

2025 Essay Prize Competition

Regressive perspectives in a modern story: How *The Iliad* exposes
Madeline Miller's adaptation, *The Song of Achilles*, as an endorsement
of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity

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1 Introduction

In 2011, Madeline Miller, a scholar of Latin and Ancient Greek, published her debut novel *The Song of Achilles*, a re-writing of Homer's *The Iliad*, which soon became a *New York Times* bestseller and international success. Readers appreciated how Miller concentrates on the intimate relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, who were companions in their youth and comrades during the Trojan War. In Miller's novel, we experience their story focalized through Patroclus who is only a minor character in *The Iliad*. Even though Homer describes their relationship as very affectionate, he does not indicate any romantic interest in each other or sexual involvement. Thus, their intimacy is depicted as merely homosocial, i.e. as a "social bond [...] between persons of the same sex" (Sedgwick 1). Miller, on the other hand, works out precisely the homosexual dimension of their relationship for which she received much praise from readers. *Time Magazine*, for instance, applauds Miller for "bringing those dark figures back to life, making them men again, and while she's at it, [using] her passionate companion piece to *The Iliad* as a subtle swipe at today's ongoing debate over gay marriage. Talk about updating the classics" (Miller 2023 "Review").

The *Time Magazine* statement captures two interrelated problems I see with Miller's allegedly subversive rewriting of the classic: The claim that Homer's male characters lack masculinity completely disregards the concept of the Homeric hero who, as opposed to traditional heteronormative definitions of men as strong and stoic, is encouraged to show his emotions — both positive and negative (Patzek 69). Although he is exceptionally gifted, he is not supernatural but remains mortal and must cope with human problems like death, bitterness and homesickness (Tilg 3). Miller, who dismisses these essential characteristics of Homeric masculinity, is praised for making Homer's characters "men again" by imposing conventional gender roles on Achilles and Patroclus in order to reinterpret their relationship as homosexual. During the creation of the novel, same-sex marriage was still widely illegal with affected people having to fight for their rights. Hence, *Time Magazine* illustrates Miller's retelling of Homer's epic as a supportive and progressive call for equality, marketing it as a prime example of advocacy for gay marriage. However, in doing so, they suggest that the reinforcement of conventional masculinity is progressive and that traditional gender roles are compatible with queer representation. Is this really updating the classics, especially if we consider the meaning of queer as "relating to a gender identity or a sexuality that does not fit society's traditional ideas about gender or sexuality" (Cambridge Dictionary)?

Although it may seem that Miller's re-writing of Homer's classic addresses contemporary issues such as queer theory and re-thinking male identity, she offers old-fashioned views on same-sex relationships and advocates hegemonic masculinity which in turn highlights the progressiveness of *The Iliad* that defines masculinity within the concept of the Homeric hero and thus provides a more modern approach than Miller does in her novel. Hence, this paper takes a closer look at Miller's portrayal of Achilles's and Patroclus's male identity, which is defined by how they relate to their masculinity themselves. In doing so, Miller reduces a complex gender identity to a questionable dichotomy of either embracing or rejecting one's masculinity, which results in the traditional gender roles Achilles and Patroclus assume in their relationship as well as in relation to larger societal expectations. Thus, I argue that Miller ultimately de-queers their relationship by turning it into a heteronormative romance, as illustrated in their relationship's dynamic which consists of Achilles as the conventional male part, i.e. the tough and reserved protector, and Patroclus as the conventional female part, i.e. the supportive and caring nurturer.

To support my central argument, I have organized my work into two main sections, consisting of a theoretical framework which allows for a nuanced reading and a comparative analysis of selected scenes in *The Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles*. In order to better understand Miller's intervention into the gender and sexual dynamics of the original Homer story, I begin with a brief consideration of the literary form of adaptation, its affordances and limitations. Following this, I want to continue with a comparative analysis that zooms in on the two key parallels that Homer and Miller construct in their narratives, namely Achilles's and Patroclus's characterization as men in a patriarchal environment as well as the interpretation of their relationship. Thus, I will focus on the following scenes: First, I will explore both authors' understanding of masculinity, comparing the Homeric hero which promotes male emotional vulnerability with Miller's advocacy of hegemonic masculinity that encourages her protagonists to either embrace toxic masculinity or reject themselves and their masculinity. In order to emphasize the difference, I will focus on two scenes in her novel: first, I want to explore how Patroclus grows up in a patriarchal society, and how, shortly before his death, he is finally manipulated into accepting his masculinity. Second, I will concentrate on Achilles's character and how Miller attributes to him precisely the masculine qualities that Patroclus rejects in himself but values in Achilles. In this context, I will define toxic masculinity and how Achilles serves as a prime example of it in Miller's narrative. As Patroclus, he undergoes a change in character shortly before his death as well, leading to self-reflection in Homer's narrative, and access to his emotional availability in Miller's. Building on these findings, I will then continue

with Miller's interpretation of their dynamic as a homosexual couple, which is influenced by "how masculine" they are. First of all, in comparison to Homer, Miller introduces a sexual component to Achilles's and Patroclus's bond in *The Song of Achilles*, which is why I want to pay special attention to two sex scenes. On the one hand, they are to underscore Miller's depiction of their relationship as overly romantic, ideal, and chaste, and on the other hand, as monogamous, further presenting Achilles as a morally conflicted character. Second of all, I want to address Achilles's and Patroclus's tasks and duties during the Trojan War described by both authors. While Homer describes their social status as well-respected soldiers, Miller imposes heteronormative gender roles on them, which arise from how they relate to their masculinity. On the one hand, Miller abolishes both men's balanced dynamic in their relationship as described by Homer, while on the other hand, it underscores how she presents queer relationships as compatible with heteronormative structures.

Therefore, my central aim is to expose the allegedly progressive nature of Miller's modern adaptation *The Song of Achilles*. Compared to Homer's forward-thinking approach regarding the definition and portrayal of masculinity and homosocial relationships in *The Iliad*, which was written around the 8th century BCE after all, Miller only appears to be innovative at first glance. In reality, she moves backward with her adaptation by advocating stereotypical masculine behavior as well as applying heteronormative models on homosexual relationships in a contemporary era.

