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Research Article

From Homosocial Triangle to Queer Relationality: Gender Performativity and Anti-Essentialism in *The Song of Achilles*

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ABSTRACT

The classical epic genre has historically been a significant site for the construction of heroic masculinity grounded in martial excellence, bodily exceptionality, and homosocial relations structured through rivalry, conquest, and the exchange of women. Homer's *Iliad* presents Achilles as a quintessential warrior whose identity is constructed through violence and honour. Although his relationship with Patroclus has often been made marginal or de-sexualised in classical reception, despite the emotional intensity of Achilles' bond with Patroclus, the epic remains uneasy with a heteronormative reading of the *Iliad*. Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* intervenes at this fault line by reimagining epic heroism through the language of intimacy, vulnerability, and care. This paper argues how the novel queers the Homeric tradition by centring the erotic and affective relationship between Achilles and Patroclus while exposing the patriarchal logics that underpin heroic masculinity. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of male homosocial desire and Judith Butler's concepts of gender performativity and anti-essentialism, the paper identifies three interrelated interventions. The story reworks, or better, refuses, Sedgwick's homosocial "erotic

triangle" by not placing women in the mediation between the men. As an alternative, it proposes an openly acknowledged erotic bond between the two men. At the same time, Briseis and Thetis' functions involving the masculine rivalry are disruptive, not stabilising, providing for queer kinship networks or as agents of patriarchal enforcement. By applying Butler's concept of gender as a "stylised repetition of acts", the paper demonstrates that Achilles, being the "greatest of the Greeks", does not express an innate masculine essence but rather the effect of repeated performances required by militarised culture. In contrast, Patroclus's care-centred role as a healer embodies an alternative masculinity rationalised through relationality and ethical responsibility. Through an anti-essentialist reading of fate and prophecy, the paper argues that Miller reframes identity as contingently produced through choices and relations, even as imperial structures foreclose sustained queer life.

KEYWORDS: Queer Theory; Homosocial Desire; Gender Performativity; Classical Myth Rewriting

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* (2011) reclaims the classical Homeric tradition by insisting that the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is more explicitly erotic and emotionally central, rather than driven by martial duty. Homer's *Iliad* portrays the bond between Patroclus and Achilles as a friendship founded on military camaraderie. However, Miller's novel intervenes in a queer register, laying bare what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the "unpredictably and ever-changingly permeable" line between homosocial and homosexual desire (Sedgwick 21). The present paper focuses on Miller's novel, which takes its point of departure from Sedgwick's analysis of male homosocial bonds and Judith Butler's theory of gender as repeatedly performed rather than essentially determined. Carefully engaging with these theories, the paper argues that Miller's novel makes three interrelated critical interventions. First, Miller's novel queers Sedgwick's triangular model by refusing to deploy women as mediating figures through which male-to-male desire circulates; second, it exposes heroic masculinity as a performative accomplishment rather than an essential truth; and third, it shows how patriarchal and imperial structures violently foreclose the possibility of sustained queer relationality. *The Song of Achilles* does not celebrate same-sex love as triumphant. However, it analyses the potentiality of losing relational care and mutual vulnerability when patriarchal systems compel commitment to death, glory, and individual heroism. The novel's tragic arc, therefore,

does not stage the triumph of queer desire but its inevitable foreclosure by patriarchal violence—a foreclosure that the very act of the novel's representation seeks to contest and memorialise.

The classical epic genre has historically been a significant site for the construction of heroic masculinity grounded in martial excellence, bodily exceptionality, and homosocial relations structured through rivalry, conquest, and the exchange of women. Homer's *Iliad* presents Achilles as a quintessential warrior whose identity is constructed through violence and honour. Although his relationship with Patroclus has often been marginalised or de-sexualised in classical reception, the emotional intensity of Achilles' bond with Patroclus makes the epic uneasy with a heteronormative reading. Miller's *The Song of Achilles* intervenes at this fault line by reimagining epic heroism through the language of intimacy, vulnerability, and care. Narrated in the first person by Patroclus in a Homeric epic style, the novel shifts focus from emotional connection, moral quality, and the impact of heroic mentality to the display of combat rather than to its impact. Miller's retelling is notable for its lyrical restraint, narrative empathy, and fine equilibrium between classical fidelity and modern sensibility. The novel challenges traditional notions of heroism and masculinity via marginal perspectives and myth rendered as lived experience. The overall aesthetic clarity, psychological insight, and revisionary relationship with classical sources make Miller's text both a literary adaptation and a critique of the epic.

