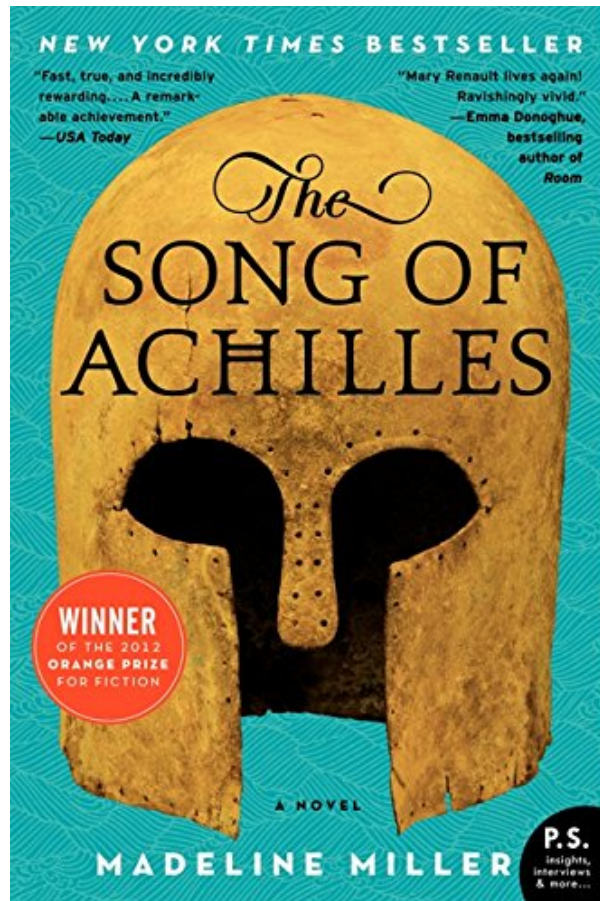
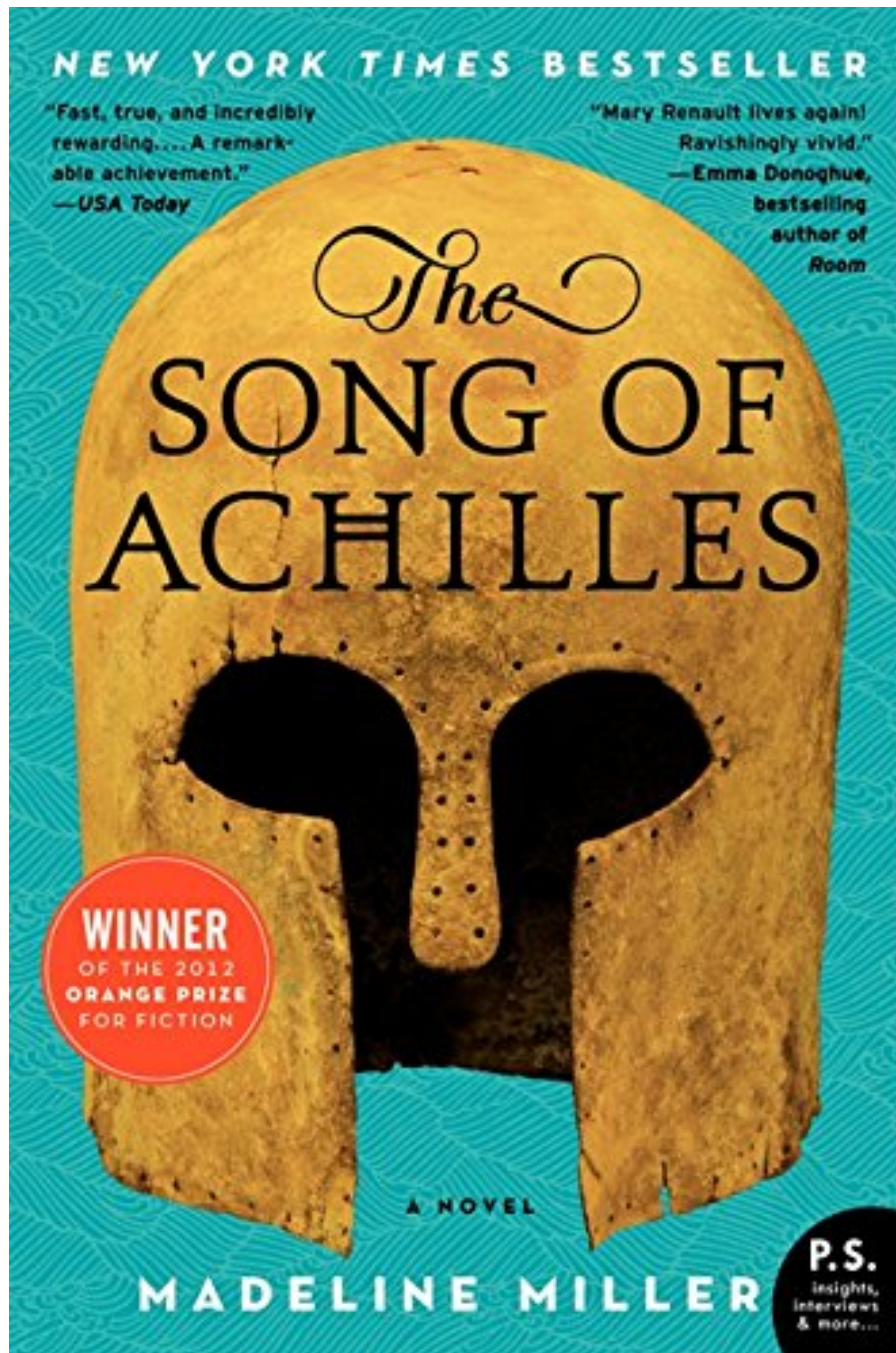


