

Love as the Phenomenal Power in Madeline Miller's The Song of Achilles

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Abstract

Love is a phenomenal force that activates almost all the living beings in the planet earth. Lover is colour blind, race blind as well as gender blind. Robert Sternberg developed the Triangular theory of love to show the components in which it is composed of. The theory is applied to same sex love couple Achilles and Patroclus in Madeline Miller's The Song of Achilles. This paper shows that the love between Achilles and Patroclus is beyond gender and they comprises Sternberg's all three-passion, intimacy and commitment until their death.

Keywords: Same sex love, Greek mythology, Theory of love, LGBTQ+

"We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves..."

The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined"

(25, Valerio)

Be it a human or an animal, love binds all beings coherently in the earth. Love, the word which holds more power than any other words in existence can generate or demolish the entire world. Men in course of time, forgot the passion and compassion, and started to fought for pride and glory. But love still holds the power to outnumber all those anonymous things. The book The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller illustrate show Achilles' love for Patroclus neither his pride nor his ego, driven him to kill Hector brutally. This paper shows how their love lasted throughout their ups and downs till their death by applying Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love.

Madeline Miller is an American novelist who took ten years to complete her debut novel The Song of Achilles which later won her the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2012. She selected Patroclus as her narrator to explicit the relationship between him and Achilles. The idea to illustrate them in an intimate relationship occurred to her when she read how Achilles embraced Patroclus' body and not let it be buried in Homer's Iliad. She made Patroclus, a nobody in Homer's Iliad, as the biggest impact in Trojan war in her book.

Robert Sternberg is an American Psychologist who developed the triangular theory of love and described that love has three components. They are passion, intimacy and commitment. These are three distinct but inter related things. Passion implies the starting stage of love where there arises closeness and bondedness. Intimacy implies physical attraction that leads to sexual consumption. Commitment implies a promise to be with each other forever. Love may occur with the absence of one among these three too. In the Song of Achilles, Achilles and Patroclus shows consummate love that holds all three components even after death.

Passionate Love

The first glimpse of love is a purest form that has all kinds of budding desires, shyness and an urge to be close as soon as possible. Some people even fall at their first sight. Patroclus' first impression of Achilles is as strong as an ox. "My eye catches on a light head among dozens of dark, tousled crowns. I leaned forward to see. Hair lit like honey in the sun, and within it, glints of gold – the circlet of a prince" (2). He was a five-year-old with simple features and no physical strength equal to his age children whereas Achilles was fast in his feet among other ones who won the leaf crown. After Patroclus was exiled to Phthia, he was avoided by other boys but Achilles was the one who approached him. For Achilles, Patroclus was interesting at his first encounter, so he asked his father to let him be his Sworn companion. The passionate love bloomed when they started to spent time together.

Patroclus was the first to develop his feelings towards Achilles. Patroclus admired everything on Achilles. The passion component comprises of the enthusiasm to do something anew, the strong feel that leads to a dangerous way and a romantic feel towards someone. The golden hair, sculptured face, green eyes, speed of his hands and heels, everything about Achilles fascinated Patroclus. He was not a socializing person yet he liked to be with Achilles. He kissed Achilles and thought of Achilles' feelings towards his act. He had developed a romantic kind of feeling towards Achilles and even dared to escape into the woods in search of him when he was sent with Chirus. Patroclus' passionate love is the first step towards their intimate love.

Intimate Love

Intimacy is something that gives the feel of closeness and tightens the bond for the mutually fallen ones.

'Name one hero who was happy.'

.....

'You can't.' He was sitting up now, leaning forward.

'I can't.'

'I know. They never let you be famous and happy.' He lifted an eyebrow. 'I'll tell you a secret.'

'Tell me.' I loved it when he was like this.

'I'm going to be the first.' (98)

Though Patroclus was the one who went through passionate phase, it is both Achilles and Patroclus tightened their bond against Thetis, Achilles' mother's disapprovals and threats.

At Chiron's, they both tightened their bondage. Achilles learnt that his mother can't see what's inside the cave and so he started being intimate with Patroclus there. Their understandings of each other and the promise to not to hide anything from each other can be seen as the development of closeness between them. When Achilles was taken to Scyros, Patroclus chased him to there. Achilles, disguised as a dancing girl named Pyrrha in the court of king Lycomedes, acclaimed Patroclus as his husband. Even when he was forced to lay with a girl, he claimed he didn't feel what he felt with Patroclus. When Patroclus got a chance to lie with a girl, he said he couldn't satisfy a

girl as she is not Achilles. They both developed the intimacy that they cannot feel the same with any other being in the world.

Commitment in Love

Commitment is something that is like a promise to stick with each other throughout life. Sometimes it may be short term, deciding to love the other one unconditionally, and sometimes it is long term, being with the chosen one for lifetime. In Troy, those nine years spent in war tested what Achilles and Patroclus held dear to each other. They both went through all sorts of emotional phases on those years yet they were passionate towards each other. "The tent was very dark, but I could just see the features of his face, the strong jaw and gentle curves of his eyes. I wanted to wake him, and see those eyes open. A thousand times I had seen it, but I never tired of it" (248). Achilles promised to protect Patroclus in war. When Patroclus asked Achilles to claim Brises as their prize, Achilles did as he asked without any flinch. Even after Patroclus' death, Achilles asked his men to put their ashes together in the same pot to be together for eternity. He committed himself to Patroclus, so he wanted to follow him in his journey to the underworld.

Achilles and Patroclus were a good example of consummate love though they both are male. Researchers, Philosophers and men in history talk about love between opposite genders but none the tenderness of same sex love. Madeline Miller, viewed the interaction and intimacy between Achilles and Patroclus as love and justified the act of Achilles crying over the death of a mere comrade into the cry for beloved. "Sometimes, you do things and you do them not because you're thinking but because you're feeling. Because you're feeling too much. And you can't always control the things you do when you're feeling too much." (240, Saenz). Robert Sternberg's Theory of love for the opposite gender attraction and togetherness can be applied to all beings who love dearly love each other. Love does not see race, colour or gender. Love is blind and it is universal.

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