

The anger of Achilles in The *Iliad* and of Francis Marion Tarwater in Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away*

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Abstract

Achilles' anger in the *Iliad* acts as a catalyzer in the war's outcome and also helps characterize Achilles himself, frustrated because, in spite of being a goddess' son, he suffers a destiny of death. This article draws a comparison between Achilles' wrath and the anger that fuels Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away*, Flannery O'Connor's last novel. As with the protagonist of the *Iliad*, Tarwater's rebellion to prove that he is in total control over his own life eventually jeopardizes the order of the world around him.

Keywords

Homer, *Iliad*, Flannery O'Connor, Anger, Achilles, Tarwater.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this article is to contribute to an understanding of the anger that characterizes Francis Marion Tarwater, the protagonist of *The Violent Bear It Away*, Flannery O'Connor's second and final novel. The element of comparison used will be the same defining anger in Achilles, which we see from the very opening verse of the *Iliad*. In principle, the two works do not seem to share any significant points of contact, but a comparison between their respective protagonists shows that similarities do indeed exist, to the extent that both find themselves faced with others who are presented as models and as rivals, with anger defining them in the complex situation of having to choose either assimilation to such models and expectations or breaking free from them. In a way, Tarwater enacts, in a sort of eternal return, the conflict Achilles had to face as a young man for his liberty and status in the world. Flannery O'Connor was a novelist, a Catholic in the Bible Belt South but the conflict is essentially the same, as we shall see.

Although O'Connor claimed to have had no classical training, she did read Homer, at least the Robert Fitzgerald's 1961 translation of the *Odyssey* (O'Connor 1979, 530). All the quotations in this article will be drawn from her friend Robert Fitzgerald's 1974 version of the *Iliad*, made ten years after her death, although it seems very

unlikely that she was aware of it. She was particularly influenced by the interpretation of the Austrian philosopher Eric Voegelin, to which I will return towards the end of this article.

I will begin by noting the structural similarities of the two works on the narrative level, before considering the implications of anger in particular, then finally turning to the family interactions between characters in the management of their anger.

2. *The violent bear it away and the Iliad, related structures*

In the *Iliad* Achilles suffers the absence of his father Peleus and has to reaffirm himself before Agamemnon, King of the Greeks, which provokes the hero's anger. Priam, father of his archenemy Hector, will be the one who makes Achilles put aside his anger, forcing him to discover compassion in the face of his own sorrow. In O'Connor's novel, Francis Marion Tarwater vacillates between fulfilling the last will of his great uncle Mason, a self-styled prophet, and staying with his uncle Rayber. Mason kidnapped Rayber when he was six in order to make him a prophet, although by the age of 14 he had rejected religion, retreating to an ascetic life guided by empiricism and oriented towards the rigorous control of his emotions and affections.

Tarwater was the son of Rayber's sister and was born shortly after a car accident as a result of which the latter and his grandparents (Mason's sister and her husband) died. Rayber had wanted to raise him, but Mason, the elderly prophet, kidnapped the baby just prior to his mother's death, baptizing him and staying with him in an unknown place in the woods of Powderhead until his own death, preparing the young Tarwater for his calling as a prophet and charging him with his eventual burial, as well as with the baptism of Rayber's own son, a child of reduced mental capacities called Bishop. The novel focuses on the situation of Tarwater from the moment of Mason's death, and on the question of whether he will respect Mason's final orders.

Both Tarwater and Achilles have to decide on the meaning of their own lives. From the beginning of the novel, the possible calling of Tarwater to become a prophet is repeated by his uncle Mason, but from the outset the boy also seeks to affirm his own freedom above all else. From the start he has an independent personality, as well as considering himself superior to his uncle ("The boy, who had ideas of his own, listened with an impatient conviction that he would not make any mistakes himself when the time came and the Lord called him", O'Connor 1988, 332). Tarwater admires the grandiose and terrible image of a prophet that he has created for himself, based on the example of Mason and on the Old Testament prophets, but pays no attention to Mason when he speaks of "the sweat and stink of the cross, of being born again to die, and of spending eternity eating the bread of life" (O'Connor 1988, 334).

