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# The Rhetoric of Parody in Plato's Menexenus

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## The Rhetoric of Parody in Plato's *Menexenus*

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In Plato's *Menexenus*, Socrates spends nearly the entire dialogue reciting an *epitaphios logos*, or funeral oration, that he claims was taught to him by Aspasia, Pericles' mistress. Three difficulties confront the interpreter of this dialogue. First, commentators have puzzled over how to understand the intention of Socrates' funeral oration (see Clavaud 1980, 17–77).<sup>1</sup> Some insist that it is parodic, performing an essentially critical function (e.g., Loraux 1986); while others claim that it is serious, in particular as an expression of Plato's political ideal (e.g., Kahn 1963).<sup>2</sup> Adherents on both sides seem to think that the options are mutually exclusive.<sup>3</sup> Second, commentators have had difficulty understanding why Plato would have Socrates attribute his entire oration to Aspasia (e.g., Coventry 1989, 3; Pownall 2004, 60). Most agree that this move is ironic and that it has something to do with the alleged target of the dialogue's criticism. But scholars have differed over whether the Aspasia reference is meant to implicate Pericles' funeral oration (Monoson 1998), rhetoric in general (Pownall 2004), Athens (Loraux 1986), or even Aeschines (Clavaud 1980).<sup>4</sup> Third, scholars have struggled to make sense of the dialogue's "deliberate and fantastic anachronism" (Dodds 1990, 24). In the funeral oration, Socrates relates the history of Athens up to the King's Peace in 386 B.C., a full thirteen years after he has died. This problem has generated the least consensus, with some scholars restricting their analysis

to dating considerations (e.g., Dodds 1990) and at least one speculating that Socrates speaks in this dialogue as a ghost (Rosenstock 1994).<sup>5</sup>

It is the contention of this article that, by understanding *the rhetoric of parody* in the *Menexenus*, one can resolve these difficulties and come to a coherent and unified understanding of the philosophical intentions of the dialogue.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, I will show that the anachronism is a consequence of a particular parodic strategy, that of amplification; that the dialogue's parody targets not only Pericles' funeral oration in particular but funeral oratory, rhetoric, *and* Athens as well; and that the parody has serious philosophical implications.<sup>7</sup> Further, I claim that the serious philosophical content is both critical and constructive. Plato subverts the civic identity and understanding of virtue encouraged by the genre of funeral oration, and he challenges its praise-based model of political discourse. At the same time, Plato's parodic criticism is not entirely negative, for it relies on alternative paradigms of civic identity, virtue, and political discourse.

## I. THE RHETORIC OF PARODY

Before turning to the *Menexenus* itself, I want to clarify what I mean by parody. For a working definition, I suggest that parody is "an imitation that distorts a target text, author, or genre."<sup>8</sup> In order to make some general observations about the rhetoric of parody, I will look briefly at an exemplar of parody from Aristophanes' *Frogs*. I do so for three reasons: to display two strategies of parodic distortion, to show that parody can have multiple targets, and to argue that parody can have both serious and complex intentions.<sup>9</sup>

In the *Frogs* (1331–63), Aristophanes uses at least two techniques of parodic distortion, *inversion* and *amplification*, in his extended parody of Euripides' monodies or single-actor odes.<sup>10</sup> Parodic inversion, broadly speaking, upsets or overturns the target text by distorting the original in a way that reverses the stylistic effect or semantic intention. Parodic amplification hones in on one aspect of the target text and amplifies it to absurdity, often exposing its artificiality as a literary trope.

The parodic scene features a woman who awakens, hysterical and terrified, from a god-sent dream, which has conveyed disturbing news. We find in this passage a particular kind of parodic inversion: *bathos*, the unexpected introduction of the vulgar, ordinary, or mundane, which undermines an otherwise somber tone.<sup>11</sup> Consider the following excerpt:

Attendants, set alight a lamp for me,  
Collect the dew of rivers in pitchers

And heat the water,  
So that I may wash away the god-sent dream.  
Oh god of the sea,  
It's happened! Oh fellow dwellers,  
Behold these portents! My rooster—  
Snatched from me by Glyce long gone. (*Frogs* 1338–45)<sup>12</sup>

The parody accesses its target by mimicking several linguistic features typical of tragic lyric (poetic diction, suppression of articles, etc.), thereby reproducing a tragic tone.<sup>13</sup> This tone is then undermined by bathos: the protagonist's terrifying prophetic dream turns out to be about nothing more than a lost chicken. The parody targets features of tragic lyric that are not necessarily peculiar to Euripides, though he is obviously the target as well. In other words, the parody targets both Euripides *and* tragedy as such.

