Brotherhood and Hatred

“The man of knowledge must be able not only to love his enemies but also to hate his friends,” (Friedrich Nietzsche.)

Brotherhood and hatred are common themes throughout *The Iliad,* whether experienced through the dismal mourning of Patroclus by Achilles or witnessed through the bitter hatred between Paris and Agamemnon, it’s apparent how these warriors are tormented and driven by these two powerful emotions. Without these substantial emotions, many of the key events in the book would not have happened. The brotherhood between Agamemnon and Menelaus, and likewise with Hector and Paris demonstrate how powerful the bond of brotherhood can be. They fight because of the everlasting bond they share. Achilles, however, is not driven to fight or even glance at the war until his friendship with Patroclus is stolen by Hector and Apollo. This mix of friendship and enmity drive the main characters of this book to make mistakes, destroy lives, and create many disastrous situations.

“Rage--Goddess sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles.” (Homer P1) In the first line of The Iliad shows an emotion that drives many characters, including Achilles, to cause doom and destruction throughout the Trojan war. The first conflict we are brought into is the childish dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles. Achilles’ pride is damaged because Agamemnon has taken his ‘prize’ Briseis from him. This causes him to become hostile towards Agamemnon as well as change his perspective on the war itself. Achilles recognizes that he is fighting another man’s fight. The Trojan War occurs mainly because Paris stole Helen from Menelaus, who coincidentally happens to be Agamemnon’s brother. In his dispute with Agamemnon, Achilles points out, "It wasn't Trojan spearmen who brought me here to fight. The Trojans never did me damage, not in the least" (Homer). Achilles' recognizes that he is fighting to help please another man’s idea of revenge. Achilles also points out that he and many other soldiers are risking their lives for Agamemnon and Menelaus, while Agamemnon sits out for a majority of the battle. Achilles states, "Never once did you arm with the troops and go to battle or risk an ambush packed with Achaea's picked men " (Homer P85). Achilles understands that the Trojan war is being fought for personal reasons rather than for glory and honor for Achaea like Agamemnon is promising. This is the main reason that Achilles decides to sit out for the majority of the Iliad, his hostility towards Agamemnon is so powerful that he decides he would rather watch his friends and brothers die than to fight alongside someone he despises.

Like Achilles, Agamemnon and his brother are also fueled by rage, however, their rage is focused towards Paris for taking Helen from Menelaus. This enmity that Menelaus and his brother share is what drives the Achaeans for the majority of the war. While the two brothers attempt to spin their motives as glory for Achaea and riches for all, the main motivator for this war is Menelaus’ anger towards Paris for wounding his pride.

Similar to what happened with Achilles with Briseis, Menelaus’ pride was damaged when Helen was stolen by Paris. He was no longer the husband of Helen, who has been labeled as the most beautiful mortal woman to ever walk the earth. This shared hatred of Paris between Agamemnon and Menelaus allows the two brothers to become closer and more united as a front in their quest to defeat Troy and avenge Menelaus’ pride. While they already shared a bond through brotherhood, this mutually shared objective creates an inseparable union that motivates these brothers in this poem.

While rage and enmity are major themes throughout the Iliad, there is also a distinct theme of friendship and brotherhood throughout the poem. Brotherhood can be seen in various points throughout this poem. Whether it’s Agamemnon and Menelaus or Paris and Hector, there are visible signs of a brotherly bond throughout multiple characters in this book. The bond shared between these brothers demonstrates their loyalty towards each other and their willingness to fight for one another. This type of relationship in the Iliad is important for both sides because it maintains a balance between the brothers. Both sides convey a message of protection, Hector protects Paris in order to keep him from further making a fool of himself, likewise, Agamemnon loves his brother Menelaus dearly, and is willing to go to great lengths to protect him from any harm that might happen upon him, as seen when Agamemnon carries Menelaus after Pandarus wounds him. Menelaus does not necessarily need the protection and wisdom from Agamemnon, as Paris does from Hector, however, he requires support from his older brother. This war is brought on by Paris's taking Helen, causing Menelaus to grieve throughout most of the poem, and likewise cause Agamemnon to fume with anger. Homer shows the importance of this brotherhood, by showing the love and devotion of Agamemnon. Agamemnon and Menelaus are both already involved in the war on behalf of Helen, this only adds to the reasons. This bond grows stronger throughout the poem and helps them through crucial times of battle.

While the bond between Menelaus and Agamemnon is crucial to the story of the Iliad, the most significant bond of friendship and brotherhood in the Iliad is by far the bond between Achilles and Patroclus. Achilles shows that he is not driven to fight for Agamemnon and the other Achaeans because he has no emotional ties with anyone, except for Patroclus. In fact, despite Agamemnon sending Odysseus, Great Ajax, and Phoenix to give a peace-offering to Achilles, which includes, Briseis back – untouched by Agamemnon, 7 cities, one of Agamemnon’s daughters, and a majority of the riches from Troy, he still declined to join the fight. It was only after hearing the news of Patroclus’ death at the hands of Hector, that Achilles decided to join his brethren in the fight against Troy. Achilles is devastated with the horror of the death of his best friend, brother, and quite possibly the love of his life. He feels as if his brotherhood with Patroclus has been stripped from him far too soon. Achilles demonstrates how deep the bond between him and Patroclus truly was when he puts his pride and ignorance behind him and join his Achaean brothers in the war, something he had been unable to do in throughout the entire poem.

In addition, Achilles was not only withholding from the war because of his pride, he had also been warned that he would meet a swift demise if he were to join the battle for Troy. In fact, Thetis, Achilles’ mother, told him explicitly that if he did not fight, he would live a long life and if he did join the fight, he would die shortly after Hector. Despite the warnings, Achilles decides to join the fight and avenge his lifelong friend. Through Achilles’ words and actions, we realize that Achilles does not want to kill Hector out of hate, or out of sorrow; the actual cause of Achilles’ final rage, is his powerful love for his best friend whom Hector had slain. We witness this when Achilles states that Hector must pay for the death of his beloved friend. This final event, the death of Hector, and Achilles parade of his body around the Achaean camp was Achilles’ final act of vengeance for Patroclus.

There are many pivotal moments throughout the Iliad that are directly caused by friendship and enmity, moments that cause large shifts in the momentum of the Trojan War. Without the loss of Patroclus, Achilles would not have amounted to be the warrior everyone praised him to be. Without the hatred of Paris, Menelaus and Agamemnon would not have pursued Ilium with such great animosity and vengeance. By being empowered by their emotions, the heroes of the Iliad brought about chaos and mass destruction to both of their people.

Bibliography

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