The interior conflict arises in him upon the death of his uncle, since he neither values the prize of the "bread of life" nor is he certain about his calling to be a prophet, which he wants to prove by means of his own affirmation and also through the stamp of a divine calling, which he expects will come about in spectacular fashion. For this reason he does not consider it his mission to baptize the backwards child of his uncle Rayber or to bury his uncle Mason. Like Achilles, he wants to operate on his own terms. As Srigley explains in Tarwater's case it is not so much a matter of an existential

problem, or that within himself he doubts the existence of God, but rather of getting in control of his own life against the two rivals, his uncles, both of very strong characters. In the end, it is about he himself knowing “who he is in relation to God and how that knowledge will affect his life and action” (Srigley 2004, 106). He has seen Mason’s struggle to control Rayber, and observes how Rayber’s rigorous asceticism is at risk through the impetuous love for his son Bishop (Srigley 2004, 181 n. 25). That love for his son would leave him at the mercy of his love for all reality, and ultimately at God’s mercy, for which Mason has prepared Tarwater yet which he finally rejects. On the other hand, Mason has taught Tarwater to fear and despise Rayber’s attempts to control them by means of psychological investigation. As a result of this, he perceives dangers everywhere, which may explain his utter lack of empathy for others. The question, then, is whether he will “bear away” through violence any control of himself, or if he will turn it on himself to baptize Bishop, recognizing his value before God. Tarwater trying to drown the young child, Srigley concludes (2004, 112-14), is his best attempt to be the master of his future life, but he gets defeated, as he utters the words of the baptism in that very moment he is drowning the child. For Ciuba (2012, 70), “Tarwater seeks not so much to escape being a prophet but to realize his vocation in a less shameful and more violent way”, yet without success.

When Mason reminds him that he escaped the control of Rayber, Tarwater feels moved: he has learned about freedom from him, but not what sustains it. As Mason explains to him:

“You were born into bondage and baptized into freedom, into the death of the Lord, into the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then the child would feel a sullenness creeping over him, a slow warm rising resentment that this freedom had to be connected with Jesus and that Jesus had to be the Lord. (*O’Connor 1988, 342*)

According to Huelin (2012, 125) there is a problem in Tarwater, compared to Mason: “Mason holds to a positive conception of freedom, that is, freedom to be renewed in Jesus Christ, Tarwater thinks of freedom entirely in negative terms: free from outside interference in his choices, free from obligations, and thus free to be one’s son”. For Bieber Lake (2010, 30), in a comparison with O’Connor and James Baldwin, the former’s “highest value is not autonomy. For her, freedom comes through fulfillment, and fulfillment comes through recognition of one’s true state before God, a recognition that must be revealed”: this is what the novel manages to explore in all its narrative possibilities in the case of Tarwater.

3. The political problem of human relations

In the *Iliad*, Achilles jeopardizes “political” order of the Greek side and risks the destruction of the army, all this through his refusal to fight due to a personal confrontation with King Agamemnon over a woman, Chryseis, a slave. Also in the case of Tarwater, the fight is one for control, a fight he begins by setting fire to his own house. What he wants is to rid himself of an obstacle to his own aims, in his case the mission of baptizing the child, as his objective is to live alone and isolated in the forest

without contact with anyone, in an impossible utopian freedom with no ties. For Achilles, the dispute arises with King Agamemnon due to a question of honour (of precedence and *status*, seen in itself in the division of the spoils of war), but at the root of this is the question of the value of life in the face of the reality of death, as he says to his mother Thetis:

As my life came from you, though it is brief,
honour at last from Zeus who storms in heaven
I call my due. He gives me precious little.
See how the lord of the great plains, Agamemnon,
humiliated me! He has my prize
by his own whim, for himself! (*Il.* 1.352-6. Translated by R. Fitzgerald)

The first thing that Tarwater confronts, and which he perceives as the first obstacle to the rest of his life, is to bury his uncle, and it is here that he begins an interior conversation with a stranger -and at the same time someone very close- who encourages him to rebel, reminding him that the estate is going to be inherited by his uncle Rayber. This conversation prompts the following response: "I own it, Tarwater said, because I'm here and can't nobody get me off. If any schoolteacher comes to claim the property, I'll kill him" (O'Connor 1988, 337). Ownership guarantees a safe space for both Achilles (his slave Chryseis) and Tarwater over other potential owners, Agamemnon and Rayber.

