

CHAPTER TWO

The *Menexenus*:
Plato's Critique of Political Rhetoric



One of the characteristic features of Attic oratory is the frequent appeal to the historical example as a means of winning over the audience to the speaker's point of view. Because the chief motivation for its use is persuasion,¹ the orators tend to render events according to popular tradition (even when it is clearly inaccurate) in order not to strike a discordant note with their audience and risk losing its good will.² Similarly, the orators often give excessively simplified or even inaccurate versions of historical events in a desire not to appear more learned than their audience.³ In

1. See, e.g., Ian Worthington, "History and Oratorical Exploitation," in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*, ed. Ian Worthington (London: Routledge, 1994), 109–29, at 109–10.

2. P. Harding, "Rhetoric and Politics in Fourth-Century Athens," *Phoenix* 41 (1987): 25–39, at 28–29: "Ancient oratory, like ancient comedy, was a popular medium. The one attempted to entertain, the other to convince the majority of the Athenians. In both, the level of appeal was to popular opinion and popular prejudice." See also K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 11–14.

3. On the efforts made by the orators to conform to the expectations of their audiences, see the (still) important observations of Lionel Pearson, "Historical Allusions in the Attic Orators," *CP* 36 (1941): 209–29; see also Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989),

general, the orators are usually more concerned with a given historical example's relevance to their argument than with Thucydidean *akribeia*.⁴ While much attention has been paid to the historical inaccuracies contained in the speeches of the Attic orators,⁵ I examine what sorts of misleading or false information the orators provide and the reaction of Plato against the Athenian orators' misuse of the historical example in service to a democratic agenda in his critique of contemporary rhetoric and politics, the *Menexenus*.

Although speakers in Herodotus and Thucydides do make some historical allusions,⁶ we have little other evidence in the extant record for the use of arguments drawn from history until Attic oratory begins to flourish in the fourth century. It is worth noting that all of our texts date from 420 to 320, all (except Isocrates 19) were written for an Athenian audience, and the speakers are generally from the social elite,⁷ although to a great extent their success depends on their ability to downplay their social status and present themselves as members of the masses.⁸ It is tempting to argue that rhetoric, with its emphasis on plausibility and persuasion over truth and its frequent use of commonplaces and examples, exerted an influence on Attic oratory by the end of the fifth century, although the dearth of extant oratory prior to this time will not allow any definite conclusions.

Some orators, particularly the authors of funeral orations and panegyrics,⁹ refer to the legendary history of Athens. Although the orators

43–44; and Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss, “Drama, Political Rhetoric, and the Discourse of Athenian Democracy,” in *Nothing to Do with Dionysus?: Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 237–70, at 238–39.

4. S. Perlman, “The Historical Example, Its Use and Importance as Political Propaganda in the Attic Orators,” *SH* 7 (1961): 150–66, esp. 155–56.

5. See now Ian Worthington, “Greek Oratory, Revision of Speeches and the Problem of Historical Reliability,” *ClMed* 42 (1991): 55–74, and “History and Oratorical Exploitation,” 109–29 (with earlier bibliography).

6. On the use of the historical example in the fifth century, see H. Lamar Crosby, “Athenian History and the Athenian Public,” in *Classical Studies Presented to Edward Capps* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 72–85, and Michel Nouhaud, *L'Utilisation de l'histoire par les orateurs attiques* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1982), 30–43.

7. Stephen Todd, “The Use and Abuse of the Attic Orators,” *GR* 37 (1990): 159–78, at 168.

8. Ober, *Mass and Elite*, esp. 190–91.

9. Although the authenticity of some of these speeches is in question, I have left them under the name of the author in whose corpus they appear on the grounds that whether or not they are the work of that author, they are nevertheless representative of late fifth- and fourth-century oratory.

themselves were probably aware of the historical unreliability of the mythological tradition, they mined it for historical examples in full knowledge that their audience liked to hear the traditional stories.¹⁰ In effect the more influential of these speeches played a large part in creating the official Athenian democratic tradition of the past.¹¹ The orators tend to refer to four specific mythological examples; they involve either Athens's prowess in war against foreign invaders (Amazons and Eumolpus) or altruistic actions in aid of the weak and oppressed (refuge to the Heracleidae and intercession with the Thebans on Adrastus's behalf),¹² which themes prefigure the Athenians' presentation of their own accomplishments during the Persian Wars. Nevertheless, when expedient, the orators are perfectly willing to throw a different light on the same events.¹³ The main motivation behind the choice of these particular examples from the legendary past is to reveal the Athenians' superiority, both military and moral, to the other city-states and thereby justify their desire to occupy the preeminent position in Greek affairs.

The Persian Wars prove an especially fertile topic for historical examples in the Attic orators. Not surprisingly, they choose to concentrate upon the two episodes that are likely to evoke the most favorable response from their audience, the famous victories at Marathon and at Salamis,¹⁴

10. See Perlman, "The Historical Example," 158–59. Nouhaud (*L'Utilisation de l'histoire*, 8 and n. 4) comments that the orators use mythological and historical examples in the same way.

11. Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 196–237.

12. Amazons: Lysias 2.4–6; cf. Herodotus's version of the Athenian speech before the Battle of Plataea (9.27.4); Eumolpus: Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates* 98–99; both: Isocrates 4.68–70, 6.42, 7.75, and 12.193; Demosthenes 60.8; Heracleidae: Isocrates 5.34, 6.42, and 12.194; Adrastus: Isocrates 12.168–71; both: Lysias 2.7–16; Isocrates 4.54–56 and 10.31; Demosthenes 60.8; cf. the Athenian speech before Plataea in Herodotus (9.27.2–3) and Procles' speech in Xenophon's *Hellenica* (6.5.46–47).

13. See, for example, the different version of the Adrastus episode in Isocrates' *Panegyricus*, when Athens was trying to forge better relations with Thebes, as compared to those in earlier works: 12.168–74; cf. 4.54–56, 10.31, 14.53.

14. Marathon: Andocides 1.107; Lysias 2.20–26; Isocrates 4.86 (but cf. 164–66), 7.75, and 16.27; Demosthenes 60.10; cf. Herodotus 9.27.5 and 7.10β.1 and Thucydides 1.73.4. See K. R. Walters, "We Fought Alone at Marathon: Historical Falsification in the Attic Funeral Oration," *RhM* 124 (1981): 206–11. Salamis: Lysias 2.27–43; Isocrates 4.93–99, 5.147, 6.42–43, 8.43, and 12.50–51 and 233; Demosthenes 6.11 and 18.204 (in both passages, Demosthenes transfers to Salamis incidents that Herodotus places before Plataea [Herodotus 9.5–6]; see R. D. Milns, "Historical Paradigms in Demosthenes' Public

with a heavy emphasis upon the Athenians' self-sacrifice for the benefit of the other Greeks. Although the orators adhere to the basic facts of the invasion as we know them from Herodotus, they exaggerate the role of Athens in unifying the Greek resistance and warding off the Persian invaders and downplay the contributions of other states.¹⁵

By giving this Atheno-centric version of the Persian Wars, the orators conform to the popular tradition, according to which the Athenians are the leaders (both moral and military) of the Greek forces against the Persians. By the second half of the fourth century, there was an inscription on public display in the deme of Acharnae purporting to be a transcription of the oath that the Athenians swore before the Battle of Plataea to fight the Persians bravely to the end, to punish the Thebans for medizing, and to keep safe the cities that fought against the barbarian.¹⁶ Leaving aside the question of its authenticity (for many scholars have argued that the oath is an Athenian invention designed to enhance the glory of Athens)¹⁷ it is important to notice that the inscribed version claims that *the Athenians* took the oath, while the literary testimonies (Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates* 80–81, and Diodorus 11.29.2–4) state that *the Greeks* swore before the battle. By attributing the oath to the Athenians alone, the inscription at Plataea conforms with the Athenians' view of themselves as the ralliers of the other Greeks and the punishers of the barbarians and their sympathizers.

