



Testing the Borders of Tolerance: Chivalry Glazed with Monstrosity in *Richard Coer de Lyon*

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Abstract

Monstrosity is an elusive term that is interlocked with the concept of normality. As a cultural construct, monster's elusiveness stems from its contingency to spatio-temporal parameters that are ever-changing so that the normative self's attempt at constructing an enclosed identity is essentially vulnerable. The normative self's continued attempts to attribute monstrosity to the other to establish an enclosed and normative selfhood invariably fail because the fluidity of monstrous identity disrespects any of the constructed boundaries between the self and the other. Accordingly, in the romance genre, monstrous identity is inextricably linked with the chivalrous identity. Analysis of monstrosity is a useful lens for exposing the discursive boundaries between the two, and displaying that chivalry is an ideal impossible to maintain. This is especially because the formulation of chivalric identity is based on malleable precepts such as moral, cultural, religious norms and performative compliance or deviance enable transition across the constructed boundaries between the knight and the monstrous other. This article defines monstrosity as excess, lack, or deviance from chivalric behaviour so that subjects are rendered monstrous due to becoming sources of undeserved harm or violence. From this perspective, this article analyses the fluidity of chivalrous and monstrous identities in *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Crusades offer symbolic and literal spaces of alterity and convergence between the East and the West in perpetual contestation. However, the attributed monstrosity of the Saracen against the moral superiority of the Christian knight is a fragile binary that is not static but in constant negotiation that makes it fluid. This fluidity is investigated through the conformity or non-conformity of Richard and other European rulers to chivalric principles and monstrosity in the romance.

Keywords: Monster, Monstrosity, Richard Coer de Lyon, Medieval Romance, Crusades, Chivalry, Richard I.

Introduction

Monsters as articulations of humanity's deepest fears and anxieties flourish on the frontiers, borders, and fringes of the familiar and the known. As Jeffrey Cohen states, it is essentially a cultural body that "is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain

cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place” (1996, p. 4). It is a discursive epithet that is consciously or unconsciously attributed to the designated other(s) because of their divergence from the self’s subjective and normative standards. However, these standards are structured upon physical, political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal precepts that are ever-changing according to spatio-temporal parameters so that attributing the status of a monster to a designated group of people is a futile attempt to establish and solidify the self’s enclosed identity. It is futile because constructing normality through monstrosity creates a relationship that makes one “dependent on the other for definition, in terms both of meaning and of boundaries” (Shildrick, 2002, p. 28). Their interdependence in terms of definition exposes the fragility of the intended supremacy of the normative self and underlines the permeability of the self and the monstrous other. In this regard, monsters are perceived as border phenomena that “hang around borders, and disrespect their integrity. They comprise a species of sinister miscreants exiled from the normative categories of the established system” (Kearney, 2003, p. 119). These borders may indeed be spatial or conceptual, and the monsters always threaten to disrupt these boundaries as a result of which they are seen as sources of violation, harm, and disruption of the normative self’s precepts. Therefore, the analysis of the monsters actually provides a useful lens in terms of disclosing the constructed nature of these boundaries. Taking a cue from poststructuralists such as Judith Butler who argues that identity is a cultural construct that is not ontologically fixed but it is “a becoming ... an ongoing discursive practice ... open to intervention and resignification” (2002, p. 43), monstrous and normative identities are also seen as epistemologies that are meaningful only through the performative reiteration of acts that comprise its reality within a particular time and place.

Within the scope of the romances that deal with the crusade topos, monstrous behaviour is presented as falling outside the discursive limits of the set of actions that are attributed to holy crusader knights. These knights are bound by an ethos that regulates their reciprocation with the world around them. This ethos is an aspirational set of behaviours purported to moderate the crusader’s character and way of life. It encourages selfless devotion to God and motivates the knight for defending and enlarging Christendom. Saracen monster is a necessary component of this hegemonic discourse which attempts to constrain the religious and political other in a particular sphere of intelligibility to establish its superiority. This particularity of the monstrous Saracen figure inheres potential harm, threat or violence posed to the physical, religious, political, and geographical integrity of Christendom. In this article, monstrosity or monstrous behaviour is defined as non-conformity through excess, lack, or deviance to the established norms of chivalric behaviour as a result of which subjects become sources of undeserved harm or violence. Through this definition, knights can also become monstrous through their non-conformity to these ideals and become sources of undeserved harm to their own societies. Therefore, this article aims to demonstrate the monstrous aspects of not only Richard but also other European rulers in terms of excess, lack and divergence from the chivalric norms in *Richard Coer de Lyon* (c. 1330).¹ These characters prioritise secular interests such as personal glory and worldly goods before crusading which essentially render them monstrous.

¹*Richard Coer de Lyon* survives in seven manuscripts. A version is chronologically presented as follows: Cambridge, *Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96, folio 1-98*, London, *British Library, MS Additional 31042, folio 125r-163r*. B version is chronologically presented as follows: Edinburgh, *National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) folio: 326r-327v*, London, *British Library, MS Egerton 2862, folio: 1r-44v*, London, *College of Arms, MS Arundel 58, folio: 250r-275r*, London, *British Library, Ms Harley 4690, folio: 109r-115v*, Oxford, *Bodleian Library, MS Douce 228, folio: 1r-40v*. In this chapter, Peter Larkin’s recent edition *Richard Coer de Lyon* is used.

