

The Fate Of Patroclus

Throughout The Iliad Of Homer, the constant theme of death is inherently apparent. Each main character, either by a spear or merely a scratch from an arrow, was wounded or killed during the progression of the story. For Zeus' son, Sarpedon, it was a spear through the heart, and for Hector, it was the bronze of the mighty Achilles through his neck which caused his early demise. It seems that no one could escape an agonizing fate. Of these deaths, the most interesting and intriguing death of all is that of Achilles' dear friend Patroclus. Although his life was taken by the mighty Hector's spear, who was truly liable for his death? Could it have been Zeus or Hector or the mighty Achilles to blame for this horrible death? The intricate story line of The Iliad makes many possible answers available, but only one possibility accurately explains the actions and events that led to this gruesome episode. The only person to blame for the death of mighty Patroclus was himself.

First of all, Patroclus was responsible for his own death because he requested his insertion into the battle, fully knowing that the Achaeans were being unmercifully defeated. In Book XVI, Patroclus said, " Send me forth now at the head of the Myrmidon host

That I may be a light of hope to the Danaans.
And let me strap on my shoulders that armor of yours
That the zealous Trojans take me for you and quickly
Withdraw from the fighting."

Because Achilles refused to help the Achaeans battle the Trojans, a discontented Patroclus took the matter into his own hands by requesting activation into battle disguised as Achilles in the hope of sending the Trojans into a full retreat from the sight of him. It is apparent that Patroclus was willing to fight although the odds were greatly against him. His vehemence towards the Trojans coupled with his disappointment of Achilles gave him the drive to conquer the Trojan army with or without the aid of Achilles. In doing so, Patroclus took an enormous risk that the Trojans would fall for his trick, a risk with his life as the stakes. Essentially, while pleading to Achilles for battle, it was his own dark death for which he plead.

Next, because Patroclus ignored Achilles' warnings before battle, the blame for his death can only be placed upon himself. In Book XVI, Achilles said,

" Do not, I tell you, get carried away
In the heat of conflict and slaughter and so lead the men
Toward the city. For one of the gods everlasting may decide
To descend from Olympus and fight against you - Apollo,
For instance, who works from afar and dearly loves
All Trojans. Come back, then, when once you have saved the
Vessels, and let others go fighting across the plain."

In explanation, Achilles was saying that he wanted Patroclus to lead the Myrmidons in an attack against the Trojans to drive them away from the ships. Once that was done, he wanted Patroclus and the army to return because imminent death surrounded Troy, antagonized by Zeus and Apollo. However, Patroclus did not heed this warning. After going into battle and sending the Trojans into a full retreat, Patroclus was overcome with fury over his slain comrade, Epeigeus, and ordered a full scale attack upon the walls of Troy.

" Then Patroclus, calling
Commands to the horses and to Automedon, drove
In pursuit of the Trojans and Lycians, blind foolhardy child
That he was! For had he obeyed the careful orders
of Peleus' son Achilles, he surely would then
Have escaped the miserable doom of murky death."

This passage in Book XVI foreshadowed how this grave mistake would lead to Patroclus' death. Because of his overwhelming desire to take revenge for the many Achaeans defeated in battle, Patroclus failed to realize the accompanying

consequences to his suicide mission. No one else made the decision to attack, therefore, only Patroclus is to blame for his narrow minded decision which led directly to his untimely demise.

Finally, because of Patroclus' inferiority to Achilles in battle, he was responsible for his own death. An example can be derived from a passage in Book XVI from Apollo to Patroclus,

" Fall back Zeus - descended Patroclus! It is not fated
That by your spear this town of the gifted Trojans
Shall be laid to waste, nor even by that of Achilles,
A man far batter than you."

This passage suggests the inferiority of Patroclus compared to Achilles. If Achilles was not fated to sack the city of Troy, how was Patroclus supposed to, being only half the warrior that Achilles was? Patroclus should have known this, but his mind was clouded with anger and grief so he decided to do even what Achilles could not and perished. Therefore, his inferiority to Achilles shown through. Another example took place after Patroclus defeated Hector's driver, Cebriones. While trying to strip the armor from the body, Patroclus and Hector began to fight over the corpse. Instead of following Achilles' orders and returning to the ships, Patroclus went for the nucleus of the Trojan army and tried to defeat Hector, as no other Achaean could do. His fury overcame him and inferiority to Achilles caused him to die. Patroclus picked a fight with an enemy aided by a god, and fell from glory with a combination of blows from Apollo, Euphorbes, and Hector. This inferiority to Achilles may have been the primary reason that Patroclus' life came to an end that day at the hands of the Trojan army.

In conclusion, among the various themes of The Iliad of Homer, death is one of the most apparent and moving themes to consistently appear throughout the story. Each death was described in full, graphic detail to more emphasize the individual people and events for which this siege was taking place. Each man had a family and a story behind his life and death. For Patroclus, however, life was cut short by his poor decisions and unyielding fury toward the Trojans. These, accompanied by his battle skills, greatly inferior to those of Achilles, caused Patroclus to disregard Achilles' warnings of what fate the battle might hold and attack Troy as well as Hector. If these decisions had not been made, Patroclus could have ridden beside Achilles in their sack of Troy. Thus, because of Patroclus' over - zealous and inferior battle decisions and behaviors, it is apparent that he is solely responsible for his own death.