2 Adaptation: a theoretical approach

Madeline Miller's interpretation of Achilles and Patroclus as lovers led to the creation of an entirely new novel that explores the intimate connection between Homer's two Greek warriors during the Trojan War. She was inspired by Plato's *Symposium*, in which he depicts their relationship as romantic and homoerotic, which is why Miller decided to explore this ancient idea in order to refute the persistent homophobic interpretation of the two men as mere close friends (Miller 2021). By describing the protagonists as homosexual, she does not offer a repetition of Homer's epic poem but changes it according to her own beliefs and interests. According to Linda Hutcheon, author of *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013), this makes Miller an adapter, i.e. someone who first interprets an existing story and then creates a new one (18). However, the challenge for adapters is to make their story their own, and not just a copy of the original one. Hence, if the adapter has enough creativity and talent (21), Hutcheon appeals to

view adaptations not as secondary or inferior to their original (2) but to treat them as autonomous works, not reproductions (6).

To be more precise, she categorizes the term ‘adaptation’ into three different approaches: firstly, an adaptation can be seen as a product, i.e. “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work” (8). Here, the adapter’s choices can cause a change in medium, genre or frame. The latter includes a shift in focalization which Miller decided to do by narrating her story through Patroclus’s point of view and thus giving a minor character a voice. Secondly, an adaptation is a “*process of creation*,” meaning adapting always consists of first interpretation and then creation (ibid.). Miller, for instance, interpreted Achilles’s and Patroclus’s relationship as homosexual which prompted her to write a completely new novel that focuses on their love story in order to counter the claim made by scholars that the bond between the two men was based on nothing more than friendship. Thirdly, adaptation describes the “extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work,” which means that we perceive adaptations as palimpsests that are shaped by memory and variation (ibid.). This can be observed by Miller’s fascination with Homer’s description of Achilles’s intense reaction to Patroclus’s death. It inspired her to rethink their relationship which Homer described as very devoted but not going beyond friendly feelings (Miller 2023 “Q&A”). Although she tries to reconstruct Achilles’s devastating grief as described in *The Iliad*, she reads more into it, making Achilles losing his lover, not just his friend and comrade. This mixture of both familiarity, such as using Homer’s characters and plot, and novelty, namely changing the epic poem into a romance novel, makes adaptations so interesting for audiences (Hutcheon 114).

When considering the creation of adaptations, Hutcheon explains that “[s]tories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments,” which allows adapters to engage with both personal and political issues (32). Hence, since adaptations are shaped in historical, societal, and cultural contexts, many adapters choose to update the story’s setting to make it more appealing for modern audiences (142). Regarding Miller’s narrative, she aimed to prove the romantic feelings Achilles and Patroclus had for each other as she perceived denying them was homophobic and outdated. Thus, by portraying them according to Plato’s and her own interpretation as a couple, she tried to make her own story more contemporary and to criticize traditional interpretations that disregard the romantic desire between the two male warriors. This echoes Hutcheon’s argument that adaptations can be a great tool to “engage in a larger social or cultural critique” when done right (94). However, while I appreciate Miller’s original motivation to offer an alternative to long-established interpretations that view Achilles and Patroclus merely as friends, I believe that her adaptation contains two problematic aspects

that need to be examined more closely before it can be praised as a prime example of modern queer literature.

Both problems are related to a shift in the understanding of gender and sexuality, a side effect that occurs when adapting a text from one culture to another which Hutcheon refers to as “transcultural adaptation”. This transculturation is often accompanied by the recontextualizing of a text within a new cultural framework which may also lead to different social and political ideas that are presented to a new audience. Consequently, transcultural adaptations reflect the values of the new culture and thus, often lead to changes in racial and gender politics (145-147). This shift in cultures and their perspectives becomes evident when comparing Homer’s and Miller’s views on masculinity and homosocial relationships in their respective societies, i.e. in ancient Greece versus today’s Western society.

3 Analysis

To highlight this difference, I will now continue with the analytical part of this work which is to illustrate two key problems in Miller’s interpretation. Although she had very good ideas that capture modern issues when re-thinking Homer’s story, such as challenging scholars’ interpretation of Achilles’s and Patroclus’s relationship as platonic, they are not revolutionary and even have the opposite effect on closer inspection. Therefore, I specifically address Miller’s conservative and problematic views on masculinity and homosexual relationships, as these are intercorrelated and thus present two major issues in her narrative. These issues affect Achilles’s and Patroclus’s dynamic both as a homosexual couple and as individuals in a patriarchal environment: first of all, explored in more detail in chapter 3.1, Miller defines both men’s personalities solely with regard to their attitude toward their masculinity, reducing a complex gender identity to hegemonic masculinity which negates any other form of masculinity. Even though Homer’s story revolves around patriarchal structures as well, his focus on male emotionality, described within the concept of the hero, is what stands out the most and clearly draws a line between Miller’s and his understanding of male identity and the ability to express emotions. Second of all, and the primary concern of chapter 3.2, she imposes traditional gender roles on Achilles and Patroclus based on their attitude toward their masculinity, and thus applies heteronormative models on their homosexual relationship. Moreover, she describes their physical intimacy as exclusive and monogamous, which stands in huge contrast to Homer’s portrayal of it: While Homer is quite imprecise in labelling their relationship as anything other than homosocial, he still engages with their sexual relations in a contemporary way and regards polyamory as a normal form of human sexuality.

3.1 Masculinity in *The Song of Achilles* and *The Iliad*

One major problem in Miller's novel is her advocacy of hegemonic masculinity, i.e. "the normative ideal of manhood" (George and Waltz 1) that consists of men having to maintain power, suppress their emotions, be physically strong and assert dominance over women and different types of masculinity (Connell 183). Instead of exploring these different types of masculinity in her supposedly modern adaptation, Miller presents her male characters in a false dichotomy: men who embrace and accept their masculinity embody the stereotypical and toxic idea of what it means to be a man, as opposed to men who struggle with their masculinity and associate it only with the traditional masculine characteristics, and therefore will never accept it or be accepted by society as real men. In doing so, she illustrates an ideal of what it means to be a man that prioritizes one way of being masculine over others. R.W. Connell classifies this as a crucial aspect of hegemonic masculinity which negates and subordinates other forms of masculinities (187).

This is perfectly exemplified in her portrayal of Achilles, the dominant and respected warrior, and Patroclus, the compassionate pacifist; character traits and values that place Achilles at the top and Patroclus at the very bottom of the male hierarchy. Miller's portrayal of the two men is shaped by their attitudes toward killing, which in turn also represents their relationship to their masculinity. While Homer describes them as equals regarding their role as respected men in *The Iliad*, Miller juxtaposes Achilles's superiority in martial prowess with Patroclus's refusal to touch a weapon, dooming him to stay behind in their tent, rather than following his companion to the battlefield. This contrast in their personalities and duties stems from their attitude toward their masculinity, which is why Miller's Achilles succumbs to toxic masculinity by hiding his feelings, acting aggressively and imposing his authority in a purely male environment, while her Patroclus is reduced to his inner conflict with his masculinity, which takes him from the battlefield to the women's camp.