THE SONG OF ACHILLES: A NOVEL BY MADELINE MILLER



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Amazon.com Review

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Gregory Maguire: Ms. Miller, you write with the confidence of the zealously inspired, taking as your material one of the great foundation texts of world literature. In three millennia, *The Iliad* has garnered somewhat wider attention than *The Wizard of Oz*, with which I have played, so I have to ask: where do you get the noive? How did you come to dare to take on such a daunting task, and for your first book?

Madeline Miller: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and in my case it was just dangerous enough to get me started. If I had stopped to ponder, I think I might have been too intimidated. But it helped that Patroclus is such an underdog—giving him voice felt like standing up for him. I had been intensely frustrated by a number of articles that kept side-stepping the love between him and Achilles, which to me felt so obviously at the story's heart. So I wanted to set the record straight, as I saw it.

Maguire: The novel tells the story of the rise, fall and immortalization of the golden Achilles. You approach his famous story from a sideline, that of Patroclus, his bosom companion and lover. Was it hard to keep the mighty arc of legend from overwhelming shadowy Patroclus, and did you write more of him than you ended

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Maguire: Having glancingly heard of this legend before, I knew more or less how it would end. I had no idea how you might handle the loss of perspective and point of view when tragedy would inevitably strike. You managed to narrate an almost impossible transition from life into myth in part, I think, by your instinctual use of a combination of present and past tense, to say nothing of a masterly combining of authorial and first person observations. How many slaughtered bulls did you sacrifice, and on whose altar, to deserve the talent to risk such dangerous technique?

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“You don’t need to be familiar with Homer’s *The Iliad* (or Brad Pitt’s *Troy*, for that matter) to find Madeline Miller’s *The Song of Achilles* spellbinding....her explorations of ego, grief, and love’s many permutations are both familiar and new....[A] timeless love story.” (O magazine)

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“A modern take on *The Iliad*, full of love and feats of glory and told in an open, lyric, loose-limbed fashion that should appeal to many readers.... Next up from Miller—the story of Circe...historical fiction fans, get in on the ground floor.” (Library Journal)

“I loved this book. The language was timeless, the historical details were slipped in perfectly. I hope *SONG OF ACHILLES* becomes part of the high school summer reading lists alongside *PENELOPIAD*.” (Helen Simonson, bestselling author of *MAJOR PETTIGREW’S LAST STAND*)

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They are trained by the centaur Chiron in the arts of war and medicine, but when word comes that Helen of Sparta has been kidnapped, all the heroes of Greece are called upon to lay siege to Troy in her name. Seduced by the promise of a glorious destiny, Achilles joins their cause, and torn between love and fear for his friend, Patroclus follows. Little do they know that the cruel Fates will test them both as never before and demand a terrible sacrifice.

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- Binding: Paperback
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Most helpful customer reviews

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Aptly titled, engaging

By Priya D

It's an engaging read, recommended to those interested in Greek or Trojan mythology. That being said, there are countless interpretations of the Iliad, and it may be unfair to expect it to do something that hasn't been done before. It's not a retelling. It rarely strays from the original story, but will be a good introduction to the myth.