The practical difficulties of the burial (his uncle Mason was very bulky, the soil very hard), and considerations as to what is or is not suitable to do, go hand in hand with the ritual value of a recognition of the reality of the afterlife, and with it the hope for resurrection and the reaffirmation of faith in Christ. In an evidently non-Christian context, the characters of the *Iliad* all share the belief in the importance of the funerary honouring of the corpses, but Achilles is the only one who acts against this with respect to the corpse of his enemy, Hector, something that the latter foresaw, fearing that if he died at the hands of Achilles his body would be eaten by dogs. There is an echo in how Tarwater tells Rayber about the unburied body: "If it's anything left of him, the buzzards wouldn't have it and the bones the dogs'll carry off" (O'Connor 1988, 387).

Here, then, we have the first clear parallel: neither Tarwater nor Achilles respect the funerary rites of the dead. Achilles is consumed by anger, which demands of him a revenge never satisfied by the death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector. This anger, destructive in nature, also brings with it the death of many others, as foretold in the first two verses of the epic poem:

Anger be now your song, immortal one,
Achilles' anger, doomed and ruinous,
that caused the Achaeans loss on bitter loss
and crowded brave souls into the undergloom
(*Il.* 1.1-2. Translated by R. Fitzgerald).

To Tarwater the duty of burying Mason, which he tries to fulfil but soon renounces, finally becomes the challenge to prove that what lies behind death does not affect him. He burns down the house so as to burn the corpse which lies within it, in an act of rebellion that throughout the novel will be replicated in episodes of growing violence. The fact is that neither Achilles nor Tarwater have the least interest in the political or social implications of their actions: Achilles contemplates impassively the defeat of his side, and does nothing until he is affected personally by the death of his friend Patroclus, and even then he seeks only personal revenge against Hector. In O'Connor's novel, Tarwater, who has lived his entire life isolated in a forest with his uncle, continually shows his inability to communicate (the scene in which we see his ignorance of a telephone is especially brilliant) and the only thing he seeks is to escape the orders of his uncle and to return to the solitude of the woods, all by himself. The anger serves both protagonists as a means of further isolating them, not of communion with others. It is clear in both cases that the key element concerns their duties with respect of the dead. Especially significant is a conversation in which Mason reminds his nephew:

"The world was made for the dead. Think of all the dead there are," he said, and then as if he had conceived the answer for all the insolence in the world, he said, "There's a million times more dead than living and the dead are dead a million times longer than the living are alive," and he released him with a laugh. (O'Connor 1988, 339)

The first chapter of the novel ends with a conversation between Tarwater and Meeks, a copper flue salesman, which helps to reinforce the idea that nobody owes the dead anything:

"You don't owe the dead anything," Tarwater said in a loud voice, speaking for almost the first time since he had got in the car.

"Nor they you," said the stranger. "And that's the way it ought to be in this world—*nobody owing nobody nothing*." (O'Connor 1988, 362; my italics)

In the end, the problem also concerns duties to the divinity. In the novel, the divine presence is hinted by means of the light of the stars. At the beginning of the third chapter, while waiting to go into Rayber's house, Tarwater "did not look up at the sky but he was unpleasantly aware of the stars. They seemed to be holes in his skull through which some distant unmoving light was watching him. It was as if he were alone in the presence of an immense silent eye" (O'Connor 1988, 385). All this might be explained as Tarwater's purely subjective impression ("as if"), but it is also the case that from the point of view of the narrator the presence and mention of the sun highlighting the action has a clear sense of transcendence.

The presence of the divine is far more explicit in the *Iliad*. The gods intervene, but not to oppose Achilles' anger, given that he has the support of Zeus himself. Zeus has his own particular objectives in doing so, apart from showing his appreciation for Achilles' mother Thetis, herself a goddess. The term for "anger" (*menis*) used to

describe what affects Achilles in the *Iliad* is typically applied only to the gods, and as such carries cosmic implications, as Muellner (1996) has discussed.

