

## The Fallacy of the “Buddy Construction” on Ancient Heroic Duos

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In this paper, I seek to examine three ancient literary couples to discover the nature of their relationships. Specifically, I will argue that Enkidu and Gilgamesh, David and Jonathan, and Achilles and Patroclus each participated in a relationship that went beyond the trope of heroic friendship. I will also examine how previous scholars portrayed these men in an attempt to remove homoeroticism from their mythologies.

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The trope of the devoted male hero and sidekick pair spans from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to Batman and Robin. A question that emerges is what exactly is the nature of these relationships; are they “just friends” or is there something more? The ancient Achilles and Patroclus duo has endured debate since the classical period. Homer’s work itself presents an ambiguous view of the relationship, prompting these debates. Past scholarship has tried to assert that the two men were just “buddies,” simply close friends without any romantic or sexual attachment. This effort to heterosexualize mythical characters is paralleled in other works. The biblical David and Jonathan are similarly portrayed in an ambiguous way. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* provides a slightly more obvious sexual overtone to the relationship between Gilgamesh and his pal Enkidu, but they, too, are argued about in scholarship. These three stories share many parallels that indicate they all follow an ancient pattern for heroes and companions. Each of these duos represent a male homoerotic attachment that is separate and more intimate than what the heroes experience with women. In this paper, I will attempt to argue that these pairs were not “just friends” but were rather examples of extremely intimate homoeroticism. There will also be an examination of previous scholarship that has tried to argue away this closeness through the “buddy construction,” and possible reasons as to why this has occurred.

First, it is important to define terms. John Boswell notes that there are blurred linguistic lines in ancient Greek between the terms for “friend” and “lover.” This shows that the Greeks seemed to have less of a dichotomy between what today is considered “heterosexual” and “homosexual.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, these terms should not be applied to these heroic couples. Instead, homoeroticism better characterizes the relationships between these men. In the context of this paper, homoeroticism will be defined as a relationship based on love and intimacy, with a possible sexual component. This term is better suited than “homosexual,” which would place the emphasis on sexual acts, or “homosociality,” which can remove any connotation of sexuality altogether, and just reference the preference for male company.<sup>2</sup> Homoeroticism in this context will be the best term, because there are no unequivocal, uncontested sexual acts that occur in any of the three texts. However, as will be argued, there is intense intimacy and possible sexual contact.

David and Jonathan’s relationship is iterated in the two books of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible. Jonathan is the heir of the current king, Saul, but it is David, chosen by God, who takes the

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<sup>1</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 47.

<sup>2</sup> Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*. Translated by Kirsi Stjerna, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998): 17.

throne. The two books illustrate the rise of David as the successor of Saul.<sup>3</sup> A number of passages point to a homoerotic relationship between David and Jonathan. Their relationship is formalized as a "covenant," which Jonathan made with David "because he loved him as himself" (1 Sam 18:3). At this point he undresses in front of David, giving David his robe, tunic, sword and belt (1 Sam 18:4). When Saul plans to kill David, "Jonathan was very fond of David and warned him" (1 Sam 19:1-2), thereby betraying his own father's trust in order to save David. Later, Jonathan says, "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?" to which David replies, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" (1 Sam 20:9-10). This passage shows that Jonathan would risk retribution from his father in order to protect David. This speaks to how much Jonathan cared about David. Others recognize the closeness of their relationship. David states to Jonathan, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes" (1 Sam 20:3). Saul's reaction to the men's relationship provides compelling evidence for homoeroticism. Saul became angry with Jonathan for protecting David, and stated, "I know you have chosen the son of Jesse, which is a disgrace to yourself and the nakedness of your mother!" (1 Sam 20:30, tras. Nissinen). Martti Nissinen argues that this passage is indicative of homoeroticism. He states that "choosing" in this context points to a permanent choice in a continuing relationship with David.<sup>4</sup> "Nakedness" indicates a "negative sexual nuance" that indicates that Saul saw indecency in Jonathan's and David's relationship.<sup>5</sup> If the men had simply been involved in a simple friendship, Saul should not have had a reason to see the relationship as a "disgrace."