In order to illustrate this clash more clearly, I will first focus on Patroclus's struggles with his masculinity and his ultimate character transformation to accept it and become "a man". Following this, I will contrast Achilles as Patroclus's opposing extreme, because Miller describes him with exactly the characteristics that Patroclus rejects in himself, making Achilles a prime example of what it means to be "a man". To conclude this chapter, I want to delve into Homer's description of Achilles as the hero in *The Iliad*, his virtues and flaws as well as his potential to endanger himself and his community due to his wide emotional range that influences his actions and decision-making.

3.1.1 Patroclus's inner conflict with his masculinity

Patroclus's conflict with his masculinity is rooted in his childhood, which was influenced by both paternal and societal expectations and climaxed in an actual break with his male identity after an accident, which is why he connects his masculinity to values such as toughness, dominance, aggression and the pressure to perform since then. Having grown up with a father who has viewed him as a disappointment and weakling since birth, Patroclus's self-perception is marked by feelings of insecurity, rejection and low self-esteem. He was constantly competing with other boys his age, which his father reminded him of with the words: "That is what a son should be," referring to Achilles who had just won a race (Miller 3). The other boys did not respect him either, even though he was their prince: "But these noble sons were used to me doing what they wished. They knew my father would not intervene" (16). When he stepped in for himself for once, it ended in disaster, as he accidentally killed another boy, resulting in his banishment to Phthia (18). This accident had a significant impact on his attitude toward his male identity, as he became aware of the destructive potential of traits traditionally associated with masculinity such as aggression, dominance and physical strength. Since his actions encompassed such qualities and caused people pain, he has since been conflicted about fighting and killing and is haunted by memories and nightmares of the boy's broken skull and spreading blood. These nightmares stress his feelings of guilt as well as his dread of bloodshed and violence. From then on, Patroclus is driven by empathy, gentleness and a desire to protect others rather than endanger them in order to distance himself from the masculine traits that led to his nightmares and exile.

The irony is that he accepts such traits in Achilles who is Patroclus's exact opposite and remind him of expectations that he believes he can never fulfill. In terms of skill, beauty and grace, Patroclus clearly louses out against Achilles. Although Patroclus was initially bothered by this and envied Achilles for his effortless success in every discipline, he eventually appreciated it and came to terms with "[losing] to such a beauty" (49). This reflects the way in which he embraces Achilles's masculinity and links it to positive feelings such as confidence, success and admiration, while continuing to reject his own masculinity and associating it with his feelings of failure, self-doubt and pain. Furthermore, although he detests fighting, Patroclus accepts Achilles's destiny to become the greatest warrior of his generation and supports him by following him to the Trojan War.

In Miller's narrative, going into battle and killing are portrayed as accepting and embracing one's own masculinity, which is why Patroclus's inability and unwillingness to fight

is seen as a flaw that diminishes his masculinity and social status among the other soldiers. Although his initial function was to fight side-by-side with Achilles as his *therapon*, “[a] brother-in-arms sworn to a prince by blood and oaths and love. In war, these men were his honor guard; in peace, his closest advisers,” there are many instances in which he or even other people express doubts about his abilities as a soldier, which leads to him not being perceived as “manly enough” by other men (36). For example, when Odysseus recruits soldiers for Agamemnon’s war, Patroclus doubts that he is of any use: “... I am not a very good soldier” (153). Briseis also confronted Achilles with the fact that he had let Patroclus go into battle in his place, even though he knew that Patroclus could not fight (339). Even Achilles addressed Patroclus’s reluctance to fight: “‘But you will not fight, even if they strike at you. You hate it.’ If it had been any other man, the words would have been an insult” (210). Fighting or defending oneself is considered to be masculine, because it involves traits that are traditionally connected to masculinity such as physical strength, assertiveness and aggression. When a man refuses to fight or defend himself, he is a failure and his masculinity is diminished, as can be seen in the example of Patroclus: The soldiers do not see him as Achilles’s brother-in-arms, but degrade him to “Achilles’ pet rabbit” and thus not respect him as an equal: “If I were a warrior, they would fight me, but I am not” (290).

For this reason, it is rather surprising that, although his detest for bloodshed and violence were his personal beliefs and have been constantly stressed throughout the novel, he eventually becomes a warrior and therefore “a man” after he put on Achilles’s armor to trick both the Trojans and the Greeks into believing that Achilles returned to war. Instead of addressing the Myrmidons himself to boost their courage and fighting spirit as he did in *The Iliad* (Homer 16.308-315), Patroclus only stands by during Achilles’s talk to his warriors about the importance of Patroclus’s passivity during combat, again emphasizing both Patroclus’s poor fighting skills and his need for protection: “I must not fight, I must not leave Automedon, nor the other Myrmidons. I was to stay in the chariot and flee at the first sign of danger” (Miller 325-326). However, on the battlefield, he eventually becomes someone else and fights as if he has never done anything else:

Perhaps it was the armor, molding me. Perhaps it was the years of watching him. But the position my shoulder found was not the old wobbling awkwardness. It was higher, stronger, a perfect balance. And then, before I could think about what I did, I threw—a long straight spiral into the breast of a Trojan ... I am relentless ... From my days in the white tent I know every frailty they have. It is so easy. (328-329)

His benevolent and gentle character, for which other warriors in the camp belittled him, is destroyed within seconds in battle. Now, he becomes arrogant, bloodthirsty and delusional as he believes that he can take over Troy all by himself, trying to climb its walls and captivate Helen. However, Apollo soon intervenes this attempt by throwing him off the wall and stripping him off Achilles's armor, which reveals to the Trojans and himself that he is "only Patroclus" (333-334). As quickly as he accepted and lived out his masculinity by brutally killing Trojan warriors, including Zeus's son Sarpedon, it was taken away from him again.

It once again underlines the irony in Patroclus's character who accepted Achilles for what he was — a brutal killer who showed no mercy — but was unable to accept his own masculinity; he could only accept it in Achilles's armor, which, however, led him to abandon his personal beliefs and values. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Achilles's armor was created by the gods and thus sparked a tremendous fighting spirit and urge in the person who wore it. Since Patroclus was not nearly as skilled in fighting as Achilles, he was tricked by Achilles's armor and weapons to possess the same abilities which eventually led to his downfall (Patzner 174). Nonetheless, Miller's emphasis on Patroclus's gentleness and his reluctance to identify with traits and actions that could be traditionally considered "masculine" stands in huge contrast to his ultimate acceptance of his masculinity which he has rejected since his childhood. For me, this aligns with Miller's understanding that only on the battlefield a man could become a man, whereas in *The Iliad*, Patroclus was respected both for being Achilles's closest advisor and for the influence he had on Achilles. While he was seen as "Achilles' pet rabbit" in *The Song of Achilles* (Miller 290), he was considered a hero in *The Iliad* (Schein 81). This also reflects Homer's idea of a hero whose personality traits include more than mere physical strength and martial skills, as illustrated by the figure of Achilles, which I will discuss in more detail later.

