

Article

Women as Victims of War in Homer's Oral Poetics

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Abstract: The article presents the problem of the empathy felt by the author or authors of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* towards women depicted as victims of war. Understanding of the world in the Homeric poems may be misinterpreted today. Since Homer's works are a product of oral culture, in order to determine his intentions, it is necessary to look at them from the perspective of the tradition from which they derive. Furthermore, the author of an oral work can be deemed as creative because s/he shapes his/her story through interaction with the listening audience. The different aspects of the relationship of women as victims of war with their oppressors are, therefore, interpreted according to the use of traditional techniques adopted to evoke specific emotions in the audience.

Keywords: oral tradition; Homer; captive-women; Briseis; Andromache; funeral songs

It is above all through the perspectives of women that the poet exposes the brutality of war.

Barbara Graziosi, Johannes Haubold

In the world portrayed by Homer, women are special victims of war because they survive the downfall of the city.¹ At that point, their status changes and they become subjected to various sufferings, but they stay alive. Men do not. Nor do children. Full of wrath and hatred of the enemy, Agamemnon reprimands his brother Menelaus for showing mercy to his enemies.² In his opinion, they must not save anyone, not even fetuses in the wombs of mothers (VI 55–60). This means that women may also die in the conquest of the city, but it happens in a particular situation when they can carry male descendants in their wombs. The historical reality of this time was probably much more complex. It might have looked just like Homer depicts it or it may have been otherwise, that is, it might have been both less cruel and more cruel (Joshua captures Jericho sparing neither men nor women, nor children, nor older people, nor farm animals, Joshua 6:21). The decision to keep women alive is based on the perception of

¹ [Graziosi and Haubold \(2010\)](#), especially pp. 29–32) very aptly describe the functioning of the world of men and women in *The Iliad*.

² According to [Kim \(2000\)](#), pp. 57–58), Agamemnon represents a traditional attitude, that is, showing no mercy to enemies, which is judged positively in the *Iliad*. Hence, as Kim suggests, Menelaus receives a well-deserved admonishment from his brother. Blaming the Trojans for the entire war may be a justification for Agamemnon's atrocities (as the anonymous reviewer rightly pointed out). The Trojans' blame (collective responsibility for the immoral behavior of Paris) is undoubtedly a traditional element, i.e., present in all the songs whose subject was the Trojan War. In particular songs, however, this element could have been introduced and explained in different ways. In the *Iliad*, the collective blame of the Trojans is depicted as a violation of the truce. It seems, therefore, that there is no reason why the *Iliad*'s listeners should not have accepted Agamemnon's words with approval. The themes of cruelty and mercy are, however, much more subtly woven into the entire song. Achilles's excessive cruelty comes under criticism in the *Iliad*. The mercy shown to Priam is a breakthrough in his life, but it is also a return to the behaviors which preceded his conflict with Agamemnon, where he showed mercy to the Achaeans (by assisting them) and often to the defeated enemies. The *Iliad* presents this matter somewhat paradoxically: Achilles, by killing his enemies and saving his community from extermination, fulfils the traditional role of a hero, but this does not bring him the expected glory, because he loses himself in the cruelty towards the enemy. Agamemnon's cruelty, which is also excessive, and just like his other behaviors, only seemingly legitimate and justified by the common good, is an implicit object of rebuke of the *Iliad*'s author ([Zieliński 2014](#), pp. 474–78).

their measurable value.³ They become part of the loot—like objects or animals—and, as in the case of objects and animals, they can be used later and they serve as status symbols.⁴

Research most often focuses on the historical and the sociological aspects of how the women of defeated enemies were treated. However, the question of what this issue meant to Homer, i.e., whether he acknowledged such treatment of women as expected behavior, necessitates an attempt to reconstruct the mental world of the people of that time. The poet addresses his audience with the expectation that they will accept his point of view, even when he relates to them tales of behavior deviating from the social norm.⁵ The most recognizable indication of this is Achilles's invitation to share a meal, extended to his enemy, the father of the detested Hector, whose corpse he continuously mangled, unable to satisfy his vengeance. For the Greeks, this behavior absolutely violates all the rules, because by breaking bread together, people establish a friendship so permanent that it should last through succeeding generations⁶ (the diners become *philo* to each other, which means "their own kind" so "not strangers or enemies"). Hence, one does not dine with the enemy. Homer, however, expects his audience not to resent such behavior, but rather to understand fully or even to appreciate it.⁷

Identifying the author's intentions relies on the consideration on the nature of Homer's discourse. As is well known, Homeric poems are a product of oral culture; therefore, without understanding the circumstances of performance and the compositional techniques of this tradition, we are unable to judge them adequately. In the first decades of the research on the oral tradition, the focus was on the structure of the message and on its repetitive nature. This led to a particular perception of both the performers of traditional songs and of the works they performed. The repetition of the message served to preserve knowledge about the world and past events. Accordingly, this involved the development of tools for remembering and passing on this knowledge, in the form of stories, catalogs, proverbs, etc.⁸ The result, however, was a perception of the oral performer as being limited by a series of restrictions that forced him to replicate what he heard from others, and not to express his point of view or personality. Albert Lord emphasized that a writer of an epic composes his song during the performance;⁹ yet this may be perceived as a weakness of the performer for not remembering the story exactly as he heard it. The poor evaluation of the capabilities of the creators of oral culture was also due to the difficulties in its reception in the modern world and to different expectations from the text that emerged from the literary culture of the scholars' background. The contemporary reader simply becomes weary of the monotony of repetitive formulas, of lengthy, detailed descriptions of typical scenes and of standardized story-patterns.¹⁰ It is no wonder that some researchers in the Homeric

³ This issue is exaggerated, in my opinion, by [Gottschall \(2008\)](#), who makes women the main subject of disputes leading to manifestations of aggression (wars are supposedly fought as a result of a certain shortage of women). This is not how we should explain especially the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles in the *Iliad*, which, contrary to appearances, is not about women, but about prestige and rivalry for the title of "the best from Achaeans," and the deeper, i.e., not explicitly disclosed, roots of the dispute go back to the blame for the incurring of extermination (Apollo's wrath) upon the Achaeans.

⁴ On the value of the war prize, see [Van Wees \(1992\)](#). More on the issue of violence, rape, and enslavement of women who are victims of wars according to ancient sources, see [Gaca 2011](#).

⁵ Progress of the narrative from the deviation of norms toward recovering the social, political and cosmic normalities is suggested by [Russo 1978](#), pp. 47–49; [Elmer 2013](#), pp. 67–70).

⁶ Diomedes and Glaucus recognize that their grandfathers had established a relationship of hospitality, so they intend to abstain from fighting and avoid each other on the battlefield in the future. This relationship of friendship which prohibits hostility is renewed by exchanging gifts (VI 215–236).