A number of passages also parallel biblical depictions of male-female romantic pairs. After first meeting, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (1 Sam. 18:1). As noted in Zehnder's summary of Schroer's and Staubli's arguments, this language is paralleled in Song 1:7 and 3:1-4 to describe a woman's attachment to her lover.<sup>6</sup> The phrase "very fond of" (1 Sam 19:1) that describes Jonathan's feelings for David are used in other contexts to indicate a man's sexual desire for a woman.<sup>7</sup> Jonathan inviting David to come to a field with him (1 Sam 20:11) is almost verbatim of a passage in Song 7 where a woman asks her lover to join her.<sup>8</sup> Jonathan also swears an oath to protect David, which is reflected by romantic couples swearing oaths in Song 2 and 8.<sup>9</sup> Jonathan is paralleled with David's wife Michal when they both warn David separately about Saul's plans to murder him (1 Sam 19:1, 1 Sam 19:11). In 1 Sam. 20:41 the relationship takes on a physical component and the two men kiss. Nissinen argues that this passage shows that David's relationship was stronger with Jonathan than it was with his wives. In his farewell to Jonathan, the men weep together and kiss (1 Sam 20:41-42), "unlike the parting from his wife."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 55.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Zehnder, "Observations of the Relationship Between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007): 138.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 55.

David's lamentation over Jonathan's death is particularly indicative of their intimate relationship. Upon hearing of Jonathan's death, David and his men "took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted" (2 Sam 1:11-12). David immediately gets revenge for Jonathan by killing the soldier who had killed Jonathan (2 Sam 1:15). David speaks a lament over the deaths of both Saul and Jonathan, together and separately in their own stanza. But he devotes a number of lines to his own grief over Jonathan. Saul does not receive such treatment. Rather, in the stanza devoted to him alone, David implores the women of Israel to "weep for Saul," adding no personal feeling to the lamentation (2 Sam 1:24). In David's stanza to Jonathan, he says, "I grieve for you," indicating his personal relationship with Jonathan. Though Saul had tried to murder David, he had also referred to David as his son and gave him his daughter to marry (1 Sam 24:16, 1 Sam 18:18). That David distances himself from grieving over Saul but personally grieves for Jonathan indicates the closeness of their relationship. David more overtly states this closeness: "you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2 Sam 1:26). Again, David and Jonathan's relationship is compared to male-female relationships. However, David's relationship with Jonathan was "more wonderful," more intimate, more meaningful, than his relationship with women.

This lamentation has been greatly contested in scholarship. Zehnder says that David referring to Jonathan's love as "more wonderful than that of women" is poetic exaggeration.<sup>11</sup> Zehnder does not provide evidence that this should be read as hyperbole, only states that it is a possible reading. Zehnder also proposes, reading this phrase as hyperbole, that it was used in order to separate his relationship with Jonathan from women, specifically to point out how it is non-sexual.<sup>12</sup> Even if this is to be read as hyperbole, why would the comparison be to women? To show how close they were in comparison to his other relationships, would it not have been more effective to compare Jonathan with other men? The only women David encountered to this point were his brides. Therefore, if he is trying to create an analogy where Jonathan is superior in a completely non-erotic way, it would be more effective to compare Jonathan to other men. Instead, he compares him to women, ones with whom he had sexual relationships. David Halperin argues that this passage exists to show that the relationship specifically was not sexual, and even still it surpassed David's relationship with women.<sup>13</sup> However, as seen above, their relationship paralleled biblical male-female relationships. If this was paralleled, could physical aspects of the relationship also be paralleled? There is no specific passages that indicate physical contact between David and his wives, but David and Jonathan embrace and kiss (1 Sam 20:41-42). Therefore, it is possible to read this passage as Jonathan providing the same love to David as his wives did, only "more wonderful." Saul Olyan describes Steven McKenzie's argument that this passage cannot have sexual overtones because Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 forbid homosexual contact, and would therefore be contradicted if this passage indeed had homoerotic connotations.<sup>14</sup> Olyan provides a counter argument that those passages do not prohibit all forms

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<sup>11</sup> Zehnder, "Observations," 140.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>13</sup> David M. Halperin, "Heroes and their Pals," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, (New York: Routledge, 1990): 83.