This paper proceeds in three sections. The first examines Miller's strategic refusal of Sedgwick's homosocial model, particularly through the reconfiguration of Briseis and Thetis. The second applies Butler's performativity to reveal heroic masculinity as multiple and contextual, contrasting Achilles' warrior and lover performances with Patroclus' care-centred alternative. The third deploys Butler's anti-essentialism to reinterpret fate, prophecy, and bodily exceptionality as socially produced, culminating in the novel's queer counter-remembrance against patriarchal foreclosure. *The Song of Achilles* analyses the potentiality of losing relational care and mutual vulnerability in our lives when patriarchal systems compel us to commit ourselves to death, glory, and individual heroism. The novel's tragic arc, therefore, does not stage the triumph of queer desire but its inevitable foreclosure by patriarchal violence, a foreclosure that the very act of the novel's representation seeks to contest and memorialise.

Sedgwick's Homosocial Model and Miller's Strategic Refusal: The Continuum of Desire.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's foundational book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), proposes a theory about the emotional, social, and possibly erotic "relations between men." Sedgwick argues that the term "male

homosocial desire references a continuum of relations between men that ranges from the intensely friendly to the overtly sexual and cannot be cleanly separated from the erotic." In making this argument, she claims that she has specifically chosen the word "desire" instead of "love" to indicate the erotic emphasis of this entire continuum (Sedgwick 1-2). This language is philosophically significant because it insists that apparently platonic male bonding, military camaraderie, fraternal attachment, and political alliance are already charged with erotic investment, even when that eroticism is unspoken or socially disavowed. Furthermore, Sedgwick stresses that 'the continuum between homosocial and homosexual is a lot less oppositional than it is continuous', and that the boundary between same-sex friendship and same-sex eroticism is 'unpredictably and ever-changingly permeable' (Sedgwick 21). This theoretical move is important in that it refuses to stabilise an essential distinction between the types of male-bonding. She claims that homosocial and homosexual desire tend to exist within a spectrum wherein movement along the spectrum is contextually assigned rather than rigidly dictated by nature or essence.

According to Sedgwick's critique, a patriarchal mechanism exists whereby male-to-male desire is constitutive of patriarchal structures but is also carefully contained. She remarks that patriarchal organisation hinges on what she calls "erotic triangles", which are structured by "a man desires a woman, but the primary and structuring desire is a man for a man" (Sedgwick 25). In this opposition, we find women playing the role of the simulated female, and the male-to-male was the ground and secret of patriarchal organisation. This simulated 'feminisation' of desire becomes an object of homosocial solidarity, fraternity or rivalry. Women play a mediating role through which male-to-male desire is channelled, sanctioned, and made socially legitimate. Miller intentionally distorts the standard triangular structure that often reinforces patriarchy.

In contrast to the traditional account, in which Helen's abduction initiates the events that structure male rivalry and homosocial bonding, Miller's version reduces the mediating role of female figures, instead staging a direct erotic and emotional connection between Achilles and Patroclus. The entire narrative is retold from Patroclus' perspective, highlighting a desire to focus on something other than the martial spectacle of Achilles. The novel establishes the primary and all-consuming bond between Patroclus and Achilles from the outset, on Mount Pelion, where Patroclus first met Achilles. The directness with which Patroclus states this sentiment, "I did not think that we would ever be parted," and says concerning the first sexual act they share, "I am not sorry…" (Miller 167). These explicit assertions of relational commitment and erotic satisfaction reject the triangular schema that Sedgwick identifies as characteristic of the patriarchal homosocial organisation.

