
Love issues and romances in the Homer's Iliad

In today's society, movies in all genres thrive on romantic plots and subplots. There is often a form of "Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back" or a variation of that, wherein the guy's decisions are all centered around securing a love interest. Although Homer wrote *The Iliad* hundreds of years ago, his story is no exception to this ageless idea that love is the driving force behind humanity. As portrayed in *The Iliad*, love is so much more than just holding hands and going for long walks on the beach; love causes wars, love changes people's minds, and love makes people do things they would never do otherwise.

First, Menelaus's love for his wife causes him to go to war with the Trojans after Paris steals Helen. When offered the chance to end the war with a single duel to decide who gets Helen, Menelaus decides to fight against Paris. He tells his soldiers that they "have suffered enough for this quarrel of mine which Alexandros began" (Homer 41). By saying this, Menelaus shows that he is willing to fight for the woman he loves. He does not want anybody else to be involved, and he places all his faith in this one duel. In other words, he knows that he will either leave with his wife or die trying to win her back. Furthermore, Helen's love for Menelaus causes her to run out of the house to watch him fight. When she is told of the duel about to happen, Helen "longed for her husband of the old days" and "left the house quickly with tears running down her face" (42). Helen knows her husband is out there, perhaps about to die for her, and she badly wants to be by his side regardless of the duel's end result.

Yet love can take other forms in Homer's narrative. Between Achilles and Patroclus, there is not romantic love, but love between friends. This friendly love causes Achilles to lend Patroclus both his armor and his army, even though he wanted the Trojans to win so he could prove Agamemnon wrong. With tears flowing from his eyes, Patroclus asks Achilles to "let me go at least and take our Myrmidons," and to "put your armour on my shoulders" (188). Achilles's willingness to let his friend take his army, along with his warning to return upon clearing the ships, is evidence of how much Achilles really cares for Patroclus. The angry prince trusts his soldiers to keep Patroclus alive, and he trusts that his armor will protect him. Upon Patroclus's death, Achilles is riled up enough to fight once more, despite the prophecy that claims that he will die should he do so. He even goes to Agamemnon to apologize, asking him, "What good was it to us both, to take things to heart so... Let me meet the enemy face to face" (229). After book upon book of Achilles's absence in the battle, it is his love for Patroclus that finally allows him to see that his grudge is petty, and that he needs to fight.

Finally, there is the familial love that Priam feels for his son, Hector, and that impels the king to kneel before the enemy. This love drives Priam to make a decision that nobody in his right mind

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would make. Most would fear Achilles; most would never think it safe to go to him and request a son's corpse. However, Priam went "near Achilles and clasped his knees, and kissed the terrible murderous hands which had killed so many of his sons" (291). Despite the fact that Achilles kills so many of Priam's children-- including Hector-- he is willing to kiss the man's hands because Hector is so important to the king that he would go to the furthest extremities to retrieve his corpse. Priam desperately wants Hector to get the proper burial he deserves, because the bond between the two of them is strong, even after death. In addition, Priam's love for Hector is shown when he begs his son to return to the safety of Troy's walls. From above, he cries, "O Hector... Do not face that man alone, without a friend... Peleion will destroy you" (256). Upon hearing his father's request, Hector does not listen, and instead stays to fight Achilles. Hector's dismissal of the plea is proof of his love for Priam, because Hector feels that staying and fighting is the best chance he has at defeating Achilles, thus gaining time for and perhaps ultimately sparing his city and family.

Love is what allows the characters of *The Iliad* to paddle upstream against the raging current that is life and fate. It is love that provokes Menelaus to start a war for his wife, and to risk his life in a duel against Alexandros. It is love that brings Achilles, stubborn and angry, back into the brawl to fight for the friend he lost. It is love that influences King Priam to stoop before the prince who murdered his sons and soldiers, just to get back the corpse of his beloved Hector. Every day, people all over the world wake up, never falter in their stride, and struggle against adversity. It would be much easier to simply stop and give up. What keeps them going is love, because no matter how bitter and stolid people might be, humanity cannot just sit around and hope that love will eventually conquer all. Deep down, everybody knows that hope and love never do anything on their own; only when somebody steps up to fight in the name of love can it truly conquer.

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