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Liliana Sikorska

Faculty of English,
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
sliliana@wa.amu.edu.pl

Sir Isumbras Meets Jack Bauer, or on the (Re)Reading of Medieval Saracen Romances

Abstract. In the American hit series *24 Hours* (2001–2010) produced by Fox Television, Jack Bauer, a CTU agent (Counter Terrorist Unit, LA) always saves the day by stopping various terrorist actions, prevents nuclear bombs (known as the nucs) from going off, and viruses from decimating the population of the United States (and the world). But first and foremost, he identifies, finds and finally annihilates the real enemy (the Arabs or the Russians) who are behind all such terrorist activities. It is no surprise that such a versatile agent can do so much and mostly by himself. After all, he is a contemporary superhero, and superheroes, battered as they usually are, always win with nameless multitudes. In all his attitude to fighting and war, be they real or cyber battles, Jack Bauer is strangely similar to a medieval superhero, Sir Isumbras, who also has to fight his own weakness, overcome the grief after losing his family, and in the end boldly face death fighting countless Saracens. While Sir Isumbras is an archetypal knight, a paragon of virtue, a defender of the faith, Jack Bauer is a contemporary version of the Isumbras figure, fearless and willing to sacrifice everything for the greater good, the safety of his country. What follows is a reading of the two characters within the psychological framework of allies and enemies in medieval romance and their reincarnations in contemporary culture.

Keywords: Islam; Saracen romances; medievalism; heroism; Crusades.

1. Introduction

> All things are changing; nothing dies. The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases… (Campbell 1993: 29)[1]

In the portentous Orwellian year of 1984 a Welsh singer, Bonnie Tyler, produced a hit song commonly known as *I Need a Hero*, in which she pleaded for a hero who "gotta be strong and he's gotta be fast [...] And he's gotta be larger than life." The song quite succinctly pointed to the necessary features of a modern-day hero whose presence in our life is far from redundant. At the height of the American – Russian arms' race, this time of Reagan's traditional and traditionalist America and the British Iron Lady's conservative politics, the cultural need for idols was, perhaps, not surprising. Bonnie Tyler's song, not unintentionally, re-appeared in 2004, under the original (single) title *Holding out for a Hero* in the film *Shrek 2* (directed by Andre Adamson, Kelly Ashbury and Konrad Vernon), in which the title hero Shrek, like our very own medieval Sir Isumbras, becomes the involuntary, albeit almost, chivalric champion. In a truly postmodern manner, the authors of *Shrek* parodied fairy tale models and quite consciously referred to the medieval tradition (the famous Princess Fiona and Robin Hood and his Merry Men scene in *Shrek*). Reworking the classical heroic tradition[2], the Middle Ages solidified the concept of heroism in the context of Christian models, endowing heroes with superhuman physical abilities, which, however, were not the result of divine and human mating but a gift, even though sometimes troublesome, from the Almighty[3]. Thus, the newly

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[1] I would like to thank my MA student Adam Osman from the Academy of Social Sciences in Warsaw for bringing Campbell's book to my attention. I also enjoyed reading Campbell's work with my MA students at Adam Mickiewicz University: Agata Musiuk, Aleksandra Melcer, Damian Gaida and Beniamin Kłaniecki. Their sometimes very original interpretation of the text reassured me in views concerning medievalist re-reading of the older material.

[2] "With the undeniable mythological connotation of our hero established, it is necessary to specify the narrative structure through which the myth is offered daily or weekly to the public. There is, in fact, a fundamental difference between the figure of Superman and the traditional heroic figures of classical and Nordic mythology or the figures of Messianic religions. The traditional figure of religion was a character of human or divine origin, whose image had immutable characteristics and an irreversible destiny. It was possible that a story, as well as a number of traits, backed up the character, and it filled in the character's features in a gradual, but definitive manner" (Eco 1984: 108).

[3] Eco claims that "[i]n other words, a Greek statue could represent Hercules or a scene of Hercules' labors; in both cases, but more so in the latter, Hercules would be seen as some-

born hero would retain Herculean nature[4], yet fight for and in the name of Christian God. Fame would come to a knight as if by coincidence, while he would shun it as tantamount to the sin of pride. He would frequently forsake his name and social position, thereby renouncing all that is worldly.

It is no surprise that the hero, to use Bonnie Tyler's lyrics, must be larger than life. In whatever time frame, the hero, as Campbell in his *locus classicus*, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* argues, "is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations…" (Campbell 1993: 19–20)[5], and a pattern according to which the heroes prove themselves is as follows: the challenge or call to adventure, the journey, the trials, meeting the Earth mother, and finally re-integration. Isumbras' life adheres to that model, fortuitously it is also the blueprint of Jack Bauer's adventures in each and every series of *24 Hours*, even though Isumbras' story adheres to the design of temptation of the three arch enemies of Mankind: the flesh, the world and the devil, with ensuing penance and redemption[6]. Heroic

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one who has a story, and this story would characterize his divine features. The story has taken place and can no longer be denied. Hercules has been made real through a development of temporal events. But once the development ended his image symbolized, along with the character, the story of his development, and it became the substance of the definitive record and judgment about him. Even the account greatly favored by antiquity was almost always the story of something which had already happened and of which the public was aware" (1984: 108–109). Campbell notices that "[t]he outlines of myths and tales are subject to damage and obscuration" (Campbell 1993: 246). "The account for elements that have become, for one reason or another, meaningless, secondary interpretations are invented, often with considerable skill" (Campbell 1993: 46–247).

[4] Eco points out that Superman is not fully human. Like the heroes of classical mythology frequently the visible results of divine and human mating, he has arrived here as a youth from the planet Krypton. For Eco "Clark Kent personifies fairly typically the average reader who is harassed by complexes and despised by his fellow men; through an obvious process of self-identification, any accountant in any American city secretly feeds the hope that one day, from the slough of his actual personality, there can spring forth a superman who is capable of redeeming years of mediocre existence" (1984: 108).

[5] Campbell notices the Jungian archetypes "are precisely those that have inspired, throughout the annals of human culture, the basic images of ritual, mythology, and vision" (Campbell 1993: 18). According to Campbell, the hero's life in all mythologies follows a similar pattern which involves: the call to adventure or a challenge, the resulting separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power (sometimes connected with meeting the Earth Mother) and a life enhancing return (Campbell 1993: 35).

[6] Repeated as they were, such stories were "often narrated in moving and dramatic ways" (Eco 1984: 109). Such approach to textual practices, however, is not shared by later traditions. The novel and, by analogy, contemporary cinema, shifted the reader's/viewer's interest from *how* to *what* happens or, as Eco states, what will happen and "to the plot invention which now holds our attention. The event has not happened *before* the story; it happens *while* it is being told, and usually even the author does not know what will take place" (Eco

journeys, be they metaphorical or literal reveal something pertinent to our understanding of ourselves, our own constructions of allies and enemies, as well as forms of cultural and sociolinguistic exclusion and inclusion. External menace makes us recognize and reaffirm who *we are* and what we *want to stand for* in the context of the recent discussion of the manifested parallels between medieval and contemporary culture.

