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Women Roles in The Iliad

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Women play a significant role in “The Iliad”, where the war motive trails back to women attraction. The Iliad narrates the Trojan War, and the crafted characters transcend to a war situation creating a timeless appeal. The appeal is mostly true about women. The Iliad has only four women characters: Helen, Hecabe, Briseis and Andromache. The four women, whether human or immortal, play a significant role as male protagonists. These women have divergent and unique ways of challenging their situations.

The main woman character playing a major role in The Iliad is Helen. She is a Greek queen who left her marriage and followed the Trojan prince Paris. She becomes the main subject in book III and is mentioned as the main cause of war. Menelaus and Paris set a deal to determine who will end up with the woman; the woman is seen as an object and voiceless. The duel's main goal is whoever wins to take the woman and that she possesses and bring home with them(Homer 71-72, and 92-93). This quote in book III is evidence that Helen's feelings are ignored when it comes to life decisions. Homer shows the reader how Helen's feelings were ignored and goes ahead, revealing her true emotions. Helen longed for her previous family to the point of shedding a tear to show how sorrowful she was. Helen is overcome by guilt and shame by not seeing her brothers since she thinks the brothers refused to show up since she had disgraced them.

The Iliad depicted a world where women are seen as mere possessions having status, but they lack a voice. The concept of women being taken as someone's property led Trojans and Spartans to war. The war would not have happened if King Menelaus considered Helen to choose a mate of her choice. There are other instances in the book where women possession's quarrels arise amongst men. We can see Agamemnon taking the Khryseis to Troy refusing to return her to her father, resulting in a quarrel between the two.

Another instance is between Achilles and Agamemnon over Briseis. When the former is compelled to take back Khryseis, he takes Briseis from Achilles. Surprisingly, Briseis has been given as a war prize to Achilles after killing her parents. It can be noted that men and women quarrels have no say in determining in whose hands the woman falls. In short, the Iliad women are presented as properties to be taken, quarrelled over and traded.

Helen can be seen as the mortal match of the goddess Aphrodite. The similarity between the mortal women and the goddesses is the sexual objection. Helen acts are however liberal, e.g. when she left her matriarchal duties in Sparta. Helen rebels by eloping willingly with Paris, and by this she a war in motion is set. By Helen choosing a mate, she defies the values getting away with it. Even though Menelaus, her husband is furious and must go after her, he is not in a position of harming her. The virtue of being Helen's husband made Menelaus the king, and if she lost her, he would as well lose the throne. In this case, Helen is seen having powers of her fate determinant. The law calls for death punishment if one commits such transgression.

Hellen plays the biggest part as far as women's role is concerned in the Iliad since she is the one that starts the war. Helen is a complex character where she is seen as a possession yet being subjected to the gods' wishes and a foreigner considered as the cause of strife and suffering. She appears in six encounters where she acquires a voice in each. By being more assertive, more of her personality aspects are revealed. We can conclude that Helen moved from being silent to a public speaker.

Another woman playing a significant role in The Iliad is Andromache, Hector's wife. Andromache is seen in two scenes. One of the scenes is when she pleads with Hector not to fight her, she tells him that his courage will kill him (Homer, 6.426). Homer depicts Andromache with dignity and grace having an equality relationship with her husband. The other scene Andromache

is seen is when Hector is killed, and his body is carried for burial. She cries the death of the husband and the fortune that awaited her together with her son.

Andromache is the symbol of the earth goddess acting as a life preserver. Andromache quality is contrasted with the Iliad savage code. She strongly supports the idea that men must show their bravery or heroic status by becoming murderers. Having adhered to this code of hero's results to her husband's death, who used to protect the Trojan people. Andromache portrays a feminist juxtaposition symbol and matriarchal ethics opposing the destructive patriarchal concepts. She is given a strong voice questioning the reason why men kill each other. However, her questions go unanswered. There is a similarity between Andromache and Thetis since they both process life-preserving values. The two women are the only one who acquires power and are rebellious and still retain their female nature.

The events that took place in The Iliad took place a long time ago. Still, the role of women is almost the same in ancient Greek society .the women struggle to impact society. Their male counterparts relationships are still relevant up to date. The voices of these strong women who challenged patriarchal dominance can be compared to the ancient Greek feminists. The Iliad storey portrays a situation where men have higher regard compared to women. Women have no or little say in the Trojan war; they get affected by the gender roles that Greek society assigns them.

References

Homer (Translated by Samuel Butler). *The Iliad*. New York: Orange Street Press Classics, 1998.

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