Analyses too focused on the psychological seem far removed from Homer's art, something which can also be said in broad terms of *The Violent Bear It Away*. By considering the anger of these characters, we are not focusing so much on the expression of an inner frustration, but more on the external perception of the frustration at a desired outcome which is not fulfilled. Muellner (1996, 50-51) takes Aristarchus' definition of *menis* as "long-lasting rancor", noting that it "is not a word for a hostile emotion arising in one individual against some other individual", but that it goes against the social, cosmic order. It has social consequences, in that it supposes the breakdown of that which guarantees coexistence, beginning with the system of the distribution of awards, the exchange of wealth and also of honours. In addition, Achilles is the first victim of this anger, and "suffers from the loss of ties to the wider world but also in that he is thereby harming his own self" (1996, 138), the same as will happen to Tarwater.

4. Characterization of internalised anger in both characters: resentment

The fact that there is no clear psychological orientation in either of the works does not imply that Tarwater's anger involves no resentment. In terms of his future fate, his anger arises from the reality of death, viewed as part of life's inevitable end, when this is understood as a free space without limits of the "I". The same can be seen of Achilles: as the son of a goddess and a mortal, he could have achieved immortality, as happened to others in the same situation, such as Dionysus and Heracles, as well as the children of Zeus, but to him this is forbidden. His fate is either death now (in this case with the counterpart of an undying fame) or death years later; but death it is in either case (*Il.* 9.401-16).

What Tarwater perceives in Mason, apart from this certainty of life in real freedom that transpires, is the hunger that Mason has for Christ and which he, Tarwater, does not understand: "The boy would have a hideous vision of himself sitting forever with his great-uncle on a green bank, full and sick, staring at a broken fish and a multiplied loaf" (O'Connor 1988, 369). He does not perceive this hunger, but fears it as something that will ensue even though not desired, through something greater than what is represented in something that is hidden in his blood. For this reason he avoids thinking about it.

Tarwater desires a divine calling uncontaminated by earthly things, not the kind of eternal communion which his uncle talks about. Thus, even as he tries to dig the tomb, he reaffirms himself in his freedom to act: "'Now I can do anything I want to,' he said, softening the stranger's voice so that he could stand it'" (O'Connor 1988, 345). And it is the voice of the stranger which is tinted with anger:

As Tarwater slashed at the ground with the shovel, the stranger's voice *took on a kind of restrained fury* and he kept repeating, you got to bury him whole and completely by hand and that schoolteacher would burn him in a minute. (O'Connor 1988, 345; my italics)

As a trait of character Tarwater shares this anger with his uncle Mason, particularly enraged when he recalled the time that he spent in the city with Rayber. And that same anger is felt by Tarwater the first time he meets Bishop, as if suffering from childish jealousy (“Suddenly a tremendous indignation seized Tarwater” O’Connor 1988, 350), prompting him to tell Bishop that he had been the first in the house, falling into a rage which will grow until Mason removes him from the scene in order to baptize the child, -something which Rayber impedes- but which precipitates the announcement that Tarwater will in fact be the one who performs the baptism. The highpoint of the anger will come when Francis drowns Bishop, as a release from the weight of the responsibility of baptizing him, with which he expects to seal his future in absolute freedom and solitude.

Meeks, the salesman who takes him to town, considers him “just enough off in the head and just ignorant enough to be a very hard worker” (O’Connor 1988, 365). Such strangeness of character and lack of social skills is greatly at odds with Achilles, the son of a goddess and an outstanding character in all respects. But what does indeed unite them is stubbornness, a persistence in defending the absence of ties or limits, a state to which they both aspire, although there hangs above both of them a fate which they reject. “Mason said to Tarwater: ‘Go warn the children of God,’ saith the Lord, ‘of the terrible speed of justice.’ Who will be left? Who will be left when the Lord’s mercy strikes?’” (O’Connor 1988, 368). This is repeated at the end of the novel, when Tarwater, having been raped, returns to Powderhead and everything comes to a state of completion:

He threw himself to the ground and with his face against the dirt of the grave, he heard the command. GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY. The words were as silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood. (O’Connor 1988, 478)

There is a difference between what Mason prophesied and what Tarwater hears at the end. This latter is the order that he has been anticipating with fear throughout the novel (apart from that of baptizing Bishop, with which he complies only reluctantly) in which the “speed of justice” is associated with the fact that God will respond with mercy in the end (“when the Lord’s mercy strikes”), but which is a single mandate, but this time with the emphasis on mercy: “TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY”.

