**Publication Cycle of ‘The Song of Achilles’ by Madeline Miller**

The Song of Achilles, written by the Orange Prize-winning Madeline Miller, is published by Ecco Press, an “author-centric” imprint of HarperCollins (2022). Their mission statement is to “publish a select list of eclectic, diverse, and forward-thinking books.” The Song of Achilles is a unique retelling of the classic Greek mythology, based on Homer’s Illiad, and undoubtedly encapsulates Ecco’s manifesto as an action-packed, LGBTQIA+ romance and adventure. This essay will explore why The Song of Achilles has risen in popularity in the last few years, and will examine its themes, wider media, publishing trends, and the publicity it received on social media.

Besides literature in translation and rediscovered classics, Ecco publishes both new talents and experienced writers in various genres such as biography, politics, poetry, literary, commercial fiction and more. Among other best sellers, Ecco has also published Beasts of a Little Land, by Juhea Kim, Woman, Eat Me Whole, by Ama Asantewa Diaka, and a new translation from Robert Bagg, The Oedipus Cycle by Sophocles. Like Ecco’s other published works, they are progressive, intimate, and fresh.

Published in 2011, The Song of Achilles is Madeline Miller’s first novel. A Classics scholar, Miller has a BA and MA from Brown University and is a Latin and Ancient Greek teacher. The book is written from the perspective of Patroclus, an exiled ex-prince, who recounts his relationship with Achilles, from their meeting at childhood until their deaths. Their bond has been debated throughout history, though to later Greeks, it was clear that their relationship was that of lovers, “Myrmidons,” a lost play by Aeschylus, mentions their “frequent kisses”, and Plato’s “Symposium” also assumes as such. The question of who Patroclus really was wandered through Miller’s mind. In the Iliad, Achilles speaks of him as the “best-beloved of his companions”, and his mourning of Patroclus’ death by dragging Patroclus’ dead body around, sleeping with it, speaking to it, wanting their ashes together despite protest, is emphasis enough of their bonded relationship.

Miller’s beautifully descriptive prose reimagines their relationship, drawing upon every reference of Patroclus in ancient texts and creating the relationship between him and Achilles that we read of in Homer’s work. The Song of Achilles closely follows the plot of the Iliad, but with a couple of creative adjustments, filling some backstory. It has received a resurgence of interest due to its LBGTQIA+ themes, overnight popularity on TikTok, and breaking of conventional genre boundaries.

Written with scholarly insight and meticulous research, The Song of Achilles took over ten years to complete. Miller’s journey included having a complete manuscript in the fifth year but then discarding it entirely to start again, as she struggled to perfect the voice of Patroclus (The Guardian, 2012). Interestingly, the story itself also spans across decades, from Patroclus and Achilles’ childhood to their roles in the decade-long Trojan war. The reader stands side by side with Patroclus, experiencing a light and playful friendship, to growing up with the characters in a bitter war.

Published in 2011 at Bloomsbury in the UK and Ecco in the US, The Song of Achilles reached a wide range of readers and received a positive reception from several acclaimed reviewers. In The Washington Post, Russell (2012) wrote, “In prose as clean and spare as the driving poetry of Homer, Miller captures the intensity and devotion of adolescent friendship…”, while Haynes (2011) takes it a step further, “Miller’s prose is more poetic than almost any translation of Homer.” Its descriptive flowery language, laced with intense action, intimate scenes, honest introspection, mythical and ruthless gods, and decade-long bloody war, makes it a book difficult to put down. As a retelling of a classic, this book touches upon many prominent genres with established fanbases.

In 2012, The Song of Achilles was awarded the Orange Prize for fiction, recently renamed the Women’s Prize, whose manifesto is “We empower all women to raise their voice and own their story.” It was considered a feminist retelling of a previously hypermasculine tale. It became a New York Times bestseller, and was shortlisted for many other prizes.