The novel's handling of Briseis, the Trojan captive whose seizure by Agamemnon causes Achilles to withdraw in the *Iliad*, is revealing. Briseis is the named woman in Homer who organises and mobilises male-to-male desire through competitive rivalry. The capture of her by Agamemnon, as well as Achilles' anger at this seizure, structures the homosocial relationship between the two men. For she is the prize through which male honour and rivalries are negotiated. In contrast, Miller's novel incorporates Briseis into what Patroclus terms their "family": a queer kinship structure that decidedly rejects patriarchal exchange relations. Patroclus assures Achilles, "Briseis is not just a servant any longer. She was one of us now, and we will never give her up." Briseis is valued not as a sexual trophy or mediating object, but as a member of a non-hierarchical/non-erotic society. In long passages of the novel, Briseis tells stories by the fire, performs domestic work, and becomes integrated into the "hearth" of Achilles and Patroclus, a space of care and vulnerability that opposes the patriarchal militarism (Miller 291-98).

Miller's portrayal of Thetis, Achilles's mother, represents the patriarchal feminine who enforces patriarchal law rather than disrupts it. Thetis' agenda is not sexual rivalry with Patroclus but the insistence that Achilles submit personal investment to the pursuit of martial glory and divine renown by our patriarchal code. Achilles insists, "Patroclus is my sworn companion. His place is beside me." When Thetis hears this, there is a chilling response: "Her eyes were fixed on Achilles; they did not seem to see me at all" (Miller 196). The point of her refusal is not to exhibit a sexual jealousy towards Patroclus but rather to create a performance of erasure. This reinforces the patriarchal claim that Achilles' true fate lies in war and glory, rather than in relational love. She recognises this connection when her antagonism toward Patroclus registers. Furthermore, through this, we see that Patroclus's presence threatens the patriarchal logic that Thetis herself operates within.

Gender as Repeating Performance (Butler's Theory and Many Masculinities).

According to Judith Butler, gender identity is neither essential nor inherently expressive of a fixed nature. It is not something natural that we either have or do not have. Rather, gender is "constituted in time and an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler 519). We therefore perform gender in ways that make it appear stable and endurable. Butler provides us with this understanding of gender through her theorisations of gender performativity, primarily presented in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and the essay *"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"* (1988). It turns the traditional conception of gender on its head, where gender is not something internal that inspires behaviour and appearance. Butler holds the view that repeated stylised performances produce gender identity. She argues that "the appearance of substance is just that, as constructed identity, as performative accomplishment rather than an internal feature

of a person" (Butler 520). What appears to be a person's most profound understanding of their gendered selfhood, which feels like an internal essence, has emerged from habitual, repetitive performances that become natural through repetition. She further states that 'in its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status' (Butler 520). Gender is not inherent but performed; therefore, alternative performances are not only thinkable but also doable politically.

Miller's presentation of Achilles reveals a sharp awareness of gender performativity. Throughout the novel's narrative arc, Achilles is repeatedly depicted as embodying an idealised militarised masculinity. The logic of the heroic masculine performance, namely the script that demands sacrifice in the pursuit of patriarchal glory and fame, involves the surrender of personal happiness and relational intimacy, as his famous line alerts us: "Name one hero who was happy" (Miller 194-95). This display of tragic, sacrificial masculinity is not introduced as Achilles' "true self" or his essence. Instead, it is a performance he adopts strategically to constitute himself as the figure the patriarchal world demands. He repeats this performance on the battlefield, in the assemblies, and in front of the other warriors. Each demonstration of martial competence, each claim of superiority, and each denial of comfort or intimacy reinforces this specific performance of manhood. Miller's narrative reveals, however, that Achilles's masculinity is fundamentally multiple, relating to space and relationships. When Achilles is separated from the military arena and alone with Patroclus, he displays an entirely contrasting performance of embodied masculinity: tender, vulnerable, emotionally expressive, and openly erotic. The novel describes their first sexual experience as "We were like gods at the dawn of the world; our joy was so bright that we could see nothing else but each other" (Miller 171). It emphasises how it was a very vulnerable performance. This statement of ecstatic intimacy directly contradicts the impassive, restrained performance of martial heroism, which calls for Achilles the warrior to go through. The imagery of domestic tenderness is presented through the extended scenes as the narrator notes, "Later, we lay by the river, learning the lines of each other's bodies all over again. This, and this and this…" (Miller 172). The focus is on sensory pleasure, emotional openness, and embodied desire in these scenes, which starkly contrast with the emotionally controlled, invulnerable masculinity that Achilles must display on the battlefield.