3.1.2 The toxic flat character: Achilles in *The Song of Achilles*

In Miller's narrative, Achilles is a rather flat character, distinguished only by his toxic masculine characteristics, including his physical strength, pride and dominance, as well as his love for Patroclus which is highlighted as his only positive characteristic. He always gives plain and straightforward answers, which is masked as "honesty", but which "[s]ome people might have mistaken ... for simplicity," which I do in fact (Miller 44). I have got the impression that the seriousness in his personality destroyed his originally passionate and impulsive nature that made him such a complex, deep and imperfect character in *The Iliad*.

In Miller's novel, Achilles's character is described with masculine traits that can be considered toxic, especially when taking a closer look on his main characteristics that make up his whole persona and are summarized by Patroclus when he speculates about the severe consequences Achilles's absence from war will result in: "He would be hated now. No one would remember his glory, or his honesty, or his beauty; all his gold would be turned to ashes and ruin" (322). All in all, Achilles's character is reduced to three attributes: his fame, his honesty and his good looks. These perfectly reflect what is socially and individually expected from men as these traits are based on stereotypical masculine behavior. However, by succumbing to this behavior, men do not only endanger themselves but also their respective society, because this toxic behavior contributes to gender inequality, homophobia and men's mental and physical health issues. For instance, a man's appearance includes his physique and thus the need to be physically strong in order to assert dominance successfully, which secures a man's social reputation and thus grants him respect, i.e. glory, among other people. His physical strength also enables him to take whatever he wants, stressing his straightforward nature which excludes expressing his emotions as these are seen as feminine and weak (Flood). Achilles's character is limited to his inability to express his emotions, stressing his reserved and detached nature, as well as his beautiful and strong physique with which he aggressively asserts dominance on the battlefield, which grants him the respect of the Greek soldiers.

With regard to fighting, Achilles is the exact opposite of Patroclus, because he gains fame with his martial skills: "There was a sort of wondering triumph in his voice. 'I did not know how easy it would be. Like nothing. You should have seen it. The men cheered me afterwards'" (Miller 222-223). The respect and honor he receives from his fellow soldiers as well as his godlike strength and senses make him the ultimate personification of how a man should be: fearless, strong, reckless, confident and successful. It also echoes Miller's understanding of masculinity — going into battle, being ready and able to fight — which Achilles fully embodies, and which again highlights him as the traditionally male part in his relationship with Patroclus.

Moreover, his toxic masculine traits fuel his feeling of superiority as well as pride, and thus affect his inability to express other emotions, such as sadness, despair, shame or empathy, as they would be considered weak emotions. This is best seen when Agamemnon takes away Briseis, Achilles's war prize and "a living embodiment of Achilles' honor," and his reaction to it in *The Song of Achilles* and *The Iliad* (282). Compared to his emotional reaction in Homer's narrative, further analyzed in the next chapter, Miller's Achilles is only driven by extreme anger and a burning desire for revenge after he left Agamemnon's tent:

His anger was incandescent, a fire under his skin. His muscles were pulled so taut I was afraid to touch him, fearing they would snap like bowstrings ... His mouth was twisted, ugly and tight as I had ever seen it. His eyes were wild. 'I will kill him,' he swore. 'I will kill him.' He grabbed a spear and broke it in half with an explosion of wood. The pieces fell to the floor. 'I almost did it there,' he said. 'I should have done it. How dare he?' He flung a ewer aside, and it shattered against a chair. (Miller 283)

Instead of crying over Briseis's loss and his hurt pride, as he does in *The Iliad*, Achilles only shows one emotion here: uncontrollable and destructive rage, which could only be soothed by the promise to get revenge on Agamemnon. The male urge to compete with other men for being the best is perfectly illustrated in Agamemnon's and Achilles's fight for dominance and represents typical toxic behavior: His loss in authority drives Achilles mad, which is why he is consumed by anger, as grief or need would have been considered feminine. Thus, Achilles is unable to respond to his feeling of betrayal and hurt with any other emotion than anger, which is so intense that he is unrecognizable, even to Patroclus. Furthermore, it is important to note that Achilles only shows his true and raw anger when he is alone with Patroclus; in Agamemnon's tent, he controlled his wrath, because he did not want to publicly show the emotions that stirred inside him.

Nevertheless, Achilles gets full access to his emotions when he learns about Patroclus's death, which has such an emotional impact on him that he bursts into tears and finally accepts his feelings without the desire to hide them. For me, this was the first time Achilles truly showed his emotions: ripping out his hair, pushing away other people to get to his lover's body — so devastated that he even wants to kill himself (337). I think that Miller portrayed this scene exceptionally well, because it was like finally getting a glimpse of the "real" Achilles and his emotions that he has suppressed for so long. Like Patroclus, Achilles's character transformation — to break with his emotional restrictiveness — happens shortly before his death. Thus, it could be argued that they influenced a change in character in one another, as Patroclus accepted his masculinity in Achilles's armor, who, in turn, suffered a violent emotional breakdown when seeing Patroclus's corpse. While Patroclus's death served as Achilles's motive to fight again for the Greeks and get revenge on Hector in *The Iliad*, it has another purpose in *The Song of Achilles*: This awful event induced his emotional breakdown and thus granted him full access to his emotionality. However, this was not necessary in Homer's narrative, considering that Achilles's emotional volatility was an important characteristic of his figure since the beginning. Personally, this confirms my impression that Miller does not consider male emotionality as

something positive in her narrative, which is why I appreciate Homer's description of Achilles's character and his personal change at the end of *The Iliad* even more.