2. Ideas on Heroism

While contemporary world seems to relegate heroism to the sphere of comic-book like situations and characters, unreal and unconvincing in their superhuman feats and recurrent evasion of death, the medieval world created an unquestionable belief in heroes as models to emulate. Yet today, the sheer amount of the so-called action movies tells us that we, are still "in need of a hero". The clear-cut divisions between black and white, right and wrong, stress the nostalgia for a simpler world in which the human enemy is recognizably similar to the monstrous dark, Saracen (d)evil, frequently referred to as "black hound" (cf. *The King of Tars*) and God's will always grants the rightful Christians victory. There is no doubt, however, that the myth of the super-hero is conducive to the creation of the super-enemy. Hence, most of the Christian heroes fight with the Saracen giants, the very epitome of the barbarous Other, the personifications of Islam ever threatening the integrity of Christendom. In the classic work on hero worship, Thomas Carlyle[7] presents Muhammad as the exemplary Hero-Prophet and stresses

1984: 109). In his view, the novelistic approach "sacrifices for the most part the mythic potential of the character" (1984: 110). "The mythic character embodies a law, or a universal demand, and therefore must be in part predictable and cannot hold surprises for us; the character of a novel wants, rather, to be a man like anyone else, and what could befall him is as unforeseeable as what may happen to us. Such a character will take on what we will call an 'aesthetic universality', a capacity to serve as a reference point for behavior and feeling which belong to us all. He does not contain the universality of myth, nor does he become an archetype, the emblem of a supernatural reality. He is the result of a universal rendering for a particular and eternal event. The character of a novel is a 'historic type', therefore, to accommodate this character, the aesthetics of the novel must revive an old category particularly necessary when art abandons the territory of myth; this we may term the 'typical'" (Eco 1984: 110).

[7] Carlyle in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* originally published in 1841, offers six categories of Heroes: the hero as divinity (Odin, Scandinavian mythology), the hero as prophet (Mahomet, Islam), the hero as poet (Dante, Shakespeare), the hero as priest (Luther Reformation, Knox Puritanism), the hero as man of letters (Johnson, Rousseau, Burns) and the hero as king (Cromwell, Napoleon, Modern evolutionism).

his integrity and genuine faith; his reading of Muhammad's life is not deprived of the typical Orientalist tropes such as "the Arab mind," "the Arab way," and the improbability of the Koran "a wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite," which the Europeans read, as they "might in the State Paper Office, unreadable masses of lumber" (1924: 65). Carlyle notices, however, that Christianity in itself was not always the religion of missionary work: "We do not find, of the Christian Religion either, that it always disdained the sword, when once it had got one. Charlemagne's conversion of the Saxons was not by preaching" (1924: 61). Such attitudes are also symptomatic of Sir Isumbras and Guy of Warwick and other medieval superheroes. Unlike Guy of Warwick, however, Isumbras is spared the one to one combat with a Saracen Giant. Instead he encounters an even more terrible danger, the huge Saracen army he has to face supported solely by his wife and his miraculously returned three, now grown-up, sons.

Medieval romances like the Jack Bauer series adhere to the "division model," which reverberates with earlier ideas verbalized by Vamik Volkan in his classic study on the position of enemies and allies in our self-perception (1988). According to Volkan, we "need" enemies to stand in contrast to all that we believe in. In political psychology, the enemy is not individualized: "The enemy is insinuated into the self-image of the group or nation, becoming 'the other', a collection of traits that the group itself does *not* wish to have" (1988: 6). Enemies then, function as external stabilizers of our sense of identity, of belonging[8]. The clash of characters and civilizations be it in medieval or modern texts, is therefore a narrative necessity; it is maintained in contemporary film, not without an attempt at "psychologizing" the enemy and thus adding some "shades of grey" to the story. As Eco holds in his study of *Superman*, "Superman, by definition the character whom nothing can impede, finds himself in the worrisome narrative situation of being a hero without an adversary and therefore without the possibility of any development" (1984: 110)[9]. For Campbell "the hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he *is*" (Campbell 1993: 243). Umberto Eco corroborates the thesis that

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[8] Volkan talks about child psychology and the figure of the stranger, as the precursor to his own study (1988: 17–34). He is especially interested in the child's perception of its mother as both a good and bad person (1988: 29).

[9] "Little by little, varying formulae are offered and justify a contrast; Superman, for example, does have a weakness. He is rendered almost helpless by the radiation of Kryptonite, a metal of meteoric origin, which his adversaries naturally procure at any cost in order to neutralize their avenger" (Eco 1984: 110).

> [t]he hero equipped with powers superior to those of the common man has been a constant of the popular imagination from Hercules to Siegfried from Roland Pantagruel, all the way to Peter Pan. Often the hero's virtue is humanized, and his powers, rather than being supernatural, are the extreme realization of natural endowments such as astuteness, swiftness, fighting ability, or even the logical faculties and the pure spirit of observation found in Sherlock Holmes. In industrial society, however, where man becomes a number in the realm of the organization which has usurped his decision-making role, he has no means of production and is thus deprived of his power to decide. Individual strength, if not exerted in sports activities, is left abased when confronted with the strength of machines which determine man's very movements. In such a society the positive hero must embody to an unthinkable degree the power demands that the average citizen nurtures but cannot satisfy. (1984: 107)

The journey through which the character is tested is related to his battling both his enemies as well as his own fallible nature. Predictably, both Sir Isumbras as well as Jack Bauer have their weak points. Isumbras is too happy in his marital/family bliss, his affluence and power whereas Jack Bauer is seemingly fearless, forgetting the golden thought of Falstaff that "the better part of valor is discretion" (William Shakespeare *Henry the Fourth*, Part I, Act 5, Scene 4 l. 120–12). His, like Isumbras', main liability are the people he loves[10]. In medieval texts, prowess is one of the distinguishing features of knights, as both their physical as well as the psychological traits are tested in the course of the story. Isumbras is "bothe hardy and wyght/And doughty man of dede" (ll. 8–9). He is described as "mekil man and long/ With armes grete and body strong/And fair was to see" (ll. 13–15). This description is important because when he is faced with God's displeasure, while being admonished by a bird in the forest, he suddenly recognizes his own mortality and foresees the coming of the old age weakness. He surmises that if anything should happen, it had better be now when he is still at the height of his powers (as Michel Bublé sings in *Meglia Stasera,* "it had better be tonight" from the *Call me Irresponsible* album). Isumbras is a great Lord, liberal with his riches, one who loves minstrels to whom he gives "ryche robes withalle, /Bothe golde and fe" (ll. 20–21), he is marked out for

[10] The essay about the superman appeared in *The Role of the Reader* (1984), while in Polish it was published as a separate work *The Myth of Superman in Popular Culture* (*Superman w literaturze masowej,* 1996).