⁷ I agree with the anonymous reviewer that this meal is depicted by Homer as "exceptional and difficult" (it is not clear if the characters are going to withstand their pain in contact with each other and if everything is going to happen as expected), which helps his audience to accept the non-conventional behavior of Achilles and "to allay any 'resentment' from them." It would probably be difficult to accomplish the acceptance of a hero's controversial behavior or belief by surprise given to the audience. Homer guides his listeners slowly, in a manner typical for oral narration, while building tension like a sinusoid of alternating horror and relief. The horror is extinguished every now and again and reconstructed anew. Thanks to this, the listeners' attention is permanently maintained.

⁸ This view is primarily exhibited by the works of Eric Havelock ([Havelock 1963, 1982, 1986](#)); also [Ong \(1982\)](#).

⁹ [Lord \(1960\)](#).

¹⁰ It is then not taken into account that in the oral reception, all these elements interact in a different way, stimulating the listener's imagination and involvement.

studies community have challenged the attribution of works that had laid the foundations of European culture to an oral artist. In one way or another it was asserted that the artistry of Homeric poems and the multitude of refined details must result from the possibility of using writing to shape these poems.¹¹ The problem, however, is that there is no basis for denying the creativity of a creator of oral art. In his research, anthropologist Jack Goody emphasizes the endless changeability of the oral tradition.¹² The oral tradition is not only about transmitting the story: the story itself is not as valuable as it is in literary culture. The epic singer tells the story not only as he remembers it, but, above all, as he understands it and how he wants it to be understood by his listeners. The listeners themselves, in turn, influence the shape of the story through their behavior and eagerness to listen. The story is produced through the interaction between the singer and his listeners.¹³ The singer, in every way possible, tries to focus his attention on his story, taking into account their knowledge of tradition and their mentality and emotionality. The artistry of the Homeric poems developed in such dialogue with the recipients.¹⁴

I mention this because in the oral tradition, the use of standard techniques (e.g., repetitious formulas) can bear the characteristics of an individual artistic choice. On the other hand, the techniques that we tend to regard as innovations are still part of the oral tradition. New solutions constitute variant processing of the existing material. Thanks to this, the oral composer, Homer as well, not only recreates the world represented in the stories, but he also, by invoking it, constantly reinterprets it.

Repeatability does not exclude creativity and innovation, but from the perspective of tradition itself, these are, in a sense, indiscernible. Each performance occasions a modality of solutions, and the version of myth, stories, songs, etc. represented in the performance is the basis for the oral message's functioning in the consciousness of its recipients. The singer (sometimes in competition with other singers) endeavors to present the tradition familiar to him in a manner attractive to the audience, while employing narrative expansions or compressions of the story.¹⁵ As a result, he constructs his own vision of the presented events. Therefore, when deciding to analyse Homer's legacy, we must determine his dialogue with tradition, unceasingly and from different vantage points. This is a difficult task because this oral tradition has virtually been lost.¹⁶ Even when presenting a new episode, which the *Iliad* may well be, and when expanding it to monumental dimensions, the singer remains a part of this tradition and applies the tools that are characteristic of it.

Let us start with drawing the situation of captive women in the *Iliad*. The way they see their position and the way they behave may seem strange to the modern reader. Depriving Achilles of

¹¹ This view was expressed by: Bowra (1952); Lesky (1963, 1967); Parry (1966); Griffin (1980); West (2011, 2015).

¹² Goody (1977, 1986, 2010).

¹³ The work of Scodel (2002) is pioneering in this matter. See also Ford (1992, 1997).

¹⁴ Zieliński (2014) discusses more broadly the mechanism of influencing the emotions of listeners by the alternation of instilling horror and relief and taking advantage of the listeners' intellect and understanding the world through the use of tragic irony.

¹⁵ The principle of expansion and compression in the composition of the oral epic is presented in Nagy (2010).

¹⁶ The link between the Homeric poems and the oral tradition is primarily explored in the works of Gregory Nagy (Nagy 1996, 2010) and John M. Foley (Foley 1991, 1999). Their point of view differs from mine in many significant respects. Probably the main problem is the question of the allusions in Homer's epics. Foley's concept of traditional referentiality allows only for the understanding of individual elements of the composition thanks to their embedment in the tradition, i.e., thanks to their presence in similar contexts in other songs. The similarities between individual scenes in the Trojan cycle result, according to the classical understanding of orality, from the variation of using certain patterns. This theory has its supporters and opponents. Cairns (2011, p. 113, n. 26) sees "no evidence for the view that audiences always activate knowledge of the totality of a multiform tradition, but much evidence for their activation (or suppression) of their knowledge of specific tales and episodes". In his opinion traditional referentiality makes unsustainable claims about cultural differences in cognitive capacity (See also Cairns 2001). He is right, I think, because we should not fall into the trap of L. Lévy-Bruhl's error. However, there are many specificity in orally presented narrations, the story is presented in a different way than when the text is being created in written. First of all, we should think about the every performance in oral tradition as an adjustment of traditional patterns to the given situation. The system of allusions present in Homeric poems does not mean a departure from the oral tradition, but it constitutes, in my view, a typical element of this tradition. The author of the *Iliad*, however, does not refer to other songs, as suggested by neoanalysts, but to images perpetually functioning within the tradition: perpetually—despite the multiple variants of their use. One could say in a nutshell that the *Iliad* is one of the ways of recounting the myth about the Trojan war (Zieliński 2014).

Briseis triggered off his anger, so she may seem to be important to him. But how close was she to him and who was he for her? Is the behavior of the both sides understandable to us?

In Homer Briseis is not a virgin. Perhaps some affection for Achilles comes into play (IX 335–343), but this does not matter in the dispute between him and Agamemnon. Briseis is given a voice by Homer only when she sees Patroclus's corpse. She grieves for him because she lost a loved one, who was especially close to her. Achilles killed her three brothers and her husband, whom she had just wedded: Patroclus promised that Achilles would become her husband.¹⁷ How could a modern viewer become convinced that a woman so wronged could cherish hope for a marriage with the murderer of her loved ones? At best, she would be accused of suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.

It is, therefore, necessary to look at how Briseis is represented in the *Iliad* and what role she plays in the text. We could proclaim with horror that she is being objectified: she is a victim of a war that took her family, she is a captive and the victim of quarrels among her oppressors, transferred from hand to hand like a commodity, passed around between Achilles and Agamemnon. It must be stated, however, that treating a girl as a commodity is not something that was only true for slaves. Girls were married in exchange for property measured in heads of cattle handed over to their families.¹⁸ The maidens who danced during the holidays were identified with the epithet ἀλφεσίβοιαι “those who supply oxen” (XVIII 593). In this cultural context, they may be rather proud of such a term, because it suggests girls that are beautiful and happy,¹⁹ and not humiliated in any way. They can, therefore, joyfully take on the cultural role that is imposed on them.

