



Circe

Madeline Miller

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In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child—not powerful, like her father, nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power—the power of witchcraft, which can transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves.

Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island, where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology, including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea, and, of course, wily Odysseus.

But there is danger, too, for a woman who stands alone, and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods, ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves most, Circe must summon all her strength and choose, once and for all, whether she belongs with the gods she is born from, or the mortals she has come to love.

Circe Details

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From Reader Review Circe for online ebook

Hannah says

Absolutely beautiful!

Will Byrnes says

Men, can't live with 'em, can't turn 'em all into swine.

What do you mean *turn them into* swine? From her earliest application of her new found transformative skills it is suggested that what Circe turns her unfortunate guests into has more to do with their innermost nature than Circe's selection of a target form. (*The strength of those flowers lay in their sap, which could transform any creature to its truest self.*) Clearly her sty residents had an oinky predisposition. And I am sure that there are many who had started the transformation long before landing on her island.

Whaddya call the large sty Circe filled with erstwhile men? A good start.

Ok. You had to know this would be part of the deal for this review. So, now that I have gotten it out of my system, (it is out, right?) we can proceed.

When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist.

It was a word that Barbara Bush might have had in mind when she described Geraldine Ferraro, her husband's opponent for the Vice Presidency, in 1984. "'I can't say it, but it rhymes with 'rich,'" she said, later insisting that the word in question did not begin with a "b," but a "w." Sure, whatever. But in this case, I suppose both might apply. Circe is indeed the first witch in western literature. And many a sailing crew might have had unkind things to say about her.

Madeline Miller - image from *The Times*

Our primary introduction to Circe (which we pronounce as Sir-Sea, and even Miller goes along with this, so people don't throw things at her. But for how it might be pronounced in Greek, you know, the *proper* way, you might check out this link. Put that down, there will be no throwing of things in this review!) was that wondrous classic of Western literature, *The Odyssey*. Given how many times this and its companion volume, *The Iliad*, have been reworked through the ages, it is no surprise that there have been many variations on the stories they told. Circe's story has seen its share of re-imaginings as well. But Miller tries to stick fairly close to the Homeric version. Be warned, though, *some* license was taken, and other sources inspired the work as well. But it is from Homer that *we* get the primary association we have with her name, the magical transmutation of men into pigs.

George Romney's 1782 portrait of Emma Hamilton as Circe - image from wikipedia

We follow the life of our Ur-witch from birth to whatever. She did not start out with much by way of godly

powers. Her mother, Perse, daughter of the sea-god Oceanos, was a nymph, and her father was Helios, the sun god. Despite the lofty position of Pop's place in things, Circe was just a nymph, on the low end of the godly powers scale. This did not help in the family to which she had been born. Not one of her parents' favorites, she was blessed with neither power nor beauty, had a very ungod-like human-level voice, and her sibs were not exactly the nicest. Kinda tough to keep up when daddy is the actual bloody sun.

Years pass, and one day she comes across a mortal fisherman. He seems pretty nice, someone she can talk to. She'd like to take it to the next stage, so she lays low, listens in on family gatherings, and picks up intel on substances that might be used to effect powerful and advantageous changes. She asks her grandmother, Tethys, (wife AND SISTER to Oceanos) to transform him into a god for her, but Granny throws her out, alarmed when her granddaughter mentions this *pharmakos* stuff she had been looking into. Left to her own devices she tries this out on her bf, making him into his truest self. It does not end the way she'd hoped. (Pearls before you-know-what.) Not the last bad experience she would have with a man.

Levy's 1889 Circe - image from wikipedia

Her relationships with men are actually not *all* bad. Daddy is singularly unfeeling, and can be pretty dim for such a bright bulb, and her brothers are far less than wonderful, but there is some good in her sibling connections as well. She has a warm interaction with a titan, Prometheus, which is a net positive. Later, she has an interesting relationship with Hermes, who is *not to be trusted*, but who offers some helpful guidance. And then there are the mortals, Daedalus (the master artist, the Michelangelo, the Leonardo da Vinci of his era), Jason, of Argonaut fame, Odysseus, who you may have heard of, and more. There were dark encounters as well, and thus the whole turning-men-into-pigs thing.

Brewer's 1892 Circe and Her Swine - image from Wikipedia

Miller has had a passion for the classics since she was eight, when her mother read her the *Iliad* and began taking her to Egyptian and Greek exhibits at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It made her a nerdy classmate but was a boon when she got to college and was able to find peers who shared her love of the ancient tales. It was this passion that led her to write her first novel, *The Song of Achilles*, a reimagining of Achilles' relationship with his lover, Patroclus, a delight of a book, a Times bestseller, and winner of the Orange prize. It took her ten years to write her first novel, about seven for this one and the gestation period for number three remains to be seen. She is weighing whether to base it on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Virgil's *Aeneid*. If past is portent, it will be the latter, and should be ready by about 2025.

Ulysses and Circe, Angelica Kauffmann, 1786. - image from Miller's site

The central, driving force in the story is Circe becoming her fullest possible self. (I suppose one might say she made a silk purse from a sow's ear. I wouldn't, but some might.)

This is the story of a woman finding her power and, as part of that, finding her voice. She starts out really unable to say what she thinks and by the end of the book, she's able to live life on her terms and say what she thinks and what she feels. - from the Bookriot interview

Most gods are awful sorts, vain, selfish, greedy, careless of the harm they do to others. Circe actually has better inclinations. For instance, when Prometheus is being tortured by the titans for the crime of giving fire

to humans, Circe alone is kind to him, bringing him nectar, and talking with him when no one else offers him anything but anger and scorn. She is curious about mortals, and asks him about them, going so far as to cut herself to experience a bit of humanity.