penance because he is overcome by happiness and vanity: "Swyche pryde in his herte was brought,/On Jhesu Cryst thought he nought" (ll. 32–33). Eco argues that Superman, and by definition a super-knight, intrinsically humane and good, is a discernible super human, performing acts of bravery on a macro-cosmic scale. He asserts that "[e]ach of these heroes is gifted with such powers that he could actually take over the government, defeat the army, or alter the equilibrium of planetary politics, which is also true of Jack Bauer for whom national (or diplomatic) boundaries do not matter. Superman could exercise good on a cosmic level, or on a galactic level..." (Eco 1984: 123), all of the above done to highlight the moral of the story:

> ... that each of these characters is profoundly kind, moral, faithful to human and natural laws, and of good. In this sense the pedagogic message of these stories would be, at least on the plane of children literature, highly acceptable, and the same episode of violence with which the various stories are interspersed would appear directed toward this final indictment of evil and the triumph of honest people. (Eco 1984: 122)

Medieval romances, however, were not stories for children, and consequently, characters such as Guy of Warwick, Sir Isumbras, Richart the Lionheart, as much as Jack Bauer or the emblematic hero of the eighties John Rambo, are equally motivated by anger and capable of unnecessary violence towards one's enemy, while their super strength and intelligence are an undying reminder of our own inadequacy and frailty[11].

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[11] Both the classical as well as Christian heroic convention was preserved in many different versions of the stories. As a consequence, we can safely assume, that medieval audiences were acquainted with the adventures of both secular as well as religious heroes, whose portraits, as is arguably the case of the romance of Sir Isumbras and the legend of St. Eustace, were an amalgamation of both such traditions. Here, one should mention Braswell's (1983) seminal work on the concept of the sinner in medieval literature, whose birth and development coincides with the origin of the romance of Sir Isumbras. It is well documented, for example in the case of medieval drama, that the writers/performers would embellish, change and add details catering to the taste of their audiences (for example adding more tortures to the scene of crucifixion). The constant need for revision, should the previous versions be preserved, usually offers an interesting reading of the cultural changes fueling such revisions (see for example *Piers Plowman's* tree versions).

3. The Challenge or Call to Adventure

Unlike Sir Gawain, whose challenge is a truly chivalric one, Sir Isumbras' call to adventure is supplemented with the warning that his superciliousness made him forget Christ. In a fairly tale like fashion, he encounters a bird in a forest. The bird sings to him: "Thow haste forgete what thou was/For pryde of golde and fee" (ll. 44–45)[12]. To make the call a bit more powerful, in the spirit of the Biblical Book of Job and medieval hagiographies, Isumbras' life "to payne turned his pleye" (l. 72), as his house is burnt, yet he still has his wife and sons, even though "Owte of the fyre were fledde./As naked as they were borne" (ll. 99-100). The nakedness here is symbolic but attenuated to medieval bifurcation of poverty and wealth, as Isumbras loses all his goods and will be successively forced to shun all of his previous life. The passage is symbolic as he no longer can doubt that his penance has just begun. As a result Isumbras entrusts his life to Jesus. "He sende us our lyves fode" (ll. 131–132). The figurative transformation from Isumbras, a man of considerable wealth and power, into a poor penitent, is also marked with Isumbras' taking on a cross "With his knyfe he share/A crosse on hys sholder bare" (ll. 133–134). Renouncing his former life, Isumbras would become a man whose trials would resemble those of Christian saints spiced with the adventures of the action hero.

4. Metaphorical Journey

Having accepted the call to adventure, or the necessity of penance in Isumbras' case, the hero embarks on a metaphorical journey. In Campbell's words "the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals" (1993: 97). Indeed the road through the forest[13] is a perilous one as both of Isumbras' sons are kidnapped by animals, a lion and a leopard in turn. Isumbras is desolate and his desolation is stressed through the previous descriptions of his quite unexpected – and untypical in medieval discourses on the family – fatherly love and care of his boys; the love for his family

[12] A peculiar demand, required of him is a test akin to what Campbell associates with "the first announcement of the approach of this initiatory priest" (Campbell 1993: 74).

[13] The myth of the enchanted forest is frequently reiterated in medieval literature, see, Saunders (1993).

is the source of his inordinate happiness and the resultant immodesty[14]. The separation from the first two children is akin to the crossing of the first threshold[15]. One truly has to find oneself when all that has been known and safe is destroyed and the loyalties are necessarily re-defined. Here comes the first of Isumbras' transformations. He now becomes a wanderer and God's fool. The idea of God's fool belongs to the Eastern tradition and is related to the ideas expressed by Paul that only utter and absolute submission to God guarantees salvation. "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ" (quoted in Maissonneuve 1982: 1). Continuing his penance: "Goddes hestes [wishes] to fulfylle/For hys overdon dede" ("egregious," ll. 506–507).

Performing God's will, the Fool of God loses himself/herself in Christ. Jack Bauer is also frequently separated from his loved ones, lost in the labyrinth of the cities "under siege," and has to follow orders of his superiors. Bauer repeatedly takes wrong turns following false leads, just like Isumbras and his wife, who quite literally, roam the forest. Seemingly aimless wandering is part of that tradition, which facilitates the transition from the reality of power and material comfort to the reality of weakness and instability. The maze of contemporary city is akin to the medieval wilderness; both function as the antithesis of civilization and affluence. Isumbras and his wife are hungry and lost: "Thorwgh forest they wente days three/Tyl they come to Grykkyssche see…/As they stood upon the lande/They sawe faste come saylande/Three hundryd schyppys and moo" (ll. 193–198). The geographical indicator is here of importance, as Lavezzo (2006) shows that medieval maps not only facilitate England's geographical positioning in the medieval world (2006: 2); they also underscore the cartographic representation of the lands of Christians. For romance writers as well as for travelers like the fabled John Mandeville, Jerusalem was the center of the world, at least as long as one treads the path of the pilgrim. In medieval imagination, Jerusalem was the world navel, the Omphalos[16]. The real as well imaginary city, however, functions as a central point in a rather different way: Jerusalem acts as the fulcrum that

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[14] It is perhaps significant that the descriptions of Isumbras and his family are so warm and telling, as one of the aspects of his penance will be the (temporary) loss of his family. Isumbras, abandoning all that is worldly in a truly medieval hagiographic spirit, gives his life over to God entirely and has to accept all the consequences of such actions. Both he as well as his wife know that whatever happens to them is God's will.

[15] "The encounter and separation, for all its wildness, is typical of the sufferings of love. For when a heart insists on its destiny, resisting the general blandishment, then the agony is great; so too the danger" (Campell 1993: 228).

[16] The Greeks believed that a stone in the temple of Apollo at Delphi was a mark of the center of the Earth.

is absolutely necessary to the overall balance of the world: Prester John's Land on this side of the scales, England on the other[17].