Parody's distortion also works by amplifying an idiom or trope to absurdity. The parodic passage targets the hysterical or frenzied repetition of words typical of Euripidean monody.<sup>14</sup> Notice the multiple repetitions accumulated in five lines of the Aristophanic parody:

He soared soared [ἀνέπτατ' ἀνέπτατ'] into the ether  
On the lightest tips of his wings,  
Leaving pain pain [ἄχε' ἄχεα] for me  
And tears tears [δάκρυα δάκρυα] from my eyes  
I shed shed [ἔβαλον ἔβαλον], feeling wretched. (*Frogs* 1351–55)

The repetitions occur in a way that is recognizably Euripidean but in such close proximity as to make them seem artificial. The overaccumulation of frantic repetition undermines its rhetorical intent because the repetition occurs too frequently, and the degree to which it is a contrived literary trope is exposed.

Aristophanes' *Frogs* serves as an object lesson with respect to the serious and complex intentions of parody.<sup>15</sup> Parody expresses a kind of criticism, and while this criticism could be tongue in cheek, it might also have a serious purpose. Hence, it would be a mistake to insist that no parody has serious intentions.<sup>16</sup> The parody of Euripides deals with a serious, that is, important, issue, the relation between the decline of tragedy and the decline of Athenian prominence (Henderson 2002, 5). Dionysus, the main character, descends into Hades, where Euripides and Aeschylus compete to become the savior of Athens. In addition to this serious context, the parody exemplifies a serious and particular criticism of Euripides' poetry.

In order to understand the parody, we need to locate the determinate axis of criticism, that is, the *wherein* or *with respect to what* the parodying text is critical.<sup>17</sup> In the first quotation above, the parodic criticism is that Euripides' tragedy is too concerned with the everyday.<sup>18</sup> By dramatizing an ordinary situation in a high tragic manner, the parody absurdly exemplifies Euripides' earlier claim—a boast really—that his tragedies are concerned with everyday matters, οἰκεῖα πράγματα (*Frogs* 959). This criticism of Euripides as too mundane or ordinary is confirmed at the end of the *Frogs* when he is accused of “stripping the tragic art of its greatness” (1495–96).<sup>19</sup> The criticism does not stand alone, however; it rather depends on a certain paradigm or ideal of tragedy.

To see this, we need to turn to the *complex* intentions of parody, that is, the way that parody can be *both* critical and constructive.<sup>20</sup> Parody can criticize while at the same time pointing beyond itself to an implied ideal, which the parodied text fails to live up to. The *Frogs* is incoherent without the assumption that tragedy has a privileged didactic role to play in the city.<sup>21</sup> The question that drives the action is whether Euripides or Aeschylus better fulfills the tragedian's role as educator or, put differently, which tragedian remains true to the tragic ideal as Aristophanic comedy conceives of it. If this is right, then based on the parodic criticism of Euripides, we might conclude that the Aristophanic ideal of tragedy includes the portrayal of great, exemplary figures. One way that tragedy performs its educational function is by staging characters “better than ourselves,” as Aristotle puts it (*Poet.* 1448a16–18), as paradigms or exemplars.<sup>22</sup> But by staging an ordinary situation with an ordinary character, so the parodic criticism goes, this is just what Euripides fails to do.

Armed with this understanding of the possibilities of the rhetoric of parody, that is, its techniques, its multiple targets, and its serious and complex intentions, I now turn to the *Menexenus*.

## II. IRONIC PRAISE AND COMEDY IN THE OPENING SCENE

In the opening scene of the *Menexenus*, Plato prepares us for the parody by introducing its multiple targets through ironic praise and by establishing a comic tone. First, on hearing that Menexenus is coming from the Council Chamber, Socrates teases him by suggesting that the young man is “finished with education and philosophy” and ready to turn to the “higher pursuit” of holding political office in Athens (234a4–7). Socrates' praise of participation in Athenian politics is clearly ironic here, as there is arguably never a time

when one is done with philosophy and no sense in which holding public office in Athens constitutes a higher pursuit than philosophy.