One of the results of the Persian Wars was Athens's acquisition of a maritime empire. Naturally, there are many reflections of the *Pentecontaetia* in the orators, usually in an idealized version, designed to prove that the Athenians deserve their empire. They accomplish this aim by claiming either that the allies themselves awarded Athens maritime hegemony¹⁸ or that the Athenians ruled their empire, once obtained, justly and unselfishly.¹⁹ It seems that the fourth-century orators, in accordance with the

Speeches," *Electronic Antiquity* 2 [1995]); Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates*, 68–71; cf. Andocides 1.108.

15. The Athenian version of the Persian Wars can be seen already in Thucydides in the Athenian speech to the Peloponnesian League prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (1.73–74).

16. Peter Siewert, *Der Eid von Plataiai* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1972), 5–7.

17. On this and other alleged false documents of the fourth century, see Christian Habicht, "False Urkunden zur Geschichte Athens im Zeitalter der Perserkrieg," *Hermes* 89 (1961): 1–35; and Noël Robertson, "False Documents at Athens: Fifth-Century History and Fourth-Century Publicists," *Historical Reflections* 3 (1976): 3–25.

18. Lysias 2.47; Isocrates 4.72, 7.17 and 80, 8.30 and 76, 16.27; cf. Demosthenes 3.24 and 13.26. Note that the role of Pausanias (Thucydides 1.96.1) is conspicuous by its absence.

19. E.g., Lysias 2.55–57; Isocrates 4.100–109; and Demosthenes 60.11.

popular tradition of the fifth-century empire,²⁰ sanitize its less appealing aspects either by giving them a moral justification or by omitting them altogether.²¹ One notable exception is Andocides (3.37–38), who describes the Athenians' acquisition of their fifth-century empire as follows (3.37): “partly by persuading the other Greeks, partly surreptitiously, partly by bribing them, partly by forcing them” (τὰ μὲν πείσαντες τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τὰ δὲ λαθόντες, τὰ δὲ πριάμενοι, τὰ δὲ βιασάμενοι). He is likely the exception that proves the rule, for, unlike the other orators, Andocides' willingness to express oligarchic ideology leads him to explicit criticism of Athenian imperialism, effectively denying the demos credit for its great fifth-century achievement.²²

It is perhaps surprising at first sight that the orators do not avoid altogether the events of the Peloponnesian War, a period of which the Athenians could not have been particularly proud. Instead, they use historical examples drawn from the Peloponnesian War as a source of lessons for the future and as a means of glorifying Athens, but especially because many of them or their audience had been alive during the war.²³ Here we find the same techniques as in the case of the Pentecontaetia, that is, the orators give very generalized versions of the events, using either judicious omission or subtle distortion in their references to episodes unflattering to Athens, often in accordance with popular tradition. The only episode from the early years of the war to receive any real attention is the Athenian assistance given to Plataea during its siege and eventual fall, although we should note that the orators' accounts either leave out the Athenians' failure to carry out their promise to help (Demosthenes 59.98–103; cf. Thucydides 2.73–74) or mention only Athens's later offers of refuge to the surviving Plataeans (Isocrates 4.109, 12.94, and 14.13 and 52). For the orators, the Plataean episode was probably the most easily manipulated event of the Archidamian War to fit the Athenian democratic self-image of protectors of the oppressed.

The ill-fated Sicilian expedition receives some attention, perhaps because it symbolizes at the same time the Athenian democracy's greatest

20. See the remarks of P. A. Brunt, “Postscript. Thucydides' Funeral Speech,” in *Studies in Greek History and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 159–80, at 173.

21. See James T. Chambers, “The Fourth-Century Athenians' View of Their Fifth-Century Empire,” *PP* 30 (1975): 177–91, esp. 182–87.

22. Anna Missiou, *The Subversive Oratory of Andocides: Politics, Ideology and Decision-Making in Democratic Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 78–82.

23. Nouhaud, *L'Utilisation de l'histoire*, 247.

hopes and greatest failure. Usually the orators make reference to the Sicilian expedition in the form of a warning not to repeat its folly (e.g., Aeschines 2.76). Nevertheless, they subtly twist the facts to conform to their purpose at hand. For example, in order to enhance Athens's oft-repeated claim to be the protector of the weak and oppressed, both Andocides (3.28–32) and Aeschines (2.76) handily gloss over the true reason for the expedition, the Athenians' desire to conquer the entire island of Sicily (Thucydides 6.1 and 6.6).

Even the final defeat at Aegospotami provides the orators with an opportunity for praise of the Athenian character. Demosthenes emphasizes the Athenians' valor under extreme adversity, claiming that they did not give in until their fleet had been destroyed (22.15). Lysias (2.58) and Isocrates (14.39–41) transform the disaster into a moral victory, for the subsequent Spartan hegemony puts the previous Athenian imperial rule into a more favorable light. Moreover, the orators remove all the credit from Lysander, attributing his devastating victory (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.1.22–28) either to the incompetence of the Athenian commander or to the will of the gods.²⁴ In the hands of the orators, then, the most stunning victory (and a naval one, at that) of the Spartans over the Athenians becomes (yet another) way of glorifying the rule of Athens and her heroes.

Similarly, the oppressive rule of the so-called Thirty Tyrants becomes an occasion for praise of the Athenian character. Although the orators sometimes make references to the horrors committed by the Thirty as an example of brutality,²⁵ they usually draw out of this episode something that reflects positively upon the Athenian democracy. Often the orators comment upon the unity of those who opposed the tyranny of the Thirty; all joined the democratic movement and proved their valor, earning their freedom with their victory over their opponents.²⁶ A matter for even greater pride, however, was the reconciliation that took place after the

24. Lysias 2.58: εἴτε ἡγεμόνος κακίᾳ εἴτε θεῶν διανοίᾳ. Robin Seager ("Thrasylbulus, Conon and Athenian Imperialism, 396–386 B.C.," *JHS* 87 [1967]: 95–115, at 108) views this as a sneer at Conon; cf. 2.65. Isocrates 15.128: μίᾳ τύχῃ. Cf. Demosthenes 60.19 and 21, in reference to Chaeronea.

25. See, e.g., Andocides 3.10 (although he too has his own agenda of glossing over Sparta's past interference in Athens's internal affairs); Isocrates 20.11 and 21.12 (but cf. 4.113); Demosthenes 22.52; and Aeschines 3.235 (but cf. 187). On the reign of terror of the Thirty, see Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.3.11–4.1; [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 35–37; and Lysias 12 and 13.

26. Lysias 2.61–63; Isocrates 7.65–67, 8.108; Aeschines 2.77–78 and 3.190; Deinarchus 1.25; Hypereides 2.8.

democratic victory, when the opposing groups vowed to put aside their differences and live in harmony.²⁷

Not surprisingly, there was less occasion for pride when the Greek world descended again into internecine warfare at the beginning of the fourth century. In references to the Corinthian War, the orators tend to stick to generalities, exaggerate the contributions of the Athenians to the anti-Sparta coalition, and keep silent about the involvement of the Persian king (Lysias 2.67–68; Isocrates 14.40–41). As for the King's Peace, which concluded the Corinthian War, the orators refer to it in one of two diametrically opposed ways. When they wish to compare contemporary conditions unfavorably to Athens's great achievements in the fifth century, the orators contrast the ignominious terms of the King's Peace, procured by the Spartans and ceding the Greek city-states of Asia Minor to Persia,²⁸ with the glorious peace that their own ancestors had extracted from the Persians.²⁹ On the other hand, when their aim is to compare favorably conditions in Athens as a result of the King's Peace to their situation at the end of the Peloponnesian War or during the Corinthian War, the orators speak favorably of the peace terms.³⁰ Thus, the orators' references to the King's Peace reveal better than most other historical examples their willingness to turn historical facts to their own rhetorical ends.

Because the King's Peace is the final episode in the historical survey contained in the *Menexenus*, I conclude my examination here of the ways in which the Attic orators use the historical example to create the mainstream democratic view of the past. It is possible, however, to make some general observations on the way the orators distort history. First, there is a tendency to give generalized versions of events, which in turn allows them to

27. Andocides 1.140; Lysias 2.63–65 and 25.28; Isocrates 7.67 and 18.46; Demosthenes 40.32; and Aeschines 1.39, 2.176, and 3.208; cf. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.4.43 and [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 39–40.

