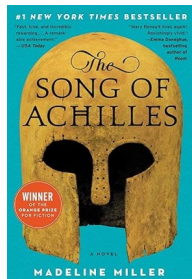




Lambda Sci-Fi
DC Area Gaylaxians



The Song of Achilles
By Madeline Miller
Discussed August 2014

Discussion Questions

1. Based on what you've previously read (or seen at the movies), how does Miller's version of the Trojan War match your own perceptions of the legend?
2. Miller includes several interesting interpretations (or changes) to Homer's story:
 - Achilles is not a battle-hardened killer before he goes to Troy. (He's only 16; and the death/sacrifice of Iphigenia is "the first death he had ever witnessed".)
 - Achilles allows Agamemnon to take Briseus so that he can kill Agamemnon when he rapes her (thus "dishonoring" Achilles).
 - Patroclus is not wearing armor when Hector kills him, so Hector knows that he's not killing Achilles.
 - Odysseus blames Achilles for the fact that the siege of Troy has lasted 10 years. ("Why is Hector not dead? ...In the last ten years, you could have killed him a thousand times over. Yet you have not.")

How did these interpretations affect your opinion or enjoyment of the story?

3. The name "Achilles" can be interpreted as "the embodiment of the grief" (akhos) "of the people" (laos); and the name Patroclus means "glory of the father". Based on this etymology, what do you think about Miller's depictions of these two characters?
4. Like Homer, Miller has chosen to add Fantasy elements to her story. How effectively did she do this? How did this affect your enjoyment of the story?
5. Unlike Homer, Miller does not bring major Greek deities (such as Artemis, Aphrodite, Zeus, Hera, Athena) "on stage". With the exception of two brief appearances by Apollo (in Chapters

30 and 32), only “minor” supernatural entities appear “on stage” in the story: Thetis, the river Scamander, sea nymphs, Chiron the Centaur, etc. What is your opinion of this?

6. Did you enjoy following the development of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus? Does Miller’s interpretation seem reasonable or realistic to you?
7. Several characters (Thetis, Odysseus, Briseus, Deidameia) comment on the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Even Achilles and Patroclus themselves reflect on the nature of their relationship. What do their comments seem to indicate about “ancient Greek” opinions about homosexuality?
8. What is your opinion of the relationship between the goddess Thetis and her son Achilles? The relationship between Thetis and Patroclus? The relationship between Thetis and Neoptolemus/Pyrhus (Achilles’s son)?
9. Patroclus is killed in Chapter 30; but his spirit continues as the first-person narrator of the story for 3 more chapters. Did this affect your enjoyment of the story?

Original Sources:

- *The Iliad* (Homer)
 - trans. by Robert Fagles (unrhymed verse, my favorite)
 - trans. by Richard Lattimore, W.H.D. Rouse, or Robert Fitzgerald (more traditional prose translations)
- *The Posthomerica* aka *The Fall of Troy* (Quintus Smyrnaeus) – takes up the story where Homer’s *Iliad* left off (the death of Paris, the death of Achilles, the Trojan Horse, and the fall of Troy)

Drama:

- *Agamemnon* (Aeschylus) – return of Agamemnon to Argos (Mycenae) after the fall of Troy, where he is killed by his wife Clytemnestra (half-sister of Helen)
- *Ajax* (Sophocles) – events leading to the suicide of Ajax after the fall of Troy
- *Philoctetes* (Sophocles) – Odysseus & Neoptolemus (son of Achilles) bring the disabled Philoctetes (who possesses Hercules’s bow) to Troy to guarantee the city’s fall per prophecy
- *The Trojan Women* (Euripides) – the fates of the women of Troy after its fall
- *Andromache* (Euripides) – 10 years after the fall of Troy, Hector’s widow is the slave of Neoptolemus (son of Achilles)
- *Hecuba* (Euripides) – the queen of Troy as a Greek captive after the fall of the city
- *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Euripides) – Agamemnon’s daughter secretly saved by Artemis from sacrifice in Aulis
- *Helen* (Euripides) – Helen was never actually in Troy (her mystical image was carried off to Troy by Paris); her adventures in Egypt
- *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Euripides) – sacrifice of Agamemnon’s daughter before the Greek fleet sails to Troy
- *Troilus and Cressida* (Shakespeare) – includes rather scandalous references to the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus

Novels:

- *Black Ships Before Troy* (Rosemary Sutcliff)
- *Black Ships* (Jo Graham)
- *Troy: Fall of Kings*, *Troy: Lord of the Silver Bow*, *Troy: Shield of Thunder* (David Gemmell)
- *The Firebrand* (Marion Zimmer Bradley)
- *Troy* (Adèle Geras)

Films:

- *Helen of Troy* (1956) – directed by Robert Wise; starring Rossana Podestà (Helen) and Jacques Sernas (Paris); a unique death for Paris.
- *Troy* (2004) – directed by Wolfgang Petersen; starring Brad Pitt (Achilles), Orlando Bloom (Paris), Eric Bana (Hector), Peter O'Toole (Priam), Sean Bean (Odysseus); Patroclus as “the cousin and student of Achilles” (not his lover)