

Seeing The Devotion: A Comparative Study Between Carlo in Captain Corelli's Mandolin and Patroclus in Iliad

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ABSTRACT

This research proposes a comparative insight into the parallel character development of Patroclus, cousin to Achilles and at the same time a fellow soldier, in Homer's *Iliad* and Carlo, an Italian soldier in Franco's army, in Louis de Bernieres' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, focusing on their close relationships with the respective heroes, Achilles and Corelli. The study proposes that the intimacy of these bonds suggests a potential homoerotic subtext, with Carlo explicitly being homosexual and the connection between Achilles and Patroclus implying similar undertones. Ultimately, the research aims to underscore the presence of same-sex relationships as a significant theme in literature, contrasting with the traditional focus on heterosexual bonds. Furthermore, it will explore the shared experiences of Patroclus and Carlo, notably their self-sacrificing ends and the necessity of concealing their identities due to social norms, all within the framework of queer studies. An additional focal point of the study is to investigate the theme of devotion in both seemingly queer relationships since it becomes a determiner in the fates of both aforementioned characters.

Key Words: *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, Carlo, Patroclus, Queer, Devotion.

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Sadakati Görmek: Yüzbaşı Corelli'nin Mandolini Romanında Carlo ve İlyada'dan Patroklos Arasında Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

ÖZ

Bu araştırma, Homeros'un *İlyada*'sında Akhilleus'un kuzeni ve aynı zamanda bir asker arkadaşı olan Patroklos ile Louis de Bernieres'in *Yüzbaşı Corelli'nin Mandolini*'nde Franco'nun ordusunda İtalyan bir asker olan Carlo'nun paralel karakter gelişimine, ilgili kahramanlar Akhilleus ve Corelli ile olan yakın ilişkilerine odaklanarak karşılaştırmalı bir bakış önermektedir. Çalışma, bu bağların yakınlığının potansiyel bir homoerotik alt metne işaret ettiğini, Carlo'nun açıkça eşcinsel olduğunu ve Achilles ile Patroclus arasındaki bağın da benzer imalar taşıdığını öne sürüyor. Nihayetinde araştırma, geleneksel olarak heteroseksüel bağlara odaklanmanın aksine, eşcinsel ilişkilerin edebiyatta önemli bir tema olarak varlığının altını çizmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, Patroklos ve Carlo'nun ortak deneyimlerini, özellikle de fedakârlıklarını ve toplumsal normlar nedeniyle kimliklerini gizleme zorunluluklarını kuir çalışmaları çerçevesinde inceleyecektir. Çalışmanın bir diğer odak noktası da, yukarıda bahsi geçen her iki karakterin kaderinde belirleyici olduğu için, alt metinde kuir görünen her iki ilişkide de sadakat temasını araştırmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yüzbaşı Corelli'nin Mandolini*, Carlo, Patroklos, Kuir, Sadakat.

1. Introduction

Human nature is something that has its own features, and it works in quite complex and sometimes yet-to-be-understood terms. As humankind, we tend to devote ourselves to anything we find of significant value because the bond between the desirer and the desired ones has been uninterrupted. During these procedures, each and every single person has had some type of struggles and has always tried to solve and overcome his or her problems. No matter what, where, when, or whom we have looked for does not matter in the sense of a relationship in which the goal is to set and achieve a simple collection of tasks, then complete and enjoy the results. However, not all people are truly lucky enough to reach the desired outcome and luxuriate in. In the path of glory, those heroes and heroines naturally face extreme reactions as shown by the people around them who are traditionally too conservative.

Under these circumstances and restrictions, people are directed to choose often secret or veiled ways to live their private lives. History has witnessed such characters and incidents, and nowadays we can turn our analytical eye on these. In a very natural way, people's sexual desires and choices are the ones which are mostly wondered. Intrinsically, the tendency towards the opposite gender -also referred as heterosexual relations- is not the subject to be studied because of the ordinariness; but on the other hand, the men and women who have the intention to have heterosexual relations have been of issue since beginning of 1990s. Until that time, these were called separately as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender studies in the scholarly research.