28. Isocrates 4.175–80 and 12.105–7; cf. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.1.25 and 31 and the detailed discussion of E. Badian, "The King's Peace," in *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell*, BICS Supplement 58, ed. Michael A. Flower and Mark Toher (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1991), 25–48.

29. Isocrates 4.118–121; Demosthenes 15.29; cf. Demosthenes 23.140. The so-called Peace of Callias is a notorious crux in fifth-century history; see the recent treatments by E. Badian, "The Peace of Callias," *JHS* 107 (1987): 1–39; reprint, *From Plataea to Potidaea: Studies in the History and Historiography of the Pentecostactia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 1–72; and G. L. Cawkwell, "The Peace between Athens and Persia," *Phoenix* 51 (1997): 115–30.

30. Isocrates 8.67–68; Demosthenes 20.60; cf. Nouhaud, *L'Utilisation de l'histoire*, 328 n. 302.

be used in a more versatile way. Second, although there are certain accepted *topoi*, these are by no means fixed, as the orators can modify them in order to fit the case they want to argue,³¹ giving their own interpretation of the facts. Third, there is a distinct (and natural) Athenian bias in allusions to the past. The orators play up Athens's successes and either omit reverses (and other unflattering material) altogether or distort them in such a way as to emphasize Athenian courage and altruism. Finally, there is the common use of popular tradition in order to pander to a mass audience even when the actual facts are available. Of course, in oratory, the present is of primary importance and the past is useful only inasmuch as it provides a basis of comparison for the present, and so the orator's use of the past differs from the historian's.³² Nevertheless, the orators must be careful to avoid giving the impression that they are twisting the facts, for, as Jon Hesk has recently demonstrated, the logocentric Athenian democracy was particularly antipathetic to perceived deception, which it associated with Spartans and oligarchs.³³

Plato's opposition to contemporary political rhetoric is well known.³⁴ In the *Apology*, the Platonic Socrates contrasts his concern for speaking the truth with the clever tricks taught by the sophists (esp. 17a–d). In the *Symposium*, Plato parodies Gorgias's style through Agathon's self-important and pretentious encomium of Eros (194e–197e),³⁵ a point that Socrates explicitly and ironically makes in his reply (198c). Plato articulates his most severe criticisms, however, in the *Gorgias*, where he dismisses political rhetoric as flattery (463a–6; cf. 503a). Instead of serving as an instrument of moral instruction, political rhetoric has given politicians an effective tool to gratify the people for their own selfish interests (esp. *Gorgias*

31. See Perlman, "The Historical Example," 150–66, and Chambers, "The Fourth-Century Athenians' View," 177–91, both of whom examine only the modification of *topoi* for political reasons.

32. Perlman, "The Historical Example," 154–55, and Nouhaud, *L'Utilisation de l'histoire*, 354. Kenneth Dover (*The Evolution of Greek Prose Style* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 5–10) shows how Lysias (2.48–53) modifies an episode found in Thucydides' *Pentecontaetia* (1.105).

33. Jon Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

34. But cf. Helen F. North, "Combing and Curling: *Orator Summus Plato*," *ICS* 16 (1991): 201–19.

35. For the parallels between Agathon's speech and the extant portion of Gorgias' funeral speech, see Kenneth Dover, ed., *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 123–24.

502e–503c).³⁶ Plato does not limit his criticism to statesmen of Alcibiades' generation but blames their predecessors, the great fifth-century leaders, Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and especially Pericles,³⁷ for their moral corruption of the state, which led to Athens's eventual downfall (*Gorgias* 515a–519c).³⁸ Thus, Plato links Athens's fifth-century imperialism with corruption, an association that, as we shall see, is a common one among the intellectual elite of fourth-century Athens, the intended readership of both Plato and the historians.

Despite the fact that the Platonic Callicles is made to justify imperialism, that is, the desire to wield power over others, with the classically sophistic "might equals right" doctrine, it is significant that the Platonic Socrates does not ever directly attack this line of argumentation.³⁹ J. Peter Euben has recently suggested that Plato attempts to detach aristocratic values of the type Callicles embraces (which would, after all, find a certain amount of sympathy among Plato's elite readership) from social class and reattach them to intelligence and philosophy.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is not Plato's method to challenge directly the positions expressed by Socrates' interlocutors but rather through dialectic to expose the flaws in their thinking or, as he does in the *Menexenus*, to take a point to extremes and thereby destroy its foundation.

Although Plato shows in the *Gorgias* that dialectical philosophy is superior to contemporary political rhetoric, the dialogue cannot be reduced to a simple debate between "philosophy" and "rhetoric."⁴¹ The Platonic Socrates ends the dialogue with the rhetorical telling of a myth, and it is implicit throughout that philosophy also is rhetorical and manipulative.⁴² Plato himself recognized the power of the spoken word to transform an audience's perception of a historical event⁴³ and was not averse to harness-

36. On Plato's aversion to the dangerously seductive "magic" of the rhetoric of the sophists, see Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 25–32 and 37–43.

37. See, however, Harvey Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), esp. 136–39.

38. E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 23–34.

39. I thank one of the referees for drawing this important point to my attention.

40. J. Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 207.

41. Cf. John R. Wallach, *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 184.

42. Euben, *Corrupting Youth*, 207.

43. For a modern parallel of the power of the spoken word, see Garry Wills's (*Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992]) convinc-

ing some of its power to his own ends. The difference is that Plato considered his manipulation of words to be justified because it was for the purpose of moral instruction rather than the flattery of the masses.

As E. R. Dodds recognized nearly forty years ago, Plato lays out his theoretical objection to the immoral use of rhetoric by Athenian politicians in the *Gorgias* but illustrates it in practice in the *Menexenus*.⁴⁴ As I shall demonstrate, Plato follows up his dismissal of rhetoric as flattery in the *Gorgias* by exposing and ridiculing the flattery of rhetoric in the *Menexenus*.

Despite his opposition to contemporary practice, however, it is important to note that in his other works Plato uses historical exempla with no more interest in *akribeia* than the orators. For example, the account of the Persian Wars offered by the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* (3.698b–699d) contains the same *topoi* as found in the Athenian orators. Another obvious example is Plato's invention of the mythical city of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, intended, as many have noted, to serve as a paradigm for the ideal state elaborated in the *Republic*.⁴⁵ Plato's disregard for strict historical truth is perhaps best illustrated by his frequent and emphatic use of anachronism.⁴⁶ The most obvious examples are the major anachronisms found in the *Gorgias* and the *Symposium*. Although the dramatic date of the *Gorgias* is set soon after 427, the date of Gorgias's visit to Athens (Pericles' death in 429 is referred to as recent at 503c), references are made to Archelaus's accession to the Macedonian throne in 413 (470d) and to the trial of the generals in Athens after the Battle of Arginusae in 406 (473e).⁴⁷ In the *Symposium*, historical allusions are made to the events of the 380s (182b, 193a), well after both the dramatic date of the dialogue, which is

ing account of how Abraham Lincoln, with the Gettysburg Address, “transformed the ugly reality into something rich and strange” (20). Wills demonstrates that while Lincoln reflected many of the standard *topoi* of the Athenian funeral orations, his address was no pale imitation but a work of new genius. I thank one of the referees for this useful reference.

44. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 24. Louis Méridier (*Platon V.1* [Paris: Collection des Universités de France, 1931], 77) and Dodds (*Plato: Gorgias*, 24) consider the work to be a sort of satyr play to the *Gorgias*. On the thematic links between the *Apology* and the *Menexenus*, see Bruce Rosenstock, “Socrates as Revenant: A Reading of the *Menexenus*,” *Phoenix* 48 (1994): 331–47.

45. See Kathryn A. Morgan, “Designer History: Plato's Atlantis Story and Fourth-Century Ideology,” *JHS* 118 (1998): 101–118 (with earlier bibliography).

46. Cf. Athenaeus 5.217c: “It is clear from many dialogues that Plato often errs with respect to chronology” (ὅτι δὲ πολλὰ ὁ Πλάτων παρὰ τοὺς χρόνους ἀμαρτάνει δῆλόν ἐστιν ἐκ πολλῶν).