What I didn't like: Flitting tenses are annoying, but that's just me. Patroclus's narration is often maudlin and he seems infatuated with Achilles and absurdly unaware of his own potential, until the moment it's revealed to us (surprise!) that Patroclus is the best of the Myrmidons. Patroclus's descriptions of Achilles are garish and repetitive, and the love scenes are sometimes laughably awkward. At some of the key moments, the purple prose strives to invoke a reaction and we lose the profound simplicity such scenes demand.

What I liked: The Song of Achilles is aptly titled and looks at Achilles in all his glory and terror with an unbiased honesty, that only a lover can show. The story and the point of view turns the hero or the villain, as he's bound to be either extreme in most interpretations of the myth, into a person. The characters of this book are charmingly fleshed out, my favourites are Odysseus, Thetis and Briseis. The floweriness of Patroclus's descriptions doesn't extend to the dialogue, which has a good flow and gives each character his distinct voice.

The all encompassing quality of this book makes it special. It strings together countless stories of all the men of Greece and Ilium and all the Olympian gods, capturing the essence of an epic. It's clear that a lot of research went into this book, and that makes the absence of information dumps all the better.

From the very first page, beginning with Patroclus's first person narration, I wondered what would happen after he died. It would be weird if the narrative just stopped after Hector killed Patroclus and the book ended with Hector still alive. No book about Achilles would skip his final revenge. And a shift in point of view so close to the end would be too jarring. So what Miller's done is use a risky literary device and let the unburied spirit of Patroclus shadow the rest of the war, invisibly watching Achilles's death and the fall of Troy. It sounds hard to pull off, and seems too contrived at first, but the ghost-narration is wonderfully executed and the book ends on an impossibly happy note.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Miller cheats and squanders a promising story

By Ben Sheppard

One star because I didn't finish. Spoiler alerts for a 2,500 year old story.

The entire draw of this book was that it would be told from the perspective of a minor character, one who (as anyone with even a cursory knowledge of The Iliad knows) dies midway through the story. It wasn't the kind of perspective you would expect for a retelling of the story of the siege of Troy, which is why I picked the book up.

Unfortunately, when the viewpoint character, Patroclus, dies, he doesn't actually die. He comes back as a ghost and watches the rest of the events of the Iliad unfold. To me, this defeated the entire purpose of reading the book in the first place. I was expecting Patroclus to die, and I was expecting the story to be structured accordingly. Telling the story from the viewpoint of Patroclus -- limited by his position in the story and by his death -- made the entire endeavor interesting. It put a constraint in place that should have forced the

author to make more interesting choices in how she told the story. As it is, *The Song of Achilles* just becomes yet another retelling of Homer's story. Once I realized what should have been the end of Patroclus' story, I quit reading, which for me means an automatic one star review.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

The Song of Achilles: Fate, Fury, and Friendship Make For A Rave Review

By Jillian Quinn

Originally posted on my blog at <https://rantandraveaboutbooks.com/2016/07/29/the-song-of-achilles-fate-fury-and-friendship-make-for-a-rave-review/>

First, I think it's important to mention that *The Iliad* is my favorite book, so my connection to the characters and this story is much deeper than most. I read *The Iliad* in 2001 and have since been obsessed with all things Greek mythology as well as anything related to the Trojan War. I've read *The Iliad* a total of six times in its entirety, so when I read *The Song of Achilles*, a work of historical fiction based on the book, I was completely blow away. I can't remember the last time I stared at the last page of a novel and felt that satisfied.

I recently wrote a post about *The Iliad* if you want to learn more about the original and the modern-day spin I added to it. We read *The Song of Achilles* as our Book of the Month for Hype or Like Friday, a Goodreads group I co-created with Britt and Larkin, and I'm looking forward to reading the reviews. If you're a member of the group or have reviewed this book in the past, feel free to share the link to your review in the comments.

I often switch up my review style, and I've decided to break the novel into 5 categories: Writing, Characters, Plot, Historical Accuracy, and Themes.

Note: If you haven't read *The Iliad* or are unaware of the history/mythology surrounding the Trojan War, then consider this your warning that there are major spoilers below that explain both *The Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles* in great detail.

The Writing...