3.1.3 The destructive hero: Achilles in *The Iliad*

In *The Iliad*, the main setting is the Trojan War, which sets the stage for the life of the Homeric hero Achilles, "a warrior who lives and dies in the pursuit of honor and glory" (Schein 69). This means that his life is influenced by gaining fame, which he achieves with his heroic actions on the battlefield, rewarding him with social recognition as well as immortality and fame after death (Horn 139-140). The importance of achieving glory that lasts beyond death becomes evident in Achilles's decision to fight in Troy, even though it had been prophesied that he would die there and never return home (Homer 9.486-491). On the one hand, this illustrates war as the hero's main setting, because it is "the medium of human existence and achievement; bravery and excellence in battle win honor and glory and thus endow life with meaning" (Schein 68). On the other hand, it underscores the importance of gaining glory as a hero, because Achilles willingly trades his own life for the prospect of never-ending fame. This highlights another important characteristic of the Homeric hero: his mortality, which, paradoxically, makes his glory and himself immortal when he dies (Horn 141). Moreover, the pursuit of glory distinguishes heroes from gods, as the latter are not influenced by the gain or loss of fame, while it makes mortals special and results in a purposeful life (Schein 70). However, even though his mortality underscores his own humanity, the Homeric hero still differs from other people in his outstanding and superior abilities. Although he receives divine assistance in battle, his actions are not supernatural, but are determined by human virtues and flaws, which in turn underscores his humanity and thus limits (Patzer 158-160). Nonetheless, he is superior to other people in terms of his physique, mind and social status, which is characterized by physical and military strength, exceptional beauty, skill and practice in using weapons, courage, intelligence, eloquence, noble birth and authority over commoners (165).

While the pursuit of glory is a hero's biggest aspiration, it can also endanger the people he is supposed to protect if he does not receive the respect he deserves or claims for himself, meaning that if he has to choose between his personal honor and the good of the community, a hero will always prioritize himself and his goals (Horn 146). Consequently, when his personal honor is violated or denied, the hero's wrath is unleashed, with terrible consequences for his enemies, his people and even himself as can be seen in the example of Achilles (Bell 64). Feeling betrayed and robbed of his honor by Agamemnon, Achilles decides to stop fighting for

him and the Greek army. Furthermore, Achilles feels so insulted that he is not able to control his wrath, without caring who is present and which consequences it might have for him:

Thus while he spake, Achilles chaf'd with rage;
And in his manly breast his heart was torn
With thoughts conflicting—whether from his side
To draw his mighty sword, and thrusting by
Th' assembled throng, to kill th' insulting King;
Or school his soul, and keep his anger down. (Homer 1.225-230)

His sword was already half drawn from its sheath, and further chaos could only be prevented at the last moment by divine intervention, which highlights how serious Achilles was to publicly take revenge on Agamemnon (1.231-249). In taking away Briseis, Agamemnon asserts dominance over Achilles, which results in Achilles's emotional turmoil that revolves around anger at Agamemnon and "bitter grief" for the loss of Briseis (1.409). His weeping and despair are so intense that even his mother has to comfort him: 'Why weeps my son? and whence his cause of grief? / Speak out, that I may hear, and share thy pain' (1.426-427). Even though the main reason for his crying is not the girl but his wounded pride, Homer nevertheless emphasizes Achilles's vulnerability, which he shows openly, and which is not perceived as weakness or effeminacy, but underlines the importance of honor which was taken from him by Agamemnon. Therefore, Achilles's wounded ego has severe consequences for the Greeks, because he refuses to be persuaded by Agamemnon's countless gifts or by the pleas of Odysseus, Phoenix and Ajax to return to battle and have pity on the Greek soldiers, whom he would otherwise leave to die (9.310-359). This illustrates how dangerous a hero can be, because "[a] wrathful hero is a destructive hero," however, his wrath can be tempered and redirected to help his people rather than harm them (Bell 67). This happens when Patroclus dies and Achilles's wrath turns from Agamemnon to Hector, who killed Patroclus, and himself, who let Patroclus fight in his place to save the Greeks. While this meant a turn for the better for Agamemnon and the Greek army, Achilles's wrath led to the downfall of both the Trojans and him. This tragedy is caused by Achilles himself, whose pride led to his and other people's pain, highlighting the hero's life as "... a life of action and of suffering" (Bell 69). Gregory Nagy even describes Achilles as "the man of constant sorrow," (81) while John M. Bell labels him as a "tragic hero" (121).

The emphasis on Achilles's agony hints at another emotion that a Homeric hero openly displays, apart from his wrath: grief. When learning about Patroclus's death, Achilles collapses and mourns Patroclus in front of everybody (Homer 18.26-32). He cannot be soothed by anything, except his promise to take revenge on Hector, certain that this means he will die soon,

too (18.125-128). This illustrates Achilles's high emotional range, which is rapid and unpredictable; his intense and overpowering grief changed quickly into overwhelming and uncontrollable rage directed at Hector and himself. Patroclus's death arouses deep feelings of guilt in him as he reflects on the consequences of his actions, which led to his failure to protect Patroclus and the Greek soldiers who so desperately needed his help (18.109-114). Achilles's unconsolable grief, that causes him to be excessively brutal and cruel, is stressed again when he assures Patroclus that he has avenged him by desecrating Hector and killing the twelve noble sons: "That on the corpse of Hector, hither dragg'd, / Our dogs should feed; and that twelve noble youths, / The sons of Troy, before thy fun'ral pyre, / My hand, in vengeance for thy death, should slay" (23.23-26). His brutality only subsides when Priam begs him to give him back his son, which Achilles grants, emphasizing his emotional capability for grief and compassion, which is demonstrated again when Priam and Achilles loudly lament their losses together (24.590-601).

Homer's description of Achilles's endless and overwhelming grief in front of his mother, the slave women, and other warriors underscores the importance for a Homeric hero to publicly express his emotions, which are so powerful that they can even influence the outcome of a war. Nonetheless, Achilles's extreme reaction to Patroclus's death is extraordinary even for other Homeric heroes, who mourn and avenge their comrades' deaths as well, but do not react as powerful as Achilles (Horn 184-185). His nuanced and flawed character is what makes *The Iliad* such a great piece of literature as his pride and wrath condemned thousands of Greeks and Trojans to die, which ultimately resulted in his downfall as well. His emotional volatility led him to make poor decisions, be indifferent to possible consequences, and thus be the reason why people and himself had to suffer. However, while his short life was full of action and suffering, in the end it still brought him what every hero strives for: "Yet, ere I die, immortal fame will win" (Homer 18.133).

When comparing Achilles's character in *The Iliad* and *The Song of Achilles*, I think the biggest difference could be observed in his personal development in both narratives: Achilles's decision to return Hector's body to his father represented a key development in his character in *The Iliad*, transforming his violent and self-destructive behavior into a sympathetic one. It invited him to question and regret his past decisions and to reflect on the consequences he caused for others and himself. Unfortunately, this personal improvement — being self-reflective and compassionate — was not addressed in Miller's novel at all. Although Achilles did have a character transformation in the book as well when learning about Patroclus's death, allowing him to feel his emotions without societal boundaries, it does not seem as profound as

in Homer's narrative, where he emphasized that Achilles always had access to more vulnerable emotions and let them out no matter where or when. As for Achilles's emotional outburst in Miller's narrative, it does not seem to be such a major character development, as Miller transformed him from an emotionally driven man into a toxic man defined only by a stoic, detached, and aggressive nature, whose emotions were reserved for himself and his private circle. Thus, I missed the overall development and depth in his character most of the time, which is why I perceived him as a flat character, whose personality was reduced to his martial skills, physique, emotional control and protectiveness toward Patroclus. Again, these characteristics underline their imbalanced dynamic in their relationship by defining them within a traditional gender dichotomy which makes one more and the other less masculine, as well as the way masculinity is measured by a man's fighting skills and willingness to go into battle.

