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Glyn Ilyffe, *The Gates of Troy*
478pp. Macmillan. £12.99
978 0 230 52929 8

One consolation for Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004) was to be reminded through the film's flaws of Homer's brilliant selectiveness in narrative: the *Iliad* starts *in medias res* and ends with the sack of Troy still unachieved but inevitable (and thus evades the charming but silly story about the horse). The long list of those who have, with varying success, expanded and elaborated on Homer is now joined by Glyn Ilyffe: his six-volume *Adventures of Odysseus* are projected to cover the hero's whole career, though it appears that he may intend to focus on events not described in the Homeric poems. This, the second volume, opens ten years after the events of the first (*King of Ithaca*, 2008). Odysseus is established on Ithaca with Penelope and the newborn Telemachus, when the news comes of Helen's elopement with Paris. The story is taken through a series of semi-familiar set pieces from the epic cycle – the feigned madness of Odysseus, Achilles among the women of Scyros, Iphigenia at Aulis, the marooning of Philoctetes – and climaxes with the Greeks landing at Troy.

Ilyffe is a talented storyteller, but it is hard not to see him struggling somewhat with the episodic nature of the material, and also the fact that some of it is just as hard to take or describe seriously as the Trojan horse. Still, his plotting is very much helped by having the archetypal plotter as protagonist. Odysseus' williness is sharpened by being observed through his guard-captain, Eperitus, a more stolid and traditional hero.

Eperitus does not know what to think when Odysseus tells him that 'the age of heroes is gone... we're entering a time of kings'. Eperitus' uncertainty here can stand for what is distinctive and potentially problematic about this book. It straddles the genres of historical novel (a paradox in a period of which we know next to nothing), and fantasy (unlike Petersen, he keeps the gods in his story). Ilyffe does not so much offer an imaginative reconstruction of Greek life in the heroic age, in the manner of Mary Renault's Theseus books, as a blend of elements taken from different periods of Greek history: Mycenaean, dark-age, and occasionally classical. Readers will have varying feelings about how successful this melange is – but they should consider that his practice is not so different from Homer's.

[This version corrects errors introduced in the editing process to the review published in *TLS* 5549, p.25]