Madeline Miller's prose is so beautiful I was instantly drawn into this novel from the first page. It's really brilliant, and that's a word I've only used to describe Stephen King's prose, so that actually means something to me in terms of quality. I'm impressed with very few authors' writing style, which made this book unputdownable for me.

I didn't realize until after I read the novel that Miller studied and teaches classic literature, and it really shines through. *The Song of Achilles* is so well written I couldn't believe this was her first novel. I avoided this one for a while because I was afraid it couldn't live up to my favorite book. I never thought a re-telling could do Homer justice, but this book knocked it out of the park.

The Characters...

Choosing Patroclus as the narrator of this story was a BRILLIANT idea! My first thought was how can Patroclus narrate from first person POV when his death is what drives Achilles to kill Hector in a fit of rage, knowing it will lead to his own death? I don't think this counts as a spoiler considering *The Iliad* is over three thousand years old and most people know the story of Achilles by now. And that's not even the most important aspect of this book.

I've always loved Patroclus and Achilles together. They are *The Iliad*, at least they are for me. Homer never

mentions they're lovers in his work, but some historians believe the reason Achilles was so distraught over Patroclus' death was because they were in a relationship. His pain would've been real whether they were friends or lovers. Who wouldn't mourn the loss of their best friend, someone they grew up with? But that's the spin Miller takes on my favorite classic that really intrigued me.

My other favorite character is Briseis, who we later meet during the Trojan War when King Agamemnon holds her captive. The Iliad starts off with Achilles fighting with Agamemnon over Briseis. It plays out almost the same but a bit different in this book. Regardless of the representation, we still get the same gist that the trio spent years living together, which is another part of The Iliad and this book I really liked.

"She is in Agamemnon's custody, but she is Achilles' prize still. To violate her is a violation of Achilles himself, the gravest insult to his honor. Achilles could kill him for it, and even Menelaus would call it fair."

Achilles is such a tough, strong-willed character that overpowers Patroclus' more sensitive side, but the two of them work so well together. When Achilles is about to go off the rails, it's always Patroclus that can rein him in.

The Plot...

Patroclus was a prince, exiled and sent to live at King Peleus' court. Achilles' father wasn't keen on Patroclus and Achilles' friendship because he was no longer a prince, but Achilles chose him and that was all that mattered. Everyone listened to what the prince said, and when Achilles speaks in the book, I really felt the power behind his words. His arrogance and air of entitlement can be an issue with some readers, but I see his character from a completely different perspective than most.

I like that Miller starts off with Patroclus at age five, drawing you into the world of Achilles, the handsome demi-god with skills that would've made every Greek jealous except Patroclus. He admired Achilles, loved him from a distance for years until one day they kissed and the rest is history.

When Helen of Sparta, later known as Helen of Troy, is allegedly kidnapped and taken to Troy this prompts Achilles' need to fight. In The Iliad, Aphrodite promises Paris, Prince of Troy, a beautiful woman, and Helen was considered one of the most beautiful women of that time. This is not shown in the novel, but I thought I'd mention it to give you some context. The entire war and story is set in motion by Helen and Paris' relationship that angers her husband Menelaus, who convinces his brother King Agamemnon to go to war.

"Yet this beautiful spear had been fashioned not in bitterness, but love. Its shape would fit no one's hand but Achilles', and its heft could suit no one's strength but his. And though the point was keen and deadly, the wood itself slipped under our fingers like the slender oiled strut of a lyre."

Slight Confession: I shed a few tears at Patroclus' death. I cry every time I read The Iliad because it's so powerful and emotionally draining to read and feel Achilles' pain over his friend, and in this story, his lover. I won't spoil the ending for you, but I will say that I absolutely loved the conclusion to Patroclus and Achilles' story.

The Historical Accuracy...

Everything from Odysseus' search for Achilles in a foreign court to the divine intervention from the gods was completely accurate. We see Apollo help Paris shoot the arrow that leads to Achilles' death. He tells him that Achilles might be part god but he's also man and even gods can be killed. I was afraid this book would take liberties with history. I was thoroughly pleased that did not happen here. While some things were not exactly the same, it was spot on for the most part, which made me smile every time I read another part that

lived up to what I'd hoped. I had so many expectations before I opened the book on my Kindle, and I'm thrilled that I can rave over *The Song of Achilles* for all the right reasons.

The Themes...

There are five recurring themes in *The Iliad* that are also presented in this novel.

