a sense of communality in which the reader may share, as opposed to the private experience of alienated modern subjectivities. As always, methods of enquiry determine results.

The important thing about a classic of criticism is not whether you agree with it, but whether it prompts you to fresh thought, including productive disagreement. As A. himself acknowledges ('Epilegomena', p. 574), '*Mimesis* is quite consciously a book that a particular person, in a particular situation, wrote at the beginning of the 1940s'. Like Curtius, with his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (English translation, London and Henley-on-Thames, 1953), he wrote it from a passionate conviction about the integrity of democratic European values then under such grave threat, hoping that it might 'contribute to bringing together again those whose love for our western history has serenely persevered' (p. 557). Perhaps for that very reason it has endured wind and weather.

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HEL(L)ENISM?

M. GUMPERT: *Grafting Helen. The Abduction of the Classical Past.* Pp. xiv + 338. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. Paper, US$21.95. ISBN: 0-299-17124-8 (0-299-17120-5 hbk).

Grafting Helen is a long, often turgid, but learned and provocative study of Helen of Troy. Its contents: Helen in ancient Greek (95 pp.), French (150 pp.) and modern Greek literature (10 pp.); a conclusion (10 pp.), footnotes (35 pp.), and bibliography (20 pp). The book is a revised Harvard dissertation written under Margaret Alexiou, Barbara Johnson, and Gregory Nagy.

Who is Helen of Troy? The question is complex—'*Which* Helen? Her origins, parentage, marriage, her very identity are all subjects of speculation and indeterminacy' (p. 11). And so, too, is the answer, not least because the book is driven by post-structuralist theory (esp. Derrida's early work on writing). Hence the cryptic table of contents: Part I: Helen in Greece—Mimesis, Anamnesis, Supplement, Speculation, Epideixis, Deixis; Part II. Helen in France—Idolatry, Translation, Genealogy, Cosmetics, Miscegenation, Prostitution. These twelve chapter titles (all variations on *graft*) are organized not by chronology or genre but by particular strategies for reading the past into the present, for recuperating the past and for concealing that act of recuperation (p. xii). Given the constraints of space and the primary audience of this journal, I will focus only on Part I. (The France of Part II is chosen because 'from the early medieval era it had always defined itself as the privileged scion of the Greco-Roman past', p. 254.)

Gumpert attempts to demonstrate that the history of Western literature perpetually re-enacts Homer's *teichoskopia*, the desire to gaze upon Helen, like the Trojan elders atop the wall, longing to embrace and plotting to expel her seductive/destructive beauty. Whereas more specialized books (Clader 1976, Suzuki 1989, Austin 1994) read Helen as a mediation between designated antitheses, Gumpert interprets her as a metaphor for ambivalence itself. But why '*Grafting* Helen'? Because, like Helen, *graft* signifies back-and-forth vacillation, always pointing towards an improper union, an illicit trade (p. xii). And why 'Grafting *Helen*'? Because Helen is 'always elusive, always a graft, more than one thing at a time' (p. xiii). Helen is never at home (Sparta, Troy, Egypt) even when at home (p. 21). If, on the one hand, the rape of Helen constitutes

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Greece's foundational event and the resulting Trojan War is the crisis that gives birth to a panhellenic identity, on the other hand, as Hellenism's emblematic founder, it is Helen's 'special property to destroy as she establishes, to mislead as she leads, to gather together as she divides' (p. 98).

G.'s unusual literary history examines

> the way in which the present continually profits from, and remakes itself out of, the pieces of the past. This is not a process . . . that takes place openly, in the light of day. The mechanisms for recuperating the past are the rules and rituals of a vast underground economy. Those mechanisms of recuperation—rhetorical strategies, or tropes—are all forms of graft. (p. 252)

So each chapter attempts

> to expose the operation of a particular species of graft . . . Helen is this study's emblem, then, for the past as something valuable: something to be stolen, appropriated, imitated, extorted, and, again, coveted. That we covet the past—and will do almost anything to make it ours—is the simple truth that this book tries to uncover. (p. 252)

Well, hardly a *simple* truth. I can only outline here Part I's main themes: Chapter 1 ('Mimesis'): Iliadic Helen, Plato on mimesis and his prosecution of Homer (poetry); interesting thoughts on the allegory of the cave (another wall, another captive audience) and on Helen's story as Socrates' target for the dangers of imitation. Chapter 2 ('Anamnesis'): Odyssean Helen and Aristotle on mimesis. Chapter 3 ('Supplement'): Derrida on Platonic mimesis; Plato's *Phaedrus* as palinodic rebuttal of the *Republic*; and Euripides' *Helen* as one more likeness of the truth. Chapter 4 ('Speculation'): the Judgement of Paris and Sappho fr. 16. Chapter 5 ('Epideixis'): Helen as a figure of rhetoric and its power in Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* and Euripides' *Trojan Women.* Chapter 6. ('Deixis'): Helen in lyric poetry, esp. Sappho fr. 16 (revisited) and Stesichorus' Palinode.