Coterminous Viewpoints of Chivalry

Maintenance of the professed superiority of normative self against the monstrous other derives one of its forces from its claim of solidarity against the monstrous other. However, the Western Christian world is not a unified whole but is comprised of coterminous viewpoints that can contradict each other. One of the great cultural chasms is the perception of chivalry for secular and clerical authorities. In this regard, the Catholic Church and clerics often criticised lay or secular knights for living lives of sin and destruction. In their writings, statements, and letters, these knights were described in monstrous terms similar to the Saracens. For instance, Pope Leo IX, one of the Gregorian reformist popes, criticised the Norman knights in Italy for behaving “with an ungodliness worse than that of the pagans” (as cited in Ashe, 2014, p. 155). A similar attribution of monstrosity based on a life of excess and deviance is observable in a letter to Archdeacon John from Peter of Blois. The letter complains that knights “plunder and despoil the poor servants of Christ, and, what is worse, they oppress mercilessly the wretched and satiate [*impleant*] with the pain of others their own forbidden pleasures [*illicitos appetitus*] and unnatural desires [*extraordinarias voluptates*]” (as cited in Cohen, 1999, p. 76). Satisfaction of the unnatural desires quite strongly evokes the clerical perception of knighthood in monstrous terms since the secular knights’ prioritisation of their unchecked lust for the appeasement of their desires goes against the principles of measure and restraint of the Christian religion.

The clerics perceived the violent and deviant impulses inherent within the emerging warrior class and took active measures to infuse a purpose to chivalry. Especially after 1054, the previously pacifist Catholic Church started promulgating its own image of a holy crusader knight. This year coincided with the Great Schism between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church which marked an observable change in the Catholic Church’s approach to war and violence (Riley-Smith, 1993, pp. 5-6). Especially during the reign of Pope Gregory (1073-85), a series of reforms within the Catholic Church including the Pope’s active involvement in the European politics, formulation of the concept of *miles Christi* or *milites sancti Petri*, and the authorisation of war against the enemies of Christ led to increased tension between the Church and the Holy Roman Empire that would be referred to as Investiture Contest (Riley-Smith, 1993, pp. 5-6). Diverting the unruly actions of the knights against the common enemy in the East was one reason for Pope Urban II’s call to arms to reclaim Jerusalem: “[l]et therefore hatred depart from among you, let your quarrels end ... wrest that land from the *wicked* race, and subject it to yourselves” (as cited in Munro, 1971, p. 7; emphasis mine). In this way, the Church’s call to arms would strengthen the hand of the papacy in terms of their active role and leadership in European politics, and the escalating tension between the Church and the Holy Roman Empire would be channelled onto the foreign enemy.

In addition, directing knightly violence to the enemies in the East imbued chivalry with a holy purpose so that the knights were expected to be not only pious but also active protectors of the Church. Moreover, their purpose transformed the monstrosity of knights into enforcers of Christian normalcy in the foreign lands. The Church’s strategy of alleviation of internal strife by uniting the Christians against a designated common enemy was supplanted by active propagation of dehumanisation and a call to arms with promises of spiritual salvation. The Church assumed an active role in the European politics and war on behalf of God because these crusaders were not only “perceived as soldiers fighting a war in the service

of God or Christ, they were considered to be bound to God by the terms of feudal obligation” and “the call for a crusade by the pope was to be understood as God calling on his ‘faithful followers’ (*fideles suos*) to join his army just like a worldly king in times of war” (Maier, 2000, p. 56). The reason for such a belief was because the call had been popularly attributed to Christ’s words in the Bible: “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16.24).

Especially after the Second Crusade, the Catholic Church would actively and institutionally take part in the crusades with papal bulls issuing official indulgences to those that take up the cross to fight against the Saracens (Nicholson, 2001, p. 24). In the popular crusading sermons such as James of Vitry’s, the crusader knights were glorified because of their service to God: “They [crusaders] are greatly honoured [who] wear the same garments that their king wore and [who] are signed with the same mark. Those who [wear] just any coat, which is called ‘pannuncel’ in the French vernacular, are not really known as soldiers of Christ; they do not carry his arms” (as cited in Maier, 2000, p. 89). Moreover, the Church initiated military orders which were praised by the Church members. Bernard of Clairvaux, who had directed the Second Crusade and instigated the Order of the Knights Templar, compares these knights to secular knights and establishes them as the warriors of Christ in his treatise entitled *In Praise of the New Knighthood*:

A new kind of knighthood seems recently to have appeared on the earth ... one unknown in ages past. It indefatigably wages a twofold combat, against flesh and blood and against a spiritual host of evil in the heavens ... How truly holy and secure this knighthood ... whenever you march out, o worldly warrior, you have to worry that killing your foe’s body may mean killing your soul, or that by him you may be killed, body and soul both. (as cited in Ashe, 2014, p. 159)

As it is clear, the knights with secular aims such as prize, loot, and renown are in danger of losing both their body and soul, whereas, at least, the crusading knights’ afterlife is secure. In one of the recruiting songs of the Second Crusade, this aspect is readily underlined: “Whoever goes with Louis now, / Need never fear the devil’s horde; / His soul will go to Paradise / With the angels of the Lord” (as cited in Morris, 1983, p. 95). Thereby, bidirectional merit, that is, ensuring the afterlife of the crusader in return for expanding Christianity’s and by extension God’s area of influence and control is regarded as the key aspect of holy knighthood.