When Menexenus clarifies that he has only been to the Council Chamber to hear the choice of speaker for the upcoming funeral oration, Socrates launches into a speech ironically extolling the virtues of funeral oratory. Socrates lauds death in war as especially fortunate, since one gets an expensive funeral and lavish praise from an expert orator, even if one was not particularly distinguished in battle. Not only are all the dead praised, but the audience is typically praised as well.<sup>23</sup> As Socrates puts it, the funeral orator “cast[s] a spell over ... the souls” of the audience by praising the city, the war dead, the city’s ancestors, and the living citizens; under this spell, Socrates claims to feel “taller and nobler and more beautiful all of a sudden,” and he imagines that Athens is the Islands of the Blessed; only after several days does this bewitching effect wear off (234c–235c).<sup>24</sup>

Menexenus immediately recognizes Socrates’ praise as ironic and accuses him of implicitly mocking and criticizing the orators in general (235c6). He worries that the speaker they choose will have insufficient time to compose the speech. Mentioning the short time between selection and speech was one of the commonplaces of the funeral oration. Here, Socrates’ criticism becomes explicit. He asserts that *epitaphioi* are all prepared ahead of time, strongly implying that they are formulaic. In addition, he claims that they are destined to succeed, since “when one performs in front of the very people one is praising, it is no great accomplishment to seem to speak well” (235d5–6).<sup>25</sup> This ironic praise of funeral oratory and rhetoric anticipates some of the substance of the parodic criticism to follow.

Socrates praises Aspasia as his formidable rhetoric teacher and Pericles, “the one exceptional orator among the Greeks,” as her best student (235e6–7). Aspasia was Pericles’ mistress and a favorite target of the comedians (Henry 1995, 19–28).<sup>26</sup> Socrates credits his epitaphios to her: she recited it “in part extemporaneously, in part by cobbling together [συγκολλῶσα] some remnants from when she was composing the funeral oration Pericles delivered” (236b3–6).<sup>27</sup> By claiming the much-maligned Aspasia as his rhetoric teacher and attributing a funeral oration to her, he implicitly denigrates both rhetoric and funeral oratory.<sup>28</sup> Further, by insisting on attributing to her both Pericles’ rhetorical education and his funeral oration, Socrates makes clear that Pericles’ funeral oration is also one of his targets.<sup>29</sup> Even Menexenus understands Socrates’ irony in attributing the speech to Aspasia (236c5–7).<sup>30</sup>

Socrates' ironic claim that even someone less well educated than himself could succeed in praising Athenians in front of Athenians seems to indicate that the parody targets the Periclean funeral oration as Thucydides presented it. He cites the example of "a man who was taught music by Lamprus and oratory by Antiphon the Rhamnusian" (236a). This is arguably a reference to Thucydides. Marcellinus, impressed with Thucydides' praise of Antiphon and their similar prose style, had speculated that Antiphon was Thucydides' teacher (*Vit. Thuc.* 22).<sup>31</sup> In addition, Socrates uses Thucydidean language in the prologue: he twice refers to the Spartans as "Peloponnesians" (235d3, 235d4), a term that Thucydides uses frequently and Plato, almost never. In other dialogues, Plato uses "Lacadaimonians" almost exclusively.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to these ironic hints as to the target of the parody, Plato includes some *topoi* from Old Comedy, which signal that the funeral speech is parodic. Socrates plays the comic figure of the late learner, whose old age and attendant forgetfulness make his enrollment in school ridiculous.<sup>33</sup> He hesitates to give the speech because he is afraid that Menexenus will laugh at him since, though he is such an old man, he will be playing with epitaphios. In addition, Socrates portrays Aspasia as a tyrant, who nearly beat him for not remembering her speech well enough, and he fears that she will be very angry with him for revealing it. Socrates finally commits to performing the speech *for* Menexenus, whom he so greatly wishes to gratify that he would willingly strip and dance for him (236c11–d2). This declaration recalls the practice of the chorus in Old Comedy, which always cast off their cloaks before dancing and sometimes announced that they were doing so.<sup>34</sup> The playfulness of the opening scene prepares us for the parody—but, as many commentators have noticed, the playful tone of the prologue does not carry over into the epitaphios itself (e.g., Kennedy 1963, 159).<sup>35</sup>

### III. PLATO'S PARODY OF PERICLES

Socrates' speech contains all of the conventional elements of the epitaphios: a prelude (*prooemium*) identifying the speech as required by law, praise (*epainos*) of the dead and of the city's past glory, a consoling exhortation (*paramythia*) to the relatives of the dead, and an epilogue concluding the speech and dismissing the audience (Ziolkowski 1981).<sup>36</sup> However, there are also more particular reminiscences of the Periclean oration (Gomme 1956; Henderson 1975; Kahn 1963; Monoson 1998).<sup>37</sup> Though the two speeches are bound by the same conventions, in two instances Plato seems clearly to be parodying Pericles (Kahn 1963, 222).<sup>38</sup>