These are hard and intense expressions, in which the threat is first perceived, but is finally united with the love of God as the father of mercy. It is this mercy that Tarwater recognizes in the end. It is Buford, a black character, who serves as the trigger for mercy, as was also the case in O’Connor’s *The artificial nigger* (1955).

The case of Achilles is similar: through his suffering he prepares, albeit unconsciously, for that moment when an old man, Priam, touches him in order to bid of him the piety to conduct a burial, that of his son Hector. Achilles had sought to desecrate Hector’s body, although without success, because the gods have prevented such an outcome. Thus, the victim requests of the executioner –reminding him of his absent father– an act of mercy, as it were. Here resides the greatness of the *Iliad*: at the end of the poem the cycle is completed and anger gives way to serenity:

Achilles

be reverent toward the great gods! and take
pity on me, remember your own father.
Think me more pityful by far, since I
have brought myself to do what no man else
has done before –to lift to my lips the hand
of one who killed my son.

Now in Achilles

the evocation of his father stirred
new longing, and an ache of grief. He lifted
the old man's hand and gently put him by.
Then both were overborne as they remembered:
the old king huddled at Achilles' feet
wept, and wept for Hector, killer of men,
while great Achilles wept for his own father
as for Patroclus once again, and sobbing
filled the room. (*Il.* 24.503-12. Translated by R. Fitzgerald)

Muellner (1996, 133-68) explains at length that Achilles's anger is an expression of friendship (*philotes*) for his group over the rest. At the end of the *Iliad*, what finally calms his anger is the act of stepping out from the confines of friendship *philotes* (φιλυτις) for his group, in identifying with Priam (1996, 174).

Through the course of O'Connor's novel, anger dominates as the engine of evil, until it turns on Tarwater himself. It is an anger that he shares with his uncles, in those complex relationships between them that are continuously repeated. For example, when Mason baptized the baby, Tarwater, at a moment in which Rayber had left the cradle unattended, shows a reaction of an insulting joy, while that of Rayber is first one of being deceived, then of anger:

Not even angry at first, just hacked.

Old Tarwater had said, "He's been born again and there ain't a thing you can do about it" and then he had seen the rage rise in the nephew's face and had seen him try to conceal it. (O'Connor 1988, 375)

And the confrontation continues with a heated argument in which the two strong personalities are set against each other, until Rayber makes a gesture of commiseration with a calmed voice and an air of forced understanding: "reached across the table and put his hand on the old man's wrist in to gesture of pity" (O'Connor 1988, 379). It is precisely the opposite of the case of Bishop approaching and touching Tarwater before he drowns him, which marks the start of the latter's final process of conversion, as Priam's act of touching Achilles marks the end of his anger. It is impossible not to recall a similar gesture in a short story by Flannery O'Connor, that of the grandmother with the Misfit in *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955).

Later on, when Rayber recalls how at 14 he went to see Mason, his anger is described very graphically: "his fists clenched, trying to shout, trying to make his

adolescent fury come out in clear sensible words. He had only stood there shrilling, ‘You’re crazy, you’re crazy, you’re a liar, you have a head full of crap, you belong in a nut house!’” (O’Connor 1988, 430). It is an anger associated with resentment, in considering that Mason, rather than saving him, has destroyed his life.

In the case of Tarwater, his anger arises above all in respect of Bishop and the responsibility of baptising him: “Nothing irritated the boy so much as this” (O’Connor 1988, 379). It is again a question of the control he seeks over his own actions. This scene forms part of a long flashback ending in a return to the present in which Tarwater is with Meeks, at the moment when for the first time in his life Tarwater sees and uses a telephone. He calls Rayber’s house, but establishes a connection with Bishop, in silence, but “not a silence that seemed to be empty”. When he realises who is at the other end of the phone, the moment is described like this: “The heavy breathing began again as if in answer. It was a kind of bubbling noise, the kind of noise someone would make who was struggling to breathe in water”. In ending the call, Tarwater is absorbed, “as if he had received a revelation he could not yet decipher” (O’Connor 1988, 383). It is a subtle anticipation of the subsequent baptism by immersion.

