

THE TEARS OF ACHILLES IN HOMER'S EPIC
(WITH SOME REMARKS ON HIS FOLLOWERS)*

by

ELŻBIETA WESOŁOWSKA

ABSTRACT: This article aims to offer insights into the psychological profile of the greatest hero of the *Iliad*, Achilles, with particular reference to the passages in which the hero responds to specific events in the story by crying. I attempt to contribute to the current debates on the matter by contemplating three reasons for Achilles' emotional responses: (1) his youth and the sense of his lack of authority among his comrades in arms; (2) the awareness of his impending death; (3) his status as a demigod, which is seen by the Achaeans as belittling the merits of the hero.

Tears are a particular form of non-verbal communication¹. It is commonly believed that crying brings relief². Although some scientists are sceptical about the veracity of this assumption, the debate continues³. The characters of Homer's

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¹ The nonverbal character of crying poses insurmountable challenges to theatrical actors. Since crying is too spontaneous an emotion to be rendered faithfully on stage by an actor, it is described verbally by another character on stage. This device has its origins in the epic tradition. Cf. STAMM 1975: *passim*.

² For this reason, it is often considered that such strong emotions should not be suppressed, especially by boys, who are expected to control their feelings. Didactic scholars argue that this may entail far-reaching and negative consequences, such as an inability to deal with stressful situations in adult life. Cf. VON GLAHN 2006.

³ See BOSWORTH (2019), who is sceptical about the claim that tears are capable of easing the sufferer's mind. VON GLAHN (2006), on the other hand, persuasively makes a case for the therapeutic function of weeping. A therapist can help the patient release the healing powers of crying by showing respect and patience towards this natural process by which tears help one recover from traumatic experiences, much like wounded flesh that heals naturally. In order to achieve this the therapist must foster a positive relationship with the patient based on trust and a sense of safety to encourage them to share their painful experience, no matter how excruciating it may be. VON GLAHN argues that the therapeutic function of tears is the most effective form of treatment. However, this kind of crying is different from the fear-induced form of crying. The therapeutic form of crying occurs when someone feels that the other person shows an interest in them personally rather than only in their feelings. This, however, provokes the question of whether tears can appease the

epic poems are often found crying or lamenting for different reasons and in different ways. They cry alone, in the presence of others or with others⁴. H el ene MONSACR E’s captivating study on the language of mourning shows that some expressions used in Homer’s poems referring to crying over the dead, which is a specific form of crying, without ritual connotations, e.g. δ ακρυ or δ ακρυα χ εειν and κλαίειν, are used for both individual and collective pain. In contrast,  λοφ υρεσθαι may refer to individual acts of lamentation mixed with the feeling of longing for the dead⁵. Homer’s works also demonstrate a range of expressions for tears or silent sobbing⁶.

According to WIENIEWSKI⁷, the characters in Homer’s epic works cry “not unlike children”⁸. After all, scenes in which the characters are seen concealing their emotions are rather rare⁹. According to TSAGALIS¹⁰, there are numerous episodes in Homer in which the characters cry, for example Thetis (crying with her son in *Il.* XVIII 70 ff.). As will be explained later on in this papers, Achilles is among those characters who do not take pains to conceal their tears¹¹. Other characters who weep include Briseis (and other kidnapped brides) who cries over the death of Patroclus (*Il.* XIX 287–300)¹², Hecuba (crying twice over the death of Hector:

mind of a lonely person. If there is no one to address (nor a higher form of being for that matter), by what means is one supposed to stimulate this kind of emotion?

⁴ Which is not to imply that the reasons for crying with or among others are always the same. It may occur that people who are seen crying together are crying for altogether different reasons.

⁵ Cf. MONSACR E 1984: 171 f.

⁶ Cf. F OLLINGER 2009: 20 ff.

⁷ WIENIEWSKI 1961: XXVII.

⁸ It should be mentioned that the phrase “the crying hero” used in relation to Homer’s works is not an example of oxymoron.

⁹ In the *Odyssey*, for instance, Odysseus holds back his tears – perhaps tears of embarrassment (CAIRNS 2009) – upon seeing his dying dog, Argos. Demodocus, while singing about the fall of Troy at the court of the Phaeacians, causes Odysseus to draw his mantle over his eyes to hide his tears. Elsewhere, he is seen crying openly with joy, e.g. when he speaks to the faithful Eumaeus or when he meets his son (*Od.* XVI 190–191); see KONSTAN (2009: 311) who believes that Meleager in his epigrams was the first to describe tears as pleasurable. I gather that the fact that the hero refuses to show his tears when seeing his dying dog is caused by the necessity to remain incognito before his confrontation with his wife’s suitors.