The subjection of women in this world is symbolized, in some way, by Helena. Her circumstance exemplifies two methods of winning a wife: buying her or kidnapping her. In both cases, she legally becomes a wife. In the mythical version, the contract between the father and the groom (and often the family of the groom) materializes in the setting of a competition²⁰ in which the winner gets the girl's hand as a prize (even then, it is difficult to call it her choice). Kidnapping, in turn, is nothing reprehensible: it is a widespread custom for obtaining a wife in many cultures. Paris is disapprovingly portrayed by Homer not because he acquired his wife through kidnapping, but because he violated the law of hospitality: he acted as an enemy against someone who offered him friendship. That is why it makes sense to have the fight between Menelaus and Paris happen at the beginning of the war: the winner takes Helena and the treasures because he deserves them as the stronger opponent. After the death of Paris, Helena is inevitably promised to one of his brothers, Deiphobus. By taking Helena as a wife, he takes command of the Trojans. It can thus be inferred that Helena fulfills the function of a magical talisman in the epic of the Trojan tradition: whoever possesses her has the power.²¹

Briseis is brought back to the tent of Achilles, along with the seven girls from Lesbos, who Agamemnon had previously offered to Achilles as part of a canny game between them. Their magnificence is beyond doubt, as Agamemnon comments, stating that he chose them himself,²² because they were those (IX 130)

... αἱ κάλλει ἐνίκων φῦλα γυναικῶν

who surpassed other women in their beauty.

¹⁷ Dué (2002, pp. 67–81) delineates a change in the attitude of Briseis to Achilles, who, from the murderer of her family, becomes a person desired by her in an erotic sense and as a future husband.

¹⁸ McInerney (2010); Walcot (1979).

¹⁹ I borrowed this expression from Andrew Dalby (2006, p. 7): they are beautiful and lucky.

²⁰ Jamison (1999, esp. pp. 243–258) points out the parallels in the Old Indian epic to this way of acquiring a wife (*vīryaśulka svayamvara*) and concludes about the common Indo-European origin of these ritual, ceremonial and epic structures.

²¹ What seems to have an analogous function in the epic about the Argonauts' expedition is the golden fleece, while in the epic about the Theban war, it is the necklace given to Eriphyle by Polyneikes. There are more magical items of this importance, see (Zieliński 2014, pp. 234–41).

²² The spoils were common property of the group and were distributed among all men in accordance with hierarchy of rank and merit. It should be noted that choosing something from the spoils is a special privilege, which in *The Iliad* is confirmed to have been reserved for Agamemnon and Achilles.

Gregory Nagy suggests that the word *φύλα*, not translated above, means not so much a group of women as such, but a group of girls taking part in the singing and dancing agons on Lesbos, where the inhabitants, the Aeolians, gathered.²³ In Nagy's interpretation, these are girls who had won the competition against others, so they were the most eligible maidens, but the war thwarted their youthful plans: Achilles conquered the island and their fate changed completely; they became slaves, intended for sexual bondage and housework. To some extent, one can assume, their aristocratic status was, nevertheless, preserved, because usually the epic poem and the Attic tragedy mention only spinning and weaving as the chores awaiting those aristocratic female captives.²⁴ It is difficult to say whether and to what extent this reflects the historical reality and whether, in this case, the ability to weave is not synonymous in an epic poem with women's work in general. In any event, in the Homeric world, women are always portrayed at work. Men can rest while sitting and feasting. In the *Odyssey*, Helena, despite the ongoing wedding reception of her daughter, only leaves the women's rooms for a moment to talk to her husband and Telemachus, and even then she spools the thread, so as not to waste time.

In front of Achilles's tent, Briseis discerns the body of Patroclus and laments over it. The lament has a ritual character (XIX 284–286):

ἀμφ' αὐτῷ χυμένη λίγ' ἐκώκυε, χερσὶ δ' ἄμυσσε
 στήθεά τ' ἠδ' ἀπαλήν δειρήν ἰδὲ καλὰ πρόσωπα.
 εἶπε δ' ἄρα κλαίουσα γυνή εἰκυῖα θεῆσι

she flung her arms around him and gave out a shrill shriek, then she tore with her nails

her breasts, her soft neck and her lovely face.

Wailing, this goddess-like woman said . . .

Women's lamentation is mandatory in the Greek funeral ritual. The loud wailing and crying are accompanied by ritual gestures. The entire assortment of these gestures is never listed. The economy which is characteristic for the Homeric technique manifests itself in the mere mention of only some behaviors adapted to the situational context.²⁵ Richard Seaford explains women's self-mutilation gestures as a message directed to other men. The laceration of the breasts, neck and face disfigures women, so their sexual attraction becomes compromised. The death of a man in a family, especially a sudden and violent one, is a threat to women: by overstating their mourning, they demonstrate that they have been deprived of a defender. Consequently, with their crying, women prompt other men of their family to take revenge on the killer.²⁶ The explosion of feelings manifested by women causes the men to share rapidly these feelings. In the *Iliad*, this situation is better visible in the scene of the lamentation of women in Troy over the body of Hector. There are no warriors' families in the Achaean camp. The role of the women related by blood is played by the captives, who are Agamemnon's compensation for the harm done to Achilles. Their presence, then, signals a restoration of the hero's reputation, but they actually appear there only to perform rituals over the body of Achilles's friend.²⁷

When Briseis finished the mourning speech for Patroclus, the other women joined her, XIX 301–302:

²³ (Nagy 2010).

²⁴ See (Rabinowitz 1998, pp. 56–68; Dué 2006, pp. 27, 109; Nagy 2010, pp. 241–50, 285). On more about the importance of weaving see Nagy (2010, pp. 273–308). In reference to Andromache, however, carrying water (VI 457) is also mentioned, which is undoubtedly hard work.

²⁵ Hitch (2009) shows that there is not one template of a scene depicting the entire sacrifice ritual, but that each time only selected elements of this typical scene are exposed, depending on the requirements of the narrative.

²⁶ Seaford (1994, chp. 3, especially pp. 86–92). The first observations on the role of lamentation and self-mutilation of women in order to provoke men's revenge were made by Alexiou (2002, pp. 21–22).

²⁷ These are not the only captive women owned by Achilles. When the hero refuses to take part in the fight and sends away the ambassadors sent to him, he beds down with Diomede, also captured from Lesbos, and Patroclus with Iphis, captured from Skyros (IX 663–668). However, it seems that Homer does not mention them in the context of funeral laments.

Ἦς ἔφατο κλαίουσ' ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες
Πάτροκλον πρόφασιν, σφῶν δ' αὐτῶν κήδε' ἑκάστη.

That's what she said while weeping and the women moaned
over Patroclus, and each of them had her own cause for distress.