Bishop is everyone’s victim, a character who is mute, silent, and in principle passive. In Chapter 6 we find the only example of anger in him, when his father Rayber recalls the moment when he tried to drown him, “The face under the water was wrathfully contorted, twisted by some primeval rage to save itself” (O’Connor 1988, 418-9). This might seem a perfectly natural reaction, arising from his instinct for survival, yet it does not happen later on when Tarwater attempts the same thing. Indeed, in this case there is an express action by Bishop of touching him and, as the narrator explains, of guiding him towards the water: “the child in the boat stood up, caught him around the neck and climbed into his back” (O’Connor 1988, 462). It illustrates that Bishop wants and needs to be baptised.

In all this there is a running rivalry which unleashes anger. Ciuba (2007, 126) has addressed this using Girard’s theories of mimetic desire (1977, 152), in which he implicitly equates Tarwater with Achilles, explaining that “Tarwater seeks what Homer terms *kudos*, the glory of the demigod that comes from victory in competition”. Thus, Ciuba argues that it is a form of glory sought at the cost of others and with the aim of keeping it forever. The boy may seem like an anti-prophet, but he is immersed in the same kind of violence as that of his great-uncle: “Driven by mimetic desire to violence, Tarwater would out-Elijah Elijah” (Ciuba 2007, 126).

In addition, his escape to the city can be seen as having its basis in his desire for Rayber’s recognition of his rebellion against Mason, which in this regard is Tarwater’s model. We are presented, thus, with a triangle in which one of the elements wants to beat another through comparing himself to the third. When Tarwater tells Rayber that he has burned the body of his uncle, the latter’s joy makes Tarwater react (“The boy’s face darkened. His expression hardened until it was a fortress wall to keep his thoughts from being exposed”, O’Connor 1988, 388), something that Rayber is oblivious to, lost in dreams of his idealised image of Tarwater. But then Bishop enters

and his presence makes Tarwater tense, leading him to ball his fists. At this moment comes the revelation that he will have to baptize Bishop:

Then the revelation came, silent, implacable, direct as a bullet. He did not look into the eyes of any fiery beast or see a burning bush. He only knew, with a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for. He knew that he was called to be a prophet and that the ways of his prophecy would not be remarkable. (O'Connor 1988, 388-9)

He immediately tries to avoid it, but:

Suddenly he knew that the child *recognized* him, that the old man himself had primed him from on high that here was the forced servant of God come to see that he was born again. The little boy was sticking out his hand to touch him. (O'Connor 1988, 389)

Tarwater's reaction to Bishop's attempt to touch him is to strike the child. Rayber tries to mediate, and says he will get used to Bishop, but Tarwater does not give way:

"No!" the boy shouted. It was like a shout that had been waiting, straining to burst out. "I won't get used to him! I won't have anything to do with him!" He clenched his fist and lifted it. "I won't have anything to do with him!" he shouted and the words were clear and positive and defiant like a challenge hurled in the face of his silent adversary. (O'Connor 1988, 390)

Tarwater's anger is clearly in negation, now directly so, of the divine order (or that which he perceives as divine) to fulfil a mission that he does not like, partly because he doesn't see it as fitting his expectations, and partly because he perceives in Bishop something which he doesn't understand and which unnerves him. This is the key, according to Johansen (2012, 109), who draws here on the "figures d'affliction" of Simone Weil, according to which Bishop is an "enfleshed icon on which Rayber's and Tarwater's eyes are riveted and their responses to affliction depend. Bishop becomes the novel's fulcrum on which refusal to obedience or the desire to obey hinge".