Moreover, anonymous Christian texts such as *Ordene de chevalerie* (c. 1220) written against the backdrop of the Third Crusade expanded upon the clerical understanding of chivalry. The text incorporates historical persons such as Hugh II of Tiberias who is taken prisoner by the Muslim ruler Saladin and instructed to explain the concept of chivalry. Accordingly, it foregrounds virtues the knights should obey such as piety, honesty, courtesy, goodness, cleanliness, and chastity. It elucidates that the knight should observe religious customs such as fasting, and hearing Mass. He should protect the Church, the weak, and the women at all costs. He should avoid sinning, false judgement, and treason. He should be ready to sacrifice himself for the glory of God and ever strive for winning Paradise (Busby, 1983, pp.170-3). Hence, clerical understanding of chivalry had been shaped by various accounts such as religious treatises and didactic works to encapsulate the unruly knights within the Christian cosmology by appointing a divine purpose and channelling the unmitigated violence of the knights towards the designated monstrous others in the East. The Church aimed to normalise the knights by trimming their excessively violent impulses. It imposed several virtues and behavioural patterns that knights were required to observe.

Moderation was propagated as the presiding virtue of the knights because it alluded to regulation and order. On the other hand, excess, deviance, or deficiency were closely associated with unrestraint and chaos and by extension monstrosity.

The Monstrosity of the Kings in *Richard Coer de Lyon*

Richard Coer de Lyon portrays not only the other European rulers but also Richard as a crusader knight and king who is far from ideal despite the narrator's incessant claims to the contrary. Besides Richard's excessively large body, his unquenchable lust for power, and enjoyment of excessive violence such as massacres and cannibalism position him as a figure of monstrosity. Therefore, the religious perspective of chivalry that the Church endorsed promulgates the unison of Christians against the non-Christian foe in their holy purpose of reclaiming the Holy Land. However, it is argued that the portrayal of the European nations riven by strife exposes the dangers the secular aspect of chivalry poses for the knights, and the Christian community in general. Hence, the disunity generated by the conflicts between the European rulers, prioritisation of their personal hidden agendas and communal interests, and their adherence to secular ideals of chivalry become a direct criticism for the failure of the crusading enterprise.

Richard had in fact been largely celebrated as the pinnacle of chivalry and the prime example of a crusader due to his successful crusading activity in the Third Crusade. Despite the modern tradition of perceiving him as an absentee king of England, "the general complaisance of the English magnates during this long period hardly seems to indicate much aristocratic discontent with the situation" (Crouch, 2011, para. 28). On the contrary, his bravery on the battlefield, devotion to the crusading cause, and the famous rivalry with Saladin earned him a solid reputation as the ideal crusader knight. Even the contemporary Muslim chronicler Ibn-al-Athir points out that "Richard's courage, shrewdness, energy, and patience made him the most remarkable ruler of his times" (as cited in Gillingham, 1994, p. 95). Still, his reception as the brave King of England was not a series of unbridled praise over the subsequent centuries. As Jean Flori in *Richard the Lionheart: King and Knight* demonstrates there was a tradition of criticism from contemporary and later authors that condemned his indulgence in a sinful life and associated him with the vices of debauchery, greed, lust, and pride (2007, pp. 465-70). In addition, the unclear outcome of the Third Crusade was occasionally attributed to Richard's wayward lifestyle since the fourteenth-century preacher John of Bromyard in his *Summa praedicatorum* "singled out the king's lapse into vanity and pride as a reason for the destruction of the Third Crusade. Treachery, jealousy, and loose-living had invaded the ranks of Richard I's army" (as cited in Guard, 2013, p. 178). Therefore, the negative representation of King Richard that seeped into the romance may come from the negative criticism towards Richard in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Correspondingly, Finlayson illustrates that except for the earliest known version in the Auchinleck Manuscript (c. 1330) all the other extant manuscripts contain a certain degree of interpolated material be it historical or fictional (1990, p. 161). These interpolations complicated Richard's reputation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because they introduced overwhelmingly troubling aspects of Richard. These episodes include switching of Richard's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, with a monstrous one, Cassiodorien, who refuses to hear Mass and eventually flies away; Three Days' Tournament in which Richard kills his own men; his scouting expedition to the Holy Land; his imprisonment on his way back in Germany where he kills the son of Mordred by cheating in the exchange of blows; his consumption of a lion's heart; introduction of two fictitious knights, Fouke Doyly and Thomas of Multon who

act as foils to Richard's monstrous nature; Richard's two cannibalism episodes; his duel with Saladin (Larkin, 2015, pp. 3-4; Loomis, 1915, p. 511). In this article these episodes are the primary locus of investigation concerning Richard's monstrous representation. In this regard, the interpolated romance material can be considered as in line with the critical trend that surged in the fourteenth century, especially after the loss of the Holy Land, a period in which, as Janet Coleman suggests, "few works were meant merely to entertain, but were intended rather to ... criticize and eventually to reform social practice, by which was meant the behavior of church officials and the politically and economically powerful" (1981, p. 16).