The turning point of literary studies and criticism concerning gay, lesbian, and transgenders was the time when Teresa de Lauretis coined the term during her speech in a conference using the provocative title "queer studies". "Her usage was scandalously offensive" (Halperin, 2008, p. 340), and she believed that after then "gay and lesbian" studies should have been carried out hand in hand. After then, it turned into one of the most widely studied research topics, and in this work, especially male couples and their bonds will be investigated. However, it would be appropriate to mention about the

accumulation of the theory. Queer earned a solid ground in literary criticism from the 1990s onwards. As Whittington (2012) states, “queer theory as formulated in the 1990s and practiced today, has used the term to refer to topics outside the range of lesbian/gay studies, employing it instead as a kind of position against normative or dominant models of thought” (p. 157). Today, we witness queer theory as an encompassing term that houses transgender studies along with lesbian and gay studies since the general stance of the theory poses a stance against the traditional and normative mainstream. The queer individual experienced the sidelines in the narratives; however, the approach put the queer individual to the forefront in the literary criticism. What is more, queer theory can not be thought to be working in the frames of literary thought; the anthropological roots highlight queer individuals in their visibility in the society since they have been pushed to the margins of the social body.

While the heteronormative dominant thought on the reflection and representation of the traditional gender roles, queer theory elaborates on the either absence or misrepresentation of these individuals. Nonetheless, being seen constructs only one side of representation. Moreover, “being recognized often involves a new set of struggles because the subject cannot always predict or control the effects of the recognition” (Gonella, 2025, pp. 105-6). It is important that queer individuals earned a visible space in society, culture, and literature. However, recognition might not be equal to be acknowledged and accepted by the majority. Penney (2014) highlights the fact that “to be acknowledged as normal” (p. 29) is one of the focal points of queer studies. What is argued here is that being queer is not the acceptance of the existence of a marginalized group of individuals as if seeing the queer is part of a set of diversity framework; on the contrary, accepting the queer and acknowledging them as part of the normal is imperative.

Acknowledging the normal stance of the queer individuals has been one of the challenges the queer studies have faced since their position in the society has often been described as exceptional.

“In a heteronormative order sex, gender and sexuality/desire are tightly interwoven and implicate each other with normative results that are systematic, often systemic, frequently disadvantageous and sometimes lethal for those people who are not part of their normative weave, the loose ends.” (Graham, 2014, p. 22)

As Graham puts it, heteronormative frame determines the desire patterns of both sexes which develop into tight frame outside of which is marginalised. The queer that stands outside of this frame faces often a precarious reaction which challenges societal existence of the individual. Queer as a “sexually non-normative self” (Farina, 2017, p. 78) is confronted. If we were to circle back to the aim of the queer studies, then it is important to state that queer studies attempt to change the marginalised setting of the queer individual to the forefront.

Nature does not order the people what to do; on the contrary, presents us with the available selections and lets us choose. The decision maker in this process uses rational thinking ability and evaluates the possible results of the actions he/she would take, finally applying what is beneficial for him/her. As mentioned earlier, when it comes to feelings, it gets harder to decide on the case because of the fact that no matter how people feel, emotional hardships have controversial effects on one's life and personality.

2. Myth Across Time

As one of the most significant human sciences, history has often featured stories and experiences focusing on the aforementioned subject; it is also a fruitful source to get inspired about making comparisons and finding intertextual elements between so-long-told stories. In other words, the

myths and today's contemporary works can be seen to feature certain bridges among each other. These myth and mythical elements were taken into consideration by French structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, for he saw and made evaluations as the culture was the main concept to build language and "made the claim that "myth is language"." (Levi-Strauss, 1955, p. 211) Both language and myth consist of constituents, in terms of myth, these are called mythemes which are small parts, and in order to truly evaluate and understand a myth, one needs to put together them, and he explains as:

"The true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning." (Levi-Strauss, 1955, p. 211)

According to Lévi-Strauss and Carl Jung, the Swiss anthropologist, creating meaning among constitutes -mythemes- is more essential than creating relations, they dedicated themselves in this manner.