This comprehension of gender performativity throws light on Patroclus's depiction in the novel. Patroclus embodies an alternative masculinity; one that emphasises care, emotional vulnerability and subordinates individual fame to commitments to others. His medical work at Troy, tending to wounds, alleviating pain, and preventing infection, is not represented as supplemental to "real" masculine achievement (warring) but as an equally valid performance of gendered identity. Patroclus states, "I was getting a reputation, a standing among the camp. I was asked

for, known for my quick hands and how little pain I caused" (Miller 288). One does not achieve such a standing through martial prowess, but through being caring and ethical. Patroclus's masculinity is based on healing, devotion, and the valorisation of vulnerability and emotional connection, precisely the kind of performance that patriarchal culture works to devalue and erase.

The book thus showcases many performances of masculinity that compete with one another. As the novel's development shows, this heroic masculinity is not a fixed, essential property. Instead, it is a space where different ways of performing gender coexist. *The Song of Achilles* is a tragedy because it enforces a single version of masculinity, one that is militarised, emotionally restrained, and glory-seeking, as exemplified by the warrior Achilles himself, while devaluing and crushing the alternative performances embodied by Patroclus and the Achilles-in-love.

The Anti-Essentialist Perspective and the Nature of the Heroic Fate

Anti-essentialism, as articulated by Judith Butler, rejects the notion of gender as a natural or prediscursive essence, instead understanding identity as performatively constituted. It refuses to ground identity in some biological, psychological, or metaphysical substrate. It can provide us with helpful analytical resources in understanding the essentialism that Miller willfully challenges in classical mythology and the patriarchal logic it harbours. Butler insists repeatedly in her work that "there are no pre-social essences" and that "what we take to be the internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body". The performances of social, cultural, and political components have led to the emergence of identity categories, such as gender, sexuality, and race, rather than to their being manifestations of any prior essential properties.

Classical mythologies often operate with an essentialist logic that construes greatness and destiny in a heroic mould as properties inscribed in bodily matter or by the will of the divine. The story of Achilles exemplifies essentialism. In later versions of the myth (notably Statius and other post-Homeric sources), Achilles' mother, Thetis, dips her infant son in the Styx River, making him invulnerable, except for his heel. Achilles' invulnerability is presented as fundamentally an immutable, unchanging mark on Achilles' very flesh that determines his fate, destiny and historical significance. Being "Achilles" in an essentialist sense means having that essential invulnerability; he is who he is and has that power by virtue of biology.

Miller's novel expressly rejects this essentialist framework. Miller depicts Achilles, following Homer's model, as a character with preternatural skills: skilled, fast, strong, and coordinated. He is not depicted as someone invulnerable in an essential sense. The choice of wording in this narrative is philosophically significant, as it denies that Achilles' heroic greatness and historical importance are grounded in an essential,

biological, or unchangeable property. According to Joan E. Mumaugh, Achilles is not the greatest warrior because of some inborn and immutable characteristic, but is forged through years of commitment to rigorous training with the centaur Chiron, through experience as a combatant, and through the affective labour and devotion of those around him, in particular Patroclus. His ability is created via social relations and repetition of practices not inscribed in the flesh.

The prophecy that structures the narrative – which figures strongly in the novel even if Miller avoids the literal invulnerability – further illustrates this anti-essentialist epistemology. According to a prophecy revealed to Achilles by his mother, Thetis, a Myrmidon will die within the next two years (Miller 317). This prediction seems to mark Achilles as, at heart, doomed to die, his being "best" thereby creating the destined victim of the oracle. However, Miller presents this prophecy not as an inescapable truth about the essence of Achilles but as a limitation against which Achilles and Patroclus nevertheless struggle. The choice to stay together, the choice to assert their relationship against the prophecy, gives them an identity which is performatively achieved rather than essentially given. They reject the patriarchal and divine design; thus, they choose their identity as lovers. That choice is not the expression of any prior essence but the performative constitution of themselves as queer subjects.

Miller's anti-essentialist epistemology is embodied most fully by Patroclus. Patroclus, youthful heir to the King of Phthia, arrives at Mount Pelion, where the story's mythical hero – Achilles- practises under the centaur Chiron. Patroclus was exiled from his homeland for accidentally killing someone as a child. However, he lacks the requisite nobility of birth, martial prowess, or divine favour that mythological narrative usually demands of a significant character. The way his significance is constructed becomes entirely accidental; it is his relationality to Achilles and the care work he performs at Troy, to which the narrative ascribes importance. He gains status in the war camp by repeatedly caring for the wounded, easing their pain, and preventing infection. When a man matters, he is someone whose presence we choose, not because he necessarily possesses essential properties, but because of what he does, and how he does it.