The Crusades[18], when they occurred, were a continuation of the ongoing struggle to protect the newly instituted European Christendom and places it deemed sanctified by their connection with Christian sacred history. Such locations, in fact, had as much to do with the territorial expansion of the Christian European empires as with religion. Frequently presented as the center of the universe, the earthly as well as the celestial city, Jerusalem, was also the sacred place from which Muhammad departed to heaven. Hence, Jerusalem could be seen as uniting rather than dividing all three great religions. Yet the early medieval growth of the Muslim world and the threats it posed at the eastern borders of Christendom stimulated the most universal military movement in all Europe. After the First Crusade, Jerusalem stood for the symbol of victory over the barbarians. The Crusaders going "into hethen cuntre" (*Guy of Warwick*, ll. 7396–7397) then, ventured into the limits of the civilized world they were defending. Neither the place of Isumbras' origins, nor the city in which his wife resides as the Sultan's Queen ("a ryche burgh" l. 533) – this time the unspecified location symptomatic of the lack of interest in the city itself as it is the castle and its Queen which matter – is specified, but Acre in which Isumbras is a penitent, and Jerusalem ("Besyde the burgh of Jerusalem," l. 511) in which his penance ends, are. Isumbras has already passed through *Civitas Diaboli* and was pardoned close to *Civitas Dei*. For the last seven years of his penance, Isumbras turns himself into a pilgrim in Acre: "In hungyr and in thurst ful sore/In book as men rede" (ll. 499–501).

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[17] In contemporary novel by Tabish Khair which is a story about misreading and 'Danish Axe plot' *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* (2012) one of the characters says: "Twelfth century. Europeans are frightened of the Saracens. Suddenly, good news: it appears that on the other side of the Islamic threat there is a powerful Christian emperor, Prester John, just waiting to join forces with European crusaders. Hallelujah! For centuries, he is there, on the other side of every Islamic threat, real or imagined, about to come to the rescue of Christendom. Only poor Prester John never existed" (2012: 73).

[18] "The equivalent Arabic term for 'Crusaders' (*al-salibiyyun* those who take up arms in the service of the Cross) is a later usage which dates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Interestingly enough, the etymology of both terms, (Crusaders from the Latin *crux* [cross] and *salibiyyun* from the Arabic *salib* [cross], stresses the centrality of the symbolism of the Cross underlying the European military campaigns which came to be known as the Crusades (in modern Arabic called 'the Crusading wars' (*al-harub al-salibiyya*)). Indeed for the Western European Christians, a crusade was believed to be 'Christ's own enterprise, legitimized by his own personal mandate'" (Hillenbrand 2000: 31).

Even if the Crusades are not in the immediate perspective, religious disparity is stressed in each and every one of the Saracen romances, because this was the only way to justify the preemptive war. Hence, the geographical location of Isumbras' instinctive wandering which highlights the unavoidability of his encounter with the hated Other: "A hethene kyng (strangers were almost always seen as 'pagan', in contemporary terms, he could be a member of the Pastafarian church) was therinne/That Crystendome com to wynne, /To wakkyn woo ful wyde" (ll. 202–204). There comes the first ill-omened meetings between the Christians and the heathens. And there is a Middle Eastern episode in almost all Jack Bauer episodes. Medieval representations of the shape of the world, such as one finds in Bartholomeus Anglicus *On the Properties of Things*, linked the continents to the climactic zone maps. According to Akbari: "The bodies of the inhabitants of such eastern regions were marked by the sun, not only in the color of their skin and their anatomy but also in their physiology; these corporeal differences were consequently manifested in their behavior, emotions, and intellectual capacity. For medieval readers, the irascible Saracen was as much a product of the Oriental climate that was natural to him, as of the deviant 'law of Muhammad' to which he was obedient" (Akbari 2009: 3)[19]. The heathen king and his army are there not on a sightseeing tour but to pillage and to conquer the Christian lands, his presence never incurs hospitality.

The heathen king becomes the very emblem of barbarous exteriority. Jacques Derrida's deliberations on hospitality – inclusive and exclusive hospitality – are useful in our reading of medieval Christian – Saracen conflicts. It is true that not all visitors in the medieval mind would have been hostile, unfortunately there is also quite a considerable degree of violence marking medieval hostility/pitality[20]. Wherever and whenever a foreigner appear, he is allowed to stay for only a limited period of time[21]. After all

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[19] Interestingly, Abdulrahman Munif in his *Cities of Salt* (1989) [1987] claims that irascibility, nervousness and a certain dose of anger were blamed on the climate (hot and then windy) and on the murderous Samum.

[20] Anne Dufourmantelle reads Derrida as sourcing Oedipus: "But to reject the family (and any structure in which it is continued-civil society, the state, the nation), is to confirm pure hospitality in its impossibility. It must therefore be conceived of on the basis of this paradox" (2000: 96); "the obvious example from which Derrida begins is almost amusing. It is contained in these words: 'Human beings offer hospitality only to human beings...' Let's be reassured hospitality is definitely a human characteristic." Is it? What about Ocio (Othello) and Frunio (Humphrey the Cat) who are by all animal standards, friends. My long standing observation of my cats can attest to their forming alliances and friendships.

[21] The three days of Beowulf's stay at Heorot are perhaps one of the best examples. Likewise, medieval Penitentials specified citizen's behavior towards unannounced strangers

as Derrida sees it: "The laws of hospitality thus reserve the right of each host to evaluate, select and choose those he/she wishes to include or exclude- that is to discriminate" (2003: 68). Whoever the newcomers are, they are usually more of a problem than an asset. Hospitality then, be it medieval or modern, is coextensive with the ethical problem of the acceptance of the Other[22]. Contemporary laws on immigration are equally restrictive. No wonder Jack Bauer's attitude to strangers is likewise wary, or rather I should say the series creators' attitude is hesitant. Still, even if any series begins with well-defined categories of enemies and allies, it continues with the destruction of such polarization and the revision of earlier standpoints, only to reveal that in the end the true face of evil remains unchanged. It is internal (homegrown Middle Eastern and Latino terrorists are eventually the most despised)[23], as well as external and in that case the bad guys are unalterably the Russians.

The initial conversation of Sir Isumbras and the Sultan would be of interests to socio-linguists[24] and is geared towards the revelation of not the heart of but the spiritual defeats of, the Oriental mystery. Isumbras is perceived as a "gentyl man" (l. 243), and quite without any preamble in perfect Middle English is asked to convert "Be Mahoun that the bought" (l. 231). He, of course, refuses to "forsake my lay" (l. 161) and turn against Christianity, but at that moment Isumbras still thinks - a notion the falseness of which underscores the true threat of Islam - that logical arguments will be good enough for the barbarians and so he tells the Sultan and his crew "For Hys love that deyde on Rode,/And lat us gon oure way" (ll. 266–267). Refusing to grant Isumbras his wish, the Sultan decides to try and buy Isumbras' wife from him offering him, "gold and fee" (l. 271). Andrea Hopkins cites Günther Blaicher, who argues that the text should be read as an allegory and suggests that "the Sultan's offer of gold in exchange for his wife is a temptation which Ysumbras successfully resists" (2011: 135). The significance of this passage for the medieval audience is immensurable both in its metaphorical and the literal aspects. Isumbras is tempted with gold and riches and with "penyys

found outside the city/village limits. For more, see Sikorska, "Malevolent Visitors: On Hosts and Hostiles in Medieval Saracen Romances" (2013).