But in Tarwater, Rayber sees a repetition of himself, yet one with the guilty eyes of the theology student who left the boy's mother pregnant: "The face before him was his own, but the eyes were not his own. They were the student's eyes, singed with guilt" (O'Connor 1988, 392). In the next chapter, when Rayber follows him at night, the attitude is the same: "Rayber saw only the hat, *intransigently ground* upon his head, *fierce-looking* even in the dim light. It had the boy's own *defiant quality*, as if its shape had been formed over the years by his personality" (O'Connor 1988, 405, my italics). Tarwater is impervious to his uncle's attempts to establish contact, which produces in the latter "an almost uncontrollable fury" (O'Connor 1988, 393). When Tarwater recognizes the photograph of Rayber's wife and makes derogatory remarks about her, "irritation mounted in him" (O'Connor 1988, 394). It is the same anger that the old man Mason provoked in him: "the same familiar fantastic anger, out of all

proportion to its cause, that his uncle had always been able to stir in him” (O’Connor 1988, 394).

The tension between the two of them is the same as the one that exists between Mason and Rayber. When Rayber tries to apply his psychological schemes to make Tarwater consider his anger as a result of his guilt of having abandoned the body of Mason, offering himself to occupy Mason’s place as a paternal figure, that produces a violent reaction in Tarwater. Rayber also attributed his own anger and affliction to a genetic problem, a family inheritance, thus something carried in the blood:

The affliction was in the family. It lay hidden in the line of blood that touched them, flowing from some ancient source, some desert prophet or pole-sitter, until, its power unabated, it appeared in the old man and him and, he surmised, in the boy. Those it touched were condemned to fight it constantly or be ruled by it. The old man had been ruled by it. He, at the cost of a full life, staved it off. What the boy would do hung in the balance. (O’Connor 1988, 402)

Rayber’s anger is parallel to that of Tarwater, of a future Tarwater who would have denied everything and lived in that self-imposed asceticism in which Rayber lives, and which arises from the division within him between “a violent and a rational self” (O’Connor 1988, 417). In his case it manifests itself especially during the discourse of the girl preacher, in which he wants to be recognized as an innocent victim before Christ, the Savior who survived the massacre of the innocents.

Tarwater’s anger reaches its highpoint when he is able to look into the eyes of Bishop: “The hostility in it seemed contained and directed toward some planned goal” (O’Connor 1988, 447). The stranger who converses in his mind has already encouraged him to drown Bishop, insinuating that he will only end the obsession with the child by killing him. A short time before doing so, the last confrontation with Rayber was such that he “felt such a fury that for the moment all his strength left him. Go, he wanted to shout. Get your damn impudent face out of my sight! Go to hell! Go baptize the whole world!” (O’Connor 1988, 448). Rayber promises Tarwater salvation in rationality and explains that they have a common compulsion, something that Tarwater rejects, because he is sure that he can find release from it whenever he wants. It is then that he takes Bishop in a boat. After sleeping a while, Rayber awakes to realise that Tarwater has simultaneously baptised and drowned the child.

A little later, when a truck driver takes Tarwater far away, the latter recounts his wishes for life: “‘There’s nothing where I’m going but the stall,’ he began again, ‘because the house is burnt up but that’s the way I want it. I don’t want nothing of his. Now it’s all mine’” (O’Connor 1988, 458).

The anger that he hopes to have dominated by violence will find him once more, this time in the brutal rape he suffers, in which he discovers the presence and effects of evil in himself. It will be, as we have already said, the contemplation of Mason’s tomb, the achievement of Buford, which will definitively release his anger, the wave of which will carry him to the city to preach God’s mercy, one which burns at great speed.

As Srigley explains, the image of Tarwater's growing hunger culminates in the eschatological banquet that is revealed at this moment, in which "he arrives at a place of communion rather than isolation" (Srigley 2012, 210). O'Connor herself explained this in a letter: "[t]here are two main symbols in the book –water and the bread that Christ is. The whole action of the novel is Tarwater's selfish will against all the little lake (the baptismal font) and the bread stand for. This book is a very minor hymn to the Eucharist" (O'Connor 1979, 387). And Kroeker (2012, 138) adds: "The paradoxical ways in which freedom to act is linked to the prophetic vocation and the messianic meaning of the claim that 'Jesus is the bread of life' constitute the spiritual trial and existential crisis Tarwater undergoes in the novel".