The prelude typically consisted of a reference to the *nomos* prescribing the speech, reflection on the proper kind of *logos*, and some preliminary praise, which marked a transition to the next section (Ziolkowski 1981, 58–73). The *logos-ergon* antithesis was a commonplace in the prelude to denote the difficulty of finding the words to do justice to the brave deeds of the fallen (Ziolkowski 1981, 68–70). Both Pericles and Socrates begin their speeches with a more elaborate version of this antithesis:

Many of those [οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ] who have spoken here in the past have praised the man who set down the custom [τῷ νόμῳ] of this speech [τὸν λόγον τόνδε], deeming it good that it should be delivered at the burial of those who fall in battle. For my part [ἐμοὶ δὲ], it seems that the worth that had displayed itself in deeds [ἔργῳ] should be sufficiently rewarded by honors also shown by deeds [ἔργῳ], such as you now see in this funeral prepared at the people's cost, and not have the valor [ἀρετᾶς] of many men imperiled by one man, to stand or fall according to whether he spoke well or poorly. (Thuc. 2.35.1)

As for deeds [ἔργῳ μὲν], these man have received their due from us, and with it they travel on their destined path, accompanied communally by the city and privately by their families. As for words [λόγῳ μὲν], the remaining honor, which the custom [νόμος] assigns for these men and duty demands, must be bestowed. When deeds [ἔργων] have been bravely done, it is through beautifully spoken words [λόγῳ] that commemoration and honor accrue for the doers from the audience. What is required, then, is a speech [λόγου] that sufficiently praises those who have died. (*Mx.* 236d7–e1)

Kahn persuasively argues that the respective antitheses are too particular to be coincidental: “In both cases the *logos* in question is, of course, the funeral oration; and in both cases, the contrasting *ἔργῳ* is used twice: first for the ceremonious act of public burial and, secondly, for the brave deeds of the dead warriors” (1963, 222).<sup>39</sup> No other oration contains such an elaborate antithesis, and no other refers to the act of burial as one of the “deeds” to be contrasted with the funeral speech.<sup>40</sup>

Though he uses the same terms (*logos, ergon, nomos*) and syntactical construction (antithesis) as Pericles in order to introduce his task, Socrates makes the opposite point. Whereas Pericles laments the necessity of words



in order to make deeds praiseworthy and regrets the custom that makes his speech necessary at all, Socrates emphatically endorses the custom and the necessity of beautiful words.<sup>41</sup> Socrates reminds one of Pericles' antithesis but inverts or overturns the meaning. This inversion operates on two levels because both Pericles and Socrates are (to some degree) dissembling: we might call Pericles' rhetorical figure a kind of false modesty, an affected or feigned self-deprecation. In overtly denying the wisdom of the tradition and the importance of his role as executor, Pericles actually means to affirm it, and by not doing what everyone else does, he draws attention to himself as a unique speaker. Socrates turns this figure on its head—in ironically praising the custom and exalting himself as its executor, he actually undermines both the speech's and the speaker's importance.

Thus, Socrates implicitly challenges the tradition and announces a "polemical relationship" with Pericles (Kahn 1963, 222).<sup>42</sup> He implies that the beautiful but *false* words are necessary, since the truth would be ill suited to the event's purpose: as Socrates points out earlier, not all of the deeds were brave or praiseworthy (234c2–6). The words will not match but, rather, exceed the deeds, though the tradition has it the other way around. The implicit ideal is that words should be appropriate to deeds: beautiful words should be reserved for truly admirable deeds. Pericles and other funeral orators praise the deeds of the war dead with beautiful words whether they deserve it or not.

In the praise section of the epitaphios, it was common to praise the constitution, or πολιτεία, of Athens (Ziolkowski 1981, 89–91, 95).<sup>43</sup> The speech's second clear parallel to Pericles' oration comes in Socrates' manner of praising the city's democratic constitution:

In name, [our constitution] is called a democracy [δημοκρατία κέκληται], because we govern not for the few but for the many; whereas equality in the eyes of the law exists for all in their private disputes, with respect to social standing [κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀξίωσιν], each person is honored with public office for his good reputation [ἔν τῳ εὐδοκιμεί]—not by class but rather by virtue [ἀπ' ἀρετῆς]—and nor again if he is poor but capable of doing some good for the city will he be prevented on account of insufficient public esteem. (Thuc. 2.37.1–2)

Though one man calls [καλεῖ] our constitution a democracy [δημοκρατίαν], and another, whatever pleases him, in truth, it is an aristocracy with the people's approval. We have always had kings.