In this regard, Marcel Elias and Angela Florschuetz argue that interpolated sections indeed destabilise "the image of King Richard ... by stressing ambivalent features of his character" (Elias, 2017, p. 8) or subvert the romance's intended premises such as "the text's ability to deliver on the nationalistic promises of its opening" (Florschuetz, 2014, p. 131). Thus, for Florschuetz, the text's immediate association of Richard's father, King Henry, with Thomas á Becket whose murder marred the legitimacy of his rule, and the subsequent replacement of Eleanor by Cassodorien are conscious choices to undermine Richard's rule as well (2014, p. 131-32). Most importantly, these sections problematise the borders between legitimate and illegitimate use of violence performed by Richard and the other rulers of the West. Hence, Richard's representation in the romance constantly treads between the fine line of a courageous crusader and a monstrous tyrant. He conquers lands and castles with his physical might and tactical genius while at the same time he begets not only the hatred of his enemies but also his fellow crusaders on account of his excessive performance of violence. The representation of Richard within the text constantly wavers between "a doughty man, / A stout werreour" (*RCL*, lines 6218-19) and "devyl of helle" (*RCL*, line 2580). His heroic legacy inflicts fear and intimidation on his opponents so much so that at one point in the romance, the Saracens refuse to fight him and instead "ovyr the bord lopen [jump] thay / And drownyd hem in the see that day" (*RCL*, lines 2581-82). On the other hand, he is described as an excessively evil man enjoying the employment of unnecessary violence and cruelty to his Saracen opponents. For instance, after taking the city of Acre, Richard murders their leaders. Then, he demands ransom for the remaining hostages, and information concerning the whereabouts of the sacred Cross in the city. Richard announces that if his demands are not met, the hostages "schole dye in evyl rage!" (*RCL*, line 3722). The Saracens swiftly and with much concern answer that "They nyste [do not know] where the croys was become" (*RCL*, line 3732), but Richard who does not accept "No" as an answer orders the execution of the sixty thousand Saracen hostages.

On this point, Richard's brutal actions against the Saracens may at first seem justified since the crusading propaganda had been built around the idea of dehumanising the Saracens so as to free the participants of the holy war from the sin of killing a human being and legitimise the annexation of the Holy Land. Bernard of Clairvaux endorses this idea by stating that killing the Saracens in the holy war does not count as murder: "if he [a Christian knight] kills an evil-doer, he is not a man-killer, but, if I may so put it, an evil-killer" (2000, p. 39). Identifying the Saracens with the concept of evil is an effort to dissociate their embodied, cultural and religious similitude with that of the Christian West, thereby alienating and reducing them to a category of less-than-human status in an effort to legitimise the subjection of the Saracens. Accordingly, When Richard has scruples about his decision, he is comforted by the angels at the right moment: "'Seygnyours, tues [kill], tues, / Spares hem nought – behedith these!'" (*RCL*, lines 3749-50). The intrusion of the angels suggests that as the ordained enemies of God that have been customarily dissociated from the normative attributes

of humanity, the lives of the Saracens do not matter if their existence does not help Richard's furtherance of crusading goals.

Moreover, the romance employs a physical process of monsterisation by likening Saracens to "hounds" (*RCL*, lines 4054, 5113, 5231, 6136, 6786, 7120) and portraying Saladin as "A maystyr nigromacien" (*RCL*, line 5530) who has a deep connection with the evil forces that enable him to conjure "Through the feendes craft of helle, / Twoo stronge feendes of the eyr / In lyknesse of twoo stedes feyr" (*RCL*, lines 5332-34). In contrast, during the penultimate duel with Saladin, Richard is aided by the angels who warn him about the enchanted horse bestowed by Saladin, and they instruct Richard how to master the horse (*RCL*, lines 5548-75) so that he manages to wound Saladin and force him to flee the battle. Furthermore, as John Talon stresses, the Saracens are frequently represented as "worship[ing] a trinity of golden idols: Apollo, Tervagant, and Mahomet" (2013, p. 1). The Christian concept of the Holy Trinity is inverted to represent an unholy trinity of the Saracens or a corrupted version of Christianity. This is also emphasised in the text since the Saracens are represented as believing in a mixture of idolised, fabricated, and classic gods such as Mahoun (*RCL*, line 2714), Termagaunt (*RCL*, line 2714), Jubiterre (*RCL*, line 4451), Appolyn (*RCL*, line 3744), Plotoun (*RCL*, line 6476).