47. On dating indications in the *Gorgias*, see Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 17–18.

Agathon's first victory at the Lenaea in 416 (173a), and the deaths of several of the *dramatis personae*, including both Socrates and Alcibiades. Likewise, if the dramatic date of the *Republic* could be established as 411, then Plato's raising of Cephalus from the dead is a major anachronism on a par with those in the *Symposium*.⁴⁸ Plato's use of anachronism seems akin to his technique of the noble lie, a fiction that in the interests of moral truth transcends the bounds of factual accuracy.⁴⁹ Thus, he uses the device of anachronism as a reminder to look beneath the transparently fictional surface for the underlying moral truth.

Plato's disregard for strict historical accuracy in the *Menexenus* is of a different nature altogether. The *Menexenus* is indeed a puzzling dialogue, and its difficulty of interpretation led, in the nineteenth century, to fears that it was not authentic.⁵⁰ No one now seriously doubts Plato's authorship,⁵¹ but the work still raises various questions. It has been shown that Plato's subtle subversion of the genre of funeral oratory in the *Menexenus* extends to criticism of contemporary rhetoric and politics as a whole.⁵² In my discussion, I shall focus exclusively upon the historical section of the *Menexenus* to show how Plato deliberately parodies the conventional distortions of the funeral oration in order to subvert the sanitized versions of the past presented by the orators in Athens as a means of promoting democratic ideology.⁵³

In form, the greater part of the *Menexenus* is an example of the funeral

48. On anachronism in the *Republic*, see now Debra Nails, "The Dramatic Date of Plato's *Republic*," *CJ* 93 (1998): 383–96.

49. *Republic* 382b–d, 389b, 414b–c, 459c–d, *Laws* 663d; see also Carl Page, "The Truth about Lies in Plato's *Republic*," *Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1991): 1–33; Christopher Gill, "Plato on Falsehood—Not Fiction," in *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher Gill and T. P. Wiseman (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 38–87; and Jon Hesk, *Deception and Democracy*, esp. 151–62.

50. Méridier (*Platon VI*, 77) lists some of the nineteenth-century attempts to contest or deny the authenticity of the *Menexenus*. A twentieth-century attack is that of A. Momigliano, "Il Menesseno," *RFIC* 58 (1930): 40–53.

51. The most convincing argument against the attackers of the *Menexenus*'s authenticity is the fact that Aristotle twice refers to 235d in his *Rhetoric* (1367b and 1415b); see George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 158.

52. Robert Clavaud, *Le Ménexène de Platon et la rhétorique de son temps* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1980); Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, esp. 312–27; and Lucinda Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," *JHS* 109 (1989): 1–15.

53. Andrea Wilson Nightingale (*Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995]) provides a thorough discussion of Plato's "masterful use of parody as a device for defining and privileging his own pursuits" (59), but does not consider the *Menexenus* in detail (106–7).

speech (*epitaphios*) given in Athens over those who perished in war.⁵⁴ The work begins with an introductory dialogue in which Socrates meets the young Menexenus, who informs him that an orator is to be selected by the city to give the customary funeral speech (234a–b).⁵⁵ After a rather ironic assessment of the expertise of orators (234c–235d), Socrates offers to repeat from memory a speech that had been composed by his (and Pericles’) teacher, Aspasia (235e–236d). He proceeds to deliver this speech, which consists of two parts: a section of praise (ἔπαινος) of the dead (237a–246a), which includes a historical survey, and an exhortation (παρά-ίνεσις) to the living (246a–249c). Menexenus, after expressing his skepticism about Aspasia’s authorship of the funeral oration, then takes his leave of Socrates (249d–e). I shall refer to the speaker of the *epitaphios* contained in the *Menexenus* as “The Speaker” for reasons of simplicity. While Plato attributes the speech to Socrates, who in turn attributes it to Aspasia, the *epitaphios* itself cannot be thought to contain the actual views of any of these historical figures.

Turning now to the historical survey in the *epitaphios* (239d–246a), it is important to note that it contains two levels of distortion. First, there is the patriotic distortion required by the very nature of the funeral oration. Naturally, the speaker of a funeral oration undertakes to praise the dead and their native city, and thus cannot diminish his eulogy by mentioning material that does not reflect well upon Athens and the Athenian democracy. Plato is very careful to show that the funeral oration in the *Menexenus* conforms to the others in this respect (cf. 235d, 237a). This tendentious nature of the funeral oration also gives rise to insidious exaggerations and misrepresentations of both fact and intent, all to reflect the glory of Athens. Where we find such distortions, it is not always easy to distinguish whether Plato is simply making the speech obey the usual conventions of the *epitaphios* or whether he has a second, deeper purpose in mind. Scholars generally agree that the distortions in this *epitaphios* are far worse than

54. Five other *epitaphioi* survive: twenty-two lines of a funeral oration ascribed to Gorgias contained in the introduction to Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s essay on Demosthenes, Pericles’ famous funeral oration in Thucydides (2.35–46), and those preserved in the corpora of Lysias (2), Demosthenes (60), and Hypereides (6). This was apparently a custom unique to Athens (Demosthenes 20.141). For recent detailed discussions, see John E. Ziolkowski, *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens* (Salem, N.H.: Ayer, 1981), and Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*.

55. On the significance of the choice of Menexenus as Socrates’ interlocutor, see Rosenstock, “Socrates as Revenant,” 331–47, and Lesley Dean-Jones, “Menexenus—Son of Socrates,” *CQ* n.s., 45 (1995): 51–57.

those of the other funeral orations.⁵⁶ The very fact that the errors contained in the historical section of the *epitaphios* given in the *Menexenus* are so blatant and so numerous casts aspersions on the credibility not only of the funeral oration in general but also of contemporary democratic politics and rhetoric as a whole.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the narration of the past contained in this alleged funeral oration, The Speaker uses *praeteritio* to mention the standard legendary exploits of the Athenians, stating that these deeds have already been hymned by the poets (239b–c). For this reason, he begins his survey of Athens's glorious past with its actions in the Persian Wars, which he claims have not yet been hymned satisfactorily by the poets and still lie in oblivion, a statement that would have come as a surprise to readers of Aeschylus and Simonides. And so, the historical survey in the *epitaphios* begins with a factual incident, rather than a legendary one, but does so on the dubious pretext that the Persian Wars had not been properly treated by the poets.

In his treatment of the Persian Wars (239d–241d), The Speaker emphasizes the usual theme of the fight for freedom against the barbarians. Unlike the other orators, however, The Speaker delves into the antecedents to the Persian expeditions against Greece and is the only one to mention Cyrus and Cambyses, as well as Darius. Cyrus freed his fellow Persians but enslaved the Medes, and he ruled over all of Asia except Egypt. Cambyses gained control over Egypt and as much of Libya as was possible to traverse, while Darius extended his land empire as far as Scythia, and controlled the sea and the islands with his navy (239d–e). This emphasis on imperialism, with its reference to the sea, would naturally have brought to mind Athens's fifth-century empire, equating it with the enslavement by the Persians of their subjects.