Achilles knows his destiny is to be the best fighter to ever live, and when his mother Thetis, a sea goddess, tells him he will die if he goes to Troy, he chooses fame and glory over homecoming. He was raised with the assumption he would be the greatest warrior the Greeks had ever seen. While this is true, his pride is a problem that starts to wear on the Greek companies in Troy after Achilles is unable to come to a truce with Agamemnon.

The last of her fire was gone; only marble remained. "It is true. But there is more, and worse that he has not said." The words came tonelessly, as a statue would speak them. "If you go to Troy, you will never return. You will die a young man there." Achilles' face went pale. "It is certain?" This is what all mortals ask first, in disbelief, shock, fear. Is there no exception for me? "It is certain."

We see homecoming after the war in the *Odyssey* with Odysseus, but fate is determined by the Fates themselves, the spinners of life and death. Achilles' mother pleads with the gods to save her son, but his fate was already set and unavoidable.

Odysseus inclines his head. "True. But fame is a strange thing. Some men gain glory after they die, while others fade. What is admired in one generation is abhorred in another." He spread his broad hands. "We cannot say who will survive the holocaust of memory. Who knows?" He smiles. "Perhaps one day even I will be famous. Perhaps more famous than you."

Another important theme is the concept of honor. Achilles goes to Troy because he knows it's the honorable thing to do. He also fights with Agamemnon over Briseis because he believes that the king is a dishonorable man and by taking his war prize, who later becomes his friend, he's showing Achilles a lack of respect and therefore has not earned his in return.

The Wrath of Achilles is the most notable theme of *The Iliad*. His anger for Agamemnon is present from the beginning of the book until the bitter end, and his anger over Patroclus' death only intensifies that fury that he's waited to unleash. He tears through Trojans like they're nothing, ripping apart their best fighters until he finally gets the chance to make Hector, Prince of Troy and best of the Trojans, suffer for what he did to his friend.

Hector's eyes are wide, but he will run no longer. He says, "Grant me this. Give my body to my family, when you have killed me."

Achilles makes a sound like choking. "There are no bargains between lions and men. I will kill you and eat you raw." His spearpoint flies in a dark whirlwind, bright as the evening-star, to catch the hollow at Hector's throat.

The one thing I really liked about *The Iliad* is that we saw a great deal of Hector. We saw very little of Hector in *The Song of Achilles*, and I suppose that's because of the first person narration by Patroclus. There's so many wonderful quotes I would've loved to have read from *The Iliad* that perfectly capture the words spoken between Hector and Achilles. Hector and Achilles are such a great match for each other because they both want the fame and glory that comes with death, and I really liked Hector in *The Iliad*. I

only wish I would've seen more of him in this story.

This may either tie or beat Red Rising for the longest review I've ever written. I hope this all makes sense and doesn't come off as a Greek lit fangirl ramble.

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THE SONG OF ACHILLES: A NOVEL BY MADELINE MILLER PDF

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Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, March 2012: Betrayal, ardor, war, and prophecies--in *The Song of Achilles*, author Madeline Miller brings together everything I love about *The Iliad* without the labor of epic poetry. In this new twist on the Trojan War story, Patroclus and Achilles are the quintessential mismatched pair--a mortal underdog exiled in shame and a glorious demigod revered by all--but what would a novel of ancient Greece be without star-crossed love? Miller includes other good tragic bits--foreknowledge of death, ruthless choices that pit pride and reputation against the lives of innocents, the folly of men and gods--and through her beautiful writing my spine chilled in the presence of Achilles' mother, the sea goddess Thetis, and I became a bystander in the battlefield of Troy awash with blood, exaltation, and despair. *The Song of Achilles* infuses the essence of Homer with modern storytelling in a combination that is utterly absorbing and gratifying--I can't wait to see what Miller tackles next. --Seira Wilson Gregory Maguire Interviews Madeline Miller

Gregory Maguire is the best-selling author of *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, *Lost*, *Mirror Mirror*, the *Wicked Years*, a series that includes *Wicked*, *Son of a Witch*, *A Lion Among Men*, and most recently, *Out of Oz*.

Gregory Maguire: Ms. Miller, you write with the confidence of the zealously inspired, taking as your material one of the great foundation texts of world literature. In three millennia, *The Iliad* has garnered somewhat wider attention than *The Wizard of Oz*, with which I have played, so I have to ask: where do you get the noive? How did you come to dare to take on such a daunting task, and for your first book?