Throughout history, many great civilizations established their legacies in terms of literary works. Greek culture has an impact on the historical heritage of the planet, with its numerous works in different fields of arts. Both oral and written masterpieces were produced and are still being studied by everyone who searches for real beauty beyond and between the lines. *The Iliad* by Homer has been appreciated not only in Greek culture but also others with its meticulous writing style and many significant characters including Gods, demigods, emperors, soldiers and lastly beautiful and charming women for the sake of whom this epic war was declared and happened. Helen is one of the main characters on whom the story was built; apart from her, Achilles and Hector, who are the mightiest warriors of the two sides of the war. Historically they were depicted as heroes of their people, praised a lot. Even the story consists largely of war scenes, surely, the personalities and the relationships between characters are sections worth studying. Achilles, the leader of ancient nation Myrmidons, with his 50 ships, all of them carrying 50 men, comes to Troy with his distant cousin Patroclus, helps Agamemnon to conquer and establish his legacy. After all, writing one's name in history was an important thing in an age of heroes, as this also denotes the term *kleos*.

According to Greek mythology, humanity has been experiencing certain ages: the first one being the Golden Age in which people, created as the first race by Gods, lived a prosperous life and died peacefully. This is followed by the Silver Age when a lesser kind of humans habited the world, and it is followed by the Bronze Age in which wars between humans started as the technology of warfare developed. As the kind of metal is deteriorating as the time passes; however, there is an interruption to this sequence. The Bronze Age is followed by the Age of Heroes in which Homer's great epics are narrated. As heroism and bravery were the major themes, all the heroes that attended the Trojan War wanted to fulfil this concept of heroism by their bravery in battle. One-to-one battles between heroes were especially prominent as both sides symbolized their own country and later their names would become immortal through bards' songs throughout centuries.

"The *Iliad* has a sustained focus not only on various subgenres of heroic myth but especially on what might be thought of as the high style of heroic, the great hero and his duels, a style the Bible does use, though more sparingly than Homeric epic." (Louden, 2006, p. 8)

The conflict in *Iliad* begins when Agamemnon disrespects the code of honour for heroes when he becomes greedy and fails to make an even distribution of the riches his armies got from Troy. Two slave girls, Briseis and Chryseis are to be presented to the brave heroes, but Agamemnon keeps both of them to himself due to the fact that he is the ultimate commander of the Greek army. Agamemnon's

action can be interpreted as a reflection of the concept of "basileus", which refers to being a king, a ruler. From Agamemnon's point of view, claiming his kingly right is just and sound. However, this unjust situation from the point of view of the other heroes angers especially Achilles since he fought the bravest against the Trojans and acquired success. Therefore, he withdraws himself from the war for quite a long time, during which Trojans get the upper hand. Such a non-heroic behaviour would mean dishonour to the other heroes and soldiers in the Greek army.

As the battles went on and Trojans, often helped by Gods, began to make the Greek army back to their ships, Patroclus, Achilles' cousin, became more and more distraught. For him, breaking the heroic code was unbearable. His rejection to fight in the battle puts Achilles in a dilemma: on the one hand, as a ruler and a warrior he is supposed to pursue his battles; on the other hand, his ego is far too challenged to pursue the campaign.

Achilles's own army expects the hero to partake in the battles, but his refrainment becomes controversial. Then, instead of Achilles, his cousin Patroclus fights Hector wearing the Achilles's equipment but fails and is killed by Hector.

"Death cut him short. The end dosed in around him.

Flying free of his limbs

his soul went winging down to the House of Death,

wailing his fate. leaving his manhood far behind.

his young and supple strength." (Homer, 1991, p. 440)

Actually, Hector also is upset to see that he defeated not Achilles but another man because he thinks that he killed the best warrior of the enemy and earned glory against such a renowned hero.