<sup>14</sup> Saul M. Olyan, "Surpassing the Love of Women: Another Look at 2 Samuel 1:26 and the Relationship of David and Jonathan," in *Social Inequality in the World of the Text: the Significance of Ritual and Social Distinctions in the Hebrew Bible* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 96.

of same-sex sexual contact, but rather just anal intercourse.<sup>15</sup> He also notes that these passages should not be applied to the story of David and Jonathan, because it is likely that Leviticus was written after Samuel.<sup>16</sup>

A second story that represents the controversy of ancient homoeroticism is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The story follows the demi-god Gilgamesh, king of Uruk. To remedy his despotic and abusive behavior, the gods created Enkidu as a distraction to keep him from harming his people. In their adventures, Enkidu is killed by the gods, and the second half of the epic deals with Gilgamesh's grief and quest for immortality.<sup>17</sup> In Foster's translation, he states that Gilgamesh is represented from the beginning as not only being sexually interested in women: "Gilgamesh does not leave a son to his father [or] a girl to her mother" (Tablet I). Jerrold Cooper illustrates that the argument this quote indicates, is that Gilgamesh oppresses the people of Uruk sexually, both males and females.<sup>18</sup> Enkidu was constructed in a feminine, more wifely role; he "had a full head of hair like a woman" (Tablet I). Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, entreats female deities to help Enkidu protect her son (Tablet III). This connects him again to women. Enkidu is further connected to Ninsun when both act to protect Gilgamesh. In tablet III, Ninsun laments Gilgamesh's "restless heart" that puts him into danger. She gives Enkidu the responsibility to protect Gilgamesh (Tablet III). In tablet IV, Enkidu attempts to stop Gilgamesh from entering the forest where the monster Humbaba is, because he does not want to put Gilgamesh in danger. These passages parallel each other and connect Enkidu to the protective feminine role. Enkidu also performs domestic duties, like preparing the sleeping area for Gilgamesh, that place him again into the feminine role (Tablet III). Enkidu's and Gilgamesh's relationship is also specifically referred to in terms of husband and wife. Before meeting Enkidu, Gilgamesh has two dreams. In one, he sees a "meteorite" and "loved it and embraced it as a wife" (Tablet I). In the second it is an axe that he "loved and embraced like a wife" (Tablet I). Ninsun interprets these dreams as being about "a mighty man, a comrade who saves his friend," (Tablet I), which through the story is shown clearly to be Enkidu. In Foster's translation, he states that their relationship "has no sexual basis at all."<sup>19</sup> However, he does not address the meteorite scene. Charles Beye argues that these scenes are indeed to be read as sexual,<sup>20</sup> and it is difficult to read, "embraced like a wife" in any way but sexually. There is a physical aspect to their relationship in the waking world, as well. Upon meeting, the two "kiss and become friends" (Tablet II). Moreover, during their adventure, they often hold hands (Tablet II-IV). Upon his death, Gilgamesh "covered his friend's face like a bride" (Tablet VIII). After which, Gilgamesh tears out his hair and rips his clothes, acting, according to Halperin, like a widow.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Maureen Gallery Kovacs, <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/>, 1998. This translation does not provide line numbers.

<sup>18</sup> Jerrold S Cooper, "Buddies in Babylonia: Gilgamesh, Enkidu and Mesopotamian Homosexuality," in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen*, ed. Tzvi Abusch (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 74.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Foster, "Gilgamesh: Sex, Love and the Ascent of Knowledge," in *Love & Death in the Ancient Near East*, (Guilford: Four Quarters Pub Co, 1987), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Rowan Beye, *Ancient Epic Poetry: Homer, Apollonius, Virgil with a Chapter on the Gilgamesh Poem*, (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2006), 292.

<sup>21</sup> Halperin, *Heroes and their Pals*, 81.