It is typical for the choral song developed within the Greek oral culture to be performed by one person, while others repeat the ritual patterns and quasi-choruses after him or her. The antiphonal character of the song is typical of primitive cultures²⁸ and we can assume that this form of expression in the song has been present in human culture from its very beginnings. The song, i.e., rhythmical and often melodized speech, is primarily a way of conveying emotions to the other members of the group. C.M. Bowra noticed that in primitive cultures, virtually every powerful emotion is directly articulated in a song, be it in a public or a private situation.²⁹ In my opinion, the group's response to the expression of emotions by the person who performs the song is the token of an emotional contagion spreading to others. It involves the gradual "infection" with feelings of the people to whom the expression is addressed. These people gradually fall into a trance that allows them to share the feelings articulated by the "coryphaeus," whether plunging with him into grief or sinking into exaltation caused by joy. A choral song of a ritual nature, both a funeral and a wedding song, will, therefore, have the same sense. This is also true for a song which constitutes a dramatic re-enactment of a myth, in which the protagonist embodies a mythical character experiencing what happened to the hero in a time of the beginning; and the group does not look at this as spectators, but becomes the community of their ancestors accompanying the protagonist in his actions. Just as he talks about what happens to him, they respond by giving him emotional support or commenting on his behavior.

Similarly, the women gathered over the corpse of Hector, taking turns to praise the deceased (using a Greek word, they "start" gr. *arkhein*): Andromache, his wife, Hecuba, his mother, and Helena, his sister-in-law, while the other Trojans respond with laments (XXIV 721–775). The groaning and wailing of the Trojan women are also heard after each relative speaks about the dead man:

XXIV 745

Ἦς ἔφατο κλαίουσ' ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες

So she said weeping and the women added their groans

XXIV 760

Ἦς ἔφατο κλαίουσα, γόον δ' ἀλίαστον ὄρινε

So she said weeping, and unceasing lament [goos] was stirred up

XXIV 776

Ἦς ἔφατο κλαίουσ', ἐπὶ δ' ἔστενε δῆμος ἀπείρων.

So she said weeping, and the innumerable crowd join in the moaning

In the case of lamentation over Patroclus, Homer allows himself to remark that each of the women had her own reason to express despair. Their lament cannot be spontaneous, because they are not related to the dead through kinship, so they are somehow forced to play the role of the mourners,

²⁸ Antiphonal form and structure of the Greek dirges are described by [Alexiou \(2002\)](#), pp. 131–40). She finds that both the antiphonal structure and often present in it dialogues where identifications with the dead or tomb appear are primitive in character.

²⁹ [Bowra \(1962\)](#).

even though such coercion was not expressed *expressis verbis*.³⁰ Briseis is not a relative either, so she justifies her wailing with the fact that Patroclus had always been good to her, even the best of all because he gave her hope for a better life.³¹ The laments are honest, because each of the women remembers her misfortune: instead of a wonderful marriage and family they now have bondage and the sight of the death of their loved ones in front of their eyes.³²

Let us note, then, that women perform a ritual function here, that is, they express what constitutes an indispensable element of the tradition: a fallen warrior, a hero must be properly mourned. The author of the *Iliad* can, however, grasp the circumstances of their fate and indicates that their gesture is, on the one hand, a formality, and on the other hand, the evocation of feelings alone inspires the experiencing of the feelings and linking them with one's own motives. We could say that Homer, when evoking the traditional image of a warrior's funeral,³³ capitalizes on the opportunity to emphasize the particular nature of the situation in which the characters, including background characters, find themselves. He is also able to empathize not only with the situation of the heroes, but also the victims of their wars and disputes.

It would be premature to treat this remark as a typical expression of the author's individual style. In the further part of this scene, only the most important Achaean chiefs (Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus, Nestor, Phoinix and Idomeneus), stay with Achilles at the body of Patroclus and do their utmost to comfort him (XIX 312–313). Their efforts are ineffective, because only bloody revenge can heal Achilles's wound. Now, in turn, Achilles expresses his grief with weeping and a speech (XIX 315–337), and the lament of the chiefs accompanying him joins in:

Ἦς ἔφατο κλαίων, ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γέροντες
μνησόμενοι τὰ ἕκαστος ἐνὶ μεγάροισι ἔλειπον

He said so weeping, and the old men moaned
Each mentioning something that he had left in his palace

Achilles, when mourning the death of Patroclus, recalls his family home, juxtaposing the present loss with hypothetical news about the death of his father, whom he left at home, or the death of his son Neoptolemus, whom Patroclus was supposed to bring to his homeland after the war (he knew about his death at Troy, but did not predict the death of his friend). The chiefs, companions for the expedition, were called γέροντες, i.e., "elders" here. Usually, this term refers to their rank as members of the council (their high command, so to speak), but in this instance it can also take on the meaning of the hypothetical members of the family who are grieving.³⁴ Achaean chiefs have far more reasons to

³⁰ Tyrtaeus fr 7 testifies that in Sparta, the Helots (the people conquered and subjugated by the Dorians), were expected to attend the funeral lamentations in honor of their oppressors. Similarly, Hippias from Erythrai says the analogous was true for the inhabitants of Erythrai (Athenaios 259e). Alexiou (2002, p. 10) notes that alongside the family, strangers, often hired or forced to perform lamentation and other behaviors, participated in funeral ceremonies throughout antiquity. This is how she evaluates the use of the women captives to mourn Patroclus. Alexiou, however, does not seem to notice the problem of substitution which is visible in the *Iliad*, and which must have been the basis of the habits of using strangers in funeral rituals.

³¹ However sincere the comforting assurances by Patroclus were, Achilles's next statement shows that the hopes for their coming true were vain. Achilles knew he could not return home and must die at Troy, so the future marriage to Briseis turns out to be an illusion created for the sake of the girl, an illusion which Achilles did not really believe in. However, we cannot accuse him of insincerity because it was his friend that had beguiled her with false hope.

³² Alexiou (2002, p. 41) emphasizes the commitment and even the genuinity of the lamentation of rented mourners in modern Greece. He gives an example of one of them (Sophia Lala), who confesses that when wailing for the dead, she expresses his pain after the loss of her relatives. This means that the behavior of the women captives in the *Iliad*, who express pain over the body of Patroclus, should be considered typical. They do their duty, on the one hand, by stimulating the despair of relatives, and on the other, by absorbing the misery experienced by the family of the dead, which releases their own pain resulting from their own ordeals.

³³ There are many indications that the spectacular funeral of Patroclus corresponds to the traditional image of the funeral of Achilles, to which the *Iliad* refers allusively and which the *Odyssey* mentions. The mention of Oedipus's funeral (XXIII 679–680) seems to testify to the traditional nature of the motif of the spectacular burial of the hero in the Greek epic tradition.