Even if the Saracens are popularly represented as "anti-types of humanity" (Uebel, 2005, p. 13) that are not bound by any moral or cultural codes familiar to the West, the primary responsibility of a knight is to overcome these opponents within the strict regulative code of chivalry in order not to step outside the boundaries of the normative types of behaviour attributed to these knights. Conversely, however, Richard is frequently represented as employing foul play in his encounters with the other knights or Saracens. Therefore, against the purported moral superiority of the West, Richard is often measured and found lacking in terms of his moral and behavioural conduct. For instance, on several occasions, Richard promises Saracens that they would go unharmed if they surrendered, however, as soon as he lures them out of their castles, he breaks his promise or supplants conditions that cannot be fulfilled within the appointed time. However, kings as quasi-religious figures were expected to respect their oaths (*RCL*, line 3325-3334, 6055-6212). The public aspect of oaths has a citational value that "provide[s] an opportunity for ... bearing witness in a binding and unchallengeable manner" (Zupka, 2016, p. 63). Breaking an oath is one of the most monstrous actions that a king can commit because in a largely illiterate society verbal bonds are seen as social agreements that regulate the societal relations. Hence, violation of the verbal bond as a social agreement is a violation of the essence of humanity. Consequently, the action inflicts harm to the king's public image and trustworthiness, and mars fundamentals of social stability.

In another instance, during Richard's custody under the German king, the king's son, Ardour, who is described as "a knight of grete fame" and "stronge, and fere" (*RCL*, lines 742-43), visits Richard in his cell to challenge him for a test of strength. Ardour proposes that he will strike a blow barehanded and the next day he will allow Richard to strike him in the same manner. Richard accepts the challenge, however, upon receiving the blow to his ear, albeit in strict compliance to their agreement, Richard believes that Ardour "dyd him wronge" (*RCL*, line 762) and swears revenge. As Marcel Elias argues, from this point on, "the narrative ascribes particular prominence to Ardour's goodwill, courtesy, and desire for a fair fight" (2017, p. 25). Conversely, however, Richard begrudges Ardour, waxes his hand to artificially strengthen his punch, and with his waxed hand he "brak hys [Ardour's] cheke bon" (*RCL*, line 797). The scene underlines Richard's tendency to deviate from chivalric principles just to

achieve personal victory by all means necessary. Moreover, the text's emphasis on Ardour's adherence to the "forwarde as a trewe man" (*RCL*, line 786) heightens Richard's foul play and "the vindictive, wrathful drive to Richard's violence, measured against Ardour's 'curtese' and 'good wyll,' is cast in a critical light and set forth as disturbing – a feeling which the reader retains throughout the rest of the romance" (Elias, 2017, p. 26). Richard's performance is monstrous not only because it leads to the death of a fair challenger, but also it oversteps the established conventions of the chivalric code and exposes the fluidity of the established boundaries by performance. In this regard, Richard's conduct reveals that behaviourally monstrous attributes that have been carefully excised from knights are ideals that cannot be maintained.

Richard's performances in the romance constantly fall short of the requirements of a crusader knight. In fact, his excessively brutal treatment of the Saracens generates the obverse effect and actually reinforces a sympathetic portrayal of their plight as they are oppressed with an unreasonable ruthlessness. Their emotions under these circumstances are often relayed with a human touch that is always missing in Richard. For instance, after Richard's conquest of Acre, he captures Muslim commanders who are positively described as "Hardy knyghtes and of most prys, / Of hethenesse chef lordynges," (*RCL*, line 3350-51). Concerned for the safety of their brethren, the Saracens opt for the diplomatically rational course of action by offering a large amount of ransom for the release of their people whose health and wellbeing they care about immensely: "Of tresore Kyng Richard wole be fawe [happy], / That oure children may come hom hayl [healthy]" (*RCL*, line 3370-71). However, Richard gets offended and feels humiliated by such an offer despite its common practice in the West. He then decides to behead the hostages and serves the head of the Saracen hostages to the envoys. This becomes an action which defies any of the accepted rules of chivalry. Geraldine Heng tries to defend Richard's diabolical plan as a meticulously planned "diplomatic exercise, carefully staged to bring home the full, intimidatory power of Christian military-gustatory aggression to Saladin's aged, aristocratic ambassadors" (2012, p. 73). Indeed, the Saracens present in the meal are utterly shocked when they discover the content of the meal; the cooked heads are carefully placed with "the teeth grennand" (*RCL*, line 3430), and the ghastly sight terrifies the envoys so that "The teres ran out of here eyen; / And whenne they the letter redde, / To be slayn ful sore they dredde" (*RCL*, lines 3466-68). In this regard, Richard's message is certainly transmitted across the envoys but his monstrous conduct overshadows the intended message as it becomes an act of unnecessary and excessive ruthlessness violating every code of chivalry, hospitality, and royal custom. Therefore, as much as Richard enjoys his demonic scheme as he proceeds to eat the Saracen heads "with herte good" (*RCL*, line 3481), even asking in jest the reason for the Saracens' reluctance in eating their meals, the horror of Richard's performance is so potent for the rest that "Everyman" including the English "sat style and pokyd other" (*RCL*, line 3483) in silence.