Carracci's c.1590 Ulysses and Circe in the Farnese Palace - image from Wikipedia

Livestock comes in for some attention outside the sty. Turns out Circe's father has a thing for a well-turned fetlock, so maybe she comes by her affinity for animals of all sorts, albeit in a very different way, quite naturally. Her island is rich with diverse fauna, including some close companions most of us would flee. An early version of Doctor Doolittle?

Scholars have debated whether Circe's pet lions are supposed to be transformed men, or merely tamed beasts. In my novel, I chose to make them actual animals, because I wanted to honor Circe's connection to Eastern and Anatolian goddesses like Cybele. Such goddesses also had power over fierce animals, and are known by the title Potnia Theron, Mistress of the Beasts.

Not be confused with The Beastmaster

Circe and Odysseus. Alessandro Allori, 1560 - image from Miller's site

While she has her darker side (she does change her nymph love-rival Scylla into a beast of epic proportions, which gets her sent to her room, or in this case, island, and there is that pig thing again) she is also a welcoming hostess on her isle of exile, Aiaia. (Which sounds to me like the palindromic beginning of a lament, Aiaiaiaiaiaia, which might feel a bit more familiar with a minor transformation, to oy-oy-oy-oy-oy-oy-oy-oy). I mean, she runs a pretty nifty BnB, with free-roaming wild animals, of both the barnyard and terrifying sort, a steady flow of wayward nymphs sent there by desperate parents in hopes that Circe might transform them into less troublesome progeny, a table with a seemingly bottomless supply of food and drink. And she is more than willing to offer special services to world-class mortals, among others. I mean, after that little misunderstanding with Odysseus about his men, (Pigs? What pigs? What could you possibly mean? Oh, you mean *those* pigs. Oopsy. How careless of me.) she not only invites everyone to stay for a prolonged vacay, but shacks up with the peripatetic one, offers him instructions on reaching the underworld, suggests ways to get past Scylla and Charybdis, and probably packs bag lunches for him and his crew. She is not all bad.

Barker's 1889 Circe - image from Wikipedia

Circe struggles with the mortals-vs-immortals tension. Her mortal voice makes her less frightening to the short-lived ones, allowing her to establish actual relationships with them that a more boombox-voice-level deity might not be able to manage. Of course, it is still quite limiting that even the youngest of her mortal love interests would wither and die while she remained the same age pretty much forever. Knowing that you will see any man you love die is a definite limiting factor. Yet, she manages. She certainly recognizes what a psycho crew the immortals are, even her immediate family, and respects that mortals who gain fame do so by the sweat of their brow or extreme cunning, (even if it is to dark purpose) not their questionable godly DNA. Reinforcing this is her front row seat to the real-housewives tension between the erstwhile global rulers, the Titans, and the relatively new champions of everything there is, the Olympians. I mean, perpetual torture, thunderbolts, ongoing seditious plots, the nurturing of monsters, wholesale slaughter of mortals? She knows

a thing or two, because she's seen a thing or two.

My thoughts about [Circe as caregiver] really start with the gods, who in Greek myth are horrendous creatures. Selfish, totally invested only in their own desires, and unable to really care for anyone but themselves. Circe has this impulse from the beginning to care for other people. She has this initial encounter with Prometheus where she comes across another god who seems to understand that and also who triggers that impulse in her. I wanted to write about what it's like when you want to try to be a good person, but you have absolutely no models for that. How do you construct a moral view coming from a completely immoral family? - from Bookriot interview

Circe Offering the Cup to Odysseus – by John William Waterhouse – 1891 - image from Wikimedia

Of course, there is a pretty straight line between the sort of MCP hogwash Circe had to endure in the wayback and recent events that have been getting so much attention of late

“I wasn’t trying to write Circe’s story in a modern way... I was just trying to be true to her experience in the ancient world.”

“It was a very eerie experience. I would put the book away and check the news. The top story was literally the same issue I had just been writing about — sexual assault, abuse, men refusing to allow women to have any power ... I was drawn to the mystery of her character — why is she turning men into pigs?” – from The Times interview

There are plenty of classical connections peppered throughout Circe’s tale. Jason and Medea (niece) pop by for a spell. She is summoned to assist in the birthing of the minotaur (nephew) to her seriously nasty sister. She is part of Scylla’s origin story, interacts with Prometheus (cousin), gives shit to Athena, even heads into the briny deep to take a meeting with a huge sea creature (no, not the Kraaken). Hangs with Penelope (her bf’s wife) and Telemachus (bf’s son), and spends a lot of time with Hermes. She definitely had a life, many even, particularly for someone who was ostracized to live on an island.

