

The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller

Wednesday, May 20th, 2020

Virtual Discussion

2:00-3:00

30 attendees

Notes taken by: Elizabeth Hopkins

Discussion led by: Lizzie Matkowski

*Note- this was the first ever virtual ARRT Book Club Study. The discussion was held via Zoom. Attendees were asked to keep their mics muted when not speaking and to use the "Raise Hand" feature when they wanted to contribute to the discussion. We also utilized the chat feature. A transcript of our chat can be found [here](#).

Lizzie began the discussion by explaining we would begin as one large group and then she would break us into smaller groups for more discussion.

What were your first impressions of the book?

- LOVE Greek mythology. I felt like I was watching the movie *Troy* all over again.
- The audio was great. One narrator just like the print book. I don't know why I never read it before. Anyone who enjoyed Greek mythology as a kid should read this.
- I read *Circe* first and fell in love with it. I missed the female voice in this one. I wish I read them in the other order.
- If you read this and thought it would be more awesome if it was set in space with more violence and sex, then you should read *Red Rising*.
- *The Silence of the Girls* was also mentioned.
- I also read *Circe* first....and this was good too. I was surprised at how people viewed same sex relationships.

Was anyone else frustrated by the slow burn?

- They were sort of awkward outsiders in society. But the story built up well.
- If they got together too early it wouldn't be as much of a "soul mate" situation.
- We had to wait for them to grow up. As a reader, the sex was uncomfortable for me because the characters were so young. I think she faded to black at the right time. Miller beautifully communicates that they were real people with real feelings for each other.

How many people have read *The Iliad*? How did this compare? Do you like this narrative choice?

- I enjoyed this so much more! I loved our narrator.
- I liked that I read *The Iliad* so I knew what to expect. The focus was on politics, not battles. This was the Cliff's Notes version of all these relationships.
- *The Iliad* served as a nice guidepost.

There was a lot of foreshadowing in this book. "What has Hector done to me?" She still does a great job of building that stress and tension. What did you think of the depictions of kings/gods?

- I liked that you knew these people due to their legendary status, but they were written in a more human way.
- I think she did a good enough job that you could still enjoy the book without any mythology knowledge.
- I like that Odysseus was a side character. It would be easy for him to overpower the story.
- I loved how human these characters are. I remember the humanization of both sides in *The Iliad*. It was a nice homage for Miller to make to the original.

*Lizzie then broke the group into "rooms," about five people per room. She gave us a few prompts to discuss, if needed. Here are the notes from my (Elizabeth) breakout room's discussion:

- I thought women were handled better than expected. As a female author, I think she did the best she could.
- I liked Patroclus more after I saw how he was helping the women. This was a refreshing side of the story.
- The women were more than just afterthoughts.
- Also highlights that society was structured by gender.
- How well drawn the characters were...a running theme in mythology was how the gods/everyone were jerks. But here the author fleshed out the reasoning.
- Would love to see Miller create her own characters. She's so good at creating a cast with very little to go on.
- She did a great job bringing in other characters. All of the cameos with other characters made sense and were well done.
- I liked the wink-wink to hero stories.
- I'm always upset when I hear these stories...just how LONG this war was!

- The audio was especially great. Knowing how to pronounce the names. I had a more emotional response to the narrator. You were with the narrator while listening. He was your best friend.
- I liked that this famous story was told from an “outsider.” I felt connected that way.

*When we left our breakout rooms and returned as a large group, we briefly shared some highlights from our smaller discussions. Lizzie then wrapped the discussion by recommending checking out Miller’s interviews...very fascinating.