3.1.4 Progressive perspectives in an ancient story

On closer analysis, Homer does present men as dominant figures who are defined by their martial skills and their authority over women and other men. After all, he describes the relationship and coexistence between men in a patriarchal system that reflects the father-son dynamic, as sons must submit to paternal authority and therefore, when they go to war, see their superiors, like Agamemnon as military leader or Nestor as experienced old man, as a father figure, i.e. someone to whom they must subordinate (Wöhrle 18-19). Since young men are raised in a predominantly male environment, they are soon confronted with a definition of "what it means to be a man" in order to survive or assert themselves (33). This includes martial skills and the willingness to fight (40), which on the one hand encourage men to compete to become the best (*aristos*) (22), but on the other hand defame men who refuse to fight or who lack the necessary skills as effeminate. Thus, if a man was physically strong, courageous and a fearless warrior, he was honored by others, raising his social status among the warrior culture (40).

Nevertheless, while his fighting skills and his honor are a central part of a man's identity that maintain his reputation and social standing, Homer emphasizes that a "real man" is also defined by his ability to feel and express emotions openly, as this was not seen as weakness or shame, but as emotional availability and part of his humanity. Especially Achilles's character, driven by merciless brutality and uncontrollable wrath, was ultimately able to turn his violence into compassion and correct his errors by returning Hector's body to Priam. Thus, Homer does not define men solely by their physical but also by their emotional strength that illustrates both a complex understanding of a man's masculinity and humanity.

3.2 Patroclus and Achilles: heteronormativity in a homosexual relationship

As I have already explained in chapter 3.1, Miller's portrayal of hegemonic masculinity places Achilles and Patroclus in a patriarchal system that measures the "degree" of how masculine they are, and based on that, imposes traditional gender roles onto their characters. The belief that people in romantic relationships have to follow a certain social script regarding societal expectations is heavily questioned and rethought nowadays, but exactly what Miller includes in her narrative: While it is bad enough that she enforces this conservative thinking of male and female roles in heterosexual relationships in her novel, it is even worse that she applies it to a homosexual couple. By defining Achilles and Patroclus according to their relationship with their masculinity, she imposes stereotypical male and female behaviors to their characters: Patroclus is the supportive and sensitive caretaker for Achilles, the spear-wives and the wounded soldiers, while Achilles is described as the indifferent and strong warrior who does not bother himself with domestic labor, which is even further stressed in his decision to give his and Deidameia's son into his mother's care.

With this portrayal, Miller not only disregards Homer's description of Achilles and Patroclus as equals in their relationship but also imposes heteronormative gender roles on them. In doing so, she supports the concept of heteronormativity — the conservative belief that heterosexuality enjoys a dominant and superior position in society. With that, heteronormativity introduces societal norms and certain behaviors that are applied on and carried out by the man and the woman in a heterosexual relationship (Herz and Johansson 1010-1011). Hence, it can be said that this socially expected behavior stems from a person's gender and can be summarized as people's "social roles", which describe "[the] notion of a socially provided script for individual behaviour [sic], first learned and then enacted" (Connell 30). For instance, the "female role" regarded women as caregivers and "mothers-and-wives," perfectly illustrated by Miller in Patroclus's character (Connell 32).

The critical answer to these societal norms and power dynamics is given in queer theory, in the sense that it "embraces whatever is nonnormative" (Calafell and Nakayama 1). So, it challenges the idea of heteronormative constructs as fixed and thus rethinks (gender) identities. For that, it reconsiders the binary differentiation of hetero- and homosexuality as these only exist in a cultural context and extends its frame to concepts such as transsexuality and gender ambiguity (Calafell and Nakayama 1-3). Although Miller was applauded for exactly this modern thinking that queer theory presents, it becomes even more evident in the next two chapters why Miller miserably failed on that regard.

First of all, I want to shortly address what makes Achilles's and Patroclus's relationship homosexual, according to Miller. For that, she adds their sexual involvement with each other to their relationship, which, on closer inspection, has a bitter taste regarding questions of morality. While Homer presents their relationship rather imprecisely, ignoring a direct involvement with each other, he does talk about their sexual encounters with other people, featuring the nonnormative idea of polyamory, as opposed to Miller's focus on monogamy. Second of all, I will come to their duties and their social behavior, which is based on heteronormativity. Here, I want to shortly summarize what ultimately de-queers their relationship and makes Miller's story anything but subversive.

3.2.1 Morality in sex, but nowhere else

With her interpretation of Achilles's and Patroclus's relationship as homosexual, Miller adds a sexual dimension to their bond, which she depicts as overly romantic, chaste, innocent and, most of all, mainly monogamous. However, it is exactly this emphasis on their total devotion that has a bitter taste for me, especially regarding Achilles's character: Although he is such an imperfect character who does not shy away from murder for the sake of his fame or pride, he sets his boundaries when it comes to remain loyal to Patroclus. While it perfectly aligns with Miller's interpretation of their relationship as ideal, it also adds to her problematic portrayal of Achilles as perfect boyfriend, but an otherwise flat character with questionable morals. This becomes evident on two occasions: first, when delving into Homer's description of their sex lives which specifically includes other people, and second, when comparing two sex scenes that involve Achilles and his feelings about it.

