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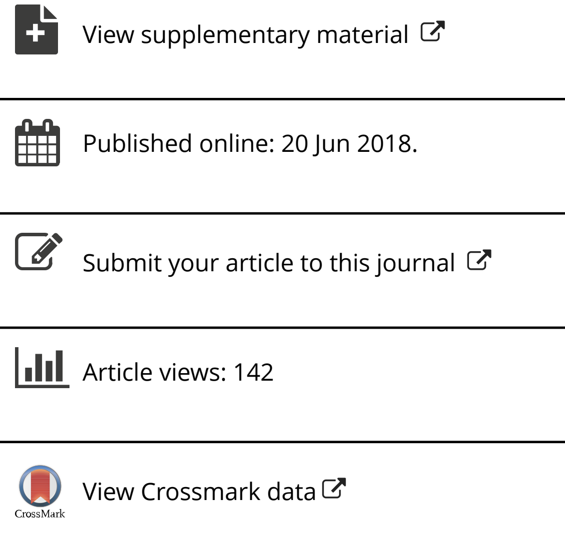

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Achilles: A Homeric hero enamoured with the absolute[1]

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A video abstract of this article can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6YzKsvyCzM&feature=youtu.be

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This article explores through a psychoanalytical lens the character of Achilles in Homer's Iliad, the matrix behind the Western conception of heroism. The contribution reveals the psychological link binding the words and acts of the most valiant of warriors in Antiquity, which is situated in myth and termed "the Eros of the absolute." The paroxystic ideality underlying the aforementioned myth, which is rooted in the anthropological need to believe, is at the origin of Achilles' legendary μῆνις, that is, the flood of rage triggered by contests for supremacy, aggravated by the loss of his war comrade, aroused by the drama of aging and death, and then transfigured through song and memory. The main claim of the author is that Iliad, despite its seeming lack of attention to interiority, is launched by the archetypal emotion of wrath and owes its appeal to its hero's embrace of heroic idealism in an excessive, radical and absolute way that results in a captivating narcissism and sadomasochistic antithesis of ideality. This argument leads to the conclusion that Homer is the Father of the "primitive horde" of affects.

Keywords: Homer, *Iliad*, Achilles, psychological myth, Eros of the absolute, paranoid-schizoid position, splitting, idealization, depressive position, mourning, mania, sublimation

In a few the urge to action rises so powerfully,
that they are already waiting and glowing with their heart's fullness [...]
heroes perhaps, and those chosen to vanish prematurely [...]
The hero is strangely close to those who died young. Lasting
doesn't contain him.

(RM Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, VI, trans. AS Kline, 1923)

Introduction

Achilles: common parlance committed an anatomical error by rendering his 'heel' (instead of his 'tendon') the symbol of our vulnerability. This metaphor

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originates from an ancient legend first attested in an incomplete Latin epic, only part of which has survived to date. Statius' *Achilleid* (first century CE) narrates how the sea nymph, Thetis, plunged her young son, Achilles, into the river of Hades so as to render him invincible while clutching onto the tendon of his ankle. Achilles thus became invincible wherever the water touched his skin, the exception being his tendon, his sole vulnerability. According to one of the versions of the narrative, this is precisely where he was struck by the mortal arrow of a Trojan adversary aided by the god Apollo.[2]

While the mythical character of Achilles has inspired innumerable poets throughout the ages, the *Iliad* of Homer helped to popularize the adventures of this hero, celebrated as the most valiant warrior of Ancient Greece. This monumental work, composed of some 16,000 verses and considered to be the 'primal scene' of Western literature and the matrix of the Western concept of heroism,[3] belongs to the epic genre, the most noble and elevated genre in the hierarchy of literary forms according to the Ancients. An epic glorified a hero or pivotal event, being chanted to the accompaniment of the lyre and alternating between the words of the narrator and the characters, thus drawing from both the lyrical genre – in which only the author spoke – and the dramatic genre – in which only the characters spoke (Sauzeau, 2000, p. 10). The *Iliad* falls within the Trojan Cycle, that is, the group of epics depicting the famous Trojan War whose historical reality still remains a matter of controversy. With war being an essentially male affair in this type of society, the heroism found in the *Iliad* thus relates to a mythology of the masculine.

It should be emphasized from the outset that the warrior universe depicted in the *Iliad* constitutes a structured *representation*, which, by borrowing different elements from the successive phases of Hellenic culture, does not directly 'reflect' the society, but rather the vision held by the poet-singer – *aoidos* – around the eighth century BCE as well as the aristocrats who delighted in hearing its recital.[4] Despite the simplistic and 'Marxist' approach deeming a work of art to be the reflection of the social context that gave birth to it, the Homeric world, similarly to its composite, artificial language that no one ever spoke,[5] never in fact existed: it was, above all, a fiction endowed with its own narrative cohesion, pervaded principally by heroic idealism whose mainspring was rooted in the anthropological need – both pre-religious and pre-institutionalized – to believe.[6] Achilles embodies

[2]On "Achilles' heel," see Gantz (1996, p. 231), and Burgess (2009, pp. 11–13).

[3]Alongside the Western tradition stemming from Homer and theorized by Aristotle – for example, *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius, *Aeneid* by Virgil, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, or *Paradise Lost* by Milton – traditional heroic narratives have emerged in diverse cultures, often completely independent from the Homeric model, such as the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, and the medieval European *Chanson de geste*. On this subject, see Sauzeau (2000, p. 9).

[4]Regarding the relation between the *Iliad* and historical societies, see Morris (2002, pp. 57–91), Ulf (1992, pp. 557–8) and Van Wees (1992). More specifically, on the Aristotelian distinction between real events and the facts portrayed in the Homeric narrative, see Vernant (2007, vol. 1, p. IX).

[5]The epic dialect combines linguistic forms of varying dates and origins to serve the specific needs of the *aoidos*. On this issue, see Parry (1971).

[6]On this 'need to believe', see the eponymous psychoanalytical work by Mijolla-Mellor (2004) as well as Kristeva (2007).

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the paradigmatic model of this ideal, as illustrated in both his captivating narcissism and sadomasochistic antithesis of ideality.

This article therefore aims to shed light on certain aspects of the complex "character" of this emblematic hero, who, as the antithesis of Prometheus, symbolizing the renunciation of drives in favour of civilized culture according to Freud[7] (or repressive sublimation according to Marcuse's extrapolation[8]), is essential to the Homeric narrative as the expression of both impulsive, antisocial drives and sublimatory self-realization. Let us clarify that the contemporary notion of character is difficult to pinpoint in this early form of poetry. The notion of character instead emerges and takes shape over time, as much in literary history as in the psychological development of the individual. According to Arvanitakis (2008, p. 16), "in the epics, we are dealing with a world bathing in psychological, pre-Oedipal fluidity, with the character still in the process of formation".[9]

Although the epic genre typically betrays little interest in the inner life of its characters, in turn rendering the interpretation of their individual psychology a rather delicate task,[10] Achilles may easily be perceived as the mouthpiece of transindividual and transcultural truths, or even more so, as the vector of a transhistorical, psychological myth lending itself easily to analysis. This myth, which may be construed as an emblem of youth or what we nowadays call adolescence, thus concerns the 'Eros of the absolute'. My overall claim is that the universal appeal of the *Iliad* originates precisely in Achilles' excessive, radical, and absolute embrace of heroic idealism, which reactivates primitive stages of our ontogenesis.