For Circe, I would say the *Odyssey* was my primary touch-stone in the sense that that’s where I started building the character. I take character clues directly from Homer’s text, both large and small. I mentioned her mortal-like voice. The lions. The pigs. And then when I get to the Odysseus episode in the book, I follow Homer obviously very closely... - from the BookRiot interview

"Circea", #38 in Boccaccio's c.?1365 *De Claris Mulieribus*, a catalogue of famous women, from a 1474 edition - image from wikipedia

In terms of sources, I used texts from all over the ancient world and a few from the more modern world as well. For Circe herself, I drew inspiration from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, the lost epic *Telegony* (which survives only in summary) and myths of the Anatolian goddess Cybele. For other characters, I was inspired by the *Iliad*, of course, the tragedies (specifically the *Oresteia*, *Medea* and *Philoctetes*), Vergil’s *Aeneid* again, Tennyson’s *Ulysses* and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*. Alert readers may note a few small pieces of Shakespeare’s Ulysses in my *Odysseus*! - from Refinery29 interview

Circe – by Lorenzo Garbieri - image From Maicar Greek Mythology Link

Madeline Miller's *Circe* is not a lovelorn, lonely heart desperate for connection in her isolation, but a multi-faceted character (not actually a human being, though), with inner seams of the dark and light sort, with family issues that might seem familiar in feel, if not in external content, with sins on her soul, but a desire to do good, and with a curiosity about the world. She may not have been the brightest light in the house of Helios, but she glowed with an inner strength, a capacity for mercy, an appreciation for genius, beauty and talent, and a fondness for pork. This is the epic story of a life lived to the fullest. *Circe* is an explorer, a lover, a destroyer, and can be a very angry goddess. This transformative figure is our doorway to a very accessible look at the Greek tales which lie at the root of so much of our culture. If you have a decent grounding in western mythology this will offer a delightful refresher. If you do not, it can offer a delightful introduction, and will no doubt spark a desire to root about for more. Madeline Miller may not have a wand with special powers, or transmuting potions at her command, but she demonstrates here a power to transform mere readers into fans. *Circe* is a fabulous read! You will go hog wild for it. Can you pass the hot dogs? That's All Folks

The Sorceress Circe, oil painting by Dosso Dossi, c. 1530; in the Borghese Gallery, Rome
SCALA/Art Resource, New York – image from Britannica

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December 2018 - *Circe* wins the 2018 Goodreads Choice Award for favorite Fantasy novel of the year

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal, Twitter and FB pages

Interviews

----- BookPage – April 10, 2018 - Madeline Miller – The season of the witch - by Trisha Ping

-----Bookriot – April 19, 2018 - Writing of Gods and Mortals: A Madeline Miller Interview - by Nikki Vanry

-----The Times – April 5, 2018 - The Magazine Interview: Madeline Miller, author of this summer's must-read novel, *Circe*, on seeing history through women's eyes - by Helena de Bertodano

NY Times - April 6, 2018 - A lovely profile from the NY Times - *Circe*, a Vilified Witch From Classical Mythology, Gets Her Own Epic - by Alexandra Alter

My review of *The Song of Achilles*

The *Odyssey* on Gutenberg

A very nifty, brief, and entertaining summary of *The Odyssey* can be found on Schmoop.com.

A fitting piece of music from Studio Killers

=====STUFFING

A wonderful piece from Allan Ishac at Medium, on the Russia investigation. - Mueller Tells Staff: "This Swine Is Mine"

President Trump is ready for slaughter, according to people inside Robert Mueller's office. (Credit: wemeantwell.com and imgur.com) – from above article

Elise (TheBookishActress) says

You threw me to the crows, but it turns out I prefer them to you.

My words are not as good as the ones in this book. *Circe* is a book about... finding yourself. But god, **it stands out so far from just that.**

Okay, to get started, I'm just going to say it: **Madeline Miller is one of the best writers of our time.** She has such a way with words that it is absolutely impossible not to be engaged in her storytelling.

The thing that brings this whole novel together is **Circe's character.** She is a woman who has done awful, evil things, and yet remains unfailingly human. She is lonely, and harsh, and hiding herself in sarcasm much of the time. And there is not a moment in this novel in which I didn't adore her. Madeline Miller does such an amazing job developing this character, weaving her thoughts into the narrative without manipulating you into feeling a certain way, keeping the narrative wide yet keeping it focused around Circe. Throughout this novel I developed such a deep level of admiration for both this author and this character, **this character I'm sure will stay with me forever.**

This novel is so interesting because at its core, it is an exploration of the voice of women in Greek mythology. Circe is a character we see nothing of in the narrative of Greek mythology, a character with seemingly evil intentions and little motivation – and all this despite showing up in several different stories. There's something supremely excellent about seeing a character like this who is essentially a plot device be given a story. I know I have a tendency to repeat the term "narrative agency" but it beats repeating— **I absolutely love giving characters who have been given no agency the agency they deserve.**

I mean, everything about this book was just brilliant. I loved the myth interpretation: Penelope and Odysseus are both written perfectly, and seeing Jason basically get called an asshole while Medea stood on being young and morally grey and in love was so fantastic. And the exploration of gods vs. mortals is just brilliant:

You cannot know how frightened gods are of pain. There is nothing more foreign to them, and so nothing they ache more deeply to see.

I loved the relationships — just as a special note, the relationship between Circe and Telegonus made me want to cry. I basically loved everything.

I mean, I think you guys have gotten pretty easily why I liked this so much — **a morally-grey-character-driven retelling revolving around agency is basically my entire what-I-like bio.** This did all the things I like and I want to reread it daily and hourly. I very well might.

[I also want you all to know this book gave rise to my favorite update meme I have ever posted so thanks for that!!]

Blog | Goodreads | Twitter | Youtube
buddyread with my favorite Melanie ?

destiny ??? [howling libraries] says

When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist.

Where do I even begin? This was one of the most amazing, beautiful, intricate, captivating books I have had the pleasure of reading in my entire life. I have been a bookworm since I was barely walking, and yet *this* book, this gorgeous retelling, has impacted me so profoundly that I genuinely do not know if I will ever be entirely the same.