5. Voegelin as a collaborator in Achilles's vision as a referent for Tarwater

O'Connor admired Voegelin (on this topic, Palmieri's revision is very valuable) and enjoyed *The World of the Polis*, the second volume of *Order and History*, having read it in January of 1959, as she explained in a letter at the time (O'Connor 1979, 316). In her copy of the book she underlined just one phrase: "... and the hero in the Homeric sense can be defined as the man in whose actions a more-than-human order of being becomes manifest" (1957, 104).

Voegelin's characterization of Achilles in the *Iliad* (1957, 88-91) is not specifically referred to in the notes she made on the dustjacket, nor did she underline anything in those pages. However, it is not difficult to see how it might have served as a template for the character of Tarwater or, since she was already well into writing the novel by then, it might have had a considerable influence on the final formulation of his character.

In Achilles there is, prior to anger, a void:

The specific wrath that precipitates the events of the *Iliad* must be distinguished from the void, the blankness of which it is a manifestation. this void in Achilles disturbs the formation of the normal social relations from his boyhood. His own father who knows the child well sends him to war with admonitions to curb his 'proudhearted spirit' and to keep him out of 'mischiefmaking strife'; honor will be gained rather by 'gentlemindedness [philophrosyne]' (IX, 254-56). (Voegelin 1957, 88)

And Achilles' internal struggles are described in these terms:

The nature and source of this isolating iciness [from his comrades] is, then, more closely circumscribed by scraps of self-analysis when Achilles reflects on the alternatives of action in face of his fate. The meaning of the divine revelation as a personal obsession can be discerned perhaps most clearly in the fact that Achilles is the only one among the princes who toys with the idea of leaving the war and returning home. Odd as this may sound, Achilles is afraid of death to the point of openly considering the possibility of desertion. He is ardently in love with life. (...) The gods have created him a warrior; he lives truly in battle, and his sulking wrath is most painful to maintain while joyous slaughter goes on without him. (...) Achilles is bound to the war, and can never return, because he is a

warrior (perhaps even killer would not be too strong a word) who would fit into the order at home even less that into the order of the army. (Voegelin 1957, 88-89)

However, anger can also help Achilles attain another level of order:

Functioning within an established order, the *cholos*, as an emotion, will supply the force that will resist injustice and restore just order. (...) The proper functioning of *cholos*, thus, is essential to the maintenance of order. (...) The *cholos* of Achilles (...) is not a finite reaction against a finite threat (...); it is rather an outburst of the deep-seated anxiety that has grown in him through preoccupation with his fate; it is caused by an emotional short-circuit between the diminution of his honor and the anticipation of his death". (Voegelin 1957, 90)

It is the death of his friend Patroclus that finally makes him recover order, when he sees his alter ego dead:

he returns to the reality of life in community; and the decisive symptom of this return is the readiness to shoulder its obligations even at the risk of death. (...) And finally, perhaps the most subtle trait, he is now even willing to acquire imperishable renown by his deeds in the common run of his obligations as an Achaean warrior-he will no longer try to cheat fate by triumph in life." (Voegelin 1957, 92)

All this, I believe, is reflected in Tarwater, whether by coincidence or because, to a greater or lesser extent, Voegelin's original reading and characterisation of Achilles was indeed reflected in the protagonist of the novel. The coincidences in their characters are indeed notable, in the difficult orientation which both men seek for their lives, and especially in the incidences of their anger, with evident social consequences, most clearly in their refusal to perform funerary rites on the dead and their paralysing inaction, but also with respect to the similar way in which they both escape this anger, thanks to a simple demonstration of human intimacy, the mere act of touching the hand.

6. Conclusions

I think it is possible to affirm now that there is a clear parallelism between Achilles, a young Greek warrior, and Tarwater, a backwoods young prophet-to-be. One can consider how fruitful the connections can be in a mythical paradigm where the notion of eternal return of basic human problems revolves. But also there are indications, particularly from the books of Eric Voegelin, that there is a genealogical connection between Homer and the last novel by Flannery O'Connor.

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