Nissinen argues that the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is much more intimate than any relationships they have with women.<sup>22</sup> In tablet I there is a scene in which Enkidu has graphically described sex with a *ō*harlot*ö* for seven nights. Gilgamesh is also shown to have sexual relations with brides-to-be in Uruk (Tablet I). The goddess Ishtar also proposes him marriage, because she desires his *ö*beauty*ö* and *ö*lusciousness*ö* (Tablet VI). Therefore, the Epic does not shy away from depicting sex, but it does not state that Gilgamesh and Enkidu had any overtly sexual contact apart from in dreams. Nissinen argues that this is due to their relationship being based on intimacy and love rather than sex, as is the case with women, and is therefore not focused on in the text.<sup>23</sup> Gilgamesh treats Enkidu as a spouse, whereas they both just use women for sex. After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh states, *ö*[for] six days and seven nights I mourned over him and would not allow him to be buried*ö* (Tablet X). This timeframe parallels Enkidu's relationship with the prostitute exactly (Tablet I). By using the same wording, the two distinct types of intimacy are highlighted. Any intimate interactions between women and Gilgamesh or Enkidu are based on physical intimacy rather than the emotional intimacy they have with each other.

This emotional closeness between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is also shown in Gilgamesh's reaction to Enkidu's death. Gilgamesh orders an over-the-top monument to be built to Enkidu, with a statue of him where *ö*[Enkidu's] chest will be of lapis lazuli, [his] skin will be of gold*ö* (Tablet VIII). After this, Gilgamesh becomes completely animalistic. He goes into the mountains and wears animal skins as clothes (Tablet IX). In tablet X he states that he had strong love for Enkidu: *ö*Enkidu, whom I love deeply.*ö*

The final ancient duo to be addressed in this paper is Achilles and Patroclus of *The Iliad*. *The Iliad* is an epic Greek poem attributed to Homer, set in the final few weeks of the Trojan War.<sup>24</sup> The homoeroticism between Achilles and Patroclus is constructed throughout the epic. Upon Patroclus's death, Achilles says: *ö*my dear companion has perished, Patroklos, whom I loved beyond all other companions*ö* (Il. 18.80-81). Patroclus is similarly referred to as the most beloved of Achilles throughout the epic. Indeed, Clarke argues that no other person in *The Iliad* is referred to so consistently through his relationship to someone else.<sup>25</sup> This speaks to the intense closeness between the two men. Other characters observe this closeness. Nestor recognizes that Patroclus is the only one who is likely to convince Achilles to rejoin the battle (Il. 11.785-90). Zeus remarks that Hector is doomed after killing Patroclus, because *ö*you have killed [Achilles's] dear friend,*ö* and their bond demands revenge (Il. 17.200-08). The retrieval of Patroclus's body becomes of tantamount importance in Book 17. Menelaus states, *ö*we must make for fallen Patroklos to try if we can carry back to Achilles the body*ö* (Il. 17.120-39), even though it is incredibly dangerous to do so. Apollo had scared off the rest of the Greeks, leaving Menelaus and Aias to rescue the body from Hector, who was still near. The fighting over the body goes into Book 18. Why would his body be so important that it would get more attention than any of the other fallen Greeks? Both the Greeks and Trojans recognize the importance of

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<sup>22</sup> Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> W. M. Clarke, *ö*Achilles and Patroclus in Love,*ö* *Hermes* 106 (1978): 392.

having control of Patroclus's body. Hector had already taken the armour Patroclus was wearing (Il. 18.123), so the monetary and honorary value of the body had been removed. Therefore, what becomes important is Patroclus himself. If he was just another of Achilles' companions or allies, his body should not have caused so much strife. However, the concern over getting the body back to Achilles indicates his and Patroclus's high level of love and caring for each other. Their intimacy is shown before Patroclus's death when Achilles states to Patroclus, "you and I could emerge from the slaughter so that we two alone could break Troy's hallowed coronal" (Il. 16.99-100). Clarke argues that this passage shows "the intensely exclusive relationship of the two heroes."<sup>26</sup> Rather than caring about the rest of the Greeks, Achilles's concern is only for himself and Patroclus to survive. However, once Patroclus is dead, Achilles does not even care about his own survival. His mother warns him that he will die if he kills Hector, to which Achilles replies, "I must die soon then," being completely bent on revenge for his beloved Patroclus (Il. 18.95-100). The death of Patroclus is so devastating to Achilles that the messenger is worried Achilles will kill himself (Il. 18.22-25). After Patroclus's funeral, Achilles cannot sleep for "longing for Patroclus's manliness and strength" (Il. 24.6). Davidson notes that the term used here for "strength" is *menos*. He argues that another translation could be manly courage, or semen.<sup>27</sup> If Homer did in fact intend the latter, that would put the relationship into obvious sexual terms. A second sexual connotation comes from Thetis, Achilles's mother, in Book 24 when she tries to convince Achilles to stop mourning for Patroclus: "how long will you go on eating your heart out in sorrow and lamentation, and remember neither your food nor going to bed? It is a good thing even to lie with a woman in love" (Il. 24.128-31). Clarke interprets this scene as evidence that Achilles and Patroclus were sexually involved. By specifically noting he should sleep with a woman, Thetis is trying to help Achilles move on from Patroclus. If he did choose to sleep with a man, it may only serve to remind Achilles of Patroclus.<sup>28</sup> And indeed, if there had been no sexual contact between Achilles and Patroclus, why would Thetis need to specify gender? If having sex with a man would not cause him any emotional pain, then Thetis would not have needed to specify.