It is a common saying that women are delicate creatures—flowers, eggs, anything that may be crushed in a moment's carelessness. If I had ever believed it, I no longer did.

As a child, I loved Greek mythology, and though I lost some of that knowledge through recent years, when I heard that this story was releasing, I knew I just had to read it. I thought it was going to be the story from Circe's point of view, but ultimately, I expected it to revolve around Odysseus; I had no idea that I was in for such a treat, though, as he is only a small portion of the immortal Circe's life. This isn't a retelling, it's an origin story, a history, a tale of centuries' worth of loves and losses, griefs and triumphs.

The thought was this: that all my life had been murk and depths, but I was not a part of that dark water. I was a creature within it.

From the very start, we see that Circe is so vastly set apart from her fellow gods and goddesses; as a nymph with the reedy voice of a mortal, she is told she is wholly useless, but it's evident from the beginning that she is this brilliant, clever, strong woman: a force to be reckoned with in every way. I knew I would love her, but I couldn't have predicted how fast or hard I would find myself rooting for her to succeed.

But of course I could not die. I would live on, through each scalding moment to the next. This is the grief that makes our kind choose to be stones and trees rather than flesh.

Of course, Circe's exile on the isle of Aiaia is bound to be an unhappy story, and that's a common thread throughout *Circe*: you always know something miserable or painful is on its way, but the moments in between those travesties, and the ways Circe handles the hand of cards life has dealt her, makes it so incredibly worth the ache. Perhaps the greatest thing about watching her struggle is how much relatability it lends to her character; despite being a goddess, an immortal, and a witch, Circe at her core is a spurned woman who has lived too long under the heels of spiteful, power-hungry men, and a wicked society that

values beauty over strength.

But in a solitary life, there are rare moments when another soul dips near yours, as stars once a year brush the earth. Such a constellation was he to me.

Of course, Circe's tale is not entirely a desolate one, but her joys are often her curses, as she loves mortals and sees in them the same potential that cursed Prometheus to his rock. Throughout her life, we get to see relationships come and go, and I was enthralled by how incredibly sex-positive and sure of herself she remains. Rather than selling herself away to the highest bidder, Circe's primary focus is to never let her pursuit of pleasures and companionship win out over her need to be her own person.

*"It is not fair," I said. "I cannot bear it."
"Those are two different things," my grandmother said.*

It was so enjoyable to watch the different characters cycle in and out of her memories, whether it was Daedalus and his loom, or Hermes and his messages and antics, or—of course—Odysseus, who we saw in a much more realistic light, as Circe portrayed an image of him that was far less heroic or noble than many of the legends would have one believe. There are even mentions of Patroclus and Achilles, and what became of them, though I was pleased to find that prior knowledge of *The Song of Achilles* was not at all necessary to fully enjoy this book.

I would look at him and feel a love so sharp it seemed my flesh lay open. I made a list of all the things I would do for him. Scald off my skin. Tear out my eyes. Walk my feet to bones, if only he would be happy and well.

Of all the things Madeline's writing had to offer me, though, the one that meant the most to me was wholly unexpected: the perfect, beautiful depiction of motherhood through Circe's relationship with her son. As a mother to a wild little boy of my own, I related to so many of her thoughts and fears, but most of all, to the utter authenticity of the love she describes for him. It consumes her entirely—for better or for worse—and her need to protect him holds such ferocity that she worries it will destroy her at times. Many of the thoughts she held for him gave me chills or brought tears to my eye, and throughout it all, I just kept thinking that I had *never* felt like motherhood had been so perfectly described as it is in this book.

You threw me to the crows, but it turns out I prefer them to you.

Truly, I could gush for days, but I'm going to cut myself off here and just ask you to please, *please* pick up a copy of this beautiful book. I sound like a broken record, but it meant so much to me, and has earned such a warm place in my heart that I know I will reread it over and over in the coming years. Whether you are a mother, or a lover of Greek mythology, or just a bookworm looking for a story that will capture you so wholly, you'll never want to leave its embrace—this book is flawless, utter perfection, and I cannot possibly recommend it highly enough.

All quotes come from an unfinished ARC and may not match the finished release. Thank you to Little, Brown

and Company for providing me with an ARC in exchange for my honest review!

Buddy read with Heather!

You can find this review and more on my blog, or you can follow me on twitter, bookstagram, or facebook!

Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says

If you like mythology, you need to read this book!

Personally it's not even something I'm a fan of but I couldn't put this... audiobook down. The narrator did a great job and her voice was quite relaxing. I ended up finishing the book in 3 days and taking detour on my walks just to be able to listen to it more!

Would recommend.

Now I need to go finish The Song of Achilles...

Jeffrey Keeten says

"It was true what Hermes said. Every moment mortals died, by shipwreck and sword, by wild beasts and wild men, by illness, neglect, and age. It was their fate, as Prometheus had told me, the story that they all shared. No matter how vivid they were in life, no matter how brilliant, no matter the wonders they made, they came to dust and smoke. Meanwhile every petty and useless god would go on sucking down the bright air until the stars went dark."

Sculpture by Nicolas-Sébastien Adam in the Louvre.

Meeting Prometheus in chains, very briefly, before he was taken to the mountain side to begin his punishment had a profound impact on Circe. He had given man fire, and in the process had angered the Gods. He was condemned by Zeus to have an eagle rip his liver from his body each day and eat it over and over again for all eternity. Mortals paid attention to the Gods more when they experienced more suffering. Fire reduced their offerings to the Gods. One might say that fire made them need the Gods less.