Μῆνις triggered by contests for supremacy

Much more than an ode to war and force, the *Iliad* constitutes a hymn to affect, indeed a poem devoted to the paroxysm of emotion. The opening verses of the narrative thus set the tone: "The wrath [*μῆνις*] sing, goddess, of Peleus's son Achilles, the accursed wrath which brought countless sorrows upon the Achaeans, and sent down to Hades many valiant souls of warriors, and made the men themselves to be the spoil for dogs and birds of every kind" (1, 1–5).[11] The heralded theme of the poem is therefore *μῆνις*, the gruesome, surging, and enduring rage,[12] the prerogative of Zeus in Hesiod's *Theogony* and the sole privilege of Achilles throughout the Homeric corpus, in which other mortals are only 'authorized' to feel anger

[7]See Freud's analysis of the myth of Prometheus (1932), as well as in the collection of texts inspired by him in issue 22 of *Libres Cahiers pour la psychanalyse* (2010). See also the seductive reading of the myth of Prometheus by Birraux (2013), who explores the necessity for the adolescent to renounce his infantile omnipotence in order to gain maturity.

[8]Marcuse, *Éros et Civilisation* (1955, pp. 143–4).

[9]Cf. also the remarks of Dodds (2004, p. 26), on the Homeric notion of personality. On the opposition between epics and fictional psychology, see Kristeva (1986, p. 173 *sq.*).

[10]On the personality and inner life of the poem's characters, see the work of Gill (1996) and Pelliccia (1995).

[11]All translations of the *Iliad* appearing in the article are taken from Homer (1999).

[12]According to the etymological hypothesis put forward by the Ancients, *μῆνις* is associated with *μένω* [to remain, to not change], since it relates to an abiding feeling. See Chantraine (1999), s. v. *μῆνις*.

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of a lesser violence.[13] In the Beginning there was emotion: violence, rage, and torment akin to what we experience at the threshold of our psychological life and when we regress toward this original phase, constitutive of our Being. The poet appears to understand this connection between archaic drives and ulterior urges, since he has Achilles repeat the words of his comrades-at-arms who are alarmed by his uncontrollable temper: "surely it was on gall that your mother reared you [*χόλῳ ἔτρεφε*]" (16, 203). Actually, in the Beginning, there was a toxic feeding [*τρέφω*]: this is what the *Iliad* implies, preceding by many centuries Bion (1963) who argued for the preconception of a poisonous breast in the child's mind, thus reversing the Freudian perspective of an initially satisfying other (Freud, 1911) and radicalizing the Kleinian thinking of an originally polarized (gratifying/frustrating) part object (Klein, 1934, 1946, 1957).

The poetic incident provoking this primal rage and providing the material for this inaugural masterpiece in the history of Western literature revolves around a quarrel [*ἔρις*] over a young woman, which is, truth be told, only a mask for a contest for supremacy between two chiefs. Furious that Apollo forced him to render his female captive Chryseis to his father – one of the god's priests – King Agamemnon demands Briseis as compensation, the "prize" [*γέρας*][14] that had formerly been granted to Achilles, the mightiest of warriors. This act is repeatedly attributed in the text to blindness caused by the obscure force that the Greeks personified and termed "*Ἄτη*" (Blindness), "classically" projecting an internal perturbation onto an exterior agent.[15] Agamemnon incidentally defends himself in the following terms: "It is not I who am at fault, but Zeus and Fate and Erinys that walks in darkness, since in the place of assembly they cast on my mind fierce *Ἄτη* on that day when on my own authority I took from Achilles his prize" (19, 86–8). He likewise justifies his act by arguing that he is "so much more kingly [βασιλεύτερος] [than Achilles], and claim[s] to be so much his elder [γενεῇ προγενέστερος]" (9, 160–1).

As to Achilles, he defends his warrior's honour by fighting on the frontline, risking his life for the glorious conquest of cities and the capture of their female inhabitants. The rampart that he intends to surmount is the "the sacred diadem of Troy" (16, 100): "He thus compares Troy, the inviolate city-state to date, to a female captive, whose veil is forcefully torn off by the victor" (Mazon cited by Sauzeau, 2000, p. 28). Achilles accuses Agamemnon, the "king of kings" who seizes his sceptre from Zeus in person and who belongs to a previous generation, of being a cupid sensualist and usurper, reminiscent of the sexually voracious father of a primitive horde who takes pleasure in women to the detriment of the brotherly clan.[16]

[13]On *μῆνις*, see the remarks of Monsacré in her critical apparatus of the original text of the *Iliade* (2007, vol. 1, p. 3, n. 2). See also the brilliant analysis of this affect (inherent to Achilles) by Dumoulié (2012, pp. 16–23).

[14]On the rare privilege of *γέρας*, constituting a service accorded on special grounds in recognition of superiority, notably through rank, function, or worth and accomplishment, see Vernant (1989, pp. 41–79).

[15]On *Ἄτη* in Homeric texts, see Dodds (1951, p. 11-29).

[16]On the father of the primitive horde, see Freud (1912–13).

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This allegation might also echo the primal envy of the omnipotent and omnipossessive breast, an ungenerous part object in the infant's phantasies, insatiably keeping all to itself the milk, love, and care associated with the good mother or primary caregiver.[17] Let us repeat here that the *Iliad* substantially refers to a pre-oedipal past permeated by archaic drives, whether we adopt Freudian, Kleinian, or Bionian language to describe them.

> Just as a bird brings to her unfledged chicks any morsel she may find, but with herself goes ill, so was I used to watch through many a sleepless night, and bloody days I passed in battle, fighting with warriors for their women's sake. [. . .] I took treasures many and noble, and all would I bring and give to Agamemnon, this son of Atreus; but he staying behind beside his swift ships, would take and apportion some small part but keep the most. [. . .] But from me alone of the Achaeans he has taken and keeps my wife, the darling of my heart. Let him lie by her side and take his joy.
>
> (9, 325–32)

With his female booty confiscated, Achilles is overcome by a sense of dispossession: an almighty rage takes hold of him and incites him to withdraw from combat. This act has detrimental consequences for the Greek army, which had declared war on the Trojans precisely over a matter of women: Prince Paris of Ilion (another name for the city of Troy), an impulsive seducer and attendant of Aphrodite, had snatched the incomparable Helen from her legitimate husband, Menelaus, the King of Sparta. In short, Achilles' anger stems from a dispute over the prize of sexual jouissance, this being at the origin of the conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans. And his vengeance – abstaining from the war – repeats in an inverse, negative form the actions that had triggered the military expedition against Troy after a similar insult was suffered by Menelaus. This correspondence leads us to infer that the *Iliad* stages a primitive competition between males around the issue of sexual power. Hand-to-hand confrontation is thus called for: Achilles prepares to brandish his sword to kill Agamemnon, but the goddess Athena, daughter of Metis (canny intelligence) and a wise counsellor, intercepts by incidentally substituting action with verbal venting (1, 193–243). Similarly, when Menelaus, the dishonoured spouse, throws himself on his sexual rival like a lion, Aphrodite saves Paris by making him disappear behind a cloud.