At one time, they were by birth; at another time, they were elected. But for the most part, the people possess power over the city, and they grant government offices and powers to those who at any given time seem to be the best [τοῖς ἀεὶ δόξασιν ἀρίστοις εἶναι]. No one is excluded because of poverty or weakness or obscure parentage—nor is anyone honored because of the opposites, as in other cities—but there is one standard: the one who seems wise or good [ὁ δόξας σοφὸς ἢ ἀγαθὸς εἶναι] has power and governs. (*Mx.* 238c7–d8)

Both emphasize that the leaders are chosen based on their reputation for virtue. What Pericles implies, that the constitution is not *really* a democracy, Socrates comes right out and says by calling it an aristocracy.<sup>44</sup> When Thucydides describes the state of Athens during Pericles' heyday, he claims that it was *in practice* not a democracy: "While in speech the city was a democracy, in fact, it was ruled by a first citizen" (2.65.10).

In his praise of the Athenian constitution, Socrates amplifies the necessity of *seeming* or *appearing* wise in order to rule in the city. The necessity of appearing is implicit in the Periclean formulation: the second antithesis concerns the evaluation, the deeming worthy, which is granted according to reputation or esteem (τῷ εὐδοκίμει). When describing the public choice or preference, the reference to reputation, the implication of seeming, falls away, and the choice is described as being made according to virtue (ἀπ' ἀρετῆς). For Pericles, the implication is that seeming virtuous is, or must be, an indication of virtue. Socrates exposes this not only by leaving the implication of seeming intact in his reformulation but by making it so explicit as to give pause.<sup>45</sup> The "heaviness" of the two clauses, τοῖς ἀεὶ δόξασιν ἀρίστοις εἶναι and ὁ δόξας σοφὸς ἢ ἀγαθὸς εἶναι, focuses our attention on the importance of seeming. Through this amplification, Socrates suggests that seeming wise—having a reputation for wisdom—is not a sufficient condition of being wise.

The implication of the parody is that, in a democracy, one never gets outside of the appearance of virtue to the reality of the matter. Thus, Socrates undermines the supposedly meritocratic basis of democratic political power. Socrates' parodic criticism targets Pericles both as speaker, by undermining his assertion, and as leader of Athens, by undermining his claim to be virtuous and thus deserving of rule.<sup>46</sup> Ideally, of course, the best, or the virtuous, should rule. That they do not in Athens is not an incidental feature of the democracy. Rather, it follows from democracy's emphasis on appearances

and the attendant importance of rhetoric that the most persuasive speaker will rule instead.<sup>47</sup>

#### IV. THE DISTORTION OF ATHENIAN HISTORY IN THE FUNERAL ORATION

The praise section typically contained a historical part, which celebrated the noble deeds of the ancestors of the dead (Ziolkowski 1981, 90, 95–97). After giving an account of the city’s autochthonous origin, Socrates uses the Persian War as a paradigm to paint a portrait of Athens—in line with the tradition of funeral oratory—as a philanthropic city that fights for the freedom of the Greeks against barbarian aggression.<sup>48</sup> The genre requires the history to reflect Athenian moral and military superiority. To achieve this, Socrates’ funeral oration incorporates numerous historical inaccuracies.<sup>49</sup> However, since fourth-century orators and funeral speakers in particular regularly misrepresented Athenian history (Pearson 1941; Perlman 1961; Pownall 2004, 38–40; Samons 2000, 96; Worthington 1994), often for the greater glory of Athens, we cannot conclude from the mere presence of historical inaccuracies, or of any particular inaccuracy, that Socrates’ speech contains *parodic* distortion.<sup>50</sup> The parodic distortion lies rather in the accumulation of such inaccuracies that render the history it presents both self-contradictory in places and on the whole unbelievable.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Socrates adopts the logic of patriotic, revisionist history and amplifies the revisions to absurdity.<sup>52</sup> In this way, Plato exposes the deceptive and self-aggrandizing character of the history section as a whole. I will focus my analysis on three distortions: first, Socrates omits mention of Athens’ fifth-century empire; second, he claims that Athens has never been defeated; last, he insists that Athens is always hostile to Persia.