The men are also connected to domestic, marital terms. Patroclus acts domestically around Achilles's camp. As noted by Halperin, Patroclus performs female roles for Achilles; he prepares their food (Il. 19.315-17) and guest beds for visitors (Il. 9.620-21). Patroclus is further compared to the wifely role in Phoenix's story about Meleager and Cleopatra. Meleager's wife's insistence convinces him to go off to battle after other soldiers had tried in vain to convince him (Il. 9.585-596). This story directly parallels Achilles and Patroclus; Greek soldiers try in vain to convince Achilles to rejoin the fighting, but only Patroclus can get through to him (Il. 16.20-45). Indeed, this connection between Cleopatra and Patroclus is paralleled linguistically through their names, which are composed of the same sounds inverted.<sup>29</sup> Although, instead of convincing Achilles to fight, Patroclus convinces Achilles to allow him to fight with his armour. But it still is Patroclus who ultimately causes Achilles to rejoin the fight after his death.

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<sup>26</sup> Clarke, "Achilles and Patroclus," 385.

<sup>27</sup> James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 258.

<sup>28</sup> Clarke, "Achilles and Patroclus," 387.

<sup>29</sup> Davidson, "The Greeks," 259.

The feminine domestic role is not only attributed to Patroclus. Achilles is similarly paralleled with Andromache, wife of Hector. Upon hearing of the death of Hector, Andromache falls to the floor and her beautiful headdress falls (Il. 22.667-70). Achilles similarly falls over Patroclus' death and caught up the grimy dust, and poured it over his head and face; took and tore at his hair with his hands, and defiled it (Il. 18.22-25). Both characters have similar reactions and lose the beauty around their heads. Both Andromache and Achilles lead the lamentations for their respective loves (Il. 24.723, 23.12). Both characters also hold the head of the deceased during the funeral (Il. 24.724, 23.13). This is possibly indicative that Andromache and Achilles performed the same function to Hector and Patroclus.

Part of the controversy surrounding this relationship is that it does not follow the lines of Classical Greek pederasty. Patroclus is the older man, however Achilles acts as the stronger, more dominant partner. Indeed, even ancient philosophers discussed the unusual relationship. In Plato's *Symposium*, Achilles and Patroclus are discussed in terms of pederasty (Plato *Symposium*, 179-181). However, the fact remains that the symposiasts did not doubt whether or not Patroclus and Achilles were involved romantically, rather just what the exact nature of the relationship was. Levin argues that scholars are applying Classical concepts of pederasty back on to Homeric times.<sup>30</sup> However, as noted by Clarke, there seems to have been evidence in *The Odyssey* for pederasty: "Nestor, the Geranian horseman, told Telemachus, godlike Odysseus' dear son, to sleep right there, on a corded bed in the echoing corridor, with spear fighter Peisistratus" (Ody. 397-401).<sup>31</sup> So pederasty was conceivable for *The Odyssey*, also attributed to Homer, why is it inconceivable that it would similarly be present in *The Iliad*? Even if the relationship did not follow pederastic patterns, does that make it less homoerotic? I would argue not. As seen above, multiple examples place Achilles and Patroclus in an intimate, perhaps sexual, relationship. They are also presented as domestic partners. It is, therefore, perhaps more useful to view the relationship through more of a marriage paradigm than a Classical pederastic lens. Either way, the pair is shown to be intimate and devoted to one another. Indeed, Davidson argues that the love between Achilles and Patroclus is central to the plot.<sup>32</sup> The epic ends with the conclusion of Achilles' grief and the end of his revenge over Patroclus. If this were simply a story about war, then Homer would have concluded with the fall of Troy.<sup>33</sup>