Gods are fickle, childish creatures in need of constant reassurance.

Circe was a daughter of Helios. **"At my father's feet, the whole world was made of gold. The light came from everywhere at once, his yellow skin, his lambent eyes, the bronze flashing of his hair. His flesh was hot as a brazier, and I pressed as close as he would let me, like a lizard to noontday rocks. My aunt had said that some of the lesser gods could scarcely bear to look at him, but I was his daughter and blood, and I stared at his face so long that when I looked away it was pressed upon my vision still, glowing from the floor, the shining walls and inlaid tables, even my own skin."**

She was the oldest daughter of the nymph Perse, and she was quickly followed by three siblings. When Zeus

discovered they were all witches, he ordered Helios to slake his lust elsewhere. Maybe that was when Helios started turning himself into a bull and fucking his herd of precious cows. I'm not sure if that was bestiality or if it deserved some new moniker to describe such perversity.

Painting of Circe by Joseph Herrin

Circe could never win the approval of her father because she was simply not as beautiful as she should be. Her voice was too thin, like a mortals, and her chin was too sharply made. When I looked at a picture of the Roosevelt family with all those attractive features, broad shoulders, and waspish waists, Eleanor Roosevelt stood out. She was Circe amongst all that beauty. In a normal family, attractive attributes could be noticed about Eleanor, but standing in the midst of the Roosevelts she was a flower with too few petals.

Circe's siblings and cousins made her life a godly hell. They lived forever, and spite and vindictiveness were the slings and arrows of idle hands. She was lonely and made more lonely by the fact that no God would marry her, and mortals were simply not good enough for the daughter of Helios.

She was discovering that she had powers. The very witchcraft that made the Gods shift uneasily in their thrones. She could transform an iris into a rose or a bee into a mouse. Then she met the mortal fisherman Glaucos. What she does to him confirmed all the fears that the Olympians had trembled over before. Her powers were a wellspring not yet beginning to geyser.

Oh, and she turned the bitchy Scylla into a more representative version of herself.

***Shudder*.**

Circe was banished to the island of Aiaia.

***Sigh*.** Perpetually misunderstood.

I liked the way Madeline Miller tied in Circe's encounter with Prometheus, who sacrificed eternal torment for humanity, and what would turn out to be her lifetime fascination with mortals. Chicks dig scars, and Circe was no exception. After growing up with Gods whose skin, despite what hazards are encountered, remained unblemished, those scars on mortals were fascinating to her because they told the story of their lives in every livid slash and puncture. They might have worn their scars on their skin, but Circe bore hers on her soul. She wanted to help mortals, but found that usually when she tried to help, she made things worse. Not that there weren't bobbles in her relationship with mortals. After all, she did spend many years turning them into pigs, but then she was only bringing to light the least attractive part of their inner selves.

She may have loved the mortal Odysseus the most, which brought her into conflict with: **"She struck the room, tall and straight and sudden-white, a talon of lightning in the midnight sky. Her horse-hair helmet brushed the ceiling. Her mirror armor threw off sparks. The spear in her hand was long and thin, its keen edge limned in firelight. She was burning certainty, and before her all the shuffling and strained dross of the world must shrink away. Zeus' bright and favorite child, Athena."**

Odysseus

Odysseus might have been the cleverest man of his generation, but Circe would have had to be even more clever as she harnessed what power she had to outwit a God that wished to have Odysseus at all cost, but also wished to bring harm to Circe's son, as well.

A wonderful, reimagining of an ancient tale that was deftly brought to life by the assured, clear, precise writing style of a gifted writer and researcher. Don't tarry any longer. Experience the pleasure of epic triumph and tragedy spun in the threads of Daedalus's loom and wrapped in the magic that only Circe could conjure.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
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Navidad Thélamour says

3.5 stars

Madeline Miller's *Circe* is an epic that's sweeping the nation today. Everywhere you turn, you see that magnificent cover (honestly, that cover work is DIVINE and I've had the MOST fun photographing it for the Bookstagram). Twitter and Instagram are as we speak packed with *Circe* references and Miller interviews and, within all of that, *Circe* has found itself wrapped in all of the fluff and buildup and publicity of a typical ultra-hyped, big-named publisher release. Let's be serious—most of us **LOVE** these kinds of releases and all the hysteria involved, even if we shy away from actually reading the hyped release itself. It can be a book lover's dream--a book with all the fanfare of a blockbuster, silver screen release. I, too, was swept up in the craze, yet another smash hit from the publisher who brought us fan favorites like *Twilight* and whom I once interned for in London. But, in the end, I couldn't ride the *Circe* wave all the way through.

Let's get one thing clear from the very start: Madeline Miller's follow up to *The Song of Achilles* is an epic in the years spanned but not necessarily in the execution. To me, it read far more like a long story than an "epic." When I think of that four-lettered word, I think of a novel that's monumental and moving. I think of *The Odyssey* and sweeping sagas like *A Song of Ice and Fire*, even novels that are gripping and complex, long and treacherous as a Hajj like *A Little Life*. But *Circe* did not touch me in that way. In fact, there were moments—those times when the novel resorted to recounting the tales of the mythology we all know so well rather than ~~putting the reader in the moment of these tales~~—where I was bored to skimming. In *Circe*, pages upon pages passed of one character telling another a "story" of others' happenings, travels and wars: Telemachus telling Circe about Odysseus, Circe recounting the story of Hermes, and on and on. Who wants to hear second- and third-hand about the chronicles of these larger-than-life names within a novel that calls itself an "epic?" I'd rather **feel and live** the stories of these mortals and gods alike. Wouldn't you?