[22] There always remains the ethical problem of to what extent the Other wishes to accept and be a part of the cultural mores of the society he is moving into, which side is to be made uncomfortable by alien and clashing habits.

[23] I cannot avoid mentioning Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* and John Updike's *The Terrorist.*

[24] Contemporary sociolinguistic sources, such as Bassiouney (2014) discuss the concepts of honor and modesty as well as politeness in Arabic, thereby explaining behavioral differences between English and Arabic speakers.

that be hool and round/And ryche robes sevene" (l. 275–276). The sinfulness of the want or sheer possession of riches is undeniable, but what possibly is all too frequently omitted is the unspoken threat of polygamy. Even if the Sultan wants to make Isumbras' wife, the Queen of his land, and thus more of an administrator than part of his harem, the theme of polygamy (or bigamy, at least from a Christian perspective, as Isumbras' wife is still married to him in the Christian faith)[25] is still of paramount importance here. Hence, what is not uttered, the physical sensual perception of Islam, which a couple of centuries later will result in the oriental fantasies of "Lusftul Turks," is here linked with the temptations of the world, material and corrupt, such motifs enhancing the misrepresentations of Islam[26]. Isumbras is then forced to leave his wife, having been beaten despite his being recognized earlier as an upper class man[27], and this is how our hero becomes our very own "reluctant fundamentalist"[28].

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[25] There is a very interesting comment on monogamy, polygyny [original spelling] and polyandry in George Bernard Shaw's preface to his play *Getting Married,* which is his reflection on the so-called marriage debate. Defending the Christian idea of marriage, he is, however, also discussing the idea of polygyny and polyandry "as not an ethical" problem but one that depends "solely on the proportion of the sexes in the population" (1927: 137). He claims that "experience shews that women do not object to polygyny when it is customary; on the contrary, they are its most ardent supporters. The reason is obvious. The question, as it presents itself in practice to a woman, is whether it is better to have, say, a whole share in a tenth-rate man or a tenth share in a first-rate man. Substitute the word Income for the word Man, and you will have the question as it presents itself economically to the dependent woman" (1927: 138). "On the other hand, women object to polyandry, because polyandry enables the best women to monopolize all the women. That is why all our ordinary men and women are unanimous in defence of monogamy, the men because it excludes polygyny, and the women because it excludes polyandry" (1927: 138). Shaw goes on explaining the difference between Oriental and occidental polygyny, deeming the Oriental one as much more backward as the "women are secluded and marriages are arranged" (1927: 140).

[26] Campbell quoting Leo Tolstoy "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Campbell 1993: 25). "Modern romance, like Greek tragedy, celebrates the mystery of dismemberment, which is life in time." (Campbell 1993: 25). And more "[m]odern literature is devoted, in great measure, to a courageous, open-eyed observation of the sickeningly broken figurations that abound before us, around us, and within" (Campell 1993: 27).

[27] The Sultan is not interested in taking a hostage, he simply wants Isumbras as one of his knights. In Jack Bauer's world, according to Derrida, "[h]ostages are no longer prisoners of war protected by the rights of wars or the rights of people. The taking of hostages has become classic in the singular conflicts that oppose fellow citizens who no longer want to be fellow citizens and who thus aspire to becoming foreigners respected as the citizens of another country – but a country that is as yet nonexistent, a State to come…" (Derrida 2000: 141),

[28] I am using here the title of Mohsin Hamid's novel (2007). According to Nash, Hamid has his main character, Changez associate fundamentalism with the most astringent form

5. The Trials of the Reluctant (Christian) Fundamentalist

Paradoxically, the loss of the wife works quite nicely with the hagiographic model, in which the separation from the family is a prerequisite for ultimate sainthood. Their mutual faithfulness pinpoints that the Christian marriage vows are more biding than, what is apparently, a spiritual marriage[29] between the Sultan and his new "spouse"[30]. Disconsolate, left with his youngest son, only to be deprived of his last piece of solace when an eagle comes and snatches the red mantle, Isumbras does not know where to turn. While Isumbras pursues the eagle, this is his final temptation, his son is being taken by the unicorn "Hys youngeste sone awey was borne-/Swyche sorwe gan he drye" (ll. 362–363). At the end of his trials the mantle and gold will foster his final recognition, the mantle will reappear close to the castle where his wife was Queen during his years of penance. He will find the mantle in a fowl's nest: "Hys owne mantyl he fond therinne/The gold there gan he fynde" (ll. 623–624). The physical object which enables the hero to regain his true identity is a rather typical medieval emblem[31]. It is not surprising then, when the Queen's servants find the mantle and gold in the poor pilgrim's chamber, that he is forced to reveal his story and tell the Queen that "my wyff was solde,/Myself far manye buffette./Three chyldryn I have lorn,/My mantyl was awey iborne/And in a nest I it fette" (ll. 668–673). Yet, when he is distracted with worldly riches, he loses his son. For the last time, Isumbras commits the sin of worldliness[32]. Now there is nothing to hold him back. Stripped of all his possessions he goes through the ultimate transfiguration, a part

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of American business practice, "embodied in the ideals and practice he picks up working for Underwood Sampson (referred to a number of times as 'the fundamentals'). The demands these place on him to exercise his buried non-American self turn Changez against America" (2012: 110–111). Hamid writes without the kind of insistence one finds in other works: "Not every Muslim is a jihadist, you are hurting us with your generalizations and suspicions".

[29] For more on the concept on sexual abstinence in medieval wedlock, see Elliott (1993). Various cases of multiple contracts and bigamy are collected by McSheffrey (1995).

[30] That is: "Ryche and pore thedyr yede,/Welcome who so wolde" (ll. 683–684).

[31] In the antiphones of the nuns at their consecration as Brides of Christ, we learn that "[t]he robe with which the Lord has clothed me is a robe of splendor with gold interwove, and the necklace with which He had adorned me is beyond price" (Campbell 1993: 356).

[32] The theme of worldly renunciation highlights the binary oppositions on which our culture is based. "Two pairs of opposites, being and not being, life and death, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and all the other polarities that bind the faculties to hope and fear, and link the organs of action to deeds of defense and acquisition are the clashing rocks (Symplegades) that crush the traveler, but between which the heroes always pass" (Campbell 1993: 89).

of his purgatorial trials[33], which is akin to the idea of being engulfed, for example in the belly of the whale: "This motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation" (Campell 1993: 91).

Elsewhere, Campbell elucidates that "[t]he agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization" (Campbell 1993: 190)[34]. Such a rejection of the world is akin to the motif of the hero as a saint, who is in other words, the world-renouncer[35], which of course, works quite nicely with the reading of Isumbras' story through the legend of St. Eustace. Both Isumras and Jack Bauer lead a double existence as family men (In Series One Jack Bauer has a wife and a daughter, in the following Series a daughter and her family) and as soldiers/agents. They are *miles Christi* and intelligence agents respectively, strong and weak in their need to protect their loved ones. On a larger scale, the duality of the human and the heroic points to the greatest Christian mystery, that of Christ, as man and God. The outside vs. the inside, the life in the world vs. the life of the soul, is always part of what Nicholas of Cusa termed the "coincidence of opposites" (Campbell 1993: 89)[36].