Levin also argues that Homeric heroes center around women.<sup>34</sup> He argues that the Trojan War was fought over a woman, and that Achilles initially pulled out of the battle based on Briseis being taken from him. However Book 4 indicates that the men are there not for Helen, but out of friendship with Menelaus, or riches, or honour in battle. It seems that Helen herself is not terribly significant to the majority of the Greeks. Similarly, Achilles refuses to fight on the grounds of a quarrel with Agamemnon. True, this is based on Agamemnon taking Briseis from him. However in doing so, Agamemnon bruised Achilles' honour. Indeed, Achilles states that Agamemnon will "eat [his] heart out in sorrow, that you did no honour to the best of the Achaians" (Il. 1.243-45). What is more, Achilles shows he cares more for Patroclus than he did for Briseis: "I wish

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<sup>30</sup> Saul Levin, "Love and the Hero of the Iliad," *American Philological Association*, 80, 1949: 37-49.

<sup>31</sup> Clarke, *Achilles and Patroclus*, 383.

<sup>32</sup> Davidson, "The Greeks," 257.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Levin, "Love and the Hero," 44.

Artemis had killed her beside the ships with an arrow on that day when I destroyed Lyrnessos and took her. For thus not all these too many Achaians would have bitten the dust, by enemy handsö (Il. 19. 59-62). He would rather have had Briseis killed than Patroclus die.

These three couples all have similar stories. One man is the dominant hero (David, Gilgamesh, and Achilles) who has a strong, but lesser, companion (Jonathan, Enkidu, Patroclus). Each of these main heroes has a connection with the Gods; David is God's anointed one, while Gilgamesh and Achilles both have one divine parent. Each hero loses his sidekick and provides a moving lament, each tearing their hair and wailing for their lost friend. As shown above, there is clear evidence for homoeroticism in each of the stories. Their stories also share the scholarly avoidance of interpreting them as homoerotic. For what reason? I argue that it is in an effort to protect the modern masculine hero trope. Each of these heroes is shown to be a gifted warrior and leader. The masculine overcompensation thesis asserts that men react to masculinity threats with extreme demonstrations of masculinity.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps having these masculine war heroes in a homoerotic setting is threatening to the masculine ideal; indeed, the partners are paralleled with wives in each story. Having a pair, or at least one half of a heroic duo, threatens the modern masculinity. Robb Willer notes that this includes aspects of competitiveness, physical strength and aggression, as well as heterosexuality and lack of feminine traits.<sup>36</sup> An example of this overcompensation is clear in the film *Troy*. Its depiction of *The Iliad* makes Patroclus into Achilles' cousin, thereby removing any homoeroticism, but also completely changing what the text shows.<sup>37</sup> However, the film's audience seems to be young males, who could be threatened by their heroes being depicted in a way that contradicts the masculine hegemony. Also to consider is the concept that homosexual males cannot possibly be soldiers. As late as 1994 a concept for a "Gay Bomb" was being developed by the United States air force Wright Laboratory. The concept was to create a chemical that would cause male soldiers to become attracted to each other in the field, thereby making it impossible to fight.<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, it would be impossible to view Achilles, Gilgamesh, David or their partners as anything but completely heterosexual, because clearly gay men cannot fight. Indeed, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was only repealed in the United States military in 2010.<sup>39</sup> From this perspective it is easy to see why scholars in the twentieth century would be reluctant to view these relationships as homo-anything.

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<sup>35</sup> Robb Willer et al, "Overdoing Gender: A Test of the Masculine Overcompensation Thesis," *American Journal of Sociology* 118, 2013: 168.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 983.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Petersen, *Troy*, perf. by Brad Pitt, Eric Bana, Orlando Bloom, Peter O'Toole, and Diane Kruger, Warner Bros., 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Rice, "Band of Lovers," *Advocate* 990, 2007: 66.

<sup>39</sup> Open Congress, "H.R. 2965- Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010," <http://www.opencongress.org/bill/hr2965-111/show>.



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