Circe's life is a true saga, and Miller's research and background in the Classics shines through in this novel and serves her well. But, there are gaps between the breadth and notoriety of the mythology she incorporated here and the skill with which the novel was actually written. There is only so far that building a modern-day epic on the backs of known names and legends could go; Miller needed to take us the rest of the way to make *Circe* a contemporary wonder, to make this a saga all her own. This novel didn't quite make it across that bridge for me.

Circe offered up a world full of color, a world of eternal life and leviathans, of clashing gods and witchcraft, all while tying in mythological tales that've been handed down for ages. Perhaps it's only fitting, in that case,

that it was overwrought with linguistic hyperbole—*The sound was a piercing chaos, like a thousand dogs howling at once...She beat the cliff-side, howling her frustration.* This novel was full of both drama and melodrama, only one of which is necessary for a sweeping epic. Yet, I had to appreciate the scale of story Miller told and the breadth of her knowledge in the Classics. *Circe* was a great story for sure, but I was never fully moved by how it was told. 3.5 stars.***

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????? ? says

Do you ever just get mad because you're spending your life paying rent and wishing you could take a break from the linear flow of time when you could have been a goddess living in an enchanted island that is only seen every ten years and is unreachable by men? You live with ancient queens of myth and you're so much a part of each other it was like a second soul inside your skin. You sing hymns, burn incenses, and make fragrant oils. You call birds to sing at your windows, fall asleep in patches of magical herbs with hair dripping all around you like a shawl and sit by the hearth with a lioness, cheeks glowing with the flames' light. Your skin is all luster and gleam and you're so far removed from the world's sorrows and so at peace and healthy. You live into 300 years, and in the space where legends and fairytales are gathering up words, your names are amongst them.

Yeah, same.

Ana O says

Hello, my name is Ana and I am a Greek mythology addict.

A brief introduction to the deities of Greek mythology.

Zeus (Thunder God, king of the Gods)

Hera (Queen of Olympus, Goddess of marriage)

Demeter (Goddess of the harvest, agriculture and fertility)

Poseidon (God of the Sea)

Hestia (Virgin goddess of the hearth)

Hades (God of the Underworld, riches, king of the dead)

Persephone/Kora (Goddess of Spring, Queen of the Underworld)

Athena (Virgin Goddess of wisdom, craft, and war; companion of heroes)

Hermes (Messenger of the gods, God of thieves, trade, travelers)

Apollo (God of prophecy, healing, poetry, music, sun)

Artemis (Virgin goddess of the hunt)

Hephaestus (God of fire and blacksmiths)
Aphrodite (Goddess of beauty and love)
Ares (God of war)
Dionysus (God of wine and the grape harvest, God of theatre)
Helios (Titan god of the sun)
Selene (Titan goddess of the moon)
Eos/Aurora (Titan Goddess of the dawn)
Gaia (Goddess of the earth)
Cronus (King of the Titans)
Rhea (wife of Cronus)
Nyx (powerful Goddess of the night)
Hypnos (God of sleep)
Morpheus (God of dreams)
Hecate (Goddess of magic and witchcraft)
Thanatos (God of death)
Nemesis (Goddess of divine retribution and revenge)
Prometheus (Creator of mankind)
Eros/Cupid (God of love)
Hebe (Goddess of youth)
Muses (Goddesses of inspiration)
The Fates/Moirai (Three sisters, weavers of a tapestry dictating the destinies of men)

~~-Shut up I don't have a problem.~~

I've been waiting for this ever since The Song of Achilles came out. I have this thing about long-dead heroes from Greek mythology.

~~-Shut up I'm not weird.~~

clears throat

Thank you for this book, Madeline Miller. You are a goddess among women.

A book about Circe. FINALLY. FINALMENTE. POR FIN. ENDLICH. NAPOKON.

Circe was a sorceress, daughter of the sun god Helios, and Perse, an Oceanid nymph. You may remember her from Odyssey. Odysseus made Circe promise not to forcibly take his manhood. Trolling at its finest.

Miller's Circe is much more humanized. She is a character you can root for. Here you will meet all the iconic characters from mythology. The Minotaur, Daedalus and his son Icarus, the infamous Medea, and the clever Odysseus. As usual, there is no shortage of fabulous characters.

Awesome, brave and resourceful. Circe definitely is all three, with a dash of sass.

I wished that they would come. I wanted to see those goggle eyes of theirs as I walked among the dens of wolves, swam in the sea where the sharks fed. I could change a fish to a bird, I could wrestle with my lion, then lie across her belly, my hair loose around me. I wanted to hear them squeal and gasp, breath-struck.

It's Greek mythology y'all. You know you love it. You know you need it. You gotta have it.

Thanks to Netgalley for the ARC. It was about time.

The perfect playlist to set the mood.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list...>

Emily May says

"Witches are not so delicate," I said.

I absolutely loved this. If you enjoy Greek mythology, complex heroines, and a generous serving of adventure, bloodshed, betrayal, magic, and monsters - both literal and figurative - then hell, READ THIS BOOK.