³⁴ This may be suggested by listing in one verse the names of Nestor and Phoinix, who appear in the plot of *The Iliad* as old, together with Idomeneus, who is described with the epithet γέρον "old" (XIX 311). Also Aias, son of Oileus (XXIII 476) points out euphemistically that Idomeneus is not of the youngest age (XXIII 476).

mourn for Patroclus than the captives from Lesbos do, and yet they also employ the same lamentation formula: that each of them had, in fact, his own private sorrows and reasons for the manifestation of grief. Thus, Homer's innovation which exhibits the traits of an individual style still remains an element of the conventional construction of the oral narrative. The "performance" of a woman "starting her song" among other women has its counterpart in the "performance" of a man "starting to sing" among other men. Their moans are divided by gender, reflected in the order of speeches. Reality may not have been so clear, and this division may reveal an epic tendency to separate the masculine world of heroes, who embark on warfare, from the female world, associated with the situation of peace, because they belong to families left at home. This female world is represented here by the women captives—prizes of war. It seems that, mourning over the body of Hector, brought to the palace of Priam, depicts a situation closer to reality, in which the moans of both sexes are not so separated, XXIV 719–724:

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ εἰσάγαγον κλυτὰ δῶματα, τὸν μὲν ἔπειτα
 τρητοῖς ἐν λεχέεσσι θέσαν, παρὰ δ' εἶσαν ἀοιδούς
 θρήνων ἐξάρχους, οἱ δὲ στενόεσσαν ἀοιδὴν
 οἱ μὲν ἄρ' ἐθρήνεον· ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναικες.
 τῆσιν δ' ἀνδρομάχη λευκώλενος ἤρχε γόοιο
 Ἔκτορος ἀνδροφόνιο· κάρη μετὰ χερσὶν ἔχουσα

they [Priam and Idaios], when they had brought him to the glorious house, laid him on a corded bedstead,³⁵ and by his side set singers, *aidoi*, "leaders" of the dirge, and [the men] started the song of lamentation³⁶— they [*aidoi* and men] chanted the dirge, and the women moaned. And among these [women] white-skinned Andromache started the wailing [*goos*], holding in her hands the head³⁷ [of Hector? Her head?]

³⁵ Most probably other men, probably younger than them, members of Priam's family had to undertake this.

³⁶ I would venture such a translation of this excerpt because of the placement of the "men" and "de" particles which is confusing when you think of the traditional interpretation of this fragment (cf. Richardson 1993, p. 351). In the traditional reading, the pronoun "hoi" from verse 721, is interpreted as dat.sg., which would mean: "the *aidoi* were singing to him as a dirge [or in the form of a dirge] (*ethrēneon*) a mourning song." These particles, however, signify a contradiction, so you could interpret this pronoun as nom.pl. (adding accent), so it would refer to the men who carried Hector's body, so you can expect them to be family members.

³⁷ It is commonly understood that Andromache holds Hector's head, which would express her great love and attachment to her husband (see N. Richardson, op cit., 352). Alexiou (2002, p. 6) assesses that the gesture of placing one's hands on the deceased is part of the funeral ritual: "Andromache leads off the dirge at Hector's *prothesis* by laying her hands around his head, and Achilles laments by laying his hand on Patroklos' breast" (XXIV 724; XVIII 317). The gesture of a woman holding dead man's head during a lament performed over the dead is confirmed by iconographic sources, Boardman (1955, pp. 56–57). However, the text is not so unambiguous. This formula follows the formula that describes Andromache's husband, and this, first of all, suggests the link with this image. In the vase paintings of the geometric period depicting a *prothesis* (laying out a dead body on a bed), women either ritually raise their hands above their heads or hold their heads in a similar ritual gesture (see geometric vase, Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 2674). A few lines above, Hecuba and Andromache embrace Hector's body when it is still in front of the gates of Troy, holding their heads. However, a different verb is used: ἀπτόμεναι κεφαλῆς, which means holding your head, and it is also sometimes suggested that it denotes tearing hair out. It is possible that in both cases we are dealing with the same gesture. In Alexiou's opinion, op.cit., p. 8: "Perhaps the more ecstatic attitude of the mourner at the tomb can be explained by the nature of the ritual. The *prothesis* was a formal affair, with a large number of people grouped round the bier in more or less set positions. Lamentation at the tomb on the other hand was at once more restricted and more personal, involving the direct communication between the relatives and the dead." The iconography on which this opinion is based, however, dates back to the period when public display of emotions at funerals was subject to far-reaching restrictions. The Homeric description refers to the clan structure, where displaying the feeling of despair and influencing others in this way is perceived as still beneficial and appropriate. Hence, no matter how we interpret Andromache's gesture, we should assume the naturalness of showing and stimulating the emotions aroused in the participants of the ceremony at all its stages.

Men join in the singers who “lead” the singing of the dirges (*thrēnoi*) and women join in Andromache who “leads” the lament (*goos*).³⁸ However, as evidenced by subsequent (already quoted) reactions to Hecuba and Helena’s (XXIV 760 and 776) lamentations/dirges, lament is contagious and overcomes all participants of the funeral.³⁹

Thus, it can be seen that the author of the *Iliad* is able to use conventional narrative structures to describe unusual situations, whose individual shape results from the specificity of this particular plot. This individuality is noticeable; nevertheless, it is not entirely innovative. Applying this to the topic of our discussion: recognizing the suffering of the victims of war—the captive women enslaved by the Achaeans—is a function of compliance with the conventions found in the oral tradition and of the possibility of adapting those patterns to the current needs of the narrative. Adapting a repetitive message to a particular situation is the guiding principle of the functioning of communication in oral culture, regardless of what form of poetic and non-poetic speech we might consider. The conventionality and the schematicism allow the singer to move his story forward, but when making choices within the matter of the epic tradition, variable by nature as it is, he takes into account the effects of plot denouements as they are applied at a given moment.

So we come to the question of on what grounds we can make judgments about Homer’s humanitarianism. The author of the *Iliad* undoubtedly tells the recipient to take into account the miserable fate of the captive women, but this results from the adaptation of the oral techniques to the needs of the narrative. Listeners probably regarded sanctioning the honesty of the laments of the women captives and the Achaean “old men” through their own sufferings as natural, but this does not change the fact that realizing the existence of an analogous source of evoked despair in “their own kin” and “strangers” means forcing the recipients to ponder on the suffering of strangers in the same terms as they think about the suffering of their own kin.⁴⁰

The issue of the fate of women who are held captive is raised several times in Homer’s poems. The most extensive description, of course, can be found in the speech of Andromache addressed to her husband Hector (VI 407–439). Her situation is analogous to Briseis’s situation: Achilles had previously killed her father and seven brothers.⁴¹ Andromache makes her husband aware of what will happen to her and their child when he dies and the city is captured. She says this to stop Hector from heading to the battlefield, but in the narrative strategy this speech performs the function of anticipating events that will inevitably follow and which will not be presented in the song. This is a special strategy of the oral poet, who refers to the audience’s knowledge of tradition. Although in the plot structure of the song there will be a place for Andromache lamenting over the dead body of her husband, this speech becomes her lamentation over herself and her child. Hector accounts for this possibility and foresees the defeat of the Trojans. He spends a moment unfolding a vision of her fate in captivity, and the

³⁸ Tsagalis (2004b, p. 32) postulates the interpretation of the *goos* as a kind of a ritual song, analogous to the dirge and the epic song. Cf. Dué (2006, pp. 1–56).