Another topic unique to the *Menexenus* is a reference to the role of the Athenians in the Ionian Revolt, which The Speaker claims was Darius's reason for aggression against the Athenians and the Eretrians (240a). The mention of the Athenians' active role in the Ionian Revolt (Herodotus 5.99–104)—including a reference to Sardis, which would surely have

56. Detailed lists of the historical inaccuracies in the *Menexenus* can be found in J. A. Shawyer, *The Menexenus of Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), xi–xv; Méridier, *Platon V.I.*, 59–64; Edmund F. Bloedow, “Aspasia and the ‘Mystery’ of the Menexenos,” *WS* n.s., 9 (1975): 32–48, at 37–42; M. M. Henderson, “Plato's *Menexenus* and the Distortion of History,” *Acta Classica* 18 (1975): 25–46, at 39–45; and Clavaud, *Le Ménexène de Platon*, 127–67.

brought to mind the burning of the temple there—appears somewhat odd in a funeral oration designed to praise Athens, because it makes Darius’s reaction seem justified. By this deliberate refusal to vilify the Persians, the reader is gently reminded that the Athenians were not entirely innocent victims of Persian aggression, as the other orators imply.⁵⁷

The next episode in which this *epitaphios* differs is the approach of Datis (240a–c), who is not named in any of the others. The Speaker comments that Datis is equipped with only three hundred triremes (240a), in contrast to the six hundred mentioned by Herodotus (6.95.2). Following this obvious underplaying of the extent of the threat presented by Datis, The Speaker exaggerates the valor of his first objects of attack, the Eretrians, characterizing them as very renowned warriors and not few in number (240b). He then states that they were defeated in three days (240b), although the figure of seven days was available (Herodotus 6.101.2), immediately revealing the falseness of his portrayal of the Eretrians as outstanding warriors. Another claim found neither in Herodotus nor in the other *epitaphioi* is that Datis and his troops joined hands in a line across the island to ensure that no Eretrian escaped. As we have seen, the other *epitaphioi* prefer to concentrate upon the Athenians’ glorious achievement at Marathon.⁵⁸ By making The Speaker dwell upon Datis’s approach, Plato implicitly criticizes the tendency of other *epitaphioi* to be misleadingly selective in their choice of events to mention. The unusually full treatment of Datis, who appears to have become a figure of fun in Athens by the end of the fifth century,⁵⁹ further indicates that Plato is indulging in subtle subversion. In the *Laws*, Plato inserts a passage similar to this one into the mouth of the Athenian speaker (698c–d). In it, however, the reference to the Eretrians as renowned warriors is omitted, as are the specific figure of triremes and the number of days for the capture of Eretria. The claim of Datis to have netted Eretria is mocked. The Athenian speaker of the *Laws* may represent Plato’s view of the amount of patriotic rhetoric that is acceptable, while he uses our *epitaphios* to show how ridiculous the patriotic claims of the democratic tradition, when taken to extremes, can be.

A review of the Persian Wars follows, in which the Athenian part is emphasized as required by the demands of the epitaphic *logos* (240a–241c). A comparison of the praise that The Speaker accords to those who

57. Cf. Lysias (2.21), who states that Darius attacked Greece hoping to enslave Europe.

58. Loraux (*The Invention of Athens*, 155–71) discusses the special place of Marathon in the Athenian panegyric tradition.

59. M. V. Molitor, “The Song of Datis,” *Mnemosyne* 39 (1986): 128–31.

fought at Salamis (241a–c) with Plato’s contempt for the naval victory in the *Laws* (707c) is instructive. It seems that Plato’s true opinion conforms to the standard aristocratic exaltation of the hoplite victory at Marathon over the democratic naval victory.⁶⁰

Our *epitaphios* then turns to the subsequent mopping-up operations that freed the seas from any Persian threat (241c–241e). Unlike the other orators (esp. Lysias 2.47 and 55–57), The Speaker says nothing about the foundation and development of Athens’s fifth-century maritime empire, except perhaps for a glancing allusion in the phrase “there was peace and the city was honored” (εἰρήνης δὲ γενομένης καὶ τῆς πόλεως τιμωμένης). He proceeds directly from the campaigns against Persia (all of which, including the notorious Egyptian campaign, he implies to be successes) to war within Greece, stating that Athens was plunged into war against its will as a result of jealousy (ζῆλος) and envy (φθόνος) on the part of the other Greeks (242a). There is nothing unusual in The Speaker’s treatment of Athens as the victim of the aggression of others (cf. Lysias 2.48), but, in contrast to the other orators, who omit any mention of Athens’s efforts toward the establishment of a land empire in central Greece in the 450s, these campaigns are the only ones that are mentioned from the Pentecontaetia. The fact that The Speaker says twice that the Athenians launch their campaign in central Greece on behalf of the freedom of the Boeotians (242b) serves only to emphasize the imperialism of the Athenians. Surprisingly, in a *logos* purportedly devoted to praise of Athens, little is made of the Athenian victory at Oenophyta, possibly lauded by other *epitaphioi*,⁶¹ and it is telescoped into the Tanagra campaign.⁶² Moreover, The Speaker claims that the dead of Oenophyta were the first to be honored with a public funeral (242b–c), a statement not found in any other source.⁶³ Nicole Loraux has drawn attention to The Speaker’s juxtaposition of this

60. Andocides 1.107–8; on Andocides’ telescoping of the hoplite battle at Marathon with the naval victory at Salamis as a reflection of his aristocratic background, see Perlman, “The Historical Example,” 163–64, and Missiou, *The Subversive Oratory of Andocides*, 51–52.

61. Diodorus (11.82.1–4) characterizes this battle as one of the greatest Athenian military achievements; it is likely that his source for this section of his narrative is an *epitaphios*, as K. R. Walters argues, following a suggestion by Strasburger (“Diodorus 11.82–84 and the Second Battle of Tanagra,” *AJAH* 3 [1978]: 188–91).

62. Oenophyta is said to have taken place two days after Tanagra (242b), whereas Thucydides states that it happened sixty-two days later (1.108.2) and Diodorus places it in the archon-year following Tanagra (11.81.1).

63. Most scholars agree that the custom most likely originated somewhere between the Battle of Plataea in 479 and the Battle of Drabescus in 465/4; see Ziolkowski, *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens*, 13–21.

statement with the inauguration of a new phase in Greek warfare, that of Greeks fighting Greeks.⁶⁴ By refusing to allow The Speaker to take advantage of the opportunity to praise Athens for a clear victory, and by highlighting with the (probably erroneous) origin of the *epitaphios* the fact that the funeral oration more often than not honors those who died in wars against other Greeks, Plato draws attention to the tendency of the other *epitaphioi* to celebrate Athenian imperialism.

Our *epitaphios* continues with a section on the Peloponnesian War that, true to the conventions of the genre, is very truncated. The Speaker mentions explicitly only one campaign of the Archidamian War, the resounding Athenian success at Pylos (242c–d); significantly, this is the only reference to this episode among the extant orations. The Speaker gives a distorted version of the Athenian treatment of the Spartans captured on the island of Sphagia,⁶⁵ claiming that although it was possible for the Athenians to put them to death, they spared them, gave them back, and made peace. Again, he appears to telescope separate events, for Thucydides says that the Spartans were kept as hostages, to be killed if their compatriots invaded Attica again (4.41), and were not given back until after the Peace of Nicias, nearly four years later (5.18.7). Furthermore, The Speaker attributes noble motives to the Athenians for their failure to put the Spartan prisoners to death immediately (242c–d), whereas Thucydides indicates that the reason they spared their lives was to use them as bargaining chips (4.41.1). By including this episode, Plato emphasizes the transparent falseness of the usual Athenian claims to altruistic actions in aid of the weak.

The short-lived Peace of Nicias also receives some attention in our *epitaphios*, where the reason given for the Athenian willingness to enter into peace negotiations is that they thought it right to wage war against their fellow Greeks only to the point of victory, but to wage war against the barbarian to the point of destruction (242d). This statement appears to be a deliberate attempt to satirize patriotic sentiments of this sort in epitaphic oratory, for the Athenian claim not to have fought to the death against their fellow Greeks is certainly awkward with reference to the year 421, in view of the fact that the Athenians had six years earlier almost put the entire male population of Mytilene to death and had recently voted to do the same to Scione (Thucydides 3.36–50; 4.122.6). Furthermore, The

64. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 62.

65. This island off the coast of Pylos is more commonly known, thanks to Thucydides, as Sphacteria. Nevertheless, as Strabo makes clear (8.4.2), it was also called Sphagia, which name the island retains today.

Speaker himself has just claimed that the campaigns against Persia in the middle of the fifth century merely frightened off the king (241e).