It should be stressed that Achilles' *μῆνις* is characterized by radicalness and the absolute. Nothing can make him retreat: not Agamemnon's apology and generous compensation or the intervention of Odysseus, Ajax, or Patroclus, or even the affectionate words of his preceptor Phoenix, who recounts his own story of anger, sexual rivalry with his father, sterility (symbolic castration), and parricidal temptation (9, 435–65). The hero, to whom "strife [is] dear [. . .] and wars and battles" (1, 177), remains lost in the haunting solitude of his rage, as inflexible as the remorseless Hades, "ungentle and unyielding, most hated by mortals of all gods" (9, 158–9).

[17]On primal envy and greed, see Klein (1957). Given the subject treated in this paper, I also encourage the reader to refer to Klein's analysis (1963b) of the *Oresteia* by Eschylus, where she examines the Greek concept of *Ὕβρις* (Hubris), that is, the excessive arrogance and cupidity punished by *Δίκη* (Diki), otherwise known as judgment.

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Though he is right to feel offended by Agamemnon's provocative act, his inclemency and intransience bring him under the auspices of *Ἄτη* (9, 496–518) on account of his lack of reserve and restraint, a trait that was denounced by the Greeks.[18] Achilles exaggerates, amplifies, and dramatizes, undoubtedly because his origins bring him closer to the gods, the incarnation of all the excesses and drives that men dare not assume.[19]

Let us not forget that *μῆνις* is not only chagrin, bitterness, and resentment; it is also pain and suffering. Achilles declares: "Not even if he gave gifts as many as sand and dust, not even so will Agamemnon any more persuade my heart until he has paid the full price of all the outrage that strings my heart [*θυμαλγέα λώβην*]" (9, 386–7). Our hero continues: "But this dread grief [*αίνὸνἄχος*] comes on heart and soul, when a man is minded to rob one who is his equal, and take from him his prize, since he surpasses him in power. Dread grief [*αίνὸνἄχος*] is this to me, since I have suffered woes at heart [*ἄλγεα θυμῷ*]" (16, 52–5). According to the Ancients, the name of Achilles may be likened to *ἄχος* [grief], a hypothesis that is supported by certain modern linguists.[20]

In the cultural context of Ancient Greece, heroes only shed tears if their status within the group was thrown into question;[21] Achilles' affliction by reason of the challenge to his *γέρας* – the recompense for his battlefield supremacy – undoubtedly exposes his social humiliation. According to a less culturally marked interpretation, his distress resembles that of Narcissus,[22] obsessed by performance and devastated if he does not take first place: "Old Peleus charged his son Achilles always to be the bravest [*ἀιὲν ἀριστεύειν*] and preeminent above all" (11, 783–4). This ideal of excellence [*ἀριστεία*], instilled by his genitor and magnified by his pride in his divine ancestry, is taken to an extreme limit by Achilles, whose "all or nothing" logic recalls the Manichean universe of pre-oedipal phantasies and the "malady of ideality"[23] that underlies all radical beliefs, with its cortege of symptoms of interiorized and/or exteriorized violence.

It is important to recall here some psychoanalytical theories liable to shed light on this implacable black-and-white thinking pervaded by narcissism. Let us begin with Freud (1915a) who maintained the existence of an originally "purified-pleasure-Ego" inclined to introject whatever provides pleasure and extroject whatever causes displeasure. In truth, the purified-pleasure-Ego is the result of a distinction between an Ego and a non-Ego, the splitting of the external and internal world into what is pleasurable and what is not. At this primitive stage, the object is confounded with the

[18]Cf., for example, 24, 28–39, where Paris, misled by *Ἄτη*, committed the condemnable act of favouring Aphrodite to the detriment of all the other goddesses because she offered him "grievous lustfulness" [*μαχλοσύνην ἀλεγεινήν*].

[19]On the mythical attribution to the gods of the libidinal drives that man must renounce, see Freud (1932, p. 193).

[20]See Chantraine (1999, s. v. *Ἀχιλλεύς*). For more details on the etymology of Achilleus (< *achos* and *laos*), see Nagy (1998).

[21]On this issue, see Devereux (1979, p. 211–241).

[22]For an extensive discussion on Achilles' narcissism, see McCary (1982).

[23]The "malady of ideality" is a Mallarmean notion adopted in psychoanalysis by Chasseguet-Smirgel (1975). Here, I follow the interpretation of J. Kristeva (2005, pp. 447–8).

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external stimuli disturbing the primal narcissistic autarky and quietude, which is why it is felt as extraneous to the Ego, a threat generating animosity and hatred. The dysfunctional object relations of what we today call narcissistic personalities (Kernberg, 1990) or individuals with a predominantly narcissistic self (Kohut, 1966) may be apprehended through the aforementioned Freudian model.

From a different, but not incompatible perspective, Fairbairn (1944, 1946), in his formulation of object relations theory, postulated the original inability of the infant to combine the fulfilling and unresponsive aspects of parents into the same individuals, instead seeing the good and bad as separate. The child thus internalizes the unsatisfying aspects of the parents and phantasizes those features as being part of him. This mechanism refers to the splitting of the Ego, where the positive and negative parts of the primordial others are kept apart and where there is no room for ambivalence.

Inspired by the Freudian purified-pleasure-Ego and Fairbairn's object relations conception, Klein (1946) argued that the earliest experiences of the infant oscillate between wholly good ones with nourishing and fulfilling objects, and wholly bad experiences with terrifying and death-dealing objects, as children struggle to integrate the primary drives of Eros and Thanatos. In the paranoid-schizoid position, there is a stark separation between positive, gratifying objects and negative, frustrating objects, because everything is polarized into extremes of love and hate. Klein refers to the "good breast" and the "bad breast" as split mental entities resulting from the ways in which these primitive states tend to deconstruct objects into good and bad portions known as part objects. Unlike Fairbairn who postulated the internalization of the unsatisfying aspects of primal caregivers, Klein stressed the introjection of both the good and bad breast.

Kristeva (2005) expounded Klein's theory by emphasizing that the paranoid-schizoid position is a persistent temptation throughout life, especially during adolescence when a similar, but exponentially stronger form of splitting occurs between good and bad objects. While the child is a researcher and an inquirer ("Who am I?", "Where do I come from?", "What do I want?"), the adolescent is a believer: "Faith implies a passion for the object relation: Faith is potentially fundamentalist, as is the adolescent" (p. 450). But because of the sadomasochistic nature of the drives, the adolescent's belief in the ideal object is constantly threatened, when it is not defeated. Consequently, Kristeva states that "the adolescent is a believer of the object relation and/or of its impossibility" (*ibid.*). This gives rise to the ideality syndrome, the belief that there is a Great Other that exists and can provide absolute satisfaction. However, this is not just a syndrome that afflicts teenagers: "We are all adolescents when we are enthralled by the absolute" (*ibid.*). As anyone can regress back to a paranoid-schizoid position, the temptation of ideality – or its flipside of sadomasochism and/or nihilism – can entice any adult, not to mention political bodies and religious groups.[24]

[24]My reading of the *Iliad* at this point is inspired by McAfee (2017), who cross-reads Klein's conception of paranoid-schizoid position and Kristeva's theory of ideality in order to highlight the politics of Donald Trump.