³⁹ Dué (2007, p. 235) accentuates the separateness of the performances of women’s and men’s songs. The joining in the *gooi* by the people of Troy after Helena’s “performance” (“not with antiphonal wailing of the women”) is explained by the fact that she is perceived as the cause of the war. Indeed, women can be hostile to Helena (it seems that no Trojan woman addresses her during the whole epic), but I do not think this matter is important here where common weeping unites everyone as a kind of collective hysteria (note the gradation of mood present in the quoted verses XXIV 745, 760, 776).

⁴⁰ Perhaps the sympathy of the audience can be evoked easier thanks to the fact that they treat the captive girls as their country people. Dué (2002) shows that the character of Briseis was characterized in the *Iliad* as clearly ‘Aeolian’. If we accept G. Nagy’s concept of the Homeric poems being shaped within the Aeolian, Ionic and Athenian traditions, and determine the first of them to be the oldest one, we get a picture in which the Aeolian hero, Achilles conquers the Lesbos island which, at the time when the epic tradition of the Trojan War was being shaped, was already inhabited by the Aeolians. The Aeolians who colonize the depopulated Troy from the eighth century BC, feel themselves to be the guardians of the Trojan tradition and the heirs of the legacy of the epic poem that they had most likely shaped. Nagy notices how individual elements fit the Aeolian tradition, including the reference to the ritual of the beauty contest of women organized in Lesbos, confirmed by other sources (Nagy 2010, pp. 241–250). Dué (2006), however, extensively shows that in classical Athens, the Trojan War was presented not so much as a victory over strangers, but as a horror of war, very often from the perspective of the defeated Trojans.

⁴¹ However, he showed respect for them: he buried the father with his armor (VI 416–419) and then he bought the mother out of captivity (VI 425–428).

thought of this is more distressing for him than that of the fate of his parents and brothers who will have to perish (VI 450–465). He firmly rejects his wife’s pleas to continue fighting behind the walls of Troy. The audience of the epic does not get the impression that they are dealing with a hysterical woman⁴² when listening to how assuredly Andromache speaks of the inevitable destiny of herself, her husband and son. The consciousness of the listeners that such a fortune really awaits them invites them to perceive her lament as real.⁴³ The singer motivates the audience to remember the facts that are known to them from tradition and that go beyond the knowledge of the heroes of the song.⁴⁴

What is missing in Andromache’s complaints is the fear of rape. This matter is not mentioned in either Homeric poem, although it is always a nightmare experienced by women during the conquest of the city.⁴⁵

The fate of Andromache is surprisingly similar to the fate of the woman who is mentioned in a simile evoked in the *Odyssey* (viii 523–531):⁴⁶

ὤς δὲ γυνὴ κλαίησι φίλον πόσιν ἀμφιπεσοῦσα,
ὅς τε ἔῃς πρόσθεν πόλιος λαῶν τε πέσησιν,
ἄστει καὶ τεκέεσσιν ἀμύμων νηλεὲς ἦμαρ·
ἢ μὲν τὸν θνήσκοντα καὶ ἀσπαίροντα ἰδοῦσα
ἀμφ’ αὐτῷ χυμένη λίγα κωκύει· οἱ δέ τ’ ὀπισθε
κόπτοντες δούρεσσι μετάφρενον ἦδὲ καὶ ὤμου
εἴρερον εἰσανάγουσι, πόνον τ’ ἐχέμεν καὶ οἰζύν·
τῆς δ’ ἐλεεινοτάτῳ ἄχεϊ φθινύθουσι παρειαί·
ὤς Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ’ ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἴβεν.

When a woman laments, embracing the body of her husband
who fell defending his city and people,
The immaculate [man] died on the merciless day for his city and children,
and she, seeing him dying in convulsions,
embraces him, and wails with piercing cries, but [the victorious men] from behind
beating her back and shoulders with their spears
escort her to be a slave and have toil and misery,
and with the most pitiful grief her cheeks waste away,
So Odysseus shed a pitiful tear beneath his eyelid.

⁴² Andromache’s speech has the characteristics of a funeral lament (Tsagalis 2004a, p. 119; Stoevesandt 2016, p. 168). Murnaghan (1999, p. 209) points out that the majority of women’s statements in the *Iliad* are structurally or thematically related to lamentation. Andromache does not act as a concerned wife, but as a wife already lamenting over her dead husband. The situation corresponds to Thetis and Nereid mourning Achilles as being dead, although he is still alive in the *Iliad*’s narrative.

⁴³ On the links between this scene and the cycle see Anderson (1997, p. 193). Nagy (2010, pp. 203–11, 321–25) assesses the version of the *Iliad*, in which Astyanax—Scamandrius is the only son of Hector and Andromache, whom inevitable death awaits after the Achaean conquest of the city, as an Attic version—intentionally breaking with the Ionic and with the Aeolian version. This circumstance has a significant impact on the tragic undertone of this scene.

⁴⁴ On accounting for and stimulating the knowledge of tradition among the listeners, see (Zieliński 2014, pp. 295–430). This is a stance discordant with the position of Scodel (2002), who assumes minimal knowledge of the audience about the characters and events under Troy as sufficient.

⁴⁵ However, this subject was present in the Greek epic tradition in the motif of change this the rape of Ajax, son of Oileus, raping (not on) on Cassandra. Seaford (1994) indicates that Homer deliberately avoids eliciting the graphic images of atrocities present in the tradition, such as incest or matricide. Nagler (1974, pp. 43–63) interprets Achilles’s metaphorical definition of the capture of the walls of Troy as a tearing of the *krēdemna*, or the face veil used by married women (xixi 100), as suggesting a picture of rape. The image of the ornaments worn by married women—including the *krēdemna* (XXII 468–472)—being cast off the head of Andromache as she faints at the sight of the death of her husband is also a symbolic sentence.

⁴⁶ Nagy (2010, p. 243ff.).

