larkin, 2015: ll. 3548–3552). The romance, therefore, becomes more than a simple tale of adventure. It functions as a cultural artefact that shapes perceptions of both self and other, creating what Heng calls “a community called ‘England,’ made up of ‘good,’ ‘English,’ ‘Christian men’ who are defined by their appetite for Muslims” (2000: 141). Through its extreme demonization of Muslim adversaries, which Akbari and Al-Olaqi have shown to be foundational to medieval English literary traditions, the text exemplifies how medieval narratives used embellishment and emotional resonance to produce not just entertainment, but a powerful ideological message that articulated and reinforced emerging concepts of English nationhood (2000: 20; 2012: 1767–69).

Tolan's *Saracens* explores the historical factors that contributed to post-truth tendencies during the Middle Ages, focusing on how Middle English romances constructed Muslims as the "other" to serve ideological ends (2002: 130–37). The historical roots of post-truth in this period are deeply intertwined with the production and circulation of Middle English romances. Often characterized by strategic adaptation and reinterpretation, these narratives played a central role in reinforcing post-truth dynamics by crafting emotionally resonant yet factually skewed portrayals of Saracens. Nicola McDonald's research on the intersection of food and fiction, particularly her analysis of anthropophagy in medieval literature, provides additional context, highlighting how these romances deployed sensational elements to captivate audiences while supporting ideological objectives (2004: 131–36). The scarcity of reliable information during this era encouraged the manipulation of truth, aligning with the broader concept of post-truth by tailoring narratives to fulfil specific socio-political goals. Pop further discusses manipulative tools such as political correctness, censorship, intimidation, and labeling, which, while modern, reflect similar mechanisms that might have shaped the production and reception of these medieval texts (2020: 65–66). Although Pop's work does not focus explicitly on Middle English romances, these tools underscore how narratives could be influenced by the need to assert ideologies through control over information.

The historical roots of post-truth in *Richard Coeur de Lion* are multifaceted, with connections to the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims, the politics of race and nation, and the portrayal of Arabs and Turks. These roots are intertwined with the production and circulation of narratives, where they are adapted and interpreted to serve specific agendas. These observations have broader implications, shedding light on the complex and evolving relationship between Christian and Islamic societies during the Middle Ages and the manipulation of truth for political and ideological purposes. Ultimately, *Richard Coeur de Lion* contributes to a pioneering exploration through the lens of post-truth, answering crucial questions about the role in a post-truth society.

## Conclusion

*Richard Coeur de Lion* offers a rich tapestry to explore the complex and evolving relationship between Christian and Islamic societies during the Middle Ages. The portrayal of Saracens reflects a multifaceted landscape that encompasses stereotypes, complexity, and the idea of Saracens as the 'other' in these narratives. When viewed through the lens of post-truth, these narratives reveal a narrative strategy that prioritizes emotional appeals over factual content, aligning with the broader socio-political and emotional landscape of the time. As a product of the medieval period, *Richard Coeur de Lion* demonstrates that post-truth has historical roots and can be observed in how narratives are crafted, manipulated, and circulated to serve various ideological and emotional purposes. The portrayal of Saracens reflects the intricate interplay between Christian and Muslim societies in *Richard Coeur de Lion*. As a product of a post-truth culture, it exemplifies a cultural landscape where truth can be moulded to fit various agendas. Narrative structures prioritize emotional appeals over factual content because they deeply resonate with the audience, offering an engaging exploration of the human experience. This romance responds to the complexities of the post-truth in medieval England, presenting a world where justice, love, and virtue frequently overcome deceit and falsehood, offering solace to its audience. The historical presence of post-truth demonstrates that post-truth has roots in the Middle Ages, and its influence is evident in how it is crafted and circulated in the production and dissemination of *Richard Coeur de Lion*. *Richard Coeur de Lion* is not merely a relic of a bygone era but a profound reflection of human nature, its complexities, and its quest for meaning.

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