¹⁰ See TSAGALIS (2004: *passim*) on the role of the three scenes of Andromache’s lament in the *Iliad*, which introduces both the open and the closed structure of the epic. Cf. also MUICH (2010) who shows Andromache’s role as being an example of the suffering of women in times of war.

¹¹ He did not even conceal his tears in the scene with Priam (*Il.* XXIV 295 ff.).

¹² DU E (2006: 43) observed that “in the *Iliad* grief spreads quickly from individual to community”. The funeral lament is the type of speech most closely associated with, and representative of, the female voice in the *Iliad*. For instance, in Book XIX, Briseis utters such a lament over the dead body of Patroclus. And her crying here is the first proper female funeral lament in the *Iliad* in the presence of the deceased, cf. NAPPI 2012.

Il. XXII 432–436, XXIV 747–759), Andromache, Priam, Helen and the Trojans crying over Hector's death (*Il.* XXIV 719–776), and several others, including Odysseus¹³. In scenes like these, crying results from remembering a particular event which the character who is being mourned participated in. This variety of crying is often referred to as “pregnant tears”¹⁴. It may also appear baffling to the reader why Thetis cries so profusely after the death of Patroclus (*Il.* XVIII 70 ff.). Although he was indeed a close friend of her son, her reaction seems somewhat excessive. A possible explanation is that her tears anticipate the impending death of her own son¹⁵. It may also happen that characters who cry together have quite different reasons for doing so (*Il.* XXIV 265 ff.).

What is likely to draw the attention of the readers (and other characters in the poem) is the exceptional status of Achilles. This prototypical Greek hero¹⁶ and a model of military prowess, albeit not always in the positive meaning of the word¹⁷, gives vent to his tears as many as six times throughout the epic. Achilles has taken part in some situations which have reduced him to tears. I would like to briefly recall them here in order to establish a contextual framework of reference. These aspects will be explored in a broader context in the pages to follow. What moves Achilles to tears in the first scene is his feeling of wrath and suffering (*Il.* I 349 ff.). These strong emotions also make him cry in the presence of his mother (*Il.* XVIII 70 ff.). Thetis is very gentle towards him and is aware that speaking about what has upset him can calm his grief, so she asks him to explain the reason for his sadness. Achilles is surprised to hear this question. After all, his mother is a goddess and therefore should know the answer¹⁸.

The third and the following three scenes in which the young hero is weeping are connected with the death of his beloved friend, Patroclus (*Il.* XVIII 79–83¹⁹, 98–136, 324–342, XIX 315–337). It is worth mentioning here that in each

¹³ Odysseus is seen crying in many scenes in the *Odyssey* (see WESOŁOWSKA 2017). Similarly, the epic shows Agamemnon weeping too (see *Od.* XI 391). Furthermore, the sight of the tearful Agamemnon moves Odysseus to tears as well.

¹⁴ This term was introduced by CURRIE (2016), as the tears are connected with a reality not shown within the epic, but predicted or sensed.

¹⁵ Thetis senses that her son will seek to revenge the death of his friend and that his end is near. For more information on this “vicarious lament”, see TSAGALIS 2004: 137. Thetis is, as it were, aware that there will be no more room in this epic to mourn the death of her son. According to some scholars of neo-analysis, this scene shows strong affinities with the earlier epic *Aethiopsis*, which contained a similar scene. Cf. PESTALOZZI 1945; EDWARDS 1990.

¹⁶ See ROSEN, SLUITER 2003: 7.

¹⁷ Cf. BASSI 2003: 34. The term ἀγηνώρ, used to compare Achilles to a great lion, has a double meaning, as it connotes both courage and insolence (this latter may refer to the suitors of Penelope).

¹⁸ It is commonly known that the Greek gods were typically not omniscient. This is exemplified by the successful attempt of Prometheus to trick Zeus over the animal sacrifice or by Tantalus' act of deception.

¹⁹ This scene should be connected with the above scene with Achilles and his mother.

of these situations, Achilles behaves differently, which partly results from the artistic choices of the author and partly from his attempt to present Achilles' personality as a complex one, which should be measured not only by heroic but also by human standards. In my opinion, his first reaction to the death of Patroclus is non-verbal, which in a sense is similar to the crying of women in the *Iliad*. It is also worth mentioning that in Homer's work female mourning is marked by the demonstrative gestures of feigned self-mutilation of the breasts and face or pulling the hair out, without the display of verbal outbursts (as in the case of professional mourning)²⁰. When informed about the death of his companion, the young hero reacts emotionally by pulling his hair out, rolling around on the ground, and smearing his body with ash and sand.

The last example of Achilles' tears in the poem (*Il.* XXIV 265 ff.) is probably the most touching, if a little ambiguous. Achilles is crying when old king Priam is begging on his knees for the body of his dead son Hector to be returned. Achilles, the dreadful and cruel warrior, is responsive to such parental grief and gives back Hector's corpse. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate in accepting a valuable ransom. This gesture led to the glorification of Hector and his death, but also to the glorification of Achilles, who exonerates himself by showing mercy to the humbled and humiliated Priam.