The scene is important because, although cannibalism has been perceived as an act that "in and of itself establish monstrosity, it is also a common characteristic among many kinds of monsters" residing in the East such as dog-heads and giants (Williams, 1996, p. 145). Therefore, the representation of Richard as the sole performer of cannibalism within the text subverts the established conventions of imputing cannibalism to the people of the East. This is evidenced by Saladin's reception of the news as he is so shocked and reviled that he cannot help but exclaim: "It [Richard] is a devyl, withouten fayle" (*RCL*, line 3664). Saladin's response to Richard's anthropophagy illustrates the moral and behavioural bottom line Richard's character has been reduced to because as breakers of taboo, "cannibals evoke fear, loathing or, at best, horrified pity; by disturbing the neat, almost sacred, divide between edible

and inedible, they challenge the very integrity of what it is to be human” (McDonald, 2004, p. 124). As Nicola McDonald suggests, the act is situated on the threshold between the permissible and the profane, human and non-human, thereby Richard’s performance becomes monstrous in its disruption of the boundaries of not only chivalry but also humanity. Furthermore, the act is also monstrous because it is in no way meritorious to the furtherance of crusading activity and crosses the line of licit violence on the Saracens chartered by the clergy. In fact, according to Marcel Elias, the treatment of the Saracens in this scene, “imbued with emotional stimulation, is one that collapses the disparities between Christians and Saracens, inviting the reader to relate to and even sympathize with the envoys’ perspective” (2017, p. 32).

In contrast to Richard’s relentless moral and performative violation of the boundaries of the conventional crusader knight, the interpolated sections of the romance introduces two fictional English knights, namely, Fouke Doly and Thomas Multon, to counterbalance Richard’s monstrosity. Probably originated because of the early redactors’ glorification of their patrons (Finlayson, 1990, p. 166; Loomis, 1915, p. 511), these knights have their own small campaign against the Saracens in which they do not follow their king’s example. For instance, upon capturing the city of Orglyous, Thomas Multon resolves to spare the lives of the Saracens but he is forced to kill them because of their treacherous attempt to assassinate him and kill his soldiers (*RCL*, line 4069-4302). According to Lesley Coote, unlike Richard, Multon’s initial display of mercy “distanced [him] from his king, who kills, and orders killing, of defeated civilians of both sexes and all ages, without mercy” (2006, p. 197). The virtue of being merciful, however, especially to those who are weak, unarmed, or who yielded is an important aspect of chivalry. In this regard, Craig Taylor states that “the association of the ideal of knighthood with mercy ... was an important counter to the concept of vengeance and righteous anger” (2013, p. 7). Therefore, the virtue of mercy is an essential quality controlling and moderating the knight and directing him to refrain from using unnecessary or excessive violence. The contrast between Richard and the two English knights exposes Richard’s deficient understanding of mercy based arbitrarily on his momentary feelings and personal profit. Hence, their introduction to the text functions as the preferred way of progress within the crusading scheme and directly opposes Richard’s performances that hinder the crusading enterprise by his excessive violence and ruthlessness.

Moreover, Fouke and Thomas are directly contrasted with Richard’s unnaturally excessive physical disposition and ferocious nature. During the tournaments at the beginning of the romance, Richard disguises himself to join the tournament, and each day he terrorises the scene with increasing ferocity to the point that on the second day, Richard even kills his opponent/soldier. It is Fouke who stops him on the third day. Fouke’s description of the disguised Richard as a “pouke” (*RCL*, line 568) and “wode schrewe” (*RCL*, line 574) indicates the terror Richard’s physical and moral disposition imposes. The knights in the romances prefigure as the norm against which the monstrous enemies are measured. Accordingly, the knight’s proportionate body is set against the excessive, deviant, or deficient corporeality of his adversaries. However, Richard is frequently described in physically excessive terms, almost giant-like. Moreover, the knights “fight with weapons and techniques that require skill, training, and substantial fiscal and technological resources,” whereas their enemies “fight with crude weapons ... which require only brute force in their manipulation” (Rider, 2000, p. 128). However, Richard is first portrayed as carrying mace as a weapon, then sporting a huge axe made in England with which he can “smote right tho / Dores, berres, and iren chaynes,” (*RCL*, line 2223). Later on, his weapon becomes a poleaxe (*RCL*, line 6800), each time becoming bulkier and blunter. For an English knight and a king, axes or poleaxes

are not quite befitting to his status since they are generally associated with giants or monstrous enemies of the knight's enemies because they rely on brute force and unsophisticated method of handling (Rider, 2000, p. 128). The romance's alignment of Richard's excessive body and brute force with his weapon choice becomes an implicit statement of his monstrosity.