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The *Iliad* illustrates this bipolar logic in a paradigmatic way through Achilles' desperate search for excellence or, what I would call following Lacan (1972–3), for the supreme and unbearably idealistic "jouissance of the Other" inherently mixed with destruction. In Kleinian terms, I would translate Achilles' *μῆνις* as a harrowing paranoid-schizoid experience aroused by the insatiable quest for an exceedingly gratifying breast, and thus, an unreachable and envied part object. Let us recall here that the excruciating feeling of wrath appears in the very first verse of the *Iliad*, thus preceding the recital of heroic perfection, whereas the narrative substantially presents *μῆνις* as a corollary of ideality. If the answer to the "chicken and the egg" question – which comes first, the chicken or the egg? – remains stunningly enigmatic in the poem, the inextricable link between extreme ideals and hetero-aggressiveness/auto-aggressiveness is undisputable.

Needless to say, the exacerbation of idealization and its sadomasochistic antithesis is commensurate with one's investment in the idealized object. Klein (1946, 1957) had the virtue of explicating that while the good object is well integrated into the Ego and forms the basis of love and secureness, the "too-good breast", that is, the idealized part object, stems from the death drive and constitutes a defence mechanism against the anxiety of persecution. Before Klein, Lacan (1949) had argued that the human infant, still unable to perceive its body as a unified whole, identifies itself with an *Ideal Ich* (ideal I) reflected in the mirror. He thus implicitly admits that idealization originates in the experience of immaturity and fragmentation.

For her part, in her reading of the Freudian text, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', Mijolla-Mellor explains that there exists an alienation of the Ego during the idealization process, since it is forced to rid itself of its narcissistic libido in favour of truly existent objects. The Ego is thus constrained to place outside of itself what essentially constitutes it, that is, the ideal that founded it, and as a result, the libido becomes more impoverished. "While identification represented an appropriation of primitive parental images, idealization renews the condition of childhood dereliction, 'a paralysis derived from the relationship between someone with superior power and someone who is without power' (Freud, 1921c)" (Mijolla-Mellor, 2009, pp. 349–51). "Whereas sublimation allows a deviation from the drive, idealization blocks it (inhibition) due to a feeling of inequality between the desired object and the smallness of the subject, who feels libidinally impoverished in the face of the idealized object. The subject thus experiences an inhibiting fascination or, as the case may be, a destructive rage, in place of libidinal fulfilment" (Mijolla-Mellor, 2002).

Ultimately, Achilles' obsession with heroic idealism, which engenders – or is engendered by – incommensurate rage, resentment, suffering, and grief, constitutes a poetic translation of the aforementioned psychoanalytical postulates, which endeavour to highlight the splitting and idealization that underpin the utterly regressive Eros of the absolute.

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Μῆνις aggravated by the loss of the beloved object

Achilles' reaction to the loss of his friend Patroclus reveals another dimension of excess and immoderation intertwined with *μῆνις*. Of all the mourning evoked in the *Iliad* (the mourning of Priam, Hecuba, Andromache, and so forth), that of Achilles is the most poignant and furious: solitary wandering throughout sleepless nights, gut-wrenching screams terrifying Greeks and Trojans alike, harrowing lamentations heard by Thetis at the bottom of the ocean, provocations directed at Apollo, violations of the sacred rules of hospitality, suicidal tendencies, and deliriums of vengeance, rage, and carnage. Before turning to this libidinal outburst, which incidentally incites Zeus to fear that the hero will go "beyond what is ordained [*ὑπὲρ μῶρον*]" (20, 30), notably his destiny, a few words should be said about the proverbial relationship between the two war comrades.

"Trusty comrade" [*πιστὸςἑταίρος*] (18, 461), "dearest comrade" [*φίλτατος ἑταίρος*] (12, 411), "dear to my heart" [*τῷ' μῷ κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ*] (11, 608), "head beloved" [*ἠθείη κεφαλή*] (23, 94), and "my other half"[25] [*ίσονἐμῇκεφαλῇ*] (18, 82): these are just some of the expressions indicating what Patroclus meant to Achilles. The latter describes his friend as "his elder but his inferior in force", calls him a "girl" [*κούρη νηπίη*] upon seeing his tears (16, 7), and cries for him as would a father for his son when he dies (23, 222–3). For his part, Patroclus models his behaviour on Achilles to the extent that he mimics his manner of speaking about Agamemnon (16, 268–74) and his way of tapping his thighs (cf. 15, 397 and 16, 125), even going so far as to take his armour and identity on the battlefield with fits of anger that could escalate to murder (23, 86–7). This symbiotic behaviour culminates in their stated intention to mix their ashes together (23, 83). The Ancients (Aeschylus, Aeschines, Plato, and so forth) perceived a pederastic aspect in this friendship – in the original sense of the term, that is, the Eros of an accomplished man [*ἐραστής*] for a beardless youth [*παίς*] under his tutelage, especially in the domain of warfare – with this proposal initiating a debate on the sexual roles of these two men that has endured to the present day. Dumoulié (2012, p. 19) writes: "As Plato recalls in the *Symposium*, Patroclus was certainly the lover and Achilles the beloved. Thus, the gods honor [Achilles] even more so because he followed his lover into death, accomplishing this passage to the afterlife, this furious voyage described by Lacan as 'the metaphor of love' following his rediscovery of the initial meaning of the term *metaphora* 'transport.'"

Notwithstanding this, the Homeric text remains silent on the exact nature of this relationship, a silence that we should avoid interpreting as a sign of discretion and/or decency on behalf of the poet; I prefer to view this as a magnificent narrative trail that incites the imagination to become aroused in the face of the extraordinary intensity of this nameless feeling, which in no way should be compared to Achilles' attachment to Briseis. We need only heed the invocation of Thetis' son, beseeching the gods to make the entire human race disappear, with the exception of himself and his dear friend:

[25]"My other half" is based on the French translation, "Mon autre moi-même," by Mazon (Homer, 1998, vol. 3, p. 63).

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"For I wish, father Zeus, and Athene, and Apollo, that no man of the Trojans might escape death, of all there are, nor any of the Argives, but that we two might escape destruction, so that alone we might loose the sacred diadem of Troy" (16, 97–100).

Such a symbiotic relationship permeated with ideality and the absolute can only bring about regressive conditions and provoke the re-emergence of infantile polymorphous perversity. Upon hearing of the death of Patroclus, "a black cloud of grief enfolded Achilles, and with both hands he took the dark dust and poured it over his head and defiled his fair face, and on his fragrant tunic the black ashes fell. And he himself in the dust lay outstretched, mighty in his mightiness, and with his one hands he tore and marred his hair" (18, 22–7). Although this echoes a cultural expression of mourning (judging by the way in which old Priam rolls about in the mire in response to the affront afflicted on the corpse of his son), the debasement of the hero's legendary beauty, his posture "lying on the ground" [*κείται ἐπί χθονί*] (18, 461), and his assimilation with the inanimate body of Patroclus constitute a refusal to abandon as well as a fantastical incorporation of the lost object in reference to the oral or cannibal phase in the evolution of the libido.