I will now focus on the key scenes in which the hero, who is otherwise greatly dreaded by his enemies, seeks consolation or expresses his anguish by crying. In one of the opening scenes of the epic, Achilles opens his heart to his mother, shedding tears after having been humiliated by the commander-in-chief of the Greeks, Agamemnon (*Il.* I 347 ff.). In this scene, the hero bemoans his impending death and loss of honour after giving his captive woman over to Agamemnon as compensation. In the scene in which Achilles meets Thetis, who arrives upon hearing her son bemoaning his fate, the hero addresses the reader rather than his mother. This is because the latter, as a goddess, knows everything, as is revealed at the beginning of her monologue.

The young hero cries as many as four times after the death of his beloved Patroclus. All of these scenes differ in terms of the stylistic figures used in them. The first three set the scene for the main outburst of lamentation. These include the sigh that implies crying²¹, and words describing the hero's response to a painful experience, such as "with despairing heart" or "with a piercing cry". These three scenes are followed by the episode in which the hero expresses his anguish and is accompanied by his commiserating comrades, which seems to reinforce

²⁰ ALEXIOU 2002: 12 and 42. As weeping can be attributed to the protagonists and many other characters in the *Iliad*, the theme constitutes an important structural point of reference. War brides and comrades in arms are important here (as demonstrated in Book XVIII).

²¹ The words he utters are so full of sorrow that Thetis, who overhears them, burst into tears upon hearing another augury of the impending death of her beloved son.

the weight of his suffering further²². Along similar lines, in *Il.* XVIII 25, Achilles sinks to the depths of despair after the death of his friend. This form of venting despair in which the hero, surrounded by Thetis and other lamenting women, is pulling his hair out in rage may strike one as ritualistic, and thus quite feminine.

These outbursts of despair, interlaced with battle scenes, end with the poignant encounter between the ghost of Patroclus and the sleeping Achilles (*Il.* XXIII 65 ff.) in which Achilles futilely attempts to embrace the bodiless spectre of his beloved friend. This acutely intimate scene turns into a collective lament of his comrades in arms. The final scene in which Achilles fails to contain his emotions is when he meets Priam (*Il.* XXIV 265 ff.). The old king begs Achilles for the body of his slaughtered son so eagerly that both of them end up crying: the former, due to the loss of his eldest son; the latter in a gesture of anticipation of the pain of his father after his only son's death.

Although Homer's epic leaves relatively little room for the gender-specific impact of crying, some scholars argue that certain expressions referring to crying carry female²³ as opposed to male characteristics. The scene in which Achilles likens his older friend Patroclus, who is crying over the defeat of the Greeks, to a snivelling girl, is important in this context²⁴. Also interesting is how Hecuba, unlike Priam, attempts to persuade Hector not to go to the duel with Achilles (*Il.* XXII 38 ff.)²⁵. Priam's lament, delivered a little earlier, appears, in turn, more rational and elaborate. And of course, as we have already observed, also Achilles, who is the bravest, finest, and fastest²⁶ hero of the Trojan war, sheds tears quite frequently²⁷. Sabine FÖLLINGER's typology of crying in the *Iliad* includes the following factors reflecting the role of the characters:

Fear. Particularly on the battlefield (e.g. Ajax, Odysseus in the *Iliad*). This characteristic cannot be ascribed to Achilles²⁸, the most valiant amongst the

²² See ALEXIOU 2002.

²³ See FÖLLINGER (2009: 21) for her discussion with MONSACRÉ (1984). She mentions several comparisons in Homer's poem aimed at distinguishing womanly and manly behaviour (see also FÖLLINGER 2009: 45 ff.).

²⁴ It is worth mentioning that Patroclus is older than Achilles. Seen in this light, the picture on the vase (Sosias' Vase, Altes Museum, Berlin, F 2278) showing Patroclus being looked after by his younger friend may not strike one as surprising.

²⁵ It should be mentioned that Hector's mother rather than his father is trying to stop his son (*Il.* VI 254–262). Presumably the women that accompany Hector can predict his ominous future.

²⁶ His speed is emphasised in Book XXI in the vain race with Apollo and, especially, in Book XXII when Achilles, being so swift-footed, can beat Hector (but paradoxically not without the help of Athene, as if his *epitheton ornans* was only partly useful...).

²⁷ It is worth remembering, after FÖLLINGER (2009: 19), an untitled poem by Goethe, probably written in 1815, in which the poet mentions Achilles weeping over the loss of Briseis as the oldest example of an ancient hero crying.

²⁸ However, we might suspect that the hero attempts to defer the battle to adjourn his impending death.

