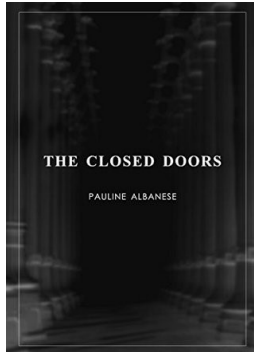


BOOK REVIEW

***The Closed Doors***

Author: Pauline Albanese

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Nur Afifah Widyaningrum

Universitas Gadjah Mada

E-mail: nur.afifah.w@mail.ugm.ac.id

The Closed Doors, a book of sixty pages, is a play written by Pauline Albanese. It was published in 2015. The poetic quality of it has some people shelved *The Closed Doors* as poetry as its genre as well in the Goodreads website. It recounts the story of Hades and Persephone, two deities from Greek mythology, which are commonly known as a pair of god and goddess who rule the realm of the dead. Other characters which appear in the play are Eurydike and Zeus who are listed respectively by Albanese as “a servant girl” and “king of Kings”. *The Closed Doors* are divided into four acts in which each act is consisted of four scenes.

The play opens with an epigraph from *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, as translated by A. S. Kline (Albanese, 2015). The epigraph focuses on the kidnapping of Persephone by Hades as it is famously known; that one day, when Persephone is picking flowers with her friends, Hades appears and kidnaps her. Reading this epigraph gives a hint on what to expect out of *The Closed Doors*, that the play would celebrate love between the King of the dead and his Queen, but hereinafter the present writer would like to explicate how Albanese has woven new dimension and complexity to the love story of Hades and Persephone.

In the first act of “*the world below*”, Persephone is in the room in which “there is no window, no wind, no air” (Albanese, 2015: 2) but there are “a coffee table littered with withered flowers, a crystal bowl of pomegranates” (Albanese, 2015: 2). She loudly complains her being there, because she does not like the room. The complaints drone on, even

though it is known here from Hades’ dialogue that Persephone herself is partially responsible for her being in the room: “You came here to me first, you filthy, sweet liar. You followed the pomegranate seeds, don’t you remember?” (Albanese, 2015: 7). However, despite Hades’ plea so Persephone would understand that her whims cannot be attended to--such as her request for water because there is no water in the Underworld--Persephone is still stubborn. She is also still intent for escape. When Persephone threatens Eurydike that her mother will come for her, Eurydike discourages her, saying, “She won’t walk through these doors without losing her soul” (Albanese, 2015: 12). The first act ends after Persephone eats pomegranate, drinks wine, and once again loudly screams so she is granted escape.

The second act is entitled “*the world within*”. By that time, Hades has offered Persephone many great things, because “something in him is pulling at her” (Albanese, 2015: 18). He says, “I will give you my skeleton, and you will be empress. Empress.” to which Persephone exclaims aggressively that she does not want any skeleton (Albanese, 2015: 20). Hades says that his tibias, his patellae, his illium, his coccyx, and his vertebrae bent before her (Albanese, 2015: 20). Such detailed and intense declaration of devotion has shown the weight of feelings that Hades harbors. Albanese writes, ever so poetically, about how Persephone’s cheeks are read and Hades’ “adolescent heart may be living again” (2015: 22). In that point, Hades has fallen in love with his captive. Readers of *The*

Closed Doors are allowed to see Persephone's heart next, more conflicted than Hades' due to her initial resentment for the king of the dead, yet Persephone claims that Hades' eyes make all the roses, all the yarrows, and all the freesias in her blood shudder (Albanese, 2015: 24). However, Eurydike informs them of Zeus' arrival, a testimony to things still need to be taken care of.

Zeus arrives in the beginning of the third act of "*the world above*". Albanese points out the stark contrasts between Zeus' realm in the world and Hades' realm in the underworld. Negotiation between Zeus and Hades does not run smoothly; Zeus fails to convince Hades to give Persephone back, in which Hades says that Persephone will not pass the door (Albanese, 2015: 41). Meanwhile, Persephone quietly listens the exchange between Zeus and Hades from the other side of the wall. The third act ends with Hades telling Persephone that he will stop people coming from the upper world for her.

The fourth act of "the Underworld" has Persephone realizing that, "The door isn't even locked. It was never locked at all" (Albanese, 2015: 29). That leaves her thinking of how Hades showed Underworld to her in a way that is unthinkable to her before, until she finally opened her arms to embrace it all (Albanese, 2015: 50). However, the news of the coming people from the world outside has reached Underworld despite all the barriers that Hades puts makes Hades despair for awhile. He ultimately puts choices in Persephone's hands. Albanese is at her finest here, stringing words to create perfectly paced events until it finally leads to the momentum:

Persephone starts to walk, slowly. She reaches him and clings to him. The wreathed hand touches her dark shoulder, adjusts against her throat. There is, in this slight hand stroking his pale neck, in this kiss laid upon his temple, in these arms hooking her waist, in their embrace, all the appeasement of the world.

PERSEPHONE

I will tell them I came for me and stayed for you.

(Albanese, 2015: 59)

The final scene is very important because it gives the emphasis differently on the mythology of Hades and Persephone. As the conclusion, Albanese's Persephone has choices; something that the traditional take on Persephone does not have. In *The Closed Doors*, eventually it is also Persephone's choice to live her life by staying with Hades. Persephone has been denied her agency in the narratives where she is taken against her will and held captive by Hades, but Persephone in *The Closed Doors* holds the freedom to choose in the palms of her hands like she cups pomegranates. This agency holds the pivotal role in adding dimension and complexity to the story of Hades and Persephone.

REFERENCES

Albanese, Pauline (2015). *The Closed Doors*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.