The emphasis upon the exaggerated claims made by the epitaphic tradition continues throughout the survey of the renewal of hostilities between Sparta and Athens (242e–243d). The first episode to be mentioned is the Sicilian expedition, although there is no explicit reference to Syracuse, which deflects attention from the true cause of the expedition, Athenian aggrandizement. The Speaker states that the Athenians went to Sicily to protect the freedom of the Leontinians, which is the motive that was preserved in the oral tradition in Athens (Aeschines 2.76). Likewise, as the tendentious nature of the *epitaphios* requires, the crushing Athenian defeat in the Battle of the Great Harbor at Syracuse is not mentioned, and The Speaker says only that the Athenians gave up the expedition, because they were victims of bad luck (243a). Statements of this sort were presumably current in Athens but the exaggeration contained in the following statement, that the prudence (σωφροσύνη) and excellence (ἀρετή) of the Athenians ensured that they were the recipients of more praise from their enemies than others receive from their friends (243a), detracts from The Speaker's credibility. It seems that Plato again has The Speaker present a statement typical of *epitaphioi*, only immediately to cut the foundations out from under it, thereby revealing its essential invalidity.

As is customary of the genre, even the inglorious last years of the Peloponnesian War provide an occasion for praise of the Athenian character (243a–d). The Speaker emphasizes the usual themes of the perfidy of the other Greeks in seeking the aid of the Persian king and of Athenian valor in adversity. Whereas the other orators mention only the final defeat at Aegospotami, the sole episode to which The Speaker refers is the Battle of Arginusae, choosing it as the example of the strength and courage of Athens. The notorious aftermath of the battle, to which The Speaker specifically alludes (243c), immediately strips away any claims of the Athenians to virtue on this occasion. The bad taste that the Arginusae episode left in the mouths of the Athenians (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.7.35) precludes any of the other orators from mentioning the battle. Like the other orators, The Speaker does not allow the Spartans to take any credit for the final defeat of the Athenians, but goes somewhat further in his statement that the Athenians defeated themselves, remaining still undefeated by others (cf. Lysias 2.65–66). Here too The Speaker engages in his usual procedure of exaggerating, and thereby undercutting, the traditional claims made by the orators.

In obedience to the requirements of funeral orations, instead of mentioning the depredations of the Thirty, The Speaker concentrates on the reconciliation between the two sides after the democrats under Thrasybulus regained power (243e–244b), attributing the cause of the civil strife to misfortune rather than to wickedness or hatred (244b). As we have seen, this emphasis on reconciliation exists also elsewhere, but our *epitaphios* goes beyond the others in saying that other states would pray to be afflicted in the same way as Athens, should they be fated to suffer civil strife (243e). Once more, The Speaker takes a point of which the Athenian democracy could legitimately be proud and exaggerates it to the point of self-parody, in mockery of the tendency of the Athenian orators to tailor historical facts to flatter the masses.

In the next section (244b–c), The Speaker conforms to the tendency of patriotic Athenian oratory to whitewash Athens by claiming that Athens's sufferings at the end of the Peloponnesian War were entirely undeserved (244b). He says that the Athenians forgave the barbarians but at this time were angry with the other Greeks for having joined the barbarians against them. The fact that this statement is inconsistent with previous statements in the *epitaphios* serves to reveal its patent inaccuracy. The Speaker has just claimed (244b) that the reason why the Athenians were able to achieve such complete reconciliation following the civil discord caused by the rule of the Thirty was that they forgave one another because they were of the same stock. The fact that now the Athenians are prepared to forgive the barbarians reveals the previous statement to be insincere.⁶⁶ Furthermore, The Speaker has stated earlier that in contrast to the other Greeks, the Athenians think it proper to wage war against the barbarian to the point of destruction (242d). By means of these inconsistencies, the Athenian claim to be *misobarbaroi* in contrast to the other, *philobarbaroi* Greeks is revealed to be hollow.

In his narrative of the Corinthian War (244d–246a), The Speaker continues this theme with the claim that even the Persian king was in such desperate straits at this time that he stood in need of Athens's help (244d), which is described as a thing most providentially arranged (τό γε θειότατον πάντων). This striking adjective not only shows that the Athenian claims to be *misobarbaroi* are transparently self-serving, but also draws attention to the falseness of this statement. Rather, it was Persia that helped Athens, by making the expatriate Athenian general Conon admiral

66. Henderson, "Plato's *Menexenus*," 43–44.

of the Persian navy. Conon turned this post to Athens's advantage, first by asking to be allowed to keep the fleet that he could then maintain from the islanders, and then by getting subsidies from Pharnabazus, the satrap of Phrygia, and the Persian king to rebuild Athens's walls (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.8.9–10). To keep a consistent presentation of the Athenians as *misobarbaroi*, The Speaker is forced to qualify Athens's "saving" of the Persian king as unofficial, carried out by refugees and volunteers (245a). The self-conscious way in which Plato makes him do so indicates his disapproval of the sort of revisionist history practiced by the orators who attribute the most imperialistic actions to Athens's compassion and desire to aid the weak. Furthermore, this is one of the more blatant examples of Plato's applying one of the standard themes of the genre to excess. While the other *epitaphioi* (with the exception of the fragmentary oration attributed to Gorgias) do employ the *topos* that the Athenians always fight for freedom on behalf of their fellow Greeks,⁶⁷ The Speaker not only adopts this commonplace (239b, 242a, 242b, 244e, 245a) but even claims that they freed the Persian king himself (246a)!

This parody of transparently revisionist history continues with The Speaker's account of the peace negotiations that put an end to the Corinthian War (245b–d). Here, the whole process of peace negotiations appears to be rolled into one set, for there were at least three attempts at peace during this period: a conference at Sardis (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.8.15), a separate one at Sparta (Andocides 3.33), and the King's Peace of 387/6 (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.1.30–36).⁶⁸ The Speaker claims that Athens is the only Greek state not willing to hand over the Greeks of Asia Minor to the Persians through hatred of the barbarian (245c). This statement appears to be referring to the first set of negotiations at Sardis in the 390s, for Xenophon agrees that the Athenians were not willing to agree to these peace terms but indicates that they refused the proposed peace terms for much less noble motives—because the autonomy clause would not allow them to keep their colonies of Lemnos, Imbros, and Scyros (*Hellenica* 4.8.15). Moreover, the Athenians were not the only ones reluctant to accept these peace terms; the other members of the anti-Sparta coalition also refused, for similarly selfish reasons. In a section very reminiscent of Andocides' argument in the *De pace*, The Speaker glosses

67. Thucydides 2.40.5; Lysias 2.14–15, 34, 42, 44, 47, 55, 68; Demosthenes 60.23; and Hypereides 6.10, 16, 19, 24, 40.

68. I discuss the first two peace conferences further in "Presbeis Autokratores: Andocides' *De pace*," *Phoenix* 49 (1995): 140–49.

over the terms of the peace, which ceded all the Asian Greeks to the Persian king (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.1.31), and comments instead upon the fact that the Athenians have obtained what they desired; their walls, ships, and colonies (245e). It is clear that, by their acceptance of the terms of the peace, the Athenians have committed that act, which just above (245d) has been called shameful and unholy (αἰσχρὸν καὶ ἀνόσιον), the surrender to Persia of the Greeks of Asia Minor. Once again, through inconsistency with previous statements, Plato makes The Speaker signal the lack of substance of the *topos* of misobarbarism found in Athenian patriotic oratory.

With his account of the peace treaty, The Speaker reveals as false many of the preceding claims made throughout the historical survey. He states now (245e) that Athens had been defeated at the end of the Peloponnesian War, although he claimed previously (243d) that Athens had the reputation (and it was true) of being impossible to defeat. The statement is also made here that the Athenians freed the king and drove the Spartans from the seas, in blatant contradiction to the proud claim earlier (242d) that the Athenians thought it right to wage war with fellow Greeks only until the point of victory but to continue the fight against the barbarian to the point of destruction. Now the Athenians have been shown explicitly not only to have fought against their fellow Greeks, but to have done so in company with the Persians. The survey of Athens's glorious deeds in the past concludes with a reference to the brave men who died in the Corinthian War (246a). It is now clear that despite their pretensions to be fighting selflessly against the barbarian for the freedom of their fellow Greeks, the Athenians have only betrayed their moral principles, with the consequent loss of many brave men. Thus, this concluding portion, with its pessimism and reversion to the truth, reveals the falseness of much of the preceding excursus and signals the hollowness of the standard claims of the Athenian democracy.