"Why, Patroclus

why prophesy my doom. my sudden death? Who knows?-

Achilles the son of sleek-hatred Thetis may outrace me

struck by my spear first-and gasp away his life!" (Homer, 1991, p. 440)

Achilles, on the other hand, after learning about the death of Patroclus, gets ready and attacks, wanting to take revenge of his cousin. Achilles challenges Hector in combat and kills him. Having lost his greatest hero, the city becomes more exposed to emperor Agamemnon and victorious Achilles, and with the help of Trojan Horse tactics, it gets easier to conquer and take control of the city. As a consequence, how invaluable it is to devote someone's life for the other was answered unquestionably. Whereas some sources claim that Patroclus is older than Achilles, some other sources claim that Patroclus is *eromenos* "an adolescent boy who is the passive (or 'receptive', 'subordinate') partner in a homosexual relationship (usually between males)" and Achilles is *erastes* who is the older and active partner. Even if it is not explicitly described what type of relationship they have with each other, David Halperin comments on it as:

"Homer, to be sure, does not portray Achilles and Patroclus as lovers (although some Classical Athenians thought he implied as much (Aeschylus fragments 135, 136 Radt; Plato Symposium 179e-

180b; Aeschines Against Timarchus 133, 141–50)), but he also did little to rule out such an interpretation.” (Halperin 2006, p. 341)

Patroclus sacrificing himself to honour and protect his affection towards Achilles shows how essential to let his love survive, keep him alive in sake of laying his own neck on the block. Their relationship is the proof of pure admiration and self-devotion at the risk of getting damaged and being killed if necessary. Furthermore, Achilles's fury after finding out that Patroclus was killed by Hector can be interpreted as a reflection of the feelings Achilles harbours for Patroclus. Achilles's sorrow is quite correlatable since “these feelings are not intensely personal but also universally recognized across societies and cultures” (Kincal, 2024, p. 347). Grief here becomes not only a feeling of sorrow after the passing of a fellow soldier but manifests itself as an expression towards a more intimate relationship.

After many centuries this epic poem was produced, one can see the similarities between Homer's *Iliad* and Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* in terms of the homosexual relationship and how one defends and takes action for his same sex love interest. One of the characters in the novel, Carlo Piero Guercio is an Italian man who was raised as a Catholic in his youth but actually has never been interested in women to have such a romantic relationship, whose reason is not clear as there is not plenty of information about his personal history and development. But the reader can see that he is an introvert person, unlike Patroclus, and has never had a chance to declare his love for fear of being alienated by the society, yet so interestingly he appears in the chapters titled “la'omosessuale” (Deniz, 2015, p. 31). He describes himself as;

“I am like spy who has signed a covenant of perpetual secrecy, I am like someone who is the only person in the world that knows the truth and yet is forbidden to utter it. And this truth weighs more than the universe, so that I am like Atlas bowed down forever beneath a burden that cracks the bones and solidifies the blood. There is no air in this world that I am fated to inhabit, I am a plant suffocated by lack of air and light, I have had my roots clipped and my leaves painted with poison. I am exploding with the fire of love and there is no one to accept it or nourish it. I am a foreigner within my own nation, an alien in my own race, I am as detested as cancer when I am as purely flesh as any priest or doctor.” (de Bernieres, 1995, p. 27)

Carlo joins the army thinking it is a preferable place to find a suitable lover, escape the mundanely restricting social order, and cope with his inner conflicts, meeting Francesco there. In fact, Francesco is portrayed as a married and religious person in the novel; Carlo approaches and treats Francesco as a brother in harsh war zones. No one around them becomes suspicious or judges with any biased actions; moreover, Carlo never reveals his emotions for Francesco. The reader only witnesses Carlo's inner conflict about coming out to Francesco. Likewise, it can be seen that this situation has an undeniable effect on Carlo's psychology. Since social restriction proposes a visible limitation for Carlo to express his feelings, this situation becomes a psychological burden.

According to Carlo, the army is the place where ‘regardless of the matter of sex, soldiers grow to love each other; and, regardless of the matter of sex, this is a love without parallel in civil life’ (de Bernieres, 1995, p. 38). When it comes to war, they are thought of as “expendables” for a secret mission to make the war break out with Greeks. They survive with the help of clothes on them, but for Carlo, it is worth dying next to Francesco. Yet on another mission against Albanians, Francesco is hit and dies in the arms of Carlo. He joins Francesco's funeral and buries his love and secret into the ground with him.