Freud (1917, 1921) argued that the identification with the lost object becomes the substitute of love for the object, if the choice of the latter was made on a narcissistic basis – or a specular basis if we borrow Lacanian terms – and this is why a regression toward primary narcissism occurs in melancholia, considered as pathological mourning. Should we repeat that the Homeric narrative presents Patroclus as a mere reflection of Achilles? I could take this a step further by considering the former as the 'imaginary twin' of the latter, hence the poetic embodiment of the idealized internal object (Bion, 1950), the negative twin of Agamemnon personifying the persecutory object according to a primary logic of splitting. And, from a contiguous Kleinian perspective, the suicidal tendencies expressed by the bereaved hero would represent the temptation of union with the internalized ideal object.[26] However, since the dependence on the object tortures and menaces the Ego, and introjection entails a danger of destroying the object, opposed reactions occur: sorrow alternates with frenzy, helplessness with omnipotence, depression with mania.

It is thus not surprising to discover in the Homeric text that the pain of loss leads to a 'melancholic' refusal of nourishment and awakens a maniacal longing for vampirism and omophagia.[27] Achilles forsakes his rage toward Agamemnon and instead redirects his anger toward Hector, the killer of Patroclus; *μῆνις* remains, but shifts its target, as if obeying the principle of psychological homeostasis.[28] In other words, the missing idolized object/

[26]Expanding on Abraham's and Glover's theories, Klein (1934, 1963a) maintained that in certain cases, the phantasy underpinning the act of suicide aims to protect the internalized good objects (or too-good objects) as well as the part of the Ego that identifies itself with the good object. Hence the hypothesis that suicide allows the union of the Ego with its gratifying objects.

[27]Omophagia or omophagy is the eating of raw flesh. The term is of importance in the context of the cult worship of Dionysos.

[28]Although the term implies topical, dynamic, and economic changes, here I focus on the quantitative aspect of libidinal excitement as it seeks stability in the psychological apparatus (Freud, 1924).

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split part of the Ego induces the re-emergence of the poisonous 'breast', stressing once more the inextricable link pinpointed by Klein (1946, 1957) between idealization and persecution. Achilles renounces his isolation and returns to the battlefields, but continues to abstain from participating in banquet rituals and so resolves to fight on an empty stomach: "Until then, down my throat, at least, neither drink nor food will pass, since my comrade is dead, who in my hut lies mangled by the sharp sword, his feet turned toward the door, while round about him our comrades mourn; so it is not at all these things that concern my mind, but slaying, and blood, and the grievous groans of men" (19, 210–14).

The antagonism between pain and nourishment is confirmed by Niobe and Priam, who, while "brooding (ruminating[29]) over their sorrows" [κήδεα πέσσει], similarly refuse to eat for as long as they are overcome by grief for their massacred children (24, 617 and 24, 639). Indeed, hunger shows not its face when Achilles is full with the 'ingestion' of his beloved, clearly identified with a good-feeding breast: "Ah surely once, unlucky one, dearest of my comrades, you used to set out a savory meal in our hut swiftly and deftly when the Achaens were making haste to bring tearful war against the horse-taming Trojans. But now you lie here mangled, and my heart will have nothing of meat and drink, though they are here at hand, through yearning for you [Patroclus]" (19, 315–21). However, it is Thetis' words that seal the link between dietary and sexual abstinence in the context of mourning: "My child, how long will you devour your heart with weeping and sorrowing, and take no thought of food or of the bed [εὐνή]? Good is it for you even to sleep with a woman in love" (24, 128–31). Intransigent Achilles declares that he will dine only after he "ha[s] taken [his] fill [τεταρπώμεσθα[30]] of dire lamenting" (23, 10–11),[31] referring in this apparent oxymoron to the famous δακρυόεν γελάσασα of Andromache (6, 484), "smiling through her tears". With anorexia and tears comprising jouissance, their substitution for carnal satisfaction is not difficult to understand.

The nostalgia for the lost object, if it suppresses the appetite, is also likely to reactivate phantasies of savage cannibalism in recollection of the ambivalence of primal orality. Love is born in the mouth, but so is hate: "I wish that somehow wrath and fury might drive me to carve your flesh and myself eat it raw because of what you have done" (22, 346–7). Thus declares an enraged Achilles to his sworn enemy, Hector, before striking him with his sword and enacting his carnivorous desire through the intermediary of canines: "Hector, son of Priam, I will not give to the fire to feed on, but to dogs" (23, 182–3). As a retort, Hecuba, the sorrowful mother of the victim, howls out her desire to "fix [her] teeth and feed on his inmost

[29]The word "ruminating" follows the French translation cited above, "ruminer," in the sense of digesting, which thus entails the notion of nourishment (Homer, 1998, vol. 2, p. 365).

[30]In Monsacré's commentaries on the original text (Homer, 1998, vol. 3, p. 387), she remarks that the word τέρπω expresses both enjoyment and satisfaction, and that it is often used in the context of a meal. Consequently, tears and pain resemble food that is "eaten" and "digested", thus bringing physical satisfaction.

[31]Cf. 23, 98 where Achilles dreams that he satisfies/enjoys himself with sad mourning in the arms of Patroclus.

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heart" (24, 212–13). Achilles' μῆνις is indeed without bounds, surpassing all other furious impulses in the Homeric text. His mourning rallies the regressive forces of rage and omnipotence, transforming the hero into "a lion that at the urging of his great might and lordly heart goes out against the flocks of men to win himself a feast" (24, 41–3). In full possession of Ἄτη (blindness) Achilles, who at one point considered suicide though never acted on this impulse (18, 98–9), converts his masochism into sadism, leading to massacres, the disgrace of corpses, and the immolation of horses, dogs, and Trojan captives, all in homage to his deceased friend. He thus violates the warrior code of honour, neglects the respect due to the gods, and illustrates a spectacular overflow of the Id – the price of ideality and an extremist belief in absolute love.

Another digression to metapsychology is required here in order to comprehend Achilles' transformation after Patroclus' slaughter by Hector. Freud (1921) inaugurally stated that during the oral phase of libidinal organization, which is the most primitive, we incorporate the craved object by eating it, and in the process, we destroy it. In correlation, he explained mania as a triumph over melancholia, a libidinal feast of the Ego fighting against pathological mourning and dependence on the missing object (1917). Closely following his mentor, Abraham (1924) argued for the link between mania and bulimia by considering the former as a cannibalistic orgy, primarily associated with the original crime of humanity: the murder and ingestion of the primitive father.

Klein (1934, 1946) gave most emphasis to the primal violence of oral-sadistic drives, phantasizing the mother's breast as lacerated in the paranoid-schizoid position. When the split part objects evolve toward ambivalence and begin to acquire the features of a whole object, access to the depressive position arouses the chagrin associated with the loss of the internalized object and caused by the very dread of having destroyed it; this consequently entails the need to repair it. To defend itself against this paranoid fear, the Ego denies the inner reality, develops a feeling of omnipotence, and struggles to take full control of the objects. This is a maniac defence against mourning characterized by oral greed. For both Klein (1934, 1940) and Winnicott (1935), depression and mania are alternating states. Bion's (1962) scheme epitomizes this process: PS ⋗ D. Between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, there is an arrow pointing in both directions to show that the subject constantly moves from one position to the other in both directions. Hence, there is a constant oscillation between paranoid-schizoid mechanisms – splitting, projection, denial, and persecution – and the access to the depressive position.