Although Homer does not specifically portray Patroclus's and Achilles's relationship as homosexual, he indicates that they sleep with the slave girls such as Briseis and Iphis, probably in front of each other as they shared a tent (Homer 9.769-775). Considering this, it is also reasonable to assume that Achilles and Patroclus slept with each other as well, which would make their relationship homoerotic in the sense that it "... [involves] sexual activity between people of the same sex" (Merriam-Webster). However, in *The Song of Achilles*, Achilles does not show any interest in the slave girls, but only in Patroclus. While it underscores Achilles's complete devotion, it also fits into Miller's interpretation of their relationship as overly romantic, which is depicted in their sex scenes' chaste and innocent nature as well:

He seemed to swell beneath my touch, to ripen. He smelled like almonds and earth. He pressed against me, crushing my lips to wine. He went still as I took him in my hand,

soft as the delicate velvet of petals ... It was not enough. My hand reached, found the place of his pleasure. (Miller 100-101)

Miller uses figurative and descriptive language that is full of metaphors and draws the reader into the scene. It is very poetic and allows for a vivid imagery, but in an intimate and innocent way. This is due to the chaste nature of their sex scenes as can be seen in her imprecise language, for instance, in her avoidance to use the word “penis.” Instead, she describes it with pronouns that refer to the whole person as in “I took him in my hand,” or nouns that center on a particular part as in “the place of his pleasure,” clearly referring to Achilles’s genitals (ibid.). There is no consuming passion in this scene, only very timid and careful caresses to explore the other’s body inch by inch. They are consumed by a slow-burning desire that climaxes in their orgasms, which are also shyly described as an inaudible, hoarse cry, as if they had to repress their joy.

In huge contrast to this stands Achilles’s description of Deidameia’s and his intercourse, which sparks jealousy in Patroclus, on the one hand, and rebuke and regret in Achilles, on the other hand:

He floundered as he tried to describe the heavy, thick smell, the wetness between her legs. ‘Greasy,’ he said, ‘like oil.’ When I pressed him further, he shook his head. ‘I cannot remember, really. It was dark, and I could not see. I wanted it to be over.’ He stroked my cheek. ‘I missed you.’ (147)

His brief description of their sex as something unpleasant stresses his discomfort to recall the memory. There is no romantic description of tender caresses, a pleasantly scented environment or a comfortable and pleasing joy. Instead, Achilles felt uncomfortable with Deidameia, and wanted to get it over with. He wants to push away the memory of it and thus assures Patroclus that he could only think about him, confirming that Achilles’s feelings are reserved for him alone.

Even though it is not my intention to say that homosexual couples could not live in a monogamous relationship as well, I think it does not work so well in Achilles’s and Patroclus’s case, especially with regard to Achilles’s normally very immoral and ruthless behavior. It shows how Miller tried to focus on an ideal relationship, instead of individual character depth. Moreover, as already explained, Homer depicted their relationship differently in that regard, inviting other people to their tent as bedmates. Hence, even if he did so unconsciously, Homer promoted polyamory here, whereas Miller sets her narrative against queer ideas again, especially when considering that the queer community rejects traditionally privileged norms of being in a heterosexual and monogamous relationship.

3.2.2 The warrior and the housemaid

In Miller's novel, Achilles's and Patroclus's duties are influenced by how comfortable they are with their masculinity, which is why they are forced into binary gender roles: As Patroclus does not conform to his male identity, he is attributed with traditionally feminine characteristics, namely being sensitive, emotional and caring. On the other hand, since Achilles had to maintain his status among his fellow soldiers, he needed to display his masculinity to avoid being perceived as feminine, which happened to Patroclus after all.

This clashes with Homer's description of their friendship as based on equality which granted both men mutual respect among other soldiers: "His vigour and his courage; all the deeds / They two together had achiev'd; the toils, / The perils they had undergone, amid / The strife of warriors, and the angry waves" (Homer 24.8-11). Patroclus is said to have fought as well, not just shortly before his death to deceive the Trojans of Achilles's return. This underscores the idea that Patroclus was capable to defend himself without Achilles's protection. Even though his main tasks revolved around hospitality duties, such as serving guests in their tent, following Achilles's orders or offering advice, Patroclus was never seen as less masculine or useless. Moreover, Homer did not diminish his social reputation by claiming that he hated fighting, as his main purpose was to support Achilles as his close comrade and friend — for which he was deeply respected.

Miller, however, concentrates on a heteronormative dynamic that influences both their social reputations and duties in the Trojan War. For instance, Achilles is known to be the best warrior of his time, granting him glory and respect of the other men, while Patroclus's inability to fight makes him dependent on Achilles's protection, and thus less masculine than others. While Achilles's main setting is on the battlefield, Patroclus is stuck with the women and wounded. For instance, at the beginning of the war, he merely helped Achilles to put on his armor and after that, remained in the camp to wait for his return (Miller 221). However, shortly after that, he is summoned to fight as well, which shocks him so deeply that Achilles has to soothe him:

Fear sluiced through me. How could I not have thought of this? Of course I would be expected to fight. We were at war now, and all had to serve. Especially the closest companion of *Aristos Achaion* ... I woke Achilles, in panic. 'I will be there,' he promised me. (236)

Patroclus is soon confronted with what society expects from him: to fight, to be "a man". Since Achilles is the best warrior, and thus respected by society for fulfilling his duties appropriately, he defends and protects Patroclus in their first battle: "I always seemed to be in a lull, a strange

pocket of emptiness into which no men came, and I was never threatened ... this was Achilles' doing" (239). Everybody knows that Achilles takes care of Patroclus which raises Achilles's status as fearless and capable soldier but diminishes Patroclus's status as such and ultimately results in his absence from battles — underscored again in both Achilles's and Patroclus's knowledge that Patroclus "... had little to do here" (186).

Nevertheless, Patroclus soon gets a new task when asking Achilles to take the slave women as his war prize and protect them from Agamemnon and his men (226). They soon trust Patroclus but avoid Achilles who does not seem to care at all — his place was with the other men on the battlefield after all. However, Patroclus spends his days with the so-called spearwives and teaches them Greek, or he serves Achilles's guests in their tent (306). During that time, Achilles is either summoned to Agamemnon to talk about strategies or to fight (231). In the meantime, Patroclus also decides to help Machaon, the Greek's physician, to care for the wounded soldiers (247-50).

To be radical here, I would summarize Patroclus's function during the war as Achilles's housewife, the slave girls' teacher and the soldiers' medic. Although there is nothing wrong with having a gentle and compassionate man, especially when he is surrounded by war, death and unnecessary bloodshed, I do not like the way Miller reduces Patroclus's social status because of these duties, making them appear as something dishonorable, less masculine and his last resort to be of any use. Especially the emphasis on his patience to wait for Achilles reminded me a lot of housewives in the 50s, in which the woman cares for the children at home and awaits her husband's return from work.