Achaean. On hearing about the death of Patroclus, Achilles rushed unarmed into the warring rabble and dispersed the crowd of his companions with his mighty roar²⁹. This image is reinforced by Odysseus' words addressed to the hero in the land of the dead, when Achilles expresses his joy upon hearing about the courage of his son, who is believed never to have shed a tear out of fear³⁰. This, rather than the promise of his everlasting glory, was the cause for rejoicing for Achilles, and one that was to compensate for his awareness that he had precious little time to live. Another interpretative problem presents itself at this point: did Achilles wilfully delay his return to the battlefield to (conveniently) avoid his impending end as foretold by his mother? Some commentators subscribe to this view³¹. On the other hand, ZIELIŃSKI convincingly argues that Achilles chooses to die on the battlefield in order to obtain the status of a hero³².

Despair. The most emblematic example here is Patroclus (*Il.* XVI 7–11), who is consistently unable to control his emotions. This invites the ridicule of his friend, who mocks him twofold by likening him to a little girl³³, saying to him:

Why then
are you crying like some poor little girl, Patroklos,
who runs after her mother and begs to be picked up and carried?³⁴

Wrath. Wrath (μῆνις) is one of the primary emotional drivers of the *Iliad*³⁵. Achilles cries in rage at the beginning of the story. The young hero feels degraded, dishonoured and bereft of his well-deserved prize³⁶. It could be argued that this scene shows signs of the immaturity of the young hero, who is too young to be able to control his emotions. But, on the other hand, his wrath persists for a long time and is not represented as a fleeting feeling. Of course, as a constitutive element of the structure of the epic, the hero's feeling of wrath must continue long enough for events to unfold and resolve themselves.

²⁹ See *Il.* XVIII 215–231.

³⁰ It follows from this that the young Neoptolemus' nobility and fame serve as a substitute for his father's immortality.

³¹ See BURGESS 2009: 73; ZIELIŃSKI 2014: 21.

³² ZIELIŃSKI 2014: 75 f.

³³ The expression κούρη νηπίη is significant here as delivered by the younger friend (see n. 24), and because the epithet νήπιος will be recalled in the narrator's utterance (*Il.* XVI 46).

³⁴ This and the other English quotations from the *Iliad* are derived from LATTIMORE 1967.

³⁵ FÖLLINGER 2009: 22.

³⁶ The classical notion of honour is vague and hard to pin down. Cf. CAIRNS 2009. This scene exposes a dissonance between the hero's sense of resentment and the reward that was taken from him by Agamemnon. After all, this young and beautiful woman laments the fact of being taken by another man.

Loss. Achilles' four³⁷ reactions to the death of Patroclus are the most notable examples of loss. That Patroclus dies wearing Achilles' armour is not inconsequential. When Hector assaults and kills the one whom he knows not to be Achilles³⁸, the armour that is conceived to protect the hero turns into his tomb. The poet drops the reader no hints about the feelings of the Trojan warriors at the moment in which such a seemingly grand achievement turns into an illusion. Because it is not Achilles that falls victim to Hector's sword, the victory loses its grandeur. We can only imagine how dispirited the Trojans must have been to see Apollo strip Patroclus of his armour ahead of the latter's duel with Hector³⁹. The Trojans were overcome with fear at the sight of Patroclus wearing the magnificent armour belonging to his famous comrade (in *Il.* XVI)⁴⁰. This implies that they must have believed (and it is unclear how long they kept that belief) that the great hero had returned to the battlefield after a long break. It should also be remembered that the battle cry of the hero is enough to make the terrified Trojans flee and leave the naked corpse of Patroclus behind them.

This scene includes horses auguring the future and other characters who mourn the death of Achilles to come, such as Ajax, Antilochus, Thetis and Briseis. The device employed here on several occasions is that of proleptic mourning. Hector, who in many ways resembles his opponent at whose hand he is to die, is also mourned prior to his death. In Book VI three women, Andromache, Hecuba and Helen, are seen lamenting and imploring him not to go to the battlefield. Each of them proleptically laments the death of Hector, which is fulfilled in Book XXII, albeit each in different ways. After the event, the parents of the vanquished hero, followed by his other supporters, shed tears over his death and his desecrated body. The deaths of both Achilles and Hector are therefore lamented at several stages. As regards Patroclus, his death is a proleptic figure of the death of Achilles, as Patroclus was in a sense an *alter ego* of Achilles. In another sense, Hector acts as a mirror image of Achilles in that the reader is aware of the fact that by killing Hector, Achilles is coming closer to his own death, of which he is reminded by his mother.

Longing. In Book XXIV Achilles unexpectedly expresses a longing for his father and imagines his solitude in old age after his own (Achilles') death. Does

³⁷ There is a link between Achilles' reactions and his three vain attempts to embrace Patroclus' ghost. And even here we should not go too far in interpreting this scene as an element of an erotic connection between them. More about this in WESOŁOWSKA 2014: 207.