The *Iliad* describes in its own poetic terms the vehemence of mania and oral greed aroused by grief due to the loss of the beloved object. Does the vivid description of Achilles' fury after Patroclus' demise not recall the fusion of the Ego with the Ego ideal that Freud (1921) discerned in the feast of mania? Depression engendered by the loss of the treasured specular object leads to the emergence of an infantile, grandiose, and omnipotent ego, the "identification with an oversized self and object representation with the primitive form of Ego Ideal" (Kernberg, 1990, p. 232). Ultimately,

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through poetic strength and psychoanalytical insight, the narrative suggests the regression toward a primitive stage of object relations and illustrates the oscillation between cannibalism and fasting, madness and mourning, paranoid-schizoid defences and endeavours to access the depressive position, corollaries of the spellbinding 'malady of ideality'.

Μῆνις aroused by the drama of ageing and death

Achilles' passion for the extraordinary inflames his ardent belief that, above all, there exists a sublimity glorifying death. The hero's fury on the battlefield is aroused not only by his anger following the loss of his narcissistic double, but also by his revolt against the notion of death without splendor.

Even after his mother's warning of imminent death if he were to avenge the demise of Patroclus, Achilles is still willing to sacrifice his life as long as he excels in spreading mourning amidst the enemy:

> As for my death, I will accept it when Zeus is minded to bring it to pass, and the other immortal gods. For not even the mighty Herakles escaped death, though he was most dear to lord Zeus, son of Cronos, but fate overcame him, and the painful wrath of Hera. So also shall I, if a like fate has been fashioned for me, lie when I am dead. But now let me win glorious renown [*κλέος ἐσθλόν*], and set many a one among the deep-bosomed Trojan and Dardanian women to weep the tears from her tender cheeks with both hands, and to moan ceaselessly; and let them know that long have I kept apart from the war.
>
> (18, 117–25)

The furious hero remains determined in his efforts to spread death for he considers his own demise ineluctable, as if the excruciating awareness of his own limits must be inverted as a show of his all-power. When a warrior, a victim of his *μῆνις*, begs him to spare his life, the ruthless Achilles retorts before piercing him with his sword:

> No friend, you too die; why lament you thus? Patroclus also died, and he was better far than you. And do you see what manner of man I am, how fair and how tall? A good man was my father, and a goddess the mother that bore me; yet over me too hang death and resistless fate. There will come a dawn or evening or midday, when my life too will some man take in battle, whether he strike me with cast of the spear, or with an arrow from the string.
>
> (21, 106–13)

Let us recall the beginning of the *Iliad*, where Achilles demands the recompense of glory, *τιμή* [honour], as both compensation and consolation for the tragically ephemeral nature of his existence: "Mother, since you bore me, though to so brief a span of life, honor [*τιμή*] surely ought the Olympian to have given into my hands, Zeus who thunders on high" (1, 332–4). He later contradicts himself when asserting that he still retains the choice of longevity: "Twofold fates are bearing me toward the doom of death: if I remain here and fight about the city of the Trojans, then lost is my return home [*νόστος*], but my renown will be imperishable [*κλέος ἄφθιτον*]; but if I

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return home to my dear native land, lost then is my glorious renown [κλέος ἐσθλόν], yet will my life long endure, and the doom of death will not come soon on me" (9, 410–16).

The words of Sarpedon, Achilles' alter ego in the Trojan camp,[32] explain the heroic choice of combat and, indirectly, the aforementioned renunciation of *νόστος* (return to the homeland), this being instead the theme of the *Odyssey*:

> Ah friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless and immortal, neither should I myself fight among the foremost, nor should I send you into battle where men win glory; but now – for in any case fates of death threaten us, fates past counting, which no mortal may escape or avoid – now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to another, or another to us.
>
> (12, 322–8)

The truth thus emerges: one does not accept to 'absurdly' risk one's life to be elevated in status among heroes, but rather one achieves heroism precisely because one is condemned by the Grim Reaper and doomed to the irreparable stigma of ageing. As Jean Cocteau (1921) wrote, "Since these mysteries are beyond us, let us pretend to have devised them": indeed, the warrior dramatizes the circumstances of his departure and "ideally" surpasses his human condition by liberating himself from an enforced, imposed, and suffering death in order to escape senescence, a drama most exemplified in the myth of Tithonus, the eternally ageing immortal. "Imperishable renown" is simply the flamboyant price paid for an existence destined to terminate as an evanescent shadow in Hades' kingdom. Achilles thus declares, "For in my eyes not of like worth with life [ψυχῆς ἀντάξιον] is all the wealth that men say Ilios possessed" (9, 401–2). His shadow utters a similar sentiment in the *Odyssey*, poignant words that captured the attention of Freud (1915b, p. 33): "I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, some landless man with hardly enough to live on, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished".[33]

On account of his radical and uncompromising preference for the 'short life', Achilles incarnates the archetypal Hero, notably the accomplished warrior that a seductive etymological speculation [ἥρως] associates with the "favorable time," the "season par excellence rich in all blossoming [ὥρα],"[34] under the alias of youth, which was deified and represented by the Greeks through the slender traits of Hebe [Ἥβη].[35] As the very antithesis of the Freudian theory in which the Hero braves all dangers because he simply

[32]On the affinities between Achilles and Sarpedon, see Vernant (1989, p. 51).

[33]Translation taken from Homer (1995, chant 11, pp. 489–91).

[34]On the association between ἥρως (hero), ὥρα (beautiful season), and Ἥρα (Hera; cf. Heracles < κλέος of Ἥρα "Glory of Hera"), see Sauzeau (2000, pp. 26–7).

[35]On the notion of ἥβη in the Homeric corpus (designating a warrior's vigour, virility, and radiance as opposed to a specific age group), see Vernant (1989, 59 *sq.*). Regarding the interpretation of this concept in the Ancient Greek world (especially the Classical and Pre-Hellenistic era) as *Youth Culture*, see the article by Devereux (1979).

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ignores the negativity of death in his hedonophilic unconscious (Freud, 1915b, p. 36).

It should nevertheless be highlighted that Freud mostly refers to instinctive and impulsive heroism. A representation of the denial of death as dictated by the unconscious ("Nothing can happen to you", *ibid.*) may be sought in an extract from the *Iliad* in which Athena, donning the traits of the brother of Hector, incites the latter to fight Achilles and no longer flee him, perfidiously giving him the illusion that he could be beat him (20, 243–6). Hector's desire to flee his rival despite his bravery may indicate his return to lucid consciousness in which the hero desires not to risk his life through confronting an incontestably stronger rival, whereas the deceptive burst of Athena may be assimilated with the emergence of an impulse developing from the unconscious and eclipsing any belief in death.

Achilles demonstrates an atrociously lucid (not 'repressed') knowledge of his own destiny. Let us recall that his imminent death is heralded by his mother, his immortal horse, and dying Hector. Consequently, his willingness to take the risk to perish in order to win glorious renown may plausibly be interpreted as another expression of his 'adolescent' ideality syndrome, that is, an over-embellishment of a 'short life' that conceals the anguish of decrepitude and finitude. The entire poem illustrates that the heroic paradigm of belligerent fury and triumphant demise stems from the menace of an ineluctable mortality, thus giving credit to Klein's (1957) conception of idealization as a derivation of the death drive.

