

Book Review

Clytemnestra's Bind. The House of Atreus

Wilson (S.) Pp. 272, map. London: Neem Tree Press Ltd., 2023. Paper, £10.99 (Cased, £14.99). ISBN: 9781911107590

Jodie Reynolds

Greenhead Sixth Form College, Huddersfield, UK
JReynolds@greenhead.ac.uk



'When men plunge a family into self-destruction, women must find a way to break the curse.' *Clytemnestra's Bind* is a fabulous feminist retelling of part of the House of Atreus myth – part one of a trilogy, with the next instalment due later this year. The basic storyline of what happens to Clytemnestra and her family is well known to anyone with an interest in the classical world and there is no attempt to radically alter the main points of the traditional story arc. In deciding to stick fairly faithfully

to much of the original material, Wilson is able to focus her tale on the impending and inescapable horror of what is to come for the characters in her story.

I was completely gripped by the narrative, which is told from the first-person perspective of Clytemnestra herself. Often quite an unlikeable character in the original source material, here Wilson considers the reasons behind her less admirable actions. Her affair with Aegisthus in her husband's absence is one which she tries to resist but is finally forced to give into after years of abuse and ill treatment at Agamemnon's hands. The story begins with the recounting of the tale of Atreus' abominable behaviour – serving up Thyestes' own sons to him in a greasy, gristly soup. We are constantly reminded of this original sin of the House of Atreus and it becomes clear that nothing can stop the inexorable advance of fate. Initially Clytemnestra, having suffered appallingly when Agamemnon comes to take control of Mycenae, tries her best to be a good wife and to raise her children well. However, she is unable to prevent the events which begin to unfold and Wilson's talent is such that reading this book is like watching a car crash in slow motion. You know what is going to happen and you are powerless to stop reading just as the characters are powerless to prevent the inevitable.

Wilson's characters are well rounded, from the adorable and loyal Iphigenia, to the troubled Electra and the monstrous bully Agamemnon. I also enjoyed the way in which the scenes were set, with lovely descriptions of the citadel of Mycenae with its famous Lion Gate and engaging accounts of the clothing and objects used. There is some violence and there are scenes which some readers may find distressing. However, these are not gratuitous in nature and will not come as a surprise to anyone versed in Greek Tragedy. The book would be suitable for Sixth Form students and adults alike and I, for one, am eagerly looking forward to part 2 which focuses more on Helen and her decision to leave Sparta with Paris.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631024000801