To sanitize the character of Athens’ fifth-century empire, or to ignore it altogether, was common in fourth-century oratory (Chambers 1975; Pownall 2004, 41–43). To maintain Athens’ moral superiority, Socrates’ speech sacrifices a significant achievement of Athens’ military superiority, her empire. To acknowledge that Athens was an empire would confound the Persian War model, by casting the heroic liberators as enslavers.<sup>53</sup> On Socrates’ account, Athens only fights just, defensive wars. Battles from the fifth century seeming to relate to the establishment, expansion, and defense of Athens’ empire are all interpreted as either strictly defensive or aiming at the liberation of an oppressed city. On Socrates’ account, the initial hostilities with the Spartans resulted from Athens’ desire to fight “for the

freedom of the Boeotians" (242a7), as the Athenians took up their new role of "fighting for the freedom of Greeks against other Greeks" (242b5–6); the Archidamian War (the first half of the Peloponnesian War) was fought because "all the Greeks attacked" Athens (242c3–5); the Sicilian expedition was undertaken in order to achieve the "freedom of the people of Leontini" (243a1–2). These descriptions are clearly self-serving, not to mention self-aggrandizing, accounts of the origins of each of the conflicts.<sup>54</sup> It is arguably the case that these battles resulted from Athens' aggressive imperialist policy, as advocated by Pericles (Thuc. 2.36) and later leaders like Alcibiades (Thuc. 6.16–18).<sup>55</sup> Socrates' silence on the topic of empire contrasts most strongly with Pericles' emphatic assertion that the expansion of the empire measures the achievement of a generation (Thuc. 2.36.1–3).<sup>56</sup> By remaining silent on the fifth-century empire, Socrates' speech challenges Pericles' ideal of an expansive empire and, with that, the need for wars of aggression.

The Athenian funeral oration, to be sure, emphasized Athenian superiority in warfare and cited its numerous victories, the Persian War most prominently (Ziolkowski 1981, 121–29). Though other orators at least concede Athens' defeats, even if they understandably do not dwell on them, Socrates insists that Athens "remains undefeated to this day" (243d5–6).<sup>57</sup> He claims that the people who thought that the city could never be defeated were *right* to believe it! Socrates qualifies this statement by clarifying that Athens was never defeated *by others*—she only defeated herself. Though his account forces Socrates to insist that every single defeat was an instance of self-defeat, he refuses to criticize the Athenians for their quarrels and disunity.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, he is at pains to emphasize their "kinship" and "steady friendship" (244a2)—even in the bitter civil war of 403 B.C.—and their avoidance of "malice" and "hatred" (244a7). Socrates claims also that, through bravery, Athens won not only the naval battle at Arginusae but also "the rest of the [Peloponnesian] war as well" (243d2)! Since military and moral inferiority are ruled out, any failure is due to "bad luck" (244b1), and Socrates uses ambiguous and distancing language to describe such occurrences.<sup>59</sup> By pausing to dwell on the question of defeat and taking such circumlocutory pains to avoid its admission, Socrates undermines his attempt to gloss over it.<sup>60</sup>

Socrates' insistence that the Athenians remain resolutely hostile to the Persians falls into obvious contradiction when imposed on the Corinthian conflict. Indeed, Socrates draws attention to the inconsistency by ratcheting up the anti-Persian rhetoric: he claims that the Athenians "by nature hate the barbarians" (245c7–d1), "are purely Greek, not mixed with barbarians" (245d1–2), and have an "uncompromising hatred of foreign

origin" (245d5–6). Socrates declares that, though against fellow Greeks "it is right to fight until victory," against the barbarians "it is right to fight until destruction" (242d1–4). The Persian king is described as the "worst enemy" of all the Greeks (243b). Other Greek cities are excoriated for conspiring with the Persians, as though this were a severe moral failing (243b, 244b–c). In response to such commiseration, the indignant Athenians adopted a policy of "no longer protecting the Greeks from being enslaved" (244c3–5). When the Spartans began to enslave Greeks and Persians alike, Socrates claims, "even the King was in such difficulties that his liberation came from none other than that city which he had been so eager to destroy" (244d5–e1). Socrates immediately offers an excuse for helping Persia followed by a disingenuous qualification. For helping the Persians, Athens can be "justly charged" with being "always excessively prone to pity and attentive to the weak" (244e1–3). She could not bear to assist the king in person, so she "released the Greeks from slavery herself" but let "exiles and mercenaries" help the Persians (245a1–7). The speciousness of this qualification becomes apparent when Socrates insists that Athens "saved" the king (245a7) and praises "those who released the king" as brave (246a1). These latter must be Athenians, since the praise comes in the context of the bravery of the Athenians lost in the Corinthian conflict.