It seems nevertheless reductive to consider Achilles' yearning for sublime self-sacrifice as a mere defence against the anxieties of transience and finitude. The Homeric text's emphasis on jouissance and self-fulfilment associated with the belief of 'imperishable renown' born from a fearless death on the battlefield takes us from idealization to sublimation, the most perfect destiny of drive, to conclude from the Freudian corpus. Unlike psychoanalytical *doxa*, sublimation is not a poor substitute of sexual satisfaction, but rather a derived form of urge, with no reason to believe that the pleasure of sublimating is less intense than the enjoyment obtained from the direct and immediate gratification of the erogenous zones.[36] Sublimation does not only apply to Eros, but also to Thanatos: Klein (1929) argued for the need to repair the paranoid-schizoid phantasy of the mutilated breast and recreate the "good object" in the depressive position, thus transfiguring anguish and guilt. In a similar vein, Winnicott (1971) conceived sublimation as originating from transitional phenomena, allowing the child's creativity to restore what has been damaged or destroyed by its sadistic impulses, provided that the mother is 'good enough'.

It is important to stress that unlike the 'malady of ideality' and its flipside of sadomasochism, the sublimatory process has the advantage of concomitantly permitting the satisfaction of the drive and the benefits of self-esteem (*Selbstachtung*). Even though indulged by the Ego ideal, sublimation is not subjected to its commands, in contrast to idealization whose subservience to

[36]See the edited volume by Mijolla-Mellor (2012), which explores the evolution of the complex and fluctuating notion of sublimation in the Freudian corpus and its influence on psychoanalytical thinking.

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an archaic, savage, and omnipotent Ego ideal induces repression and alienation (Freud, 1914). Accordingly, aside from its cultural benefits, the sublimation of libidinal and/or aggressive drives constitutes an unforced and non-repressive solution inclined toward self-indulgence and self-accomplishment. The involvement of narcissism needs to be emphasized here, since sublimation arises in psychic endeavour, which entails the transformation of the object libido into the Ego libido (Freud, 1923).

Let us distinguish now some typical symptoms of the ideality syndrome that emblematically occur in what we nowadays call adolescence: for example, the intentional pursuit of life-threatening feats through extreme sports, drug addiction, or anorexic behaviour. This is in the same vein as the heroic ideal of the *Iliad*, which in no case is suicidal, but which only accepts the likelihood of death in order to give meaning to the absurdity of the Grim Reaper and accomplish a valued destiny on both personal and social levels. According to this argument, Achilles' determination to "risk the supreme stake" (Freud, 1915a, p. 28) in order to achieve noble glory can rather be 'heard' as a desire for self-sacrifice and self-fulfillment specific to the sublimatory and non-repressive process chosen freely in the name of everlasting pleasure and gain.[37]

Μῆνις transfigured through song and memory

Not only is Achilles the most illustrious of warriors and the incarnation of the purest of heroes, he is also the sole character in the *Iliad* to employ a poetic voice: "And him they found delighting his mind [*φρένα τερπόμενον*] with a clear-toned lyre, fair and elaborate … with he was delighting his heart, and he sung of the glorious deeds of warriors [*κλέα ἀνδρῶν*]" (9, 185–9). This activity supplants the role of the poet-*aoidos* and can only echo the destiny that Achilles envisages for himself: to be glorified and forever remain in the memories of generations. Here, we detect the ultimate aspect of Achilles' uncompromised ideality: his absolute Eros of immortality.

Let us recall that Thetis's son becomes an *aoidos* precisely when he is overwhelmed by sadness following Agamemnon's insults. To describe his emotions, he employs the verb *τέρπω/τέρπομαι* [to find full gratification of one's desire], encountered above in relation to the sensual pleasure derived from the 'ingestion' of crying and tears. The correlation of suffering–epic–pleasure allows us to speak of an allusion to the reparative function of poetry in the Homeric text.[38] As Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* tells us, "Ideas are the substitute of grief." The *aoidoi* certainly reappear, but their emergence in the narrative is only to lament before Hector's inanimate body: mourning and suffering are at the heart of the poetic song. To complete the cycle, the beautiful Helena pronounces the presupposition of the epic in the following terms: "On us Zeus has brought an evil doom [*κακὸν μόρον*], so that even in days to come we may be a song for men that are to

[37]On the link between heroism and (the revised Freudian notion of) sublimation, see Mijolla-Mellor (2009, pp. 201–17).

[38]On this function of poetry in the *Odyssey*, see Arvanitakis (2008 pp. 74–118).

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be [ἀοίδιμοιἐσσομένοισι]" (6, 357–8). The collective memory thus delights in recollecting the gloomy ordeals, analogous to those figuring in the web woven by Helena (3, 125–8).

Following this idea through to its logical conclusion, I could argue that Achilles' *μῆνις*, this macabre affect rooted in the body, is destined to become annihilated and transform into *ἔπος*, that is to say, Epic speech, which then dissolves into pleasure [*τέρψις*]: the mutual sharing of jouissance between the poet-*aoidos* and his audience, a transference love engendered by the creative interaction between the artist improvising verses of historical and phantasied tribulations on the one hand and the aristocrats hearing and transfiguring this sorrowful recital by their accommodating presence and unexpected reactions on the other. This poetic interplay, able to metabolize emotions and sublimate a lugubrious experience of wrath, resentment, destruction, and mourning, brings to mind the bond between the analyst and analysand based on the transubstantiation of toxic sensoriality in liberating terms, or in other words, the "digestion" of beta elements and transformation to alpha elements through the analytical reverie (Bion, 1962), the Aristotelian catharsis born from the representation of a drive that would otherwise be abhorred if it were not experienced in the pure, primary, and non-poetic state. Through poetic speech, *μῆνις*, the memorable first word and subject of the *Iliad*, which condenses all the vehement impulses of our pre-oedipal past, transforms into *μνήμη*, memory, memorization,[39] and, according to Heidegger who recalls the etymology of the Greek work *ἀλήθεια* ("without forgetting") in reference to truth, into the unveiling [*Unverborgenheit*] of the essence of Being.[40]

Conclusion

No amount of analysis can exhaust the exceptional wealth of the character of Achilles, and even less so, that of the *Iliad*, which exploits the dominant subject of heroism and places, to borrow the expression of Nietzsche, "a large question mark over the most crucial issue": death. From the numerous angles available to study the archetypal hero of epic poetry, this article adopts an approach that, in my opinion, enlightens our understanding of his words and acts most coherently: Achilles' passion for the absolute and paroxystic[41] ideality are at the origin of his legendary *μῆνις*, an alias for his obsession with the peerless jouissance of the Other. The severity underlying this ideality thus commands: *one must find pleasure in any possible way, including through that which does not exist!* This psychological link in 'myth' was expounded in this article so as to emphasize the transcendence of its individual dimension, its enunciation through the collective, and its expansion throughout time.

[39]On the link – probably etymological as well – between *μῆνις* and *μνήμη*, see Dumoulié (2012, pp. 23–4).

[40]On the Greek paradigm of truth and Heidegger, see Christopoulou (2007, p. 51).