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[33] "Broadly speaking, Purgatory developed as the place where venial sins might be expurgated…" (Le Goff 1986: 15). And more "[b]elief in Purgatory therefore requires the projection of the afterlife of a highly sophisticated legal and penal system" (Le Goff 1986: 5).

[34] "The Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and hundreds of analogous tales throughout the world, suggest, as does this ancient legend of the farthest East, that in spite of the failure recorded, a possibility exists of a return of the lover with his lost love from beyond the terrible threshold" (Campbell 1993: 206).

[35] "The patterns of going to the father, but to the unmanifest rather than the manifest aspect: taking the step that the Bodhisattva renounced: that from which there is no return. Not the paradox of the dual perspective, but the ultimate claim of the unseen is here intended. The ego is burnt out. Like a dead leaf in a breeze, the body continues to move about the earth, but the soul has dissolved already in the ocean of bliss" (Campbell 1993: 354).

[36] A contemporary novelist, Lindsay Clarke, whose medievalist fascinations are re-enacted in his each and every novel, comments on the mystery of such a passage. "When Ronan refers to the Ancient Mariner on page 34 he is thinking of himself not the American, so yes there are parallels, which begin, of course, with the killing of a bird and go on into the ordeals of transformation by means of a penitential journey to the otherworld. After I'd finished the novel I came across an essay on Coleridge ("The Snake in the Oak") by Ted Hughes in his book of essays *Winter Pollen* where a footnote on page 423 says "Wherever the quest Hero or Heroine crosses into the other world, or takes the critical step into a forbidden mystery, the Keeper of the Threshold usually appears – most often in the form of a bird, animal or fish, sometimes benign and magically helpful, sometimes terrible and threatening destruction. Either way, directly or indirectly, this creature gives place (by immolation, by

Isumbras a knight, becomes Isumbras a smith "[a] Smethis man was he there" (l. 395), a man working for his upkeep only: "For mete wolde I swynke fayn" (l. 383), refusing to reveal his identity even to a grateful Christian king[37]. This part of his penance lasts seven years; during those seven years the nasty Sultan – "The Sawdon werryd on Crystene lond/And stroyede it ful wyde" (l. 401–402) – has been ravaging the Christian lands, and so Isumbras is given a chance to settle his accounts with the Sultan even with a lesser type of armor. Likewise, Jack Bauer goes through a number of humiliating transformations: from a retired CTU operative, through a prisoner of war, to the hostage, all of these roles serve one ultimate goal, the destruction of America's enemies whatever they are. Isumbras annihilates his former arrogant self but remains a Christian knight ever ready to fight in defense of Christianity. Consequently, he joins the battle and "In that stour (battle) he made many blede/And wrought hem woundes sore" (ll. 440–441), and is characteristically triumphant, and, rather obviously, in a sublime fashion, kills the Sultan: "He rod up unto the mountain, /The Sawdon soone hath he slayn" (ll. 442–443). Both Sir Isumbras and Jack Bauer are on a crusade against the enemies threatening Christendom and Western civilization. Both see the enemy as dehumanized, even though, as Volkan claims, it is we who lose our humanity when we dehumanize others (1988: 120). The hero becomes the world redeemer even before the wheel of fortune turns for him again[38]. In Volkan's delineation, group psychology is extremely important as the individual is subsumed within the common emotional focus of the group – resulting in loss of critical faculty, intensification of emotion and immediacy of response. What is more, he claims that groups under

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self-sacrifice, by transformation, by acting as guide or instructor etc) eventually to the prize – as if it were some aspect of that prize, the only aspect of that prize visible to the untransformed adventurer in the opening phase.' In bringing together the image-complex of the killed swan, the apparently arbitrary figure of the murdered girl, and Ronan's desperate search for Leah, I was, I believe, intuitively following this archetypal pattern. All three motifs (along with Ronan's earlier insistence on the abortion) somehow dramatize the misapprehension and violation of the female principle by a masculine culture disastrously out of touch with the values of the soul" (Lindsay Clarke e-mail message of 28. 02. 2008).

[37] In a manner of a true penitent, Isumbras refuses to reveal his name, saying simply: "Sere, a smethis man./What wole ye doo with me?" (ll. 458-459). The king is truly impressed and doesn't really believe Isumbras' was a smith, and therefore, treats him like a knight for having taken him to the nunnery where the sisters take care of his wounds. And now "The Crystene kyng was ful fayn/He gaff hym gold and fee" (ll. 449–450).

[38] Campbell quotes the Apache beliefs, (strikingly similar to the story of Jesus. Whoever believes in me and listens to what I say will have long life and will reach salvation (Campbell 1993: 35).

stress regress and reactivate childhood regulatory mechanisms (1988: 74)[39]. Responding to the challenge of the enemy, during the mythical journey the hero encounters the figure of the Earth Mother.

6. The Ultimate Threshold: Meeting the Earth Mother

The meeting with the mythical Earth Mother[40] for Campbell stands for the ultimate threshold. The novelist Lindsay Clarke is continually fascinated with such figures:

> for in one form or another she seems to haunt all my work. She is present as the outcast witch in *Sunday Whiteman*, as the bag-lady manifestation of the Loathly Lady archetype in Alice's Masque, as Cundrie in *Parzival*[41], and as Eris (modulating into the figures

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[39] In their exhaustive and thorough study of Islamism Strindberg and Wärn point out that "the salience of any given group identity is contextual, and that the more 'distinctive in context' a characteristic is – such as being African American in a predominantly White school – the more likely that the characteristics is to be internalized and emphasized as a salient group identification" (2011: 178).

[40] The goddess, the mother "is at the root of such unattainable great goddess figures as that of the chaste and terrible Diana whose absolute ruin of the young sportsman Acteon illustrates what a blast of fear is contained in such symbols of the mind's and body's blocked desire" (Campbell 1993: 111).

[41] Yes, there is indeed a Saracen element in PARZIVAL [capital letters original, LS]. Remarkably for a narrative poem written at the time of the Crusades, among the other opposites that the story seeks to reconcile, Wolfram von Eschenbach's version of the Grail Myth insists that Parzival can attain the Grail only after he has been reconciled to his Muslim half-brother Feirefitz. Because Feirefitz was the half-black half-white son of Gurnemanz by his Moorish first wife Belakane before Parzival was born, the half brothers do not meet until near the end of the story. Their confrontation is initially hostile, Parzival's sword breaks when it strikes Feirefitz's helmet and he is then at the Saracen's mercy. Only when he asks to know the name of the man who has defeated him do the two men realize that they have a father in common and become friends, progressing together to the Castle of the Grail. In Jungian terms, their reconciliation enacts the recognition and assimilation of the psyche's shadow-side without which full individuation is impossible. But given the historical hostility between the Christian and Muslim worlds, it must also have carried a profound political challenge to the European imagination of the middle Ages – one that was grounded in the culture of the Three Rings – Christian, Muslim and Judaic – which had successfully co-existed in Spain and might have formed the basis for a truly civilized European culture had not more aggressive, less compassionate forces riven the world – as, regrettably, they usually do.