Another way in which Plato indicates his criticism of the traditional *topoi* of Athenian patriotic oratory is the difference in emphasis given in the *Menexenus* to wars for which the Athenians cannot legitimately claim the same glory as they can for their role in the Persian Wars. The other funeral orations dwell in much less detail on the events of the Peloponnesian War, on the ground that the Athenians' part in this war was far less noble than their role in the Persian Wars.⁶⁹ Here, there is a longer survey of the events

69. Cf. Lysias 2.54–57 and Demosthenes 60.11.

of the Corinthian War than one might expect from the statement “Why indeed should I prolong this?” (καὶ μηχύνειν μὲν τί δεῖ), with which this section begins (244d). In this way, Plato plays upon the standard use of *praeteritio* in the oratorical tradition and reveals how deceptive it is, for he makes The Speaker provide details for several campaigns of the Corinthian War. Yet in the end the comprehensiveness of this section has its foundations removed in its turn by the claim that far more numerous and noble deeds have been omitted (246a). This is another example of the way in which our *epitaphios* takes many of the general eulogistic and patriotic themes of the funeral oration and applies them to excess.

In order to parody the genre most effectively, Plato includes in this *epitaphios* most of the standard themes. Thirty-nine commonplaces of funeral orations have been identified, of which our example contains thirty-five, close behind Lysias (thirty-seven) and Demosthenes (thirty-six).⁷⁰ It is worth noting that Lysias’s speech, at nineteen Oxford pages, is slightly longer than our example, which stands at thirteen, while Demosthenes’, at eleven Oxford pages, is slightly shorter. By means of exaggeration and internal inconsistencies in his use of these standard *topoi*, Plato signals the lack of credibility of many of the so-called historical facts contained in the oratorical tradition when used purely for political purposes.

Plato’s use of another technique draws further attention to the intentional lack of credibility of the orators’ account of the past. By means of a “deliberate and fantastic anachronism,”⁷¹ Plato attributes to Socrates, whose death in 399 was well known, knowledge of the events of the Corinthian War, which ended more than a decade after his death. Furthermore, he does not attempt to conceal this anachronism but rather draws attention to it by making the narrative of the Corinthian War (244d–246a) the most detailed part of the historical section of the *epitaphios*, despite the claim to the contrary at its introduction.⁷² By his obvious contradiction of an explicit statement, Plato draws attention to an already blatant anachronism. Why does Plato continue the historical survey contained in the *logos* until he

70. Ziolkowski, *Thucydides and the Tradition of Funeral Speeches at Athens*, 33–36.

71. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 24.

72. Jules Labarbe (“Anomalies dans le *Ménexène* de Platon,” *AntCl* 60 [1991]: 89–101) offers the bizarre suggestion that the pronouns were masculinized and the allusions to the Corinthian War were interpolated when “Aspasia’s” speech was detached from the dialogue in the Hellenistic period for annual recitation. Aside from the fact that the deliberate use of anachronism in Plato’s other works makes it unnecessary to explain away this one, Socrates indicates that Aspasia acts as a ghost writer of this *epitaphios* (236b), so the masculine pronouns are not an “anomaly” at all.

passes the point where any pretense that Socrates ever delivered this speech can still be maintained? The answer must be that by continuing the survey up through the Corinthian War, Plato is able to show that the Athenians' professedly noble motives belong in fact to the realm of self-interest.⁷³ The twin pillars of the Athenians' proud boast always to be acting purely altruistically are their claims that they have always fought for the freedom of others⁷⁴ and have continually opposed the barbarians.⁷⁵ The Speaker even goes so far as to chastise the "ingratitude" of the Spartans for soliciting help from the Persians during the Peloponnesian War (243b and 244c), which he cites as the reason for Athens's "allowing" the Spartans to enslave the other Greeks. Both of Athens's altruistic claims are revealed quite explicitly to be false, as we have seen, by the exaggerations and inconsistencies contained throughout the *epitaphios*, but they reach a climax in the account of Athens's behavior during the Corinthian War. The effect of the anachronism of Socrates' relating events a decade after his death is to galvanize the reader into true awareness of the hypocrisy of the Athenians' pride in their past, which Plato subtly reveals to be somewhat less noble than their proud claims indicate. Thus, Plato's use of anachronism in the *Menexenus* is similar to that of his other works, in that it functions as a reminder to the reader to look beneath the surface of the verbal sophistries contained in the oratorical tradition for the underlying moral truth.⁷⁶

Another way in which Plato uses the *Menexenus* to parody the oratorical tradition is Socrates' statement that he is repeating a funeral oration not of his own invention but rather one composed by Aspasia, some of which was extemporized and the rest patched together from the speech that she had prepared for Pericles (236c). As with the *Phaedrus*, in which Phaedrus purports to repeat a speech of the orator Lysias, we are not meant to take the purported authorship seriously. Plato proceeds to cast doubt upon the credibility of the attribution of the *epitaphios* to Aspasia in two ways. Socrates' tongue-in-cheek remark that he almost received a beating from Aspasia for his slowness in memorizing the speech (236c) reduces it in

73. Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 4.

74. 239b, 240d–e, 242b, 244e, and 245a.

75. 239a, 240d–e, 241b–c, 241d–242a, 242d, and 245c–e.

76. For somewhat different conclusions on the serious purposes of this anachronism, see Harold S. Stern, "Plato's Funeral Oration," *New Scholasticism* 48 (1974): 503–8, at 505; Rosenstock, "Socrates as Revenant," 331–47; and Dean-Jones, "Menexenus—Son of Socrates," 51–57.

effect, as Nicole Loraux has observed,⁷⁷ to the level of a school exercise. Also, Plato's emphasis at the end of the dialogue on Menexenus's disbelief that Aspasia did indeed compose it (249d–e) suggests the falseness of its attribution to her. As he so often does in the *Menexenus*, Plato sets up an apparent fact only to send it tumbling down afterward.

The question, then, is not whether this funeral speech was really composed by Aspasia but rather why Plato goes through the elaborate pretense of attributing it to her. Plato uses the figure of Aspasia on several different levels,⁷⁸ which explains the multitude of interpretations that modern scholars have proposed on this subject. She has been viewed as a kind of Diotima figure.⁷⁹ Certainly, both figures fill the function of the teacher, and both become frustrated with the perceived slowness of Socrates (*Menexenus* 236b–c, *Symposium* 204b and 207c). Because Aspasia is a well-known figure in her own right, however, there must be a more precise point to Plato's choice of her as Socrates' teacher in the *Menexenus*. For this reason, some scholars have seen in the figure of Aspasia a literary allusion to the lost *Aspasia* dialogue by Aeschines.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, we cannot be sure that Aeschines' dialogue, or any other Socratic work using Aspasia as an interlocutor, does in fact predate the *Menexenus* or, if so, that Plato borrowed any more than the idea of using Aspasia as the central figure. It is a logical inference that one of her functions is to create a link with Pericles' funeral speech in Thucydides, which Socrates alleges to be the work of Aspasia (236b).⁸¹ Because the latter does not contain a historical survey, however, it is clear that Plato wants to go beyond the Thucydidean version to comment upon the *epitaphios* in general, by including many of the standard historical themes.

As Madeleine Henry has recently shown, the portrayal of Aspasia in comedy has made her into an interchangeable character; her very inter-

77. Nicole Loraux, "Socrate contrepoison de l'oraison funèbre," *AntCl* 43 (1974): 172–211, at 200.

78. Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 3.

79. E.g., Ilse von Loewenclau, *Der Platonische Menexenos* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961), 33.

80. Ivo Bruns, *Das literarische Porträt der Griechen im fünften und vierten Jahrhundert vor Christi Geburt* (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1896), 359; and Heinrich Dittmar, *Aeschines von Sphettos: Studien zur Literaturgeschichte der Sokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1912), 40–59.