To be honest, I wasn't a huge fan of Miller's *The Song of Achilles* when I read it a few years back. I'm not sure if that's because my tastes were different back then, or if it was just because the plot had more of a romantic focus than *Circe*. But, whatever the reason, I had no such problem with this book. **I was absolutely captivated from start to finish.**

Circe is part beautifully-written literary fantasy and part divine Greek soap opera. This strange combination makes for a book that is extremely quotable, rich in description and detail, and also a pageturner. It moves seamlessly between the broader scope of the world and its many gods and monsters, to the more narrow focus of the nymph-turned-witch, *Circe*, and her daily life before and after she is exiled to the island *Aeaea*.

Circe becomes a powerful witch, but the strength of her story is in all her relatable flaws and weaknesses. We follow her as a naive lesser nymph, longing to be accepted and loved. We stay with her as she believes the lies of others and, later, becomes hardened against such deceivers. Her compassion constantly battles with her rage. Understandably.

There is some grim satisfaction to be gained as this woman who has been bullied, belittled and trod on her entire life slowly claws out some vengeance for herself. The pain she endures along the way means that her successes are bittersweet. **In the end, *Circe* might be full of fantasy, backstabbing and murder, but it is first and foremost the story of one woman's life - through pain, love, desire, heartache and motherhood.**

I did not go easy to motherhood. I faced it as soldiers face their enemies, girded and braced, sword up against the coming blows. Yet all my preparations were not enough.

Other Greek myths play out in the background - that of the Minotaur, and of Icarus, as well as many others -

but it is Circe's personal tale that hits the hardest. I just hope we don't have to wait another seven years for Miller to write another novel like this.

TW: Rape; graphic violence.

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Bibi says

Spoilers

How I wish Miller's Circe was a reimagining as opposed to a retelling and I say this because there's little else that can be told about Greek mythology that isn't readily available online or at the library.

A reinterpretation, on the other hand, gives an author creative license to weave a uniquely extravagant and fantastical story (Now I Rise did it perfectly) and perhaps one in which a lowly nymph attains great powers, transforms into a formidable sorceress who then proceeds to defy and defeat gods.

But, I digress.

If Miller's ultimate goal for this book is to introduce Greek mythology to a new generation of readers, then, I think she succeeded. **However, that's ALL she achieved.**

This story about an inferior but immortal nymph called, Circe, who is a progeny of not one but TWO Titans -Helios and Oceanus- is decidedly underwhelming, trite, and overwrought with both too many characters yet very little story progression. Presumably, the author had a checklist of events (and characters) that simply had to make an appearance in the story, even if the tangent was superfluous and unrelated:

Prometheus, and the banishment. Check

Scylla, the six-headed monster. Check

Pasiphae, Daedalus, the Bull of Poseidon, and the horror that was Minotaur. Check

Let's not forget, Odyssey.

And Hermes

And Athena

And many others who (*please listen closely*) WERE NOT REQUIRED TO MOVE THIS STORY FORWARD. Think I'm making this up?

Well, let's see what the story's about shall we?

1. Circe is so dull and uninteresting that
2. Pretty much everyone ignores her; that is, until...
3. She uses her magic to turn Scylla into the six-headed monster.
4. Consequently, she's exiled to an island
5. Where she at times turned unsavoury sailors into pigs

6. Eventually leaving the island only after having lived there for centuries.
7. The end.

All in all, I think if you're new to mythology then this is for you; but even then I'd recommend reading *Greek Mythology: A Captivating Guide to the Ancient Gods, Goddesses, Heroes, and Monsters* instead.

Victoria Schwab says

Spellbinding.

chandler ainsley ? says

for \$27 this book better clear my skin, water my crops, and eliminate all the stress i have ever had
buddy read with yusra!

Melanie says

ARC provided by the publisher via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

? Signed and personalized copies are available through Main Point Books! (They can ship anywhere in the US, anywhere in the UK, and also to some other international locations)

“When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist.”

This is the pièce de résistance I’ve been searching for my entire life. Not only did I fall in love with this story, I predict that this will be the best book I’ll read all year. This book is about healing and doing what it takes to come into your own. This book is about love; the love between lovers, the love of a mother, and the love you must find in yourself. This book proves why family of choice will always be greater than family of origin. This book is about magic, and how we can find it in ourselves if we look hard enough. This is a book about becoming the witch you’ve always buried deep inside you.

“They do not care if you are good. They barely care if you are wicked. The only thing that makes them listen is power.”

Okay, maybe I should start this review off with a somewhat personal story. I was very privileged to go to a very good high school where I was able to study *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* for a class my freshman year. And fourteen-year-old Melanie fell in love. To say I was obsessed was an understatement, and more and more my heart was filled with love for Odysseus, Athena, and a certain love affair with the witch-goddess Circe.

(Beautiful art by Kevin Nichols)

Even upon finishing that class, I still couldn't get enough of Homer's words. And to this day, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are the only books that I collect many editions of. All my loved ones and family correlate these epic poems with me, and always bring me new editions from their travels, and give me gifts for special events and holidays the same way they do with *Harry Potter*. One of the most prized possessions I own is an edition of *The Odyssey* that was given to me by someone who meant a lot to me, at a very important time in my life. And these two tomes will always be a big part of my identity, and I will always recognize that they not only shaped me as a reader, but they shaped me as a human being, too.

So, when I found out that that Greek mythology retelling queen, Madeline Miller, was writing a book centered around Circe, I knew it was going to end up being one of my favorite books of all time. And it ended up being everything I wanted and more. I hate to throw around the word masterpiece, but if I had to pick a book to give that title to, I'd pick *Circe*.