³⁸ Cf. XVI 721.

³⁹ This, however, is inconclusive. Hector, as well as some other Trojans, do not seem to be fooled by the fake armour (see Book XVI). On the other hand, the scene in which Patroclus is stripped of his armour marks the moment of his exposure to certain death, also in symbolic terms. By turning the death of Patroclus into a cause of Achilles' revenge, his special status as a hero has been degraded.

⁴⁰ This contradicts the claim made by EDWARDS (1990: 316) that nobody was taken in by Patroclus' disguise.

the hero fear his death, which is to come through the reversal of the natural course of events? Or does the scene mark an attempt to seek consolation by imagining the mourning of his own death? Or else does he anticipate his father's mourning after the death of his son?⁴¹ This example, however, does not offer a full picture of the father–son relationship. The preceding events show Phoenix as a foster father, but also a mother of sorts, who as a childless man treats Achilles as his own son⁴². This feeling is unexpectedly reinforced by the awareness of his (or his father's) solitude in old age after his own (Achilles') death.

Joy. Tears of joy and failure (particularly in sports, which, however, cannot be applied to Achilles) complement FÖLLINGER's list of six⁴³ reasons for crying in the *Iliad*.

In my analysis below, I will attempt to briefly expand FÖLLINGER's list, which I find valuable and persuasive, by mentioning further aspects pertaining to the tears of the bravest of the Achaeans. In my reading of the story, Achilles laments the awareness of his impending death (an awareness linked with that of his young age and origins) which other characters do not seem to take seriously enough⁴⁴. I will attempt to address this point on the basis of several factors listed and elaborated on below:

Death. The end is near. The hero is acutely aware of his impending death (*Il.* I 352):

μη̄τερ ἐπεὶ μ' ἔτεκές γε μινυθὰδιὸν περ ἐόντα⁴⁵,

Since, my mother, you bore me to be a man with a short life.

As confirmed by his mother (*Il.* I 414–418):

ὦ μοι τέκνον ἐμόν, τί νύ σ' ἔτρεφον αἰνὰ τεκοῦσα;
αἶθ' ὄφελες παρὰ νηυσὶν ἀδάκρυτος καὶ ἀπήμων
ἦσθαι, ἐπεὶ νύ τοι αἴσα μίνυθά περ οὐ τι μάλα δῆν:
νῦν δ' ἅμα τ' ὠκύμορος καὶ οἰζυρὸς περὶ πάντων
ἔπλεο: τῷ σε κακῆ αἴση τέκον ἐν μεγάροισι.

Ah me,
my child. Your birth was bitterness. Why did I raise you?
If only you could sit by your ships untroubled, not weeping,

⁴¹ Cf. TOYNBEE 1969.

⁴² Cf. STRÓŻYŃSKI, to whom I am indebted for sharing the manuscript of his work prior to its publication.

⁴³ I would like to propose applying the seventh category of crying elaborated by the author to a more general situation related to despair or wrath.

⁴⁴ This suggests that he finds it hard to maintain his authority in the eyes of the others. See STRÓŻYŃSKI (forthcoming), who discusses the matter in a different context.

⁴⁵ All Greek quotations from the *Iliad* are derived from MURRAY 1924.

since indeed your lifetime is to be short, of no length.
 Now it has befallen that your life must be brief and bitter
 beyond all men's. To a bad destiny I bore you in my chambers.

Book XI of the *Odyssey*, which includes a scene in which the ghost of Achilles bemoans the futility of existence in the kingdom of shadows⁴⁶, serves as a point of convergence between Homer's two epic poems. Achilles' mother foretells her son's inevitable, albeit heroic, death⁴⁷. In *Odyssey* XI, Agamemnon tells Odysseus that Achilles has been killed, but he fails to reveal the identity of the perpetrator or the cause of his death⁴⁸. The ambiguity of this situation is that being killed from a distance bespeaks the lack of heroism of the perpetrator⁴⁹. The cause of death may remain hidden due to the fact that death by an arrow is as disgraceful for the victim as it is for the perpetrator who has committed it⁵⁰. That Odysseus fails to mention anything about the circumstances of the hero's death might also give the reader pause for thought. The fact that Achilles is silent about his own glory, which compensates for his untimely death, is telling. Instead, the hero is preoccupied with longing for his earthly life, prior to his consignment to the Underworld⁵¹.

Prestige. The second important reason for Achilles' discomfort is his age. Needless to say, the hero is very young⁵². Although this factor is not directly expressed in the story, it is suggested that the young age of Achilles is a cause for disrespect among his comrades. This is hinted at by the narrator's foregrounding of Agamemnon's formidable stature in the scene of the disagreement between both warriors (*Il.* I 101 ff.). The wrath of Achilles, which shows no signs of abating throughout the story, can no doubt be considered as a symptom of emotional immaturity. The young hero is now compelled to keep a binding promise⁵³.

