
In the brief but characteristically well-written preface to this volume, Froma Zeitlin writes that 'by now the work of Nicole Loraux should need no introduction' and that this translation of *Les Enfants d' Athéna* is a 'sign of the status it has achieved as a classic in its own right'. I wish that were so simply true. It is not that Loraux's book is not splendid. To my mind, not only are the studies of the 'race of women' and 'autochthony' ground-breaking studies, still stimulating, perceptive and indeed thrilling some fifteen years on, but also the detailed
accounts of Euripides' *Ion* and Aristophanes' treatment of the Acropolis are especially important not least because they are rare among structuralist essays from the Parisian school in that they attempt to bring together the project of close reading of classical texts as texts with the enterprise of uncovering the cultural imagination of the Athenian polis. Laurence Kahn in *Hermès passe* (long overdue for translation) and to a lesser degree Vidal-Naquet on the *Oresteia* and *Philoctetes* or Vernant on Hesiod may be viewed as similar exceptions. Loraux's *L'Invention d' Athènes* translated in 1986 by Alan Sheridan, is likewise distinguished for its grasp of the work of Athenian rhetoric of self-projection and for its exhaustive account of the articulation of such rhetoric in the corpus of epitaphioi logoi. *Les Enfants d' Athéna* is provocative, original, subtle and scholarly and offers important general lessons about the functioning of Athenian myth, religion, literature and culture. So why do I hesitate just to affirm the laudatory words of the foreword?

As I sat at my desk rereading Loraux with pleasure, I turned casually to some well-known works on Athenian religion and drama and its message, where one would especially expect to trace Loraux's influence. I was surprised how often Loraux didn't figure, even where especially relevant. There is, for example, no mention of her work in Younis' *A New Creed: fundamental religious belief in the Athenian polis and Euripidean drama*; no mention in Mikalson's *Honor Thy Gods*; nor in Michelini's *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition*; A. Powell's *Euripides, Women and Sexuality*; Kovacs' *The Heroic Muse*; M. Heath's *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy*; Reckford's *Aristophanes' Old-and New Comedy*; O'Reagan's *Rhetoric and the Violence of Language*. I could go on... This list is as random as the system on my shelves, and my point is not one of bibliographical nit-picking (despite its honoured place in the profession). Rather, it seems striking that while Loraux's *L'Invention* has been very widely disseminated both in its details and in its general argument, *Les Enfants* has not had that sort of bibliometric success in the English speaking world. Indeed, when I checked back through *Année Philologique*, I found—again to my surprise—that *Les Enfants* has never been reviewed in any American journal, and only by one scholar, the historian Nick Fisher, in any English language periodical (significantly in a review together with *L'Invention!*). Nor has it been reviewed in any German language periodical. The reception of *Les Enfants*—whatever it says contrary to the usual perception of the importance of reviews (and the self-importance of reviewers)—does not match the expected profile of 'classic status'.

There is, of course, a counter-list of equally distinguished books which do refer to and use Loraux's studies, and there is also an indirect tradition of those who are influenced by those who have been influenced by Loraux. This translation will undoubtedly accelerate the book's slow dissemination. But is there a significant reason that accounts for the different reception of her two 1981 books, apart from the greater difficulty of the French? I think there may be. On the one hand, there is perhaps a reason that stems from the institution of classics and its pressures. The essays range widely in textual material from Simonides to Euripides' *Ion* and in subject from the name of 'women' as a class to the image of the Acropolis. Neither the texts nor the subjects are (regrettably to say) self-evidently canonical. The essays are linked by an interest in how gender,
myth and communication function in Athens (and indeed in gender studies and feminist scholarship Loraux's work is simply 'classic' in all senses). Such a subject in such a form when set in comparison with the easy flow-chart of History - Thucydides - Pericles' Funeral Speech - Loraux, in part may help explain the slower diffusion of Les Enfants (destined always to be 1981b) in what remains a male-dominated canon-led discipline. On the other hand, there is perhaps a different cultural and intellectual account. For Les Enfants draws more tellingly on a wide range of influences which are less evident in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, and less easily assimilated. Although she rarely blasts the reader with methodological imperatives, she also readily manipulates the language of psychoanalysis, anthropology, 'continental' philosophy, Annales school historiography. The way her questions are formulated is often strikingly novel in their allusiveness and scope, and her arguments move sinuously around the boundaries of what she calls 'l'imaginaire' of the Athenians (translated here as 'the imaginary'). The term indeed may stand as an icon for the gap that still exists between French and Italian scholarship on the one hand, and much of German and Anglo-American scholarship on the other.

Things are (and have been for a while) changing: this translation by a major university press will certainly help more people to see what all the fuss has been about—and why Loraux has achieved 'classic status' in the imaginary of many classicists. In the face of what is often difficult and idiomatic French, Caroline Levine has done an excellent job. There are inevitably details to question. 'Bon à penser' should, I think, be translated as 'good for thinking with' rather than 'good for thought' (to maintain a sense of process). To translate 'une écart origin-naire' as 'an original state of separation' and then 'cet écart' as 'this state of isolation' loses quite a bit of what is at stake in the choice of the word 'écart', its connotations from other French contemporary writing. Some of Loraux's single phrase paragraphs look odder in English than in French, but I don't see a way of avoiding the oddness. In general, however, this translation is a hard task very well done. It includes the preface to the second French edition and an epilogue in which Loraux discusses trenchantly some of her critics.

Since I find myself in the somewhat strange position of being the first American reviewer of such a well-known book, I feel I should at least declare, as reviewers do, that this is a landmark study that should be on the shelf of everyone interested in the classical city.

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