Brief sample criticisms. In discussing Helen's drug *ne-penthes* ('no pain'), with which she tried to obliterate her guests' memory (p. 37), G. omits that, after Helen's desertion/infidelity, Menelaos sired, by a slave, a bastard son named *Mega-penthes* ('great pain' 4.11)—an unambiguous reminder of a past Menelaos cannot forget. Homer's two *-penthes* words point to clearly competing versions of Helen (wife's vs. husband's). Despite G.'s claim that Helen is always a symbol of protean ambivalence, there is no ambiguity in a father naming his only son *Mega-penthes*.

The author's deconstructionist stance and insistence on seeing Derridean *différance* everywhere sometimes allows for so much critical slippage that compelling interpretation just disappears. In Euripides' *Helen*, for example, G. asks, 'Which is the real Helen—Homer's or Euripides'?' His conclusion: 'Euripides does not really decide: the *Helen* ends up caught between versions, grafting incompatible readings, a kind of fairytale romance situated nowhere, suspended, like Helen herself, between history and fiction' (p. 56). I do not find that very helpful. I suspect that Euripides, in the immediate aftermath of the disastrous Sicilian expedition, did not intend his *Helen* (412 B.C.E.) to leave us suspended in mid-air, and so I find, for example, the following kind of analysis more persuasive:

> Between these two Helens, the tragic adulteress of epic and the 'retouched' Helen of our play, the poet seemingly invites his audience to choose. But in one sense . . . there is really no choice; or rather, the choice is merely apparent, a device *ex hypothesi* by which Euripides obliquely but firmly drives home his point—the utter futility of the Trojan (i.e. Peloponnesian) War. The

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> palinodic fiction intensifies the tragedy of the war by demonstrating its futility, a war fought for the possession of a phantom. Helen—whoever 'Helen' may be—is rehabilitated, but the result is to assert even more strongly the meaningless suffering of all those thousands who fought and died for ten long years to bring her home. In the end, the phantom who went to Troy is more real—more symbolically real, above all in her effect upon others—than the palinodic 'flesh-and-blood' Helen of the play. (William Arrowsmith in *Euripides: Helen*, trans. J. Michie, C. Leach [New York and Oxford, 1981], p. xii)

I learned a lot from this book; although sometimes frustratingly theory-laden and digressive, *Grafting Helen* does provide many fresh perspectives on old themes.

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GREEK CULTURE(S)

C. DOUGHERTY, L. KURKE (edd.): *The Cultures within Ancient Greek Culture. Contact, Conflict, Collaboration*. Pp. xx + 289, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cased, £50/US$70. ISBN: 0-521-81566-5.

Cambridge University Press reproduce the same side of the Aristonothos crater on both front and back of the dust jacket, but no reader of this important collection of papers should come out at the far end seeing at all the same Greek world. In the face of classicists' persistent assertions about 'Greek culture' and reluctant acknowledgement of regionalism ('Macedonian culture', 'Athenian culture') or class division ('aristocratic culture'), the contributors to this book insist that many cultures sustained a competitive or collaborative coexistence under a thinly coherent Greek umbrella culture. They identify patterns where others have seen merely oddity, systematic contrast where others have found only random or arbitrary opposition. There is more structuralism here than deconstructionism, but structuralism in which the polarities are multiple not simple.

Dougherty and Kurke's *Cultural Poetics* volume of a decade ago lingers in the memory for a small number of classic papers (above all Kurke's own); in this volume no single paper stands out: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and the nine papers gain individually from the frame in which they are set by Kurke and Dougherty's lucid introduction and Josiah Ober's dense and compelling postscript. The coherence of the collection owes much to its origin in a conference at Wellesley, but something also to William Sewell's 'The Concept(s) of Culture', published in V. Bonnell and L. Hunt (edd.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, 1999) to which Kurke and Dougherty, Ober, and two other contributors explicitly refer and from which the phrase 'thin coherence' derives.

D. & K.'s introduction reviews past work on 'ancient multiculturalism', succinctly noting the limitations of works which emphasize sources of influence without interest in how cultural contact works or what exactly results. Their concern with how cultures adapt to dissonant phenomena extends to the dissonant that grows up within an umbrella culture as well as to that acquired from outside. They stress the dialectic between culture as system (Geertz) and culture as local or class-specific practice (new historicism). They insist that to locate the 'rifts and fissures' in the culture of the Greek *polis* it is necessary to do away with assumptions of neat opposition between 'private' and 'public', and to allow the politics of cultural choice which ancient authors

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