[41]Paroxystic (or paroxysmal or paroxysmic) derives from *παροξυσμός* ('irritation'), a severe attack or sudden intensification of a disease, usually recurring periodically.

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In order to highlight the richness of this myth, various psychoanalytical approaches were utilized. My ambition was to avoid confining myself to a single school of psychoanalytical thought and to 'harvest' elements from the vast field of metapsychology. This choice was chiefly inspired by the complexity and infinite plurality of the *Iliad*'s poetic narrative. Furthermore, I wanted to experience this methodological diversity in order to appraise the possibilities of establishing a dialogue between psychodynamic models stemming from several linguistic traditions, while averting the risk of an epistemological 'confusion of tongues', to speak in the manner of Ferenczi.

As a final reflection, let us consider that the cohesion of the psychological myth that I entitle 'Eros of the Absolute' and the subtlety of its expression in the *Iliad* prompt me to contribute to the famous question concerning the historical existence of Homer. Although the *Iliad* tackles themes derived from an immemorial tradition, which draws from an extensive treasure of formulae and canvases dating back to the Mycenaean period, if not to an even older Indo-European heritage, the subtleties and refinement of its construction – including the oft-quoted narrative eclipse of Achilles' death – cannot derive from a simple interaction between the *aoidos* passionate about improvisation and an auditorium of elites; they must necessarily proceed from a genius of timelessness. Our immediate and profound emotion when coming into contact with these ancient verses, though deprived of their music and milieu and perceived as but a weakened echo, leads us to establish Homer as the Father of the 'primitive horde' of affects.

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Translations of summary

Achille: Un héros homérique amoureux de l'absolu. L'auteur de cet article explore sous un angle psychanalytique le caractèred'Achille dans l'*Iliade* d'Homère, la matrice de la conception occidentale del'héroïsme. Il met en évidence le lien psychologique unissant les mots et lesactes du guerrier le plus vaillant de l'Antiquité, qu'il érige en mythe et qu'il nomme « l'Éros de l'absolu ». L'idéalité paroxystique

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sous-tendantce mythe, ancrée dans le besoin anthropologique de croire, est à l'origine dela *μῆνις* légendaire d'Achille, c'est-à-dire l'ire déclenchée par la contestation de sa préséance, qu'aura aggravée la perte de son camarade de guerre et réveilléele drame du vieillissement et de la mort et qui sera ensuite transfigurée parle chant et le souvenir. L'auteur soutient notamment que l'*Iliade*, en dépitde son manque apparent d'attention à l'intériorité, est mise en branle par l'émotion archétypique de la colère et doit son pouvoir d'attraction à l'adhésion de son héros à l'idéalisme héroïque, une adhésion si excessive,radicale et absolue qu'elle aboutit à un narcissisme captivant et une antithèse sadomasochiste d'idéalité. Cet argument conduit l'auteur à la conclusion qu'Homère est le Père de la « horde primitive » des affects.

Achilleus: ein homerischer Held, der ins Absolute verliebt ist. Dieser Beitrag untersucht durch eine psychoanalytische Linse den Charakter des Achilleus in Homers *Ilias*, dem Werk, aus dem das abendländische Verständnis des Heldentums hervorgegangen ist. Herausgearbeitet wird die psychische Verbindung zwischen den Worten und Taten dieses tapfersten aller antiken Krieger, die im Mythos gründet und hier als „Eros des Absoluten" bezeichnet wird. Die dem erwähnten Mythos zugrunde liegende paroxysmale Idealität, die in dem anthropologischen Bedürfnis zu glauben wurzelt, bildet den Ursprung des legendären μῆνις, des aufbrausenden Zornes, der durch den Streit um Vorherrschaft getriggert, durch den Verlust seines Kriegskameraden verstärkt, durch das Drama des Alterns und Sterbens geweckt und schließlich durch Gesang und Erinnerung transfiguriert wird. Die zentrale These des Autors besagt, dass die *Ilias* trotz der vermeintlich fehlenden Aufmerksamkeit für die Innenwelt durch das archetypische Gefühl des Zornes in Gang gehalten wird und dass sie ihre Anziehungskraft der exzessiven, radikalen und absoluten Art und Weise verdankt, in der ihr Protagonist dem heroischen Idealismus anhängt. Sie führt zu einem fesselnden Narzissmus und einer sadomasochistischen Antithese zur Idealität. Diese Überlegung zieht die Schlussfolgerung nach sich, dass Homer der Vater der "primitive Urhorde" der Affekte war.

Achille: un eroe omerico innamorato dell'assoluto. L'articolo utilizza una lente psicoanalitica per esplorare il personaggio di Achille nel poema omerico dell'Iliade: rappresentazione che costituisce in certo modo la matrice stessa della concezione occidentale di eroismo. In particolare, viene qui messo in luce il legame psicologico esistente tra le parole e le azioni del più valente eroe dell'Antichità, un legame qui collocato all'interno della dimensione del mito e chiamato "Eros dell'assoluto". Le tinte fortemente idealizzanti e parossistiche che colorano il mito di Achille, radicate nel bisogno antropologico di credere, sono all'origine della leggendaria μῆνις dell'eroe – ovvero, l'ira dilagante scatenata da scontri per la supremazia, esacerbata dalla perdita del suo compagno d'armi, ulteriormente eccitata dai drammi legati all'invecchiamento e alla morte e infine trasfigurata attraverso il canto e la memoria. La tesi principale dell'autore è che, nonostante l'attenzione apparentemente scarsa prestata alla sfera dell'interiorità, l'Iliade trovi proprio nell'emozione archetipica dell'ira il suo motore propulsivo: il potere di attrazione del testo sarebbe anzi legato soprattutto al fatto che il suo protagonista abbraccia l'idealismo eroico in modo tanto eccessivo, radicale e assoluto da trasformarlo in un narcisismo imprigionante e in una sorta di antitesi sadomasochista dell'idealità. L'argomento porta alla conclusione che Omero è il Padre dell'"orda primitiva" degli affetti.

Aquiles: Un héroe homérico enamorado del Absoluto. Este artículo explora, a través del lente psicoanalítico, el carácter de Aquiles en *La Ilíada* de Homero, la matriz que subyace a la concepción occidental de heroísmo. La contribución revela el vínculo psicológico entre las palabras y los actos del más valiente de los guerreros de la Antigüedad, erigido en mito y denominado "el Eros del Absoluto". En el origen de la legendaria μῆνις de Aquiles está la idealidad paroxística que subyace al mito mencionado, que tiene sus raíces en la necesidad antropológica de creer, es decir, el desborde de ira desencadenado por disputas por la supremacía, agravado por la pérdida de su compañero de armas, estimulado por el drama del envejecimiento y la muerte, y luego transfigurado mediante el canto y el recuerdo. La principal afirmación del autor es que *La Ilíada*, a pesar de su aparente falta de atención a la interioridad, está impulsada por la emoción arquetípica de la ira y debe su atracción al abrazo del héroe al idealismo heroico de una manera excesiva, radical y absoluta que da lugar a un narcisismo cautivador y a una antítesis sadomasoquista de la idealidad. Este argumento conduce a la conclusión de que Homero es el Padre de la "horda primitiva" de los afectos.

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