⁴⁶ He utters the notable words that he would rather be a peasant in his homeland than a king of the land of shadows.

⁴⁷ Thetis is endowed with knowledge about the future of her son; this departs from the traditional Greek notions about the abilities of divine beings (see n. 18).

⁴⁸ Although Odysseus probably knows everything about the death of Achilles, the reader, as a kind of extratextual addressee of the text, remains uninformed.

⁴⁹ Consider the words with which king Lycus mocks Hercules the archer in Seneca's *Hercules Furens* 159–164.

⁵⁰ This issue is discussed by many mythographers, e.g. Apollodorus III 22; 31–32.

⁵¹ Nor should the meeting of the shadows of Agamemnon and Achilles be overlooked (*Od.* XXIV 25 ff.). Although on hostile terms when alive, the characters now address each other respectfully and amiably. The heroes discuss the death of Achilles in Troy without mentioning the details of the event. Agamemnon envies the young hero his great posthumous fame and the love that the gods bestowed upon him. This is because all of this contrasts sharply with his own death: he was killed at the hands of a woman and in an ambush.

⁵² It was generally assumed that he was not a suitor for Helen.

⁵³ See SEARLE (1969) for further information on the intentionality of promising.

Towards the end of the poem, one source of anger paves the way for another. Having come to an agreement with Agamemnon, Achilles is free to return to the battlefield to avenge the death of his companion. Another notable character in the *Iliad* is Phoenix, Achilles' advisor (I 168, 430 ff., 658 f.; XVI 916)⁵⁴. It could be reasonably argued that Phoenix epitomises a mother figure to Achilles, a role to which the former committed himself all the more ardently due to his childlessness. Consequently, Achilles is raised in a milieu that can be called feminine⁵⁵. The former educator of Achilles, Chiron, possibly only partially influenced his student in terms of gender. Furthermore, given that both Achilles' mother⁵⁶ and father⁵⁷ live far away, Phoenix could also be seen to embody the figure of a child-minder⁵⁸.

As regards the authority of the greatest Greek hero, another aspect merits attention. Namely, in the eyes of his comrades, the valiance of Achilles is a gift from the gods. Nestor's mediating words addressed to Achilles (*Il.* I 280) should be mentioned here:

εἰ δὲ σὺ καρτερός ἐσσι θεὰ δέ σε γείνατο μήτηρ,

though you are the stronger man, and the mother who bore you was immortal.

If so, is this gift a blessing or a curse? How is the young hero to show his own merits rather than those he had received? A simple question, "What is *andreia* anyway?", gets the simplest of answers: "Not running away in the middle of a battle, of course"⁵⁹. Consequently, Achilles passes for the greatest warrior of all, referred to by the nickname of *andreios* (*Il.* IX 699). Nevertheless, the Achaeans remain sure about this fact, even after hearing Agamemnon's insulting words about Achilles' planned getaway (*Il.* I 173–174):

φεῦγε μάλ' εἴ τοι θυμὸς ἐπέσσεται, οὐδέ σ' ἔγωγε
λίσσομαι εἴνεκ' ἐμεῖο μένειν:

Run away by all means if your heart drives you. I will not
entreat you to stay here for my sake.

⁵⁴ For further information on the role of Phoenix in the shaping of the public image of Achilles, see STRÓŻYŃSKI.

⁵⁵ The later tradition includes the story of Achilles being hidden among the fifty daughters of Lycomedes by his mother.

⁵⁶ It needs to be mentioned that Achilles pours his heart out to his mother. It is in her presence that the hero sheds tears that may be called therapeutic, in a sense (see n. 3).

⁵⁷ Some sources maintain that the marriage of Peleus and Thetis was short-lived, cf. Apollodorus III 13, 6–7.

⁵⁸ For more on these complicated interrelations, see HESLIN 2005.

⁵⁹ Cf. ROSEN, SLUITER 2003: 6. "If someone is willing to stay at his post, to fend off the enemy, and not flee, well, you can be sure that he's got *andreia*" (Plato, *Laches* 190e, 4).

It should be mentioned that the later sources maintain that Achilles was officially invited to partake in the war, a detail that is missing in Homer⁶⁰. It is also possible that Achilles is overwhelmed by the role of a great hero which is persistently ascribed to him. Although he appears to cherish the status of the bravest one, this distinction is also a marker of exclusion, and thus loneliness – which deepens after the death of his dear friend. It should be noted that in his last encounter with Hector, Patroclus tries not to act as himself. This must have had a symbolic meaning for Achilles, who in facing the slain friend is struck by the possible nagging awareness: “It could have been me. It shall be me”⁶¹. Achilles, as an extraordinary individual, is endowed with an acute sense of self-awareness. His understanding of living as someone who has withdrawn from the battlefield is a paradox that mirrors Hector’s lack of choice. This dilemma renders them both epic and (almost) tragic heroes. They are probably united by the fact that both die unheroically, albeit in different ways⁶².