In line with this view, Alan Ambrisco locates the origins of Richard's extreme fierceness and strength in his "barbarity," a kind of "subhuman" quality that, he claims, derives from his maternal genealogy (1999, p. 511). At the very beginning, the romance replaces Richard's historical mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, with an Eastern princess, Cassodorien, who displays unusual habits. She faints upon hearing the Sunday Mass, and on the way to her chamber, she exclaims that "I dar nevere see no sacrament" (*RCL*, line 194). According to Angela Florschuetz, against the backdrop of One Hundred Years' War that historically strained the relations between the English and the French, the erasure of Eleanor effaces "Richard's status as a member of the French nobility [and] establishes him as solely aligned with and loyal to England" (2014, pp. 130-31). Indeed, the removal of Richard's ties with the French provides Richard with autonomy from his feudal duties as King Philip's vassal due to his lands in Normandy, Gascony and Aquitaine. This factor also invalidates Philip's justified position as an overlord during their conflicts in the Third Crusade. Yet, substituting Eleanor with a princess from Antioch does not align Richard's ties with the English from his mother's side because if this was the intention, then the substitute mother would at least be localised. Conversely, however, the substitution of Eleanor with Cassodorien is used as a clever device to alienate both the French maternal side and subsequently Richard via his mother from the English. The alienation is conducted by the inclusion of two distinct episodes of anthropophagy that are running counter with each other but serving the same purpose.

Mass as the symbolic eating of Christ marks as the only permissible way of performing cannibalism within the Western culture. It is an important ritualistic public performance because people's "participation in the sacrament of the eucharist identifies a community of Christians who have congregated in order to be incorporated into the body of the church and the body of Christ" (Blurton, 2007, p. 76). It is a reconciliatory performance that encapsulates people in Christian community regardless of their physical outlook, cultural difference, region, or gender. In Cassidorien's instance, her reluctance and subsequent avoidance of Mass for fifteen years signals her failed incorporation within the cultural and religious sphere of the English. Furthermore, Cassidorien's forced attendance to Mass after fifteen years of avoidance acts as a revealing instance that exposes her monstrosity and the pivotal moment of her estrangement process. She chooses to remain an outcast and escapes through the roof and from the romance. Richard's physical enormity and moral deformity can be attributed to his being a half-monster through her maternal side. Instead of her mother's refusal to partake in the ceremonious act of eating the flesh of Jesus, Richard's hearty consumption of real human flesh functions as a key point of his shift to monstrosity because as a cultural taboo for "the medieval Christian[s] cannibalism] was that dehumanizing, monstrous condition that cancels out the coordinates of recognizably human identity and reduces the sentient to the subhuman" (Behrend, 2011, p. 155). In this regard, the romance emphasises Richard's regained vitality upon consuming the flesh of the Saracens to underline Richard's "subhuman" condition.

Previously, Richard falls ill because of the arduous journey to the East and the extreme weather conditions. He demands pork to recover from his malady. It is a dietary habit of the

Christians that marks a clear divide with the Saracens for religious reasons. However, due to the scarcity of pork and food in general, the cooks decide to secretly prepare the Saracen meat instead of pork and serve it to Richard. Surprisingly this replenishes Richard so much that he is able to join the fight with “gret delyte” (*RCL*, line 3133). It seems that Richard’s nourishment with human flesh matches with his inherent but unrealised gustatory abnormality that once activated allows him to accentuate his full potential as a monster. The connection between his food choice and monstrosity is also pointed out by Suzanne Conklin Akbari, who observes that “[b]y eating unclean things, Richard assimilates that which is outside the boundaries of ordinary life, becoming a liminal figure” (2005, p. 212). Liminality as a condition of in-betweenness calls to mind monstrosity. In describing the monsters, Jeffrey Cohen highlights the “ontological liminality” of the monsters because they refuse “early compartmentalization” (1996, p. 7). As stated above, Richard’s performance of anthropophagy positions him as a liminal figure with human and non-human characteristics. Moreover, Richard enjoys this state and the fear and terror this state incurs in the Saracens and the English alike. Upon learning the actual contents of the food, Richard has no qualms about the moral implication of his act and delightfully exclaims that there will not be any scarcity of food anymore: “For hungryr, ar I be woo, / I and my folk schole eete moo!” (*RCL*, lines 3225-26). Indeed, Richard indulges in the act of eating human flesh on several other occasions, but none of his soldiers ever partake in this abominable act despite Richard’s attempts to call the habit as an English tradition: “In my court, this is the servyse: / Be servyd ferst, I and myn hynys, / With hedes hote of Sarezynys” (*RCL*, lines 3630-32). As can be seen from Richard’s statement, the text frequently employs “moments in which falsehood and lies become the rallying point for a claimed English unity, whether those falsehoods are externally or internally generated” so that Englishness is associated with “characteristics overwhelmingly identified with monstrosity and alterity: tails, cannibalism, and demonic natures” (Florschuetz, 2014, p. 137). Richard’s formulation of Englishness is, of course, a deluded perception that derives from his wish for legitimising his monstrous conduct and is not shared by his people. However, the attempt highlights the essential discursivity of communal identity, and by extension, monstrosity.