Madeline Miller: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and in my case it was just dangerous enough to get me started. If I had stopped to ponder, I think I might have been too intimidated. But it helped that Patroclus is such an underdog—giving him voice felt like standing up for him. I had been intensely frustrated by a number of articles that kept side-stepping the love between him and Achilles, which to me felt so obviously at the story's heart. So I wanted to set the record straight, as I saw it.

Maguire: The novel tells the story of the rise, fall and immortalization of the golden Achilles. You approach his famous story from a sideline, that of Patroclus, his bosom companion and lover. Was it hard to keep the mighty arc of legend from overwhelming shadowy Patroclus, and did you write more of him than you ended up using, just to be sure you had him firmly grounded in your mind?

Miller: Definitely yes to the second. I actually spent five years writing a first draft of the novel, took a good long look at it, then threw it out and started from scratch. Even though not a word survived, that draft was an

essential first step. It helped me understand the story and characters, especially Patroclus, from the inside out.

As for the overwhelming legends, I actually think they worked in my favor—because Patroclus is overwhelmed by them himself. He is this ordinary person who is pulled into a terrifying world of angry deities and destiny because of his love for Achilles.

Maguire: Having glancingly heard of this legend before, I knew more or less how it would end. I had no idea how you might handle the loss of perspective and point of view when tragedy would inevitably strike. You managed to narrate an almost impossible transition from life into myth in part, I think, by your instinctual use of a combination of present and past tense, to say nothing of a masterly combining of authorial and first person observations. How many slaughtered bulls did you sacrifice, and on whose altar, to deserve the talent to risk such dangerous technique?

Miller: It was a lot of bulls. And whatever ended up working, I give all the credit to my background in theater. When I first started writing, I had this idea that I should be in control of the story, forcing it forward. It never worked. What I needed to do was learn how to get in character, and write from there.

It took me a long time to find just the right tone for the ending—I kept writing and throwing away, writing and throwing away. Then, in the middle of apartment-hunting, inspiration struck. All the other ideas had started out well, but would gum up before they got anywhere near the finish line. But this one kept humming right along. And it was the simplest, so there you go.

Maguire: Oscar Wilde said something like, “The Odyssey was written by Homer, or another Greek of the same name.” But Oscar Wilde had clearly not met you. This is not a question. It is a salute.

Review

“I loved it.” (J.K. Rowling)

“Fast, true and incredibly rewarding...A remarkable achievement.” (USA Today)

“Wildly romantic [and] surprisingly suspenseful...[B]ringing those dark figures back to life, making them men again, and while she’s at it, us[ing] her passionate companion piece to The Iliad as a subtle swipe at today’s ongoing debate over gay marriage. Talk about updating the classics.” (Time magazine)

“One of the best novelistic adaptations of Homer in recent memory, and it offers strikingly well-rounded and compassionate portrait of Achilles....[Miller] injects a newfound sense of suspense into a story with an ending that has already been determined.” (Wall Street Journal)

“Powerful, inventive, passionate, and beautifully written.” (Boston Globe)

“Beautifully done. . .In prose as clean and spare as the driving poetry of Homer, Miller captures the intensity and devotion of adolescent friendship and lets us believe in these long-dead boys...deepening and enriching a tale that has been told for 3,000 years.” (Washington Post)

“One of 2012’s most exciting debuts...seductive, hugely entertaining...[I]magine the intimate friendship between Achilles and the devoted Patroclus...Miller conjures...soulmates. The resulting novel is cinematic—one might say epic—in scope, but refreshingly, compellingly human in detail.” (Vogue)

“You don’t need to be familiar with Homer’s *The Iliad* (or Brad Pitt’s *Troy*, for that matter) to find Madeline Miller’s *The Song of Achilles* spellbinding....her explorations of ego, grief, and love’s many permutations are both familiar and new....[A] timeless love story.” (O magazine)

“Madeline Miller’s brilliant first novel...is a story of great, passionate love between Achilles and Patroclus....[R]ewriting the Western world’s first and greatest war novel is an awesome task to undertake. That she did it with such grace, style and suspense is astonishing.” (Dallas Morning News)

“*The Song of Achilles*...should be read and enjoyed for itself, but if Madeline Miller’s novel sends the reader back to Homer and his successors, she is to be thanked for that as well.” (Washington Independent Review of Books)