One might want to object here that the history that Socrates presents does not *really* amplify—or amplify enough—the level of historical inaccuracy typical of fourth-century orators to justify calling it parody. The dialogue's "deliberate and fantastic" anachronism, which becomes clear in the history section, I suggest, caps the parodic strategy of amplification to absurdity and ensures the parodic intentions of Socrates' account. Though anachronism is not unknown in Plato, the anachronism in the *Menexenus* is unique, not only because the dramatic date is so obviously impossible but also because Socrates explicitly calls attention to it. He begins by implying that he will not dwell on the Corinthian conflict since it is contemporary (244d1–3) but then proceeds to give a long and detailed account of it. By dramatically pausing at the moment he begins the contemporary part of his history, he calls attention to himself as speaker and the essential unreliability of his account. Further, it seems very unlikely that, given the nature of his trial and execution and indeed what he says about the Athenians in *Apology* and elsewhere, Socrates would actually endorse *as true* his glowing portrait of Athens and Athenian history. Thus, like the circumlocutions and inconsistencies, the anachronism draws our attention to the dubious nature of the history that the oration presents.<sup>61</sup>

Socrates, in presenting a contradictory history, and indeed a history that it is a contradiction for him to have given, goes beyond the acceptable level of revisionist history expected of the genre. The parody makes two main points about the funeral oration's historical inaccuracies. First, by following the epitaphios's logic of praise to absurdity, Socrates exposes its utter lack of concern for truth. The bewitching feeling of self-satisfaction, which Socrates describes in the opening, depends on deception. By making the audience feel good when being deceived, the funeral oration fosters an indifference to truth. Good political rhetoric, by contrast, would foster a desire for the truth. Second, by revealing the distance between a praiseworthy Athenian history and the actual Athenian history, Socrates' parody rejects Athens' imperial past while at the same time encouraging a peaceful, or at least nonaggressive, future.

#### V. THE EXHORTATION TO VIRTUE IN THE SPEECH OF THE DEAD

A regular feature of the epitaphios was the exhortation section, which typically contained both consolation and advice (Ziolkowski 1981, 138–63, esp. 138–40). Those who argue that the funeral oration is meant seriously or nonparodically typically point to this section (246d–249c), the bulk of which consists of a speech that Socrates delivers about virtue on behalf of the dead (246d–248d). They do so based on two considerations: first, the exhortation to virtue looks like a Socratic exhortation (Kahn 1963);<sup>62</sup> second, there is a noticeable shift in tone at the beginning of the exhortation section (Collins and Stauffer 1999, 91, 104–9; Henderson 1975, 45; Monson 1998, 502; Rosenstock 1994, 340; Salkever 1993, 140).<sup>63</sup> Neither consideration is decisive: commentators have not fully appreciated, first, that the exhortation was a regular feature of the genre and, second, that a shift in tone is just what one would expect when moving from celebration and praise to consolation and exhortation.<sup>64</sup> On my view, the speech of the dead continues the parody through its subtle inversion of the impoverished and militaristic conception of virtue, or *aretē*, typical of the funeral oration.<sup>65</sup>

It would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that virtue is a central theme of epitaphios.<sup>66</sup> The funeral oration sets up a paradigm or model of virtue for the citizens. In the Socratic parody, *aretē*, as in other funeral orations, primarily means “courage” or “valor.” This is unsurprising in a speech that praises the war dead. In the beginning of the oration, Socrates claims that the two requirements of an epitaphios are to praise the dead

as they deserve and to admonish the living by urging them to imitate the *aretē* of the dead (236e3–6). Throughout the epitaphios, *aretē* simply means “courage.” During the speech of the dead, however, a paradigm shift occurs in the understanding of *aretē* that is subtle but significant.