Odysseus listening in the palace of Alcinous, one of kings of the Phaeacians, to the singer Demodocus, is compared to a woman suffering a painful loss of her husband, a widow whose future is cruel captivity. The singer is singing about the capture of Troy, emphasizing Odysseus's outstanding merits in this war. This song is, therefore, a song of praise for Odysseus. Instead of the hero's pride of his own achievements (the song about the Wooden Horse is performed at the request of Odysseus), Odysseus responds by secretly bursting into tears. He also weeps clandestinely when, in his first song, Demodocus conjures up another Trojan incident involving the protagonist. Homer's text assumes two different perspectives for the reception of it: an emotionally involved perspective, where the listener strongly identifies with the suffering of the heroes and a more relaxed perspective, where the viewer is intrigued only by the course of events.⁴⁷ The story is not presented as an audacious adventure, but as a series of misfortunes, which, in the case of Odysseus, hinder his return home.

What is surprising, however, is not only the reaction of Odysseus, but, above all, the simile itself. At the moment in which a reference is made to the heroic deeds of the hero, the narrator develops an analogy between the hero and the victims of his actions.⁴⁸ Of all the victims of the capture of the city, Homer chooses the situation of a woman (which is understandable, since men were usually murdered), who is the wife of the most important defender. In the tradition of the Trojan War entwined around the *Iliad*, this role is played by Andromache, not mentioned elsewhere in the *Odyssey*. Whether this, however, is an allusion to her specific fate, is not certain, because contrary to what one might expect, there are very few indications that the author of the *Odyssey* knew the story of the *Iliad* familiar to us. In the plots of the songs from the Trojan cycle other than the *Iliad*, the role of the main defender of the Trojans—Priam's son—is ascribed to other heroes. The most important of them, Paris/Alexander, seems to be presented in an unfavorable light in the *Iliad*. He is, however, Helena's husband, and her fate after the fall of Troy differs from the fate of Andromache. Demodocus's song about the siege of Troy mentions the scene which is crucial in Odysseus's praise, a scene in which the hero, together with Menelaus, defeats the son of Priam, Deiphobus, who had been Helena's husband since the death of Paris. Therefore, it would be quite embarrassing to refer to the character of Andromache at this point. The simile rather presents a hypothetical situation, which could have appeared many times in the broadly understood oral tradition.⁴⁹

For the author of the *Odyssey*, the widow of the hero, the city's defender seems to be the most worthy of pity. The image which is evoked in the simile is intended to arouse the listeners' compassion for the unfortunate woman. The extent of her sorrow is revealed by emphasizing the magnitude of her husband's heroism, in whom, just like their children and the entire community, she had lost her support and rescue. Such a hyperbolization of the value of a departed man is typical of women's funeral lamentations. This compassion, however, is also aimed at attaining the compassion of the listeners for the hero to whom the simile refers. One could say that in order to obtain the right emotion for his listeners, the author of the *Odyssey* alludes to the most typical compassion-arousing image in

⁴⁷ Ford (1997, pp. 413–14) discerns impropriety in his behavior, because a poet's song is supposed to bring joy, pleasure and is so perceived by the gathered Phaeacians. Odysseus's reaction is due to the fact that it is a story about his life, and so he is touched by the mere mentioning of the experienced events. All of them contributed to his current regrettable situation (the reaction of Odysseus has an analogy in the reaction of Penelope to Phemius's song on the Return of Achaeans). In turn, Segal (1994, p. 130ff.) notes that the purpose of the tale in the *Odyssey* is to provoke tears: listeners feel sorry for everyone who talks about their misfortunes, identifying in them the common fate of all mortals (an example is Odysseus's story in Eumaeus's hut). Greene (1999) assesses that inducing tears is a kind of mystical communion of the described past and present for the listeners.

⁴⁸ See (Nagy 1999, pp. 100–1).

⁴⁹ Let us note that verse VIII 527 contains the phrasing which appears in the aforementioned verse XIX 284, that is when the despair of Briseis over the body of Patroclus is described. Gaca (2008) suggests that Achilles's comparison of Patroclus to a little girl (XVI 7–11) refers to the situation of conquering a city in which the fleeing mother abandons her child. However, it is difficult for me to agree with this interpretation; it seems to me to distort the meaning of Achilles's speech.

this culture.⁵⁰ However, using such a simile for this purpose may seem drastic, and even shocking. It is surprising that such a clear reversal of roles should occur: a man is compared to a woman, a victor to a victim, and a war hero to a war captive. In Homer's poems, however, we find another example of similarly extreme reversals of meanings within similes. This may, therefore, point to a characteristic feature of Homeric technique,⁵¹ that is, reaching for such surprising combinations at crucial moments in order to evoke intense emotions in the recipients. Here is one of the most important scenes of the *Iliad*, when the old king Priam arrives to Achilles to beg him to release the body of his dead son. His behavior is illustrated by means of an astounding simile, XXIV 480–484:

ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἄν ἄνδρ' ἄτη πυκινὴ λάβῃ, ὅς τ' ἐνὶ πάτρῃ
 φῶτα κατακτείνας ἄλλων ἐξίκετο δῆμον
 ἄνδρὸς ἐς ἀφνειοῦ, θάμβος δ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντας,
 ὧς ἄχιλῆυς θάμβησεν ἰδὼν Πρίαμον θεοειδέα·
 θάμβησαν δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι, ἐς ἀλλήλους δὲ ἴδοντο.

As when a man is gripped by dense blindness, and in his native country
 kills a man, and seeks refuge in a foreign country
 in a wealthy lord's house, and amazement overwhelms those looking at him,
 so Achilles was astounded when he saw god-like Priam
 and the others were astounded as well and looked around at each other.

Priam appears in Achilles's hut suddenly. The simile actually refers only to the surprise which his unexpected arrival engenders among the men present. Meanwhile, it acquires more significance due to the message behind the whole scene. Moments later, Priam humiliates himself in front of Achilles (according to the king of Troy, like no one before him in history), begging for the mercy of his most terrible enemy and kissing the hands of the murderer of his sons. In the image constructed in the simile, the roles are reversed: it is Priam who is represented as a murderer, but one seeking help. The situation of such a man is desperate: he drew down upon himself the vengeance of a family, whose blood he shed, that is why he must leave his country; this deprives him of all protection and dooms him to the fate of an outcast. An outcast is a man of no value: no one respects his judgement (social respect is a measurable indicator of human value), and the lack of family bonds which would protect him expose him to the greatest danger everywhere. So he is forced to plead for protection, completely relying on someone's favor. The then recipient of Homer understood the gravity of the situation in which such a beggar found himself, and the comparison with Priam's lot must have led him to discover how pitiful the position of the Trojan ruler was at the moment and how threatened his life was. Priam's status in Achilles's hut is considerably different from the status he enjoyed when he was leaving the palace. To show us this change in Priam's situation, Homer resorted to portraying the reversal of the roles of both protagonists of this scene: the victim is compared to the murderer, submitting himself to the mercy of the one who is defined as the murderer of his children.