It could also be argued, after Laurel FULKERSON⁶³, that the hero suffers pangs of conscience due to the fact that his anger has brought about the defeat of the Greeks and the death of his friend. The scholar also suggests that Achilles’ agony of remorse is of a very peculiar kind, one that can be attributed to Neoptolemus, a character from the *Philoctetes* by Sophocles. This character also demonstrates an acute sense of moral distress.

I would suggest that Achilles could be said to suffer a form of “metaphysical guilt” (to use the term coined by Karl JASPERS). Since the life of Patroclus and other Achaeans depends on Achilles’ success in battle, the hero can be seen as failing to safeguard the wellbeing and principles of his people. Nevertheless, his failure is not a straightforward one. JASPERS proposes that although “morality demands from a person to take risks, it does not compel one to choose a certain death”⁶⁴. When in despair and unable to fend off his impending death, Achilles might be one step closer to grasping the metaphysical implications of his guilt.

It is valuable for the present purposes to consider what, in dramatic terms, the difference is between the tears of Odysseus and Achilles. On the psychological level, the differences are inconsequential⁶⁵. We may treat both of them as mythical heroes with their singular experiences and emotions. In the case of Odysseus, we should mention the bitter utterance in Book XI of the *Odyssey*

⁶⁰ Statius, *Achilleid* I (*passim*).

⁶¹ One should recall his words, full of grief, over the corpse of his beloved friend.

⁶² As regards the relation between the *Iliad* and the earlier *Aethiopsis*, Achilles dies in ambush, Hector attempts to withdraw from the battle before his death, and after the battle his body is desecrated.

⁶³ FULKERSON 2013.

⁶⁴ JASPERS 1965: 83.

⁶⁵ Cf. WESOŁOWSKA 2017: 122.

(170 and 217–220) where, during the conversation with his mother, he refers to his solitary wandering as “burdened with troubles” and now, unable to embrace his dear mother’s ghost, he wonders⁶⁶ “if royal Penelope makes him groan and grieve the more”. I assume the main point of divergence seems to be that Odysseus cries silently. In such intimate moments, he usually attempts to conceal his tears for different reasons: because he feels embarrassed (among the Phaeacians) or out of fear of exposure (when with his dog Argos). However, Odysseus is also capable of crying profusely, such as when embracing his wife and showing his affection to her. According to the Polish writer Roman Brandstaetter (1906–1987) who depicts him in his drama *Odysseus Crying*, he only cries when his face is not visible⁶⁷. Such is the image of the king in Telemachus’ dream. Nevertheless, the reasons for epic characters to shed tears are rarely unmixed – a topos that will be later explored by Ovid in one of his exile elegies (*Trist.* I 3). It is reasonable to assume that in Homer’s epic poem Achilles must be exhausted after nearly a decade of fighting and playing the role of the greatest, invincible hero⁶⁸. Such intense pressure might have triggered spontaneous reactions, such as anger and grief after the loss of Briseis or as a result of humiliation and vulnerability⁶⁹.

Because Achilles is an ambiguous and complex character, he has inspired countless literary adaptations, spanning the period from antiquity to modern times. Because an analysis of numerous literary iterations of this classical protagonist would extend far beyond the narrow scope of this paper, I will attempt to expound upon only two modern works that refer to the theme of Achilles’ tears. Of course, I have refrained from providing a comprehensive list of such examples⁷⁰. Instead, I will offer some remarks about the reappearance of Achilles in literary works after Homer. We should begin with the observation that Achilles was openly mocked by Euripides in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the *Hecuba* and criticised by the Roman poets: Horace, who considers him a murderer of women and children⁷¹, and Ovid, who

⁶⁶ It should be mentioned at this point that Odysseus also yearns, if futilely, for a physical contact with his mother.

⁶⁷ It occurs twice: in Telemachus’ dream and at the very end of the play.

⁶⁸ The ambivalence around Achilles’ martial superiority can be attested by the scenes in which the hero’s exceptional bravery is ascribed to his status as a demigod. It could also be proposed that the scenes of exhaustion or solitude are part of a literary convention. Cf. DUVIGNAUD 1970: 283–297.

⁶⁹ For more information on his feelings for Briseis, cf. FANTUZZI 2012. According to CAIRNS (2009: 37–57), Odysseus is embarrassed by his own unmanly behaviour, although this seems to be rather debatable.

⁷⁰ Even in a book-length study it would be almost impossible, I think, to gather all the modern works that contain such references.