***“Odysseus, son of Laertes, the great traveler, prince of wiles and tricks and a thousand ways.
He showed me his scars, and in return he let me pretend that I had none.”***

And even though Odysseus plays a huge role in this story, this book is Circe's and Circe's alone. We get to see her growing up in Oceanus, with her Titan sun god father Helios, and loveless nymph mother Perse, and her three more ambitious siblings, Aeëtes, Pasiphaë, and Perses. We get to see her living her life of solitude, exiled on the island of Aiaia. We also get to see her make a few very important trips, that are very monumental in Greek mythos. But we get to see all of Circe, the broken parts, the healing parts, and the complete parts. We get to see her love, her loss, her discovery, her resolve, and her determination. We get to see her question what it means to be immortal, what it means to be a nymph in a world ruled by gods, and what it means to just live. Her journey is unlike anything I've ever read before, and probably unlike anything I will ever read again. I have no combination of words to express how much her life and her story means to me. But I promise, I'm not the same person I was before reading this book.

“...All my life had been murk and depths, but I was not a part of that dark water. I was a creature within it.”

This is ultimately a story about how different the tales will always be told for a man. And how the ballads will always be sung for heroes, not heroines, even if a woman was truly behind all the success the man greedily reaped. **How the light will always fall to vilify the woman and showcase her as a witch that needs to be tamed, a sorceress that needs to be subdued, or an enchantress that needs to be defeated.** Women, no matter how much agency they carve out in any male dominated world, will always be a means to an end to further the achievements of man. Always. And *Circe* displays that at the forefront of this story.

Circe is most well known for turning Odysseus's men into pigs when they come to her island in *The*

Odyssey, but Madeline Miller does such a wonderful job weaving all this Greek mythology into a fully fleshed out, brand-new tale. She has created something so unique, yet so breathtakingly good, I think so many readers will find it impossible to put this new-spin of a story down. I was completely captivated and enthralled from the very first line to the very last line. This book just feels so authentic, I felt like I was in the ocean, on the island, and traveling right beside Circe throughout. And I never wanted to leave her side.

“It was their favorite bitter joke: those who fight against prophecy only draw it more tightly around their throats.”

Overall, I understand that this is a book that is very targeted to me and my likes. Not only is this a character driven story, with a main protagonist being a character I’ve been in love with for over a decade, but the writing was lyrical perfection. I’m such a quote reader, and I swear I would have highlighted this entire book. This book is also so beautifully feminist that it makes me weep just thinking about the things Circe had to endure. And it showcases the unconditional love of found families, yet also between a mother and her child, while simultaneously abolishing the notion that blood is worth more than anything else in any world. This book heavily emphasizes that you will never be the mistakes that your parents have committed. The entire story is a love letter to love itself and reveals all the things we are willing to do in the name of it. And most importantly, this is a book about how we are truly only ever in charge of our own stories, even though our actions may change the fate for others around us. Please, pick this masterpiece up, and I hope it changes your life, too.

Thank you, Madeline Miller, I will carry your Circe in my heart for the rest of my life.

“That is one thing gods and mortals share: when we are young, we think ourselves the first to have each feeling in the world.”

Trigger/Content Warnings: Violence, gore, murder, torture, physical abuse, child abuse, thoughts of suicide, brief scene with cutting, graphic childbirth scenes, mention of bestiality, mention of incest, animal sacrifice, death of a sibling, death of a child, death of a loved one, death of an animal, rape, adultery, and war themes.

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The quotes above were taken from an ARC and are subject to change upon publication.

Buddy read with Elise (My French Spider Queen)! ♥

Sean Barrs the Bookdragon says

This is a beautiful book; it is flawless and intelligent. I do not have a single criticism for this fantastic piece of writing. **I loved it!**

Circe chronicles the life of a lesser god. She is the daughter of the mighty God Helios, the living embodiment of the sun. She is born without any particular talents or powers. She exists in the shadows of her

more developed brothers and sisters. She does not shine in such spectacular company.

However, gifts come in many different forms and those with hidden talents are overlooked and devalued. More often than not quiet people are forgotten about and their worth ill-considered in all walks of existence. Circe's family never saw what she could become. Power is important, though sometimes having none teaches one a greater lesson: nothing is worth having unless it has been earned. As such Circe wills herself into power as she discovers her affinity for witchcraft, especially the art of transformation.

Her family banish her from their company for her use of such a lowly art, and in doing so they set her free. She finds herself in her exile. On her island home she finds a paradise not a prison. She becomes one with nature and finds company with lions and wolves. Centuries pass, ages pass, and eventually some rather important characters come her way. She meets Hermes and Athena, Icarus and his father Daedalus, and Odysseus, a man who changes her life and causes her to make a very powerful decision that leads this book into such an excellent conclusion.

“But in a solitary life, there are rare moments when another soul dips near yours, as stars once a year brush the earth. Such a constellation was he to me.”

Circe offers a huge story, a story that spans generations and includes many Greek heroes and gods. Such is the nature of godhood, of immortality. When life goes on forever many notable people cross one's path. And despite the huge number of famous characters here, none of it felt forced: it all slotted perfectly into Circe's life. There are so many myths that intertwine with Circe, like the story of the Minotaur and the fall of Icarus, though despite the famous nature of many of them they don't for a second overshadow her.

She met Prometheus when she was young and decided that her life would not be the same as the other gods: she was going to be her own woman. And this is a book about her finding the most ultimate form of freedom. I could not recommend it more highly. I really liked *The Song of Achilles* though this surpassed it in every way. I really hope to see more from this author in the future.

Five fantastic stars

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