However we are limited to Homeric examples, employing a reversal of meanings in similes seems to be part of tradition.⁵² To some extent, one can speak of the automatic and instrumental use of these

⁵⁰ We can find the same juxtaposition in the above mentioned statement of Hector, in which he anticipates the dire fate of Andromache in captivity—VI 455–463: it will be particularly painful for her, according to Hector, when she is called the ex-wife of Hector, the bravest of the Trojans.

⁵¹ This technique is characteristic for the author of the *Iliad* and the author of the *Odyssey*. Perhaps it means that also other authors used this method, and although the technique is extraordinary, it could also be considered as belonging to the tradition.

⁵² Foley (1984) interprets the reverse similes present in the *Odyssey*, in which the reversal of gender roles is shown: men are compared to women and women to men, as an image of the breakdown of social order on Ithaca, which will be restored by

comparisons by the poet-singer. They occur in the strategic moments of the plot, as perceived from the perspective of the task of the singer, which is to represent the hero's glory. There is no doubt that this is true in the case of Achilles's meeting with Priam in the *Iliad*, but perhaps this is less obvious when it comes to the situation described in the *Odyssey*: after all, Odysseus is safe on the island of the Phaeacians, treated like a guest of honor. The aim, however, of each epic is to present the glory of the hero, which he gains by performing a heroic act. Demodocus's song about the Wooden Horse shows the fullness of the glory of the hero, which he deserved, by contributing the most to the capture of Troy. But this is an act whose glory will not survive in human memory, if Odysseus does not return to Ithaca and does not perform a new heroic deed, that is, free his home from the suitors. Demodocus's song reminds him of that glory, but the simile used to describe Odysseus's reaction nullifies it. It rather exposes all the unfortunate circumstances of the hero, simultaneously paving the way for the glory that the hero partakes in this song about Odysseus and which is expressed directly in the apology of Odysseus that follows, and then in his deeds on Ithaca.

However, the above-presented broader analysis of the significance of the comparison of Priam with a murderer does not lead to the conclusion that the poet employs it only in order to describe the surprise of Achilles and his companions, thus acting almost mechanically. The comparison of Priam to a murderer was also shocking for Homer's audience, but it enabled them to appreciate the scale of the king's humiliation. Priam is the king of Troy, so an enemy; therefore there is no reason for the recipients of the *Iliad* to identify with him. This unexpected comparison, however, serves as a catalyst for arousing pity for the king in the listeners. As we have seen, the same role of the catalyst for arousing pity for the hero was played by the comparison of Odysseus to an unfortunate victim of war. The presented comparisons affect the emotional reception of songs in the listeners. And this is not a coincidence. The feeling of pity is the ideological dominance of the *Iliad*, as well as the *Odyssey*.⁵³

Conclusions

The evaluation of the attitude towards women enslaved by war in Homeric poems depends on the understanding of what the epic oral tradition is. Homer uses many unique techniques, which are very precisely adapted to the context, and researchers often conclude that these techniques constitute the innovations of the poet who comes beyond the tradition from which he originated. I would like to emphasize that I do not share this way of reasoning. Yet the oral tradition does not mean mechanically reproduced material. Even repetitive elements are subject to constant redistribution and selection. By telling the story, the singer chooses one of the options he follows for a time, which does not mean that he cancels others. In the oral tradition, all elements have an equal meaning, and often co-exist side by side. The constant adaptation of the variety of elements found in the tradition to the context proves the creativity of the oral artist, who repeats what is known, but in a way that he considers to be suitable. Thus, particular songs can acquire individual features associated in the tradition with the name of a particular singer. There is not enough room here, nevertheless, for an in-depth consideration of this issue.

Each time, particular formulas or scenes assume such shape which the author of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* deems appropriate for expressing his thoughts. It is not true or it is only partially true that the singer cannot omit these repeatable elements and must always evoke them. By conjuring them up at selected moments, he emphasizes what he would like his audience to see. He also tries to gain acceptance of the audience even if this concerns a matter that is not obvious for them, like a familiar,

Odysseus reintroducing order into his home (p. 60: "these similes can be interpreted as the most important part of the larger disruption and restoration in the epic"). Foley notices that compared to the fairy-tale worlds visited by Odysseus, it is only in Ithaca that the social roles are properly assigned to both sexes. Thus, the typical mission of the hero, which is to restore the cosmic order, is carried out in the *Odyssey* in the form of restoring order within the *oikos* and *dēmos*, where this situation is being presented as complicated and multifaceted, largely by means of the unique 'reverse similes'.

⁵³ Kim (2000).

common belief. One example of such unobvious reactions stimulated in the audience is recognizing one's own reasons for grieving by the victims forced to mourn for a fallen hero with whom the audience identifies. Similarly, the comparison of a hero with a widow led into captivity is not an obvious angle to take. A sense of pity is aroused in the listeners for strangers suffering from misfortune, while the enslaved woman plays an almost symbolic role. However, Homer's goal does not seem to be to present the universal truth about human fate. The hardship of the strangers, especially the calamity of the enslaved and family-deprived women, ultimately serves to depict the scale of the adversity of a hero (likewise in the case of Patroclus, Achilles and Odysseus). The fate of the hero is always the essence of the epic story.

In the world of Homer, the woman captive is treated as a commodity or, phrasing this in terms closer to Homeric axiology, as a measurable expression of respect within the community of conquerors-warriors. In any case, their fate is irrelevant in the context of disputes and wars in which the heroes engage. Nevertheless, appealing to the unfortunate fate of the female victims of war in order to incite the desired sense of pity shows that the poet-singer and his audience shared a sensitivity to the wrongs experienced also by others: not only by men, but also by women. When Homer gives voice to women, they mourn their fate, pointing to the loss brought about by the deaths of the men who used to look after them. The same way of expressing their misfortune is present in women's funeral lamentations. The power of this means of expression, called *goos* in the Greek tradition, is immense. This is due, in my opinion, to the scale of their impact on others, not only women, but even and above all on men, achieved through communicating the most intense emotions of despair and grief. I believe that this explains the persistence of women's lamentations, which—as Alexiou points out⁵⁴—survived up to modern times despite the change of religion to Christianity. The striking or even overwhelming effectiveness of women's lamentations is also a reason why there were the constant attempts to limit this form of feminine expression since antiquity to the present. For as the song should, in my opinion, be regarded as the most effective way of conveying emotions, then measured by the yardstick of effectiveness, the feminine funeral dirge should be considered the most effective of all because it arouses the strongest feeling of despair leading to uncontrolled outbursts of manhood aggression that take the form of revenge. So, in this primordial way men are defenseless against women's crying.

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⁵⁴ Alexiou (2002, esp. pp. 49–51).

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