The book points out, "I was asked for, known for how quick my hands were and how little pain I caused." (Miller 288) A person's social standing is not innate, gendered, or natural; instead, it is constructed through repeated, ethical actions. Patroclus's significance is itself anti-essentialist: he has no prior essence that determines his place within the world, nor does he possess any pre-existing nobility or power. He creates the meaning and importance of what he does. What he does makes him who he is, through the repeating performances of care that cumulatively make him priceless in his community.

Queer Interaction and the Potential of Other Society

Miller's novel, with the help of Sedgwick's analysis of homosocial desire and Butler's theory of performative gender constitution, can be read as producing "queerness" not only as a marker of same-sex desire (although that is part of this) but rather as a form of relationality and care-functioning that rejects patriarchal logic and the organised hierarchies it creates. The queer relationship designed by Miller is one built around mutuality, vulnerability, and reciprocal dependency, and prioritising the relationship over patriarchal obligations, the military chain of command, and dynastic inheritance.

The queer relationship is most noticeable in the establishment of a domestic community at the war camp in Troy by Achilles and Patroclus. They do not organise their lives around martial competition and individual glory, but neither do they settle down for a pastoral life. They do however form a "hearth" around which assembles what might be called a queer family: Achilles and Patroclus at the centre, the old Phoinix (who has loved Achilles since the latter was a child), the young Automedon (who tends their horses, and who is coaxed into their community), Briseis (the enslaved woman who becomes their sister/companion), and various other enslaved women who are coaxed into their community (Miller 291-98). This domestic sphere is claimed to be just as important as the military operations commemorated in the past. The narrative explores the interactions and care work that comprise this queer family, which encompasses sharing food, engaging in narrative exchanges by the fire, tending to wounds and ailments, and the many small acts of tenderness and care that forge relationships of affection and obligation. Patroclus notes that in this space, we are 'like children, as if the whole world were unimportant to us' (Miller 293). This characterisation of queer domesticity proposes that patriarchal time and obligation are suspended in favour of relational time and emotional presence. The fire burning at the heart of this community is always described as a site of meaning-making and connection, which is in stark contrast to the impersonal, competitive, and military camps and battlefields surrounding it.

Patroclus's medical work, in particular, is presented as constitutive of community and meaning-making, rather than being characterised as secondary, feminised, or subordinate; healing work is staged as equally valuable to martial arts. Patroclus's painstaking, patient work to limit pain, prevent infection, and cope with minor irritations becomes the foundation on which he makes himself significant and valuable. The book accentuates his increasing fame and how soldiers come looking for him as he states, "I was asked for, I was known for my quick hands and how little pain I caused to…(Miller 288)" Through non-stop acts of care, this relational standing is built.

The sexual intimacy of Achilles and Patroclus is manifestly depicted in the novel to argue that queer relationality is legitimised and sacred. Their sexual union is framed not as shameful, nor subordinate to their being perceived 'actually' as warriors, but as generative of identity and community. The novel portrays their first sexual encounter with beautiful intensity: "We were like gods at the beginning of the world, and so bright was our joy that we could see nothing else but each other" (Miller 171). Miller contends that, far from being a marginal aspect of human significance, queer desire and erotic bonding are much more the result than the cause of meaning, community, and selfhood, by positioning erotic desire and sexual intimacy over duty.

The Inevitable Foreclosure – Patriarchal Violence and the Destruction of Queer Possibility

*The Song of Achilles'*s field of action is the ancient world dominated by patriarchy and imperialism – one in which queer life is hacked as brutal action disallows intimacy, love and flourishing. The novel suggests that society, rather than individuals, is antagonistic to love. The novel not only celebrates the intimacy, mutuality, and care that Achilles and Patroclus achieve, but also records the forces, both human and divine, that systematically work against this queer community. The story shows that a patriarchal system does not just repress or stigmatise queer relationality, but actively and violently destroys it.