“A psychologically astute *Iliad* prelude featuring the heady, star-crossed adolescence of future heroes Patroclus and Achilles.” (Vogue)

“[Miller] makes a persuasive argument for the timeliness of her subject. ...Miller’s winning debut focuses on Patroclus, a young prince living in Achilles’ golden shadow. Miller also gives voice to many of the women who were also consigned to the shadows.” (Publishers Weekly, Spring 2012 Preview, Top 10 Literary Fiction)

“Masterfully brings to life an imaginative yet informed vision of ancient Greece featuring divinely human gods and larger-than-life mortals. She breaks new ground retelling one of the world’s oldest stories about men in love and war [and] extraordinary women.” (Publishers Weekly (starred review), Pick of the Week)

“A masterly vision of the drama, valor, and tragedy of the Trojan War. Readers who loved Mary Renault’s epic novels will be thrilled with Miller’s portrayal of ancient Greece. This reviewer can’t wait to see what she writes next.” (Library Journal (starred review))

“A captivating retelling of *THE ILIAD* and events leading up to it through the point of view of Patroclus: it’s a hard book to put down, and any classicist will be enthralled by her characterisation of the goddess Thetis, which carries the true savagery and chill of antiquity.” (Donna Tartt, *THE TIMES*)

“A modern take on *The Iliad*, full of love and feats of glory and told in an open, lyric, loose-limbed fashion that should appeal to many readers.... Next up from Miller—the story of Circe...historical fiction fans, get in on the ground floor.” (Library Journal)

“I loved this book. The language was timeless, the historical details were slipped in perfectly. I hope *SONG OF ACHILLES* becomes part of the high school summer reading lists alongside *PENELOPIAD*.” (Helen Simonson, bestselling author of *MAJOR PETTIGREW’S LAST STAND*)

“Mary Renault lives again! A ravishingly vivid and convincing version of one of the most legendary of love stories.” (Emma Donoghue, New York Times bestselling author of *ROOM*)

“At once a scholar’s homage to *THE ILIAD* and a startlingly original work of art by an incredibly talented new novelist. Madeline Miller has given us her own fresh take on the Trojan war and its heroes. The result is a book I could not put down.” (Ann Patchett, bestselling author of *BEL CANTO* and *STATE OF WONDER*)

“Although the details of the story are Miller’s own, the world is one that all who love the *Iliad* and its epigones will recognize. Reading this book recalled me to the breathless sense of the ancient-yet-present that

I felt when I first fell in love with the classics.” (Catherine Conybeare, Professor of Classics, Bryn Mawr College)

“THE ILIAD turns on Achilles’ pride and his relationship with Patroclus, but Homer is sparing with the personal—so much so that, though we believe in their friendship, we do not understand it. THE SONG OF ACHILLES brings light to their love. This is a beautiful book.” (Zachary Mason, author of THE LOST BOOKS OF THE ODYSSEY)

“Miller somehow (and breathtakingly so) mixes high-action commercial plotting with writing of such beautiful delicacy you sometimes have to stop and stare.” (The Independent)

“Miller’s prose is more poetic than almost any translation of Homer... This is a deeply affecting version of the Achilles story: a fully three-dimension man - a son, a father, husband and lover - now exists where a superhero previously stood and fought.” (The Guardian)

“In the tradition of Mary Renault... Miller draws on her knowledge of classical sources wisely... Well-paced, engaging and tasteful.” (London Times Literary Supplement)

“Extraordinary... Beautifully descriptive and heartachingly lyrical, this is a love story as sensitive and intuitive as any you will find.” (Daily Mail)

From the Back Cover

Achilles, "the best of all the Greeks," son of the cruel sea goddess Thetis and the legendary king Peleus, is strong, swift, and beautiful—irresistible to all who meet him. Patroclus is an awkward young prince, exiled from his homeland after an act of shocking violence. Brought together by chance, they forge an inseparable bond, despite risking the gods' wrath.

They are trained by the centaur Chiron in the arts of war and medicine, but when word comes that Helen of Sparta has been kidnapped, all the heroes of Greece are called upon to lay siege to Troy in her name. Seduced by the promise of a glorious destiny, Achilles joins their cause, and torn between love and fear for his friend, Patroclus follows. Little do they know that the cruel Fates will test them both as never before and demand a terrible sacrifice.

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