Monstrosity is also defined in physical terms and as an attribute of the enemy. In this context, Richard’s first battle is against the Greeks who are treated as treacherous people that undermine the crusading vigil of the West. They have been customarily labelled as “gryffoun” (*RCL*, lines 1669, 1856, 2898, 6090, 6109) within the text. Richard even names his wooden castle as “mate-gryffon,” (1856) which means harm to the Greeks (Gillingham, 1994 167). The association of the Greeks with the famous mythological monster, Griffin, comes from the Greeks’ behavioural similarity to this monster: “[t]he deceit and thievery of the Byzantines is moreover the favorite theme of contemporary Occidental writers. The idea is, then, that this quality suggested to the Crusaders the habits ... of the mythical griffin, who passed for a rapacious monster” (Livingston, 1907, p. 48). Similarly, the French and the Greeks repeatedly insult the English by calling them “taylarden” (*RCL*, line 1776), that is, the tailed ones or dogs with tails: “Go home, dogges, with your tayle;” (*RCL*, line 1830). Bradford Broughton argues that the image of the “‘tailed English,’ likely derives from a legend that has pagan Englishman growing tails after the devil urged them to abuse St. Augustine of Canterbury” (1966, p. 97). Hence, the derogatory legend about the English is used in a manner similar to the legends of cynocephalus associated with the Saracens because of their dark skin; dehumanisation is used as an ideological tool by the French and the Greeks to establish their superiority over the English. As these examples highlight, the Christian communal identity against the Saracen that the Church had been building up since the eleventh century via systematic crusade propaganda is shattered in the romance due to coterminous but conflicting

national identities that have their own agenda and prerogatives to the detriment of their allies. Accordingly, in the romance, the struggle for power and leadership among the European nations engenders enmity that results in the employment of the same process of dehumanisation conducted on the people of the East.

Evidently, the desire for the creation of communal identity by each nation in the romance has an intrinsic connection with the monsterisation process. Attribution of undesirable aspects of the self to the other is a way of “reinforce[ing] an imagined notion of sameness” (Uebel, 2005, p. 45). It is a relational process in which the notion of sameness is emphasised by the manifest difference from the others. In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Englishness is also established in comparison to not only the Saracens but in fact, more importantly, to the French. For Suzanne Yeager, the Anglo-French animosity resulting from the Hundred Years’ War, and the loss of Norman and Angevin territories were important reasons for the anti-French sentiment so that “by the late fourteenth century, some English people may have perceived their French adversary to be as repellent as their Islamic one” (2011, p. 74). Therefore, the binary of the East and the West disintegrates, and sometimes the separate Western nations in the romance are regarded as characteristically closer to the Saracens that have been traditionally perceived as monstrous. Accordingly, the French are constantly portrayed as cowardly, greedy, and treacherous, whereas the Saracens, albeit occasionally, receive complimentary descriptions in terms of their military ingenuity and craftiness:

Frenssche men arn arwe and feynte,
And Sarezynys be war and queynte,
And of here dedes engynous;
The Frenssche men ben covaytous. (*RCL*, lines 3849-52)

Moreover, Philip as the king of France is incessantly portrayed as performing monstrous actions that do not befit a crusader king. He constantly endangers the lives of the crusaders for his selfish gains. Moreover, he is frequently portrayed as a cowardly and morally weak king who takes bribes from the Saracens (*RCL*, lines 4679-729). Furthermore, Philip’s historical withdrawal from the Third Crusade is reimagined in the romance. His decision is ascribed to his desire “For a porcyoun of golde” (*RCL*, line 5453) which is professed to be the real reason for the failure of the entire skirmish. The internal conflict undermining the crusading endeavour is further enhanced by Richard’s subsequent withdrawal from the crusades because of his brother’s coronation as the King of England with the help of the barons at home. After receiving the news, Richard exclaims:

“What devyl!” he sayde, “Hou gos this?
Telles Jhon of me no more prys [appraise],
He wenes that I wil nought leve long;
Therefore, he wyl doo me wronge,
And yif he wende I were on lyve,
He wolde nought with me stryve.
I wole me of hym so bewrake [avenge],
That al the world therof schal speke! (*RCL*, lines 6331-38)

The extract makes it clear that the crusading knights’ secular aims such as personal glory, material gains and internal conflict in England and Europe harms the crusading campaign more than the Saracens as they abuse God’s place in chivalry.

Conclusion

Consequently, especially the interpolated sections of the romance destabilise the hyper-nationalistic sentiments which foreground the prioritisation of the individual and national interests before the communal interests of Christendom. These secular aims are monstrous as they abuse the meritorious aims of crusades for God. Therefore, from the perspective of crusade propaganda of the Church, Richard and the other kings of the Western nation become monstrous. The romance also reconfigures Richard's status as a crusader knight/king by implementing a monstrous origin to Richard that affects his overall moral and behavioural conduct. Accordingly, because of his deviant nature and his excessively violent performances, Richard is alienated from the English and is presented as the main agent of mass murder and cannibalism. As a result, while the English return safely back home, "within the confines of the romance, Richard's return 'homward to Yngeland' (*RCL*, line 7204) is followed immediately by his death ('he was schot, allas' (7207)" (Akbari, 2005, p. 212). Testing the borders of tolerance reverberates and Richard's undirected violence that garners even more violence comes back to him eventually. In this regard, *Richard Cour de Lyon* offers a critical perspective on the European rulers who succumb to their selfish interests that eventually led to the failure of the crusading enterprise.

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