There were many reasons why I wanted to re-tell the story for our own time, principally because its theme of the reconciliation of the opposites through the compassionate imagination(as embodied symbolically in the Stone from Heaven and the Neutral Angels who

> of Thetis, Clytaemnestra and Circe) in the Troy books. (She is also the Celtic Cailleach figure in stories I retell in Essential Celtic Mythology). So it seems that I'm a hag-ridden writer if ever there was one. What's this about then? For me, each of these figures is an attempt to retrieve from the shadows the demeaned, neglected, sometimes sternly repressed feminine principle that has been left so disastrously out of count by our patriarchal culture, and without whose honoured presence our feeling life is in deep trouble; as is our grasp of the full dimensionality of what masculinity – "the man in man" as Nietzsche puts it -may mean. I speak personally as well as culturally of course. (an e-mail message of March 2007)

In a way, Isumbras' wife, the Queen who was lost to him for so many years can stand for such a figure. He sees her as a stranger not knowing who the *Regina* is. "A fayr castel ther stoode./He herde tell ether dwellyd a qwene/That was bothe right and schene" (ll. 534–536). The Queen has a reputation for being generous "To pore men off every state/Floryns ryche and goode" (ll. 539–540), and so, obviously, she is well disposed towards a poor pilgrim, who despite the warm welcome: "He sat style and eet right nought/But lokyd aboute the halle" (ll. 563–564), ate nothing. It is repeated twice, while the Queen, rather inquisitive, asks the pilgrim to tell her about his travels. Preoccupied with his refusal to partake the feast[42], she tells him that she would always give him clothes and food, "For my lords soule I wole the geve – /Or for his love yiff that he leve –" (ll. 586–587). She also offers him a room and "a knave to serve thee/Withinne the castel gete" (ll. 590–591). Against medieval notions of limited hospitality, she tells him that he is welcome to stay as long as he wants.

7. Last Action Hero[43]

Additionally, a tournament is being called forth to honor the unknown (Christian) pilgrim, who is a guest of, after all, still the Saracen Queen. In his translation of Ramon Lull, entitled in English *The Book of the Ordre*

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are its guardians) is crucial both to the process of personal individuation and to the tensions of the political world. But the encounter between Parzival and Feirefitz seemed to speak directly to the recent years of violent conflict between militant Islam and the Western world (an e-mail from Lindsay Clarke Feb. 11, 2014, used by permission of the author).

[42] "The qwene wonderyd in here thought/ Why he would nought eete" (ll. 584–585).

[43] I have borrowed the title from the movie *Last Action Hero* (1993, directed by John McTiernan with Arnol Shwartzenegger).

of Chyualry, Caxton idealizes the idea of a tournament as the epitome of chivalry, auxiliary in the spiritual training of a knight. In reality, the tournaments that flourished in England in the twelfth century soon became the vehicle for organizing and voicing political opposition to the crown. As time passed the games themselves became more complex with sets of rules and customs. "The holding of tournaments still had political and military overtones which could not be ignored and were still, therefore, liable to be perverted for nefarious ends" (Barker 2003: 15). This explains how Isumbras is not only a Christian fundamentalist but is turned into "Last Action Hero" and similar to Schwarzenegger's famous utterance "big mistake!"; the line which follows the total destruction of Elsinore in the movie with a voice over: "Something is rotten in the state of Dennmark and Hamlet is taking out the trash"[44], Isumbras is "taking out the trash". The author of the romance relishes in the description of Isumbras's victories: "Many a Sareyyn he slowgh that day/Undyr the castel walle" (ll. 602-603). Other statements tell how violent the tournaments could become. The description of brutality, however, even though typical of the genre, to a modern audience is offered in a somewhat comic book fashion:

> Sum knight he gaff swyche a clout
> That bothe hys eyen styrten out (burst]
> And manye he made to blede.
> He caste the Sareyyns in dyke and slak
> And barst hem bothe nekke and bak
> And manye fledde for drede. (ll. 607–612)

For the author of the romance, violence perpetrated during the tournament is as glorious as that occurring on a battlefield. Following their reunion, Isumbras is immediately king "For he was stout and bolde" (l. 687). The focus on Isumbras's chivalry is not without its later popularity. Although the story of Isumbras might be dated before 1380 (Mehl 1968, Hibbard 1960), the story was nevertheless very popular in the fifteenth century, all the more so as it testified to the golden days of true penance and true chivalry. In the fifteenth century, Caxton still believed chivalry of the olden days to be worth imitating in the secularized and his un-heroic times: "and loke in latter

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[44] Schwarzenegger lighting a cigarette says: "Hey Claudius, you killed my father. Big Mistake!" Voice over: "Something is rotten in the State of Denmark and Hamlet is taking out the trash." Hamlet (Schwarzenegger): "To be or not to be…Not to be! (boom)." "Stay thy hand, fair prince." Schwarzenegger: "Who said I am fair?" Voice over: "No one is going to tell this sweet prince goodnight."

days of the noble actes syth the conquest, as in kyng Rychard days cuer du lyon…" (1998: 122–123). In his epilogue, Caxton mourns the declining arts of chivalry: "O ye knyghtes of Englond where is the custome and vsage of noble chyualry that was vsed in tho days" (1998: 122)[45].

Caxton argues that "[t]he office of a knight is to mayntene and deffende the holy feyth catholyque" (1998: 24), as illustrated in how Isumbras quite swiftly converts the heathens. "…comaundyd crystenyd to be swythe/ Tho that hethene ware" (ll. 691–691). The conversion, however, does not end the conflict, the resolution of which will have to be carried out in a truly medieval manner, on the battlefield. Contemporary culture deems conflicts as a normal part of life, both within self and between others (1988: 21). Successfully resolving conflict aids psycho-biological growth and development, helps us to give up fantasy structures and master reality (1988: 22). Conflicts are crucial, as he sees it, to developing differentiated ego-identity, while failure to adequately resolve conflicts fosters pathologies. Let us recall that he describes the enemy as "the reservoir into which our shared unwanted aspects are deposited" (1988: 10), yet that does not mean the reality of the enemy but a rather abstract idea created by us[46].

Seen as such, as unalterable threat are the Saracens and like Jack Bauer, Isumbras has to face the enemy almost alone. "The day off batayle

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[45] Where do we see the "curtosye & gentlynesse" (1998: 122). For him, the new world, exciting as it may be with printed books disseminating new ideas supporting cultural ferment throughout Europe, is also the world of political unrest and instability. Unaware of the palimpsest, of forthcoming interpretations covering and changing the previous versions of events and (hi)stories, Caxton evokes the earlier period's uncontested beauty, seeming safety and morality, and laments the devaluation of the ideals of the past. "How many knyghtes bent her now in Englond that haue thuse and thexcercyse of a knyghte" (1988: 123).