This reflects the problem with heteronormativity as it reduces relationships to consist of a traditional man and a traditional woman who both act accordingly to their roles that are given to them by society, i.e. the man as head of the family and main provider, and the woman as mother and housewife. Moreover, it discriminates and stigmatizes homosexuality and other forms of sexuality, which is why characterizing two male characters within such a structure is not working at all. Instead, she negates the *raison d'être* of gay couples and their individual and diverse dynamic within their same-sex relationship — not to mention that heterosexual couples do not follow these social scripts anymore either. As a result, she destroys Achilles's and Patroclus's equality in their social statuses as described by Homer and presents queer relationships not as complex and independent, but within heteronormative constructs. While Connell describes two possible solutions to transform gender relations: "One is the abolition of gender, the other is the reconstitution on new bases," Miller decided to do the first one (286): Instead of engaging with nonnormative behavior in nonnormative relationships, she abolishes

a sexual identity and transforms it within conservative heterosexual norms. In other words, by portraying Achilles and Patroclus as traditionally male and traditionally female, she stigmatizes and denies the existence of queer identities and relationships.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, I wanted to explore how *The Iliad*'s modern adaptation, *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, was mistakenly celebrated for its subversive character, applauding Miller for giving Homer's characters their masculinity back and openly supporting gay relationships by interpreting Achilles and Patroclus as homosexual. Based on a theoretical approach regarding the literary form of adaptation and an in-depth comparison of Homer's and Miller's story, my aim was to prove that Miller ultimately de-queers Achilles's and Patroclus's relationship by turning it into a heteronormative romance that consists of Achilles as the conventional male part and Patroclus as the conventional female part.

For that, I examined Linda Hutcheon's findings on what makes an adaptation, in which she explains that authors first interpret a story and then create a new one. In doing so, adapters shape the original narrative according to their personal beliefs and interests, making adaptations individual stories as well. By interpreting Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, Miller included both her personal and her society's interests: She personally agreed with Plato's reading of the two warriors as a romantic couple, not only friends, while today's queer activists want to raise attention to non-normative relationship types. However, while her initial thought was promising, her actual performance was disappointing.

The two main problems in her narrative are intercorrelated as the first problem regards Achilles's and Patroclus's masculinity, which stipulates how masculine they are according to their ability and wish to fight. This results in the second problem as it prescribes their functions in war and their social roles in a patriarchal system. By describing Patroclus's character as the exact opposite of Achilles, regarding their attitude toward fighting and their ability to be compassionate, Miller portrays Patroclus as a lesser man than others, even though exactly this emotionality and capacity for empathy is what makes men men according to Homer's concept of the hero. Instead, Miller reflects hegemonic masculinity as described by Connell since she makes men like Achilles the dominant gender that oppresses women like Briseis and other forms of masculinity like Patroclus. Patroclus finally accepts his masculinity in Achilles's armor, which induces a change in character that enhances his non-existent martial prowess, leads him to discard his personal beliefs and culminates in his downfall. The irony is that Patroclus rejected his male identity and thus himself until that point, but glorified it in Achilles,

who performs his masculinity in order to not be considered feminine. In doing so, he succumbs to toxic masculinity, which was particularly evident in his emotional suppression. This presents a stark contrast to his description in *The Iliad*, in which he is portrayed as a complex character with a wide range of emotions, which he feels openly. Especially this fact makes his change in character in *The Song of Achilles* seem so trivial: When seeing Patroclus's body, Achilles finally gets access to his emotionality which allowed him to openly feel negative emotions that were considered feminine before. Homer stresses this emotional availability and its consequences right at the beginning, which is why Achilles's transformation in *The Iliad* was induced by his generous act to return Hector's body which included self-reflection, regret and compassion. This proves Miller's reluctance to engage with male emotional vulnerability in a positive and contemporary way; instead, she uses it as reason to effeminate the figure of Patroclus for his pacifistic and sensitive personality.

So, Miller places them within a male hierarchy that influences their dynamic as a romantic couple, which she divides into two components: the traditionally male and female part. Even though Achilles is depicted as the conventional tough man who does not shy away from murder, he draws the line when it comes to being loyal toward Patroclus in their relationship — whereas Homer indicates a polyamorous component in their (individual) sex lives. Miller includes their monogamy in their sex scenes, depicting their relationship as ideal, overly romantic and chaste. However, her interpretation of a homosexual couple with stereotypical binary gender roles is even worse: While both warriors enjoyed an equally high social status in *The Iliad*, Miller portrays Patroclus as weak and dependent on Achilles, which led him to care for the women and the wounded. Although these are honorable tasks as well, as he is concerned with domestic labor in *The Iliad* as well, Miller bases these tasks on his inner conflict with his masculinity, and thus dooms him to occupy himself with other duties than fighting. In doing so, she reduces homosexual relationships to heteronormative models.

Instead of reconstructing gender ideologies in modern and new contexts by reinterpreting Achilles's and Patroclus's relationship as homosexual, she abolishes a complex gender and sexual identity: She advocates hegemonic masculinity and thus enforces patriarchal systems, while also propagating heteronormativity as superior standard for human relationships, and thus denigrating the existence of queer communities. She perfectly illustrated this with Achilles's and Patroclus's homosexual relationship, where she measured their masculinity according to their attitude toward fighting, and used this as base for their traditional binary gender roles, ultimately de-queering their relationship.

Even if Homer's narrative could be read as a representation of hegemonic masculinity and binary gender roles from a modern perspective as well, it can still be considered more modern than Miller's narrative which was written in the 21st century after all. Of course, Achilles's behavior in *The Iliad* would be criticized as toxic today, given the serious consequences his emotionality and pride had on hundreds of people. The fact that women like Briseis are reduced to symbols of a warrior's honor reflects patriarchic structures, which are also emphasized in the dominant position of men in *The Iliad*, to whom women and other men must submit, illustrating the contemporary understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless, I emphasize words like "modern" and "contemporary" here, because it is important to remember that *The Iliad* was created in the late 8th century BCE, and therefore it is difficult to apply contemporary issues such as hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender identity to Homer's story and accuse it of being deliberately sexist or discriminatory.

However, it highlights Miller's inability to engage deeply and adequately with modern issues, especially given that she is situated in a modern era and a society that is challenging conservative gender dynamics. While Homer's society was deeply concerned with the pursuit of immortal fame, today's Western society focuses on equality, inclusivity and social justice — which Miller fails to present in her story. Instead of reinterpreting Homer's story in a new cultural context, which the literary form of adaptation invites authors to do, Miller ignores current opinions on gender binary and modern masculinity, ultimately making her narrative outdated and reactionary compared to Homer's ancient story. While his narrative is already more advanced, addressing emotional vulnerability, different ways of being a man, physical and emotional consequences of war, mortality, and the pursuit of glory, Miller only scratches the surface and instead revives traditional ideas of masculinity and gender dynamics, which is ironically celebrated as modern and revolutionary.

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6 Declaration of authenticity

I hereby assure that I wrote the present bachelor's thesis independently and that I have not used any sources and aids other than those indicated, that all statements that have been taken verbatim or analogously from other writings have been identified, and that the thesis has not yet been part of a course or examination in the same or a similar version.