Years later, a resurgence. In 2021, The Song of Achilles swiftly rose in popularity after it was featured in a TikTok video, soon flooding the recommendation lists of various creators on “BookTok”. Cited by The New York Times (2021), it is shown as an example of how “BookTok” and other viral social media videos are increasing the sales of literature and thus are starting to influence publishers and bestseller lists. It has sold over 2 million copies across various formats since. As part of a wider phenomenon, a more extensive project would relate this to social media’s monopoly in marketing.

Ecco published the book in its 2011 release and its various formats: ebooks, kindle and hardcovers in 2012. After its booming popularity on social media, in 2022, Ecco released an exclusive edition hardcover, certainly capitalising on the sudden sales. The covers successfully represented the book, always classic and simple, featuring a helmet, shield, or bow, with the title clear to read. Stark and haunting, it depicts war, the one thing that prevented, yet blossomed, an honest and pure love. It also represents Achilles, the ‘Warrior of Warriors’, the one constant in the book whom Patroclus yearned for. Ecco perfectly displays the values and epitome of the novel with the simple cover.

The Song of Achilles exemplifies Ecco’s manifesto as “eclectic, diverse, and forward-thinking”. There has been a trend in retellings of Greek mythology in recent decades. In 2004, Brad Pitt starred as Achilles in the Hollywood movie Troy, exhibiting him as a traditionally masculine, straight and powerful demi-god, with Patroclus as his cousin and protégé. When The Song of Achilles upturned the identity of both Achilles and Patroclus, a minority of readers were less than pleased about the creative liberty taken. Modern and politically inclusive, it broke the traditional ruthless view of Achilles; where he was once characterised by his ravenous fury, a man trained to slaughter, he is now much more. Haynes (2011) writes that in Miller’s story, “a fully three-dimensional man – a son, a father, husband and lover – now exists where a superhero previously stood and fought.”

Alongside the popularity of other Young Adult books such as Percy Jackson and the Olympians series by Rick Riordan, (initially published in 2005 and its movie released in 2010,) the trend of Greek Myths has made another resurgence following The Song of Achilles’ popularity on TikTok. In 2020 it was announced that a Percy Jackson and the Olympians TV series is being developed, to be released on Disney+ in 2024, reimagining the story for a new generation, (Wiki, 2023). When commercial success occurs, imitations start to arise and profit from the trends.

Although it is considered YA or New YA fiction, which to some purists is unfavourable, The Song of Achilles breaks conventional genre boundaries. For a younger audience, it is an emotionally riveting journey of discovery; these are real characters with layers, emotions and justifications behind brutal actions—love blossoms in the darkest of days.

An openly LGBTQIA+ book that retells an ancient Greek myth is a deviation from other literature. However, because of this rarity, it was one of the prime reasons for its success, especially with the LGBTQIA+ rights movement and more people identifying as something other than straight. As a feminist retelling, the deeply felt love between Patroclus and Achilles was pure, as if the reader is also learning what love and trust is again. There is a trend of sex scenes in YA books, and although in The Song of Achilles, intimacy is obscured in misty language, it satisfies the reader and story, as it is life or death, and they never know if they will survive another day. Amongst the honour-driven, calculated and callous men, their goal is to survive together. Those aware of the classic story know that Patroclus does not live, but to read and watch his apparated body, who in return watches Achilles mourn over his corpse, was painstakingly tragic. Ecco helps Miller spin a classic heteronormative tale into an adaptation that touches and conveys emotion to a larger and current audience. YA fiction has become a growing and constantly evolving genre, reaching its relatability to minority groups.

To conclude, The Song of Achilles has proven to be a successful feminist retelling in both decades, with the language of romantic poetry, LGBTQIA+ themes, action, adventure, mystical gods and creatures. Ecco chose to publish a book that embodies their manifesto; eclectic and forward-thinking. Timeless. Miller has retold a classic in a modern manner, allowing new generations to connect to it emotionally. Utilising her scholarly accuracy to the original, the transcendence of genre that The Song of Achilles has achieved exhibits the complexities of the world - readers of all ages, genders and generations have enjoyed it. The flooding influence of trends in social media has allowed a whole new generation to be moved by this book, and Ecco has smartly benefited from it with its exclusive hardcover edition.

*(Word Count – 1500 words)*

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