[46] Individuals create defense mechanisms Externalization – attributes unacceptable Internal processes to external world (feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, gratification, pleasure, pain) -at level of body/image Projection – more sophisticated process than externalization, attributes unacceptable thoughts and impulses to other Displacement – gives feelings about one object to another (ex: displace anger at father to anger at boss) (1988: 19–20). "Although the child would have his own individualized psychological makeup, he would be allied to other children in his group through the common suitable target of externalization that is a reservoir of the unmended self-and object representations of all and that affirms their ethnic, cultural, and national identity. And a common reservoir of the good/idealized object representations helps to maintain the cohesiveness of the inner self-representation of many, being available 'out there' for all to turn to in case of mass regression. When kept inside, unintegrated bad units threaten the self's cohesiveness; when put out there at a safe distance and used for comparison with good self - and object representations, they can enhance the sense of self. I suggest that shared, durable bad suitable targets contain the beginning of the concept of any enemy in a social and political sense and that the reservoir of the good is the precursor of the shared ally" (1988: 33).

there was sette/The Crystene and the hethene to be mette" (ll. 700–701). In a rather uncharacteristic feminist fashion, his wife puts on an armor and offers to fight beside him. "Ageyne thirty thousand Sareynys and mo/Ther come no moo but they twoo/Whenne they metten in feelde" (ll. 728–729). One may understand that the ten thousand were killed by Isumbras and his wife alone. The children each on a beast that kidnapped them appear (l. 710) and their courage bears witness to Isumbras' spiritual victory over his own sinful nature: "They slowen hethene kyngyg twoo/And othere Sarayynys manye moo,/Twenty thousand and three" (ll. 739–741). Jack Bauer always wins the day, the rightful (democratic) order is restored, Isumbras, equally valiant, wins and converts three lands[47]. The final resolution of the conflict at the battlefield is the ultimate presentation of god and evil: "The Battlefield is symbolic of the field of life, where every creature lives on the death of another" (Campbell 1993: 238).

8. Reintegration

While the exile and (here rather forced) renunciation of the world is a conscious choice, the return of the hero signifies the bringing back of order. Isumbras does not seem to be returning to the place he came from and Jack Bauer keeps leaving his job and returns to it several times – he always tries to lead a "normal" life and is never given such a possibility. Assuming however, that even partial re-integration carries the force of a closure, Bauer is rewarded with friendships among the high and mighty (successive POTUSs of the series feature, Isumbras fares better than Jack, as he receives "more welthe thenne evere he was" (l. 761)[48]. Campell claims that "The return and reintegration with society, which is indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world, and which, from the standpoint of the community, is the justification of the long retreat, the hero himself may find the most difficult requirement of all" (Campbell 1993: 36)[49]. As has

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[47] "Thenne three londes gunne they wynne/And crysteny dalle that was thereinne,/In romaunse as men rede" (ll. 757–759).

[48] What is more, "modern Occidental judgment is founded on a tale, the myth, and the divine comedies of redemption. These, in the ancient world, were regarded as of a higher rank than tragedy, of a deeper truth, of a more difficult realization, of a sounder structure, and of a revelation more complete" (Campbell 1993: 28).

[49] Campell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* brings out the discussion on the myth of the superhero: "The unconscious sends all sorts of vapors, odd beings, terrors, and deluding images up into the mind – whether I dream, road daylight, or insanity; for the human kingdom,

been noted, the reading into the medieval cultural texts has excavated some of the deeply buried fears. Tackling them not only rejuvenated the discipline but also proved a useful tool in the understanding of contemporary anxieties concerning the presence of Islam in Europe.

9. Conclusion

Anyone who teaches medieval literature to undergraduate students knows that the way to maintain and sustain their interest span while working on a text which for them seems to be written by aliens in the language of Clingon or at any rate in a Galaxy Far Far Away, is to show them parallels with the contemporary world they recognize and understand. The idea of the superhero in medieval romance and its reincarnation in contemporary culture, through the perspective of the psychology of the enemy, is one such area which resonates nicely with medieval and contemporary discourse on "the war on terror." Contemporary films about super heroes invariably enhance modern vituperative unease concerning strangers. Both versions of heroism evince the realization that the enemy – be it medieval Saracens or present-day Middle Eastern terrorists – are cultural constructions, the former echoing the nostalgia for the by-gone days of chivalry and the latter the longing for the clearly outlined categories of good and evil, enemies and friends. Writers are cartographers of the imagination**.** They generate as well as reflect the reality they live in reminding us about our own recurrent patterns of thought. Volkan's plea is quite clear here. "If we are to get out of destructive cycles of war and violence, we have to change our mental representations of ourselves as well as of others" (Volkan 1988: 76)[50]. It is perhaps not possible to redefine the "clash of civilizations," but the investigation of such

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beneath the floor of the comparatively neat little dwelling that we call our consciousness, goes down into unsuspected Alladin caves" (Campbell 1993: 8). Campbell argues for His argument is for the mythology and psychoanalysis. "The hero is the man of self-achieved submission. But submission to what? That precisely is the riddle that today we have to ask ourselves and that it is everywhere the primary virtue and historic deed of the hero to have solved" (Campbell 1993: 16). "Only birth can conquer death – the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be – if we are to experience long survival – a continuous "recurrence of birth" (palingenesia) to mollify the unremitting recurrences of death. For it is by means of our own victories, if we are not regenerated, that the work of Nemesis is wrought: doom breaks from the shell of our very virtue" (Campell 1993: 16).

[50] He emphasizes that "[t]o reestablish the goal of peace in our time demands that we examine the enemy as more than a group whose aggressiveness and response to aggression

discourses is still worthwhile, even if characters like Isumbras are too ideal for our un-heroic age, leaving ones like Jack Bauer to fill in the space. So it is not true, in the words of Tina Turner's song "we don't need another hero"[51]. Should our two heroes ever meet, they would have a lot in common, as they equally valued *famila* and *patria*. Furthermore, both are "our heroes with a thousand faces", the heroes who can speak to different people of different things and are responsive to their particular needs and that might be the most important message of both medieval and contemporary works.

> Speak to machines with the voice of humanity
> Speak to the wise with the voice of insanity
> Speak like a leader with the voice of power and command
> And when I talk to God I know he'll understand
> Cause I'm a man of a thousand faces.
> (Marillion, 1997 *This Strange Engine*)

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is modeled on our own; it is, among other things, a living reservoir of aspects of our own group that we have rejected" (Volkan 1988: 117).

[51] *We Don't Need Another Hero (Thunderdome)* is the hit theme song to the 1985 film *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (directed by George Miller and Georgie Ogilvie) with Mel Gibson and Tina Turner. The single was recorded by Turner, who played Aunty Entity in the movie. The song was written by Terry Britten and Graham Lyle. "So what do we do with our lives/ we leave only a mark/Will our story shine like a light/Or end in the dark/Give it all or nothing/ We don't need another hero."

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