⁷¹ *Carm.* I 8, 13–16; *Epod.* 13, 11–18.

points the finger at the hero's womanising proclivities⁷². Seneca and Catullus, on the other hand, do not criticise the Greek hero⁷³.

As mentioned above, Euripides treats Achilles ironically. He mocks his grand promise to protect Iphigenia and his failure to deliver that promise. Achilles is either unconvincing or excessively utilitarian. His assertions never to let anyone harm the woman echo his words to the envoy in Book I of the *Iliad*. In Euripides' play, Achilles' bold assertions to save Iphigenia call to mind his promise to save Briseis, which may be intended as an attempt to mock Agamemnon. The play *Achilleis. Obrazy tragiczne* ("Tragic Images") by the Polish writer Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907), does not follow the Homeric structure. Every scene revolves around Achilles, which is an exciting concept. In this theatrical adaptation, Achilles cries twice: the first time in the presence of his mother and the second time when he feels humiliated by Thersites' attempts to mock him. After the loss of Patroclus, he chooses to commit suicide.

Another scene from the story of the Greek hero that has been variously adapted in many literary works is Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes. In these adaptations, the subtle manners employed by Achilles as a form of camouflage are particularly emphasised. This theme also figures prominently in an ancient text: an epic poem by Statius (*Achilleis*). In Statius' work, the only person who cries is Deidamia, the woman who is wooed by Achilles⁷⁴. This scene, therefore, includes the theme of Achilles' initiation into manhood. This more or less frivolous theme was employed in thirty operas between the mid-17th and mid-19th centuries! In contemporary popular literature, the character of Achilles has figured in more than a dozen works. Whether these works contain scenes of crying is a question for another study. Let us only consider the bestselling novel *The Song of Achilles* (2011) by Madeline Miller. The story is a loose adaptation of the theme of the close relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Whether the two characters are engaged in a sexual liaison has been the subject of debate almost since the epic poem was first composed⁷⁵. The choice of the narrator in Miller's novel is very unusual. The story is narrated by Patroclus, also after his death. By his account, Achilles is a rapturous character, one that is en-

⁷² *Ars Am.* I 689–696.

⁷³ Sen. *Agam.* 158–159 and Catull. 64, 338–369. Clytemnestra's unclear utterance in the Senecan play is worth mentioning: "Equidem et iugales filiae memini faces/ Et generum Achillem: praestitit matri fidem!" This may refer, ironically, to Agamemnon, but also, respectfully, to the faithful and honest Achilles. In Catullus, Achilles is foreseen as the greatest warrior ever, although some aspects of his cruelty are mentioned.

⁷⁴ The echo of that story is heard in the mediaeval literary epistle *Deidamia Achilli*.

⁷⁵ Contemporary scholars generally agree that Homer does not include any allusions to homosexual encounters between the characters. Cf. FANTUZZI 2012. It is worth mentioning that in later scholarship their relationship was often treated as an example of perfect male love; see the oration by Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*.

tirely devoted (literally to his dying day) to his beloved companion. In this novel, Achilles cries twice: the first time in the presence of Priam (although he takes pains to conceal his tears) and the second time in the presence of his mother, for which she chastises him.

CONCLUSIONS

Achilles, this exceptionally valiant but also in a sense narcissistic⁷⁶ and neurotic hero of Homer's epic poems, is as given to passionate outbursts of rage as he is capable of acts of mercy. After TSAGALIS⁷⁷, we may observe that Achilles surpasses other heroes in terms of his sympathetic imagination. So he looks very similar to the epic poet, reaching out to the depths of grief, to absorb, adapt and externalise his pain. However, could it be argued that Achilles possesses higher authority as a heroic performer, as TSAGALIS concludes? He is undoubtedly a complex, solitary and ambiguous character – and this manifests itself in the final scene in which Achilles, deeply moved, returns the body of Hector to Priam⁷⁸. The hero vents these extreme emotions through tears. In other scenes, Achilles laments the failure to garner the respect of others due to his divine provenance, which in the eyes of many belittles his merits and military accomplishments. However, the hero's psyche is haunted by the spectre of his inevitable death, which lures him with promises of posthumous glory – an asset which is extremely valuable for the characters of the *Iliad*, among them Achilles, and somehow insignificant for him in the *Odyssey*. This is attested in Book XI of the *Odyssey*, when the ghost of Achilles meets Odysseus. It transpires that the spectre knows nothing about life outside the Underworld, which bespeaks the futility or paradoxical nature, from his own point of view, of the concept of eternal glory.

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
elwesolo@amu.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-2053-4889

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⁷⁶ Narcissism is understood here, after DESSUANT (2007), as a form of primeval need for self-sufficiency and love for oneself.

⁷⁷ TSAGALIS 2004: 80.

⁷⁸ Which did not stop him from accepting a huge ransom, as Athene has already predicted.

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