

Women's Prize for Fiction 2019

Reading Group Guide

Circe by Madeline Miller Bloomsbury Publishing

Also by Madeline Miller:
The Song of Achilles (2011)

About the book

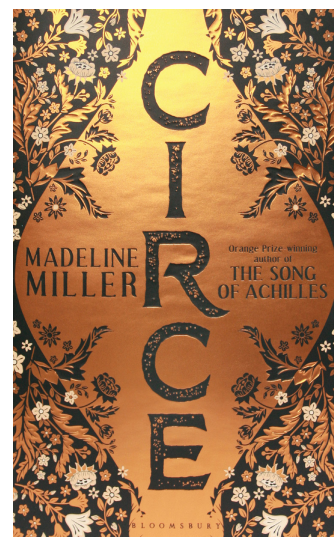
In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe has neither the look nor the voice of divinity, and is scorned and rejected by her kin. Increasingly isolated, she turns to mortals for companionship, leading her to discover a power forbidden to the gods: witchcraft.

When love drives Circe to cast a dark spell, wrathful Zeus banishes her to the remote island of Aiaia. There she learns to harness her occult craft, drawing strength from nature. But she will not always be alone; many are destined to pass through Circe's place of exile, entwining their fates with hers. The messenger god, Hermes. The craftsman, Daedalus. A ship bearing a golden fleece. And wily Odysseus, on his epic voyage home.

There is danger for a solitary woman in this world, and Circe's independence draws the wrath of men and gods alike. To protect what she holds dear, Circe must decide whether she belongs with the deities she is born from, or the mortals she has come to love.

About the author

Madeline Miller is the author of *The Song of Achilles*, which won the Orange Prize for Fiction 2012, was shortlisted for the Stonewall Writer of the Year 2012, was an instant New York Times bestseller, and was translated into twenty-five languages. Madeline holds an MA in Classics from Brown University, and she taught Latin, Greek and Shakespeare to high school students for over a decade. She has also studied at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought, and at Yale School of Drama, where she focused on the adaptation of classical texts to modern forms. Her essays have appeared in publications including the Guardian, Wall Street Journal, Lapham's Quarterly and NPR.org. She lives outside Philadelphia.



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Questions and discussion points

1. What did you know about Circe or Odysseus beforehand, and what was different to what you were expecting?
2. What do you think *Circe* says about women and power? Does this story turn a potential tale of isolation into one of empowerment, or it is more nuanced?
3. What do you think the novel says about family dynamics and single motherhood? Do you think it has a particular angle or agenda in its portrayal?
4. Circe readily enacts revenge. Discuss the moral rights or wrongs of that.
5. Would you class this as a feminist retelling of a patriarchal text? Discuss other examples of feminist rewrites which you would recommend.

Suggested reading

The Odyssey by Homer, translated by Emily Wilson

The Penelopiad by Margaret Atwood

Girl Meets Boy by Ali Smith

xo Orpheus: Fifty New Myths edited by Kate Bernheimer

Mythos by Stephen Fry

Useful links

[Circe by Madeline Miller review – myth, magic and single motherhood](#)

[Circe, Madeline Miller, review: Feminist rewrite of *The Odyssey* turns tale of subjugation into one of empowerment](#)

[Circe by Madeline Miller review: a fresh take on an ancient mythical tale](#)

[Circe gives the witch of *The Odyssey* a new life](#)

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