The killing of Patroclus is significant in this thoroughness. When the Greeks suffer a devastating defeat, Patroclus dons Achilles' armour to lead the troops and stop the slaughter of the Greeks. This performance by Patroclus is indicative of a more profound truth about the homoerotics of war: the most significant act of queering does not happen when men make love to one another. However, it resulted in death. Hector sees Achilles' armour, chases after Patroclus, and in combat, Patroclus is killed (Miller 328–33). The way in which his death is depicted in the story shows how patriarchal systems police gender performance through violence: the attempt by Patroclus to perform a masculinity that is not properly his, namely the warrior's role that has always been Achilles', proves fatal for him.

Soon after, Achilles dies, an event that totally forecloses the queer possibility that the novel has put on stage. Achilles's death serves as a reminder that, although he is such a great and mighty hero, the patriarchal heroic system is more powerful and ultimately responsible for his death. When Achilles commits himself to the pursuit of patriarchal glory, when he enters the war and agrees to become the greatest warrior, the system demands his death in exchange for his glory. The prediction that Thetis's mudslinging has come true, as the best of the Greeks die not because it is some essential, unavoidable fate inscribed upon Achilles as a man, but because the setup

itself is organised to consume and destroy anyone who disrupts its script and consolidation.

Thetis is significant in this novel. Time after time, she pushes Achilles to war and glory, and away from personal happiness and connections with Patroclus. In demanding that Achilles "consider [his] answer" about whether he will take up arms for the Trojan War, she demands that he conform his performance of masculinity to patriarchal expectations, portraying the isolated, glory-seeking warrior rather than the loving partner (Miller 210-12). She embodies patriarchal authority, as it is she who levels the logic demanding men forego relationships and personal happiness in favour of public glory.

However, the novel's epilogue affirms that queer relationality remains alive and well despite the dismantling of patriarchal structures. In the final episode, narrated from Patroclus's disembodied viewpoint after his death, we see an acknowledgement of the distance death imposes. Their ashes have become one, but they are literally rooted to the earth and do not go to the underworld. Even in this separation, even in death, the queer connection lasts with incredible power. According to Miller, on a night where two shadows reach in the hopeless, heavy, grey dark, their hands meet. Above them, light from the heavens floods down, like a hundred golden urns pouring out of the sun (Miller 346). This final shot insists that the queer relationship has a constitutive and transformative power that escapes, though it does not prevent, the death-dealing of the patriarchal.

Conclusion

Miller's *The Song of Achilles* queers the Homeric tradition not just through its depiction of same-sex desire, but more broadly through its systematic challenge to the essentialist and patriarchal logics that structure both classical mythology and contemporary heteronormative culture. Sedgwick's analysis of homosocial desire and Butler's theories of gender performativity/anti-essentialism give us tools to understand Miller's novel as exposing the constructed, performative, and contingent nature of heroic masculinity and patriarchal authority. Miller's focus on the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, based on mutuality, vulnerability, reciprocal care, and erotic intimacy rather than domination, enables a distinct epistemology of human meaning and community building that is radically anti-patriarchal.

However, the novel's real power does not lie in an ostensible celebration of queer desire. Instead, its tragedy lies in the way it shows how the patriarchal and imperial structure violently closes off the possibility of living as a queer person. Miller represents moments of intense intimacy and tenderness between Achilles and Patroclus while also documenting the forces that Thetis's demand for patriarchal greatness and the endless consumption of life by the war and the social structures that

enforce gender performance through violence that work systematically to destroy this queer community. The novel, therefore, operates as a complex meditation on loss, impossible desire, and the violence of historical foreclosure.

Miller's novel materialises queer reflection as motility and through pain and loss. Miller's insistence on representing the doomed love of Achilles and Patroclus, staging the breathtaking beauty of their intimacy even as she documents the patriarchal forces crushing it, does historical work that makes alternative possibilities of being affirmable, even when patriarchy has acted to erase those possibilities from history. Through reading this novel, we perform our own counter-remembrance to insist that there were and are other possibilities, other ways of organising human relationships and value, other performances of gender and desire, even if patriarchal violence has rendered those ways impossible to sustain. The queerness of the novel lies not just in the same-sex love representation, but also in not yielding to patriarchal forgetting of the memory and meaning of that love.

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