Later on, Carlo is sent to Greece and joins Captain Antonio Corelli's Acqui Division on the Greek island Cephalonia. Instead of behaving as the invaders, Captain and his soldiers adore the island and

think of it as a place in heaven. They have already created a music group called La Scala, all together they sing and sometimes give concerts to Italian soldiers and local people. In time, Carlo becomes a part of them and realizes how kindly and peacefully Corelli behaves towards everybody. At the same time, Carlo is aware of the fact that the Captain falls in love with Pelagia, and again Carlo has to face an unrequited love just like he had with Francesco; Carlo now must suppress his feelings for Corelli again.

While this heavy burden gets deeper every day because of the same restrictive psychological mood he experienced when he was with Francesco, one can empathize with the diary which Carlo has kept and later will have been found by Pelagia through the end of the novel. In 1945, after making the decision of ceasing fire between Italians and Germans, the Acqui Division falls into the trap, is derailed by the German troops and the whole squad is executed by a firing squad. At that very moment, Carlo, without any hesitation, puts himself in front of Captain Antonio Corelli and shields him in order not to let him get killed.

Parallels can be found between the sacrifice of Carlo to defend the Captain and Patroclus' situation. Both Carlo and Patroclus are portrayed as devoted individuals even at the expense of limiting their true feelings toward Corelli and Achilles respectively. Also, both are socially and psychologically restricted by the normative frame of the society and heteronormative culture, thereby contributing to the mytheme of the sacrificial. This mytheme, which can be described as a covert homosexual individual sacrificing himself, from Homer's *Iliad* shows total devotion of someone who is capable of surrendering one's soul and even venturing to die if needed. These incidents from different literary works are not proof of panache moves made by characters; on the contrary, they are the moves which are proof of the pureness of their feelings, total devotion, and exorable actions.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Patroclus, who appears in *The Iliad*, and Carlo, a soldier in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, are two fictional characters who existed in different periods of time and across literary works of different cultures. They may have distinctive paths in terms of living their lives and loves, but in the end, both of them experience the struggles in which they are able to demonstrate how loyal they are. Loyalty, as a concept, becomes a motif in both stories when examined from a queer perspective. It can be said that loyalty becomes a reflection of homoerotic relationship along with self-sacrifice.

Since the setting in both literary works dwell on a war atmosphere, glory, or *kleos*, is a central theme to both *The Iliad* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. Therefore, characters that belong to the military display according actions in order to glorify both their nations and their individual endeavours. But at this point, it can be discussed that *kleos* is not only one's actions on the battlefield but also their behaviour.

Even if Patroclus and Carlo lose their lives, they create chances for Achilles and Antonio to continue living, hence displaying a very strong sense of devotion. The sorrow they feel is two-fold: while they feel the sorrow of not reifying their affection to their significant others, both also have to face a fatal turn in their stories. Moreover, the desire to help the person they feel affection for stems from their devotion; thus, it can be said that desire is stemming from devotion. A quite stern feeling like desire is expressed to be rooting from an even stronger sense of devotion. Love is the extreme point among the feelings and the most sacred, but one side sometimes needs to sacrifice the most valuable thing in this world, their life.

“When we look for antiquity in [*Captian Corelli's Mandolin*], we don't see the *Other* staring back at us. Instead of contradiction and paradox, we find a familiar love story told in romantic discourse” (Jusdanis, 2021). Indeed, the same motivation to protect another person and facing death is present in de Bernieres's novel, thus crystallising the fact that both narratives depend on a similar structure relating to the complexity of love. As Kristeva suggests, the relationship between textural surfaces becomes clearer when the motives and actions of characters are analysed as well as the pathway of the narration. What's more, it can also be argued that the intersexual behaviour seen in Patroclus and Carlo pave the way to the intertextuality between *The Iliad* and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. From this moment on, neither *The Iliad* nor *The Mandolin* are estranged works to each other.

4. STATEMENTS

4.1. Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

4.2. Contributions

Each author contributed all the study equally.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

There is no need for ethical approval as there is no human or animal subject.

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