81. Dionysius of Halicarnassus was the first to draw a parallel between the funeral oration contained in the *Menexenus* and that of the Thucydidean Pericles (*Demosthenes* 23). See Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 3; and S. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 182–89.

changeability with other speakers serves to emphasize the emptiness of the sentiments contained in *epitaphioi*.⁸² Moreover, because of her well-known connection with Pericles, Aspasia is an obviously ironic choice for Plato to criticize the type of statesmanship that Pericles represents, particularly in view of his association with fifth-century imperialism; in this way, as S. Sara Monoson has noted, Plato furthers the criticism of Pericles as pandering to the demos that he articulated in the *Gorgias*.⁸³ Robert Clavaud has made a convincing case for the argument that Plato is directing his attention in the *Menexenus* not just to funeral speeches in particular but to political rhetoric in general.⁸⁴ Aspasia's function as a link to political rhetoric in general is made explicit, because Socrates says that she has taught not only Pericles but other orators too (235e).⁸⁵ Furthermore, Aspasia is a means by which to distance Socrates from the speech.⁸⁶ Because Socrates does not compose his own speech, but rather repeats one he has learned from Aspasia, Plato uses the figure of Aspasia to emphasize the way in which both the *epitaphios* and the other forms of patriotic oratory are forced by their nature to draw upon a stock of standard themes and thus allow no scope for originality or moral instruction.

Because Plato's use of the figure of Aspasia on several levels indicates that the *Menexenus* did have a wider function, it is time now to consider what its purpose might be. There are two schools of thought on this question. One believes that Plato had a positive purpose in the *Menexenus*, even though none of the proponents of this view resolves the problem of the irony contained in the dialogue. The other school considers the work to be a parody of contemporary rhetoric and politics.⁸⁷

82. Madeleine M. Henry, *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32–40.

83. Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, esp. 185. Monoson argues that Plato's critique is directed at the Thucydidean assessment of Pericles in particular.

84. Clavaud, *Le Ménexène de Platon*; his main conclusions are summarized 287–89.

85. Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 3. Stern comments more pointedly ("Plato's Funeral Oration," 506): "... both Socrates' and Pericles' speeches are attributed to the courtesan Aspasia, because to praise the Athens of his day is an act of prostitution."

86. As observed by Clavaud (*Le Ménexène de Platon*, 108–10 and 246: "Aspasie lui sert-elle d'*alibi*?") and Coventry ("Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 3 and 5–7).

87. See the summaries of the views of earlier scholars provided by Clavaud, *Le Ménexène de Platon*, 33–77. Add now Loraux (*The Invention of Athens*, esp. 312–27) and Coventry ("Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 1–5). Coventry is persuasive that the discrepancy between the ironical beginning and the seemingly serious end of the dialogue serves to highlight the superficiality and inconsistency of a state in which philosophy does not govern politics.

Indeed, the ironic tone of the introductory prologue, which mocks both speakers and audience, makes it very difficult to believe that Plato means us to take the funeral oration in the *Menexenus* as an example of a genuine *epitaphios*. Socrates cynically “praises” the entire custom of funeral speeches (234c), on the grounds that every man thus obtains a splendid funeral, even if he is poor or worthless (φαῦλος). Also, they praise everyone indiscriminately, and so bewitch (γοητεύουσιν) their audience (234c–235a);⁸⁸ the jibe against Gorgias in particular is obvious. With all this eulogizing of his city, says Socrates (235a–b), he comes to believe that he himself has become taller, more noble, and more handsome (in the case of Socrates, this is certainly an ironical statement)⁸⁹ and that the city too is more wonderful than before. This lofty feeling remains with Socrates for several days, until he realizes that he is not on the Isles of the Blessed but rather still on earth (235c).⁹⁰ Not only is the illusion of immortality detrimental to the proper conduct of politics,⁹¹ but, in contrast to the illusory afterlife offered by rhetoric, philosophy offers an authentic preparation for the soul for its destiny.⁹²

When Menexenus gently chides him for his mocking portrayal of the orators (235c), Socrates replies that the orators do not even bother to make up new speeches for each occasion but rather recycle old themes; after all, it is easy to praise Athenians to an audience of Athenians (235d). Asked if he could do any better (235e), Socrates hesitates at first, lest Menexenus think him an old man playing children’s games. When Menexenus persists, Socrates complies, claiming that he would have stripped off his clothes and danced if that had been requested of him (236d–e), and proceeds to repeat Aspasia’s funeral oration, which illustrates all the tendencies that he has just mocked.

And so, the irony contained in the prefatory section prepares the reader for a satire of the oratorical tradition of the Athenian democracy as a whole. The *epitaphios* then serves as its own critic, with a heavy touch of irony to ensure that the reader would be forced to acknowledge the hypocritical portrait of Athens’s past created by the orators in service to a

88. On the bewitchment motif, see Loraux, “Socrate contrepoison de l’oraison funèbre,” 177–89. de Romilly (*Magic and Rhetoric*, 31) comments that this passage illustrates “with splendid irony” how Plato uses the simile of magic against the orators and sophists.

89. Yunis, *Taming Democracy*, 152.

90. Cf. *Gorgias* 526c and *Republic* 519c.

91. As noted by Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 441 n. 14.

92. Rosenstock, “Socrates as Revenant,” 342–43.

democratic agenda. Nevertheless, Plato rarely explicitly controverts even the most outrageous and self-satisfied misrepresentations of the Athenian past, but rather subtly cuts the foundations out from under them. Although some authorities in antiquity recognized the irony contained in the *Menexenus*,⁹³ it seems that the work was taken seriously by others,⁹⁴ which adds to the impression that it is possible to take the *Menexenus* on more than one level. Plato is writing for an elite readership of like-minded aristocrats who are able to grapple with complex written texts and are unlikely to be seduced by the ephemeral flattery of the oratorical tradition of the Athenian democracy. This elite group would naturally have the ability to look beneath the surface and see that the irony of the *Menexenus* is designed as a bitter diatribe, not only against contemporary rhetoric,⁹⁵ but also against the immorality of contemporary politics.⁹⁶

Carl Werner Müller has recently argued that the *Menexenus* is a direct reply to Isocrates' *Panegyricus* as the exemplar of Athenian patriotic oratory.⁹⁷ Certainly Plato disapproved of the kind of oratory that the *Panegyricus* represents, but there is no way to prove that it was in fact his target. It does make sense, however, that Plato would have chosen to attack patriotic rhetoric some time not long after the end of the Corinthian War in 387/6. One wonders if the Athenians' renewed imperial aspirations, which culminated in the formation of the Second Athenian Confederacy in the early 370s, may have provided the occasion for Plato's attack on patriotic rhetoric, which he may have held responsible for the renascent empire.

The survey of the past contained in the *Menexenus* is an integral part of Plato's thinly disguised attack on contemporary rhetoric and politics. By providing a pastiche of the typical funeral oration that takes to extremes many of the usual features of the *epitaphios*, he shows how Athenian orators and politicians misrepresent the past to their own advantage. For Plato, the patriotic lie is unacceptable, because it flatters people rather than making them better; distortion of history is permitted only when it is morally useful. By means of obvious exaggerations, which he immediately

93. E.g., Plutarch, *Pericles* 24.7.

94. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in particular, devotes a long section of his essay on Demosthenes (23–21) to very high praise of Plato for his encomium of Athens urging on the Athenians toward virtue. Clavaud (*Le Ménexène de Platon*, 17–35) lists all the ancient allusions to the work.

95. Clavaud, *Le Ménexène de Platon*, 250.

96. Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 1–15.

97. Carl Werner Müller, "Platon und der 'Panegyrikos' des Isokrates: Überlegungen zum platonischen 'Menexenus,'" *Philologus* 135 (1991): 140–56.

undercuts, internal inconsistencies throughout the *epitaphios*, and the blatant and deliberate anachronism, he subtly exposes the lack of substance to the pretensions to virtue created by the Athenian orators to pander to the demos. Thus, his ironic attribution to the Athenians of noble and altruistic behavior reveals all the more clearly that their self-image as protectors of the weak and oppressed serves only to justify their imperialism, both past (with a nudge at Pericles in particular) and present. Furthermore, as the prologue to the *Menexenus* specifies, one of Plato's reasons for derision of funeral orations as a whole is that they lump everyone together in their praise, even if it is not deserved (234c). Plato uses the misrepresentations of the past in the *Menexenus* to parody the transparent falseness of the idealized portrait of Athens in funeral speeches in particular and contemporary rhetoric in general and to criticize the refusal of both rhetoricians and politicians to use their influence over their audiences for the purpose of moral instruction.