Socrates ends the praise section, recalling his own elenctic practice as described in the *Apology* 29d–30b, by encouraging the sons of the dead to be brave and claiming that “whenever I happen to meet any one of you, I will remind and exhort you [παρακελεύεσθαι] to strive to be as good as possible [ὡς ἀρίστους]” (246b7–c2). Socrates claims that he will repeat the words of the dead that he “heard from them and what ... they would gladly say to [the living] now, if they were able” (246c4–5). The speech exhorts three distinct groups: the sons of the dead (246d–247c), the parents of the dead (247c–248d), and, very briefly, the city (248d).<sup>67</sup>

The first injunction to the sons is to act always “with *aretē*, knowing that, without it, all possessions and ways of life are shameful and bad” (246e1–2). Up until this point, *aretē* has been used to indicate bravery, that is, virtue in warfare, exclusively. Given the reference to “ways of life” in this instance, however, a wider conception of *aretē* is clearly in play. This reading is confirmed by the very next instance: “All knowledge cut off from justice and the rest of virtue [τῆς ἄλλης ἀρετῆς] looks like cunning, not wisdom” (246e7–247a2). This claim has been taken as an “allusion” to the unity of the virtues (Kahn 1963, 229), but such an interpretation goes too far. While the speech surely does endorse the unity of virtue in some sense, it certainly does not do so in a genuinely Socratic way. This is confirmed by the rest of the exhortation to the children, which is concerned with honor, possessions, and public esteem; in fact, it reverts to the militaristic notion of virtue by conceiving it in terms of victory and defeat, glory and shame (247a–c).

In the exhortation to the parents, Socrates mentions, indeed features, the Delphic injunction to moderation: μηδὲν ἄγαν, or nothing in excess (247e5). Once virtue ceases to be understood as identical to military prowess, Socrates begins referring to the particular virtues (as opposed to virtue as such), including ἀνδρείος, the *vox propria* for courage, which occurs only in the exhortation to the parents (247d7, 247d8, 248a4). Again, some commentators have seen this endorsement of moderation as genuinely Socratic (e.g., Kahn 1963, 229). This is hardly so, as the moderation encouraged primarily concerns the level of grief that the parents will allow themselves to publicly express (248b–c). To be sure, such a sentiment looks like the injunction against public expressions of grief in the *Republic*, but,

by itself, it much more resembles the commonplace in the epitaphios of acknowledging parental grief while at the same time denying its necessity and enjoining the parents to moderate their expression of it (Ziolkowski 1981, 151–53).<sup>68</sup> Further, Socrates talks as though moderation *amounts to* its public face: “If [the fathers] give in to grief, they will elicit the *suspicion* that either they are not really the fathers [of the dead] or the people who praise [the dead] are wrong” (247e1–2). The emphasis here is on how one appears and not, as one would expect from a genuinely Socratic account, on the state of one’s soul.<sup>69</sup>

The parodic criticism reveals the understanding of virtue encouraged by epitaphios to be overly narrow and indeed at the expense of the other virtues. In showing this, he both reveals a limitation of the epitaphios’s conception of virtue and points to a richer ideal of virtue. While it is not inappropriate for a funeral oration to celebrate bravery in battle, the epitaphios inappropriately construes virtue as equivalent to military prowess. It restricts a citizen’s understanding of his duties to his military duties and so circumscribes the measure of his fitness or goodness as a person. For example, according to Pericles, bravery in battle *cancel[s] out* other vices (Thuc. 2.42).<sup>70</sup> This myopic understanding of virtue goes hand in hand with an aggressive military program and expansionist policies like those advocated by Pericles and other leaders.<sup>71</sup> If being good implies being a successful warrior, then the city has an obligation to look for wars in order to give its citizens an opportunity to demonstrate their worth. But this would preclude the pursuit of intellectual and more particularly philosophical goals. Further, such a narrow conception affects other virtues as well, by limiting their scope and relevance. Virtue is indeed unified on this conception, but we need moderation, it seems, only when a soldier has bravely died. The critique does not itself substantially fill out the thicker notion of virtue, but it does expose the inadequacy and attendant dangers of the narrow version.<sup>72</sup>

If this analysis is right, then Plato exploits the *superficial similarity* between Socratic exhortation and funeral oratory’s in order to expose the latter as a poor version of the former. Though the ideas in the exhortation are not themselves genuinely Socratic, the parody points toward a Socratic conception of virtue. While Socrates’ exhortation genuinely attempts to turn its audience toward a philosophically grounded conception of virtue—indeed, the discovery of the philosophical ground is often the entire point—epitaphios halfheartedly attempts to inculcate an already given war-oriented demotic virtue. The force of this point is perhaps clouded by taking the passage in isolation from the rest of the speech.<sup>73</sup>



Notice that everything preceding the exhortation encourages the audience to think that they *already are virtuous*, and so the attempt to convince them to pursue virtue at this point in the epitaphios could hardly be expected to succeed. By contrast, genuinely Socratic protreptic operates via criticism, not praise.<sup>74</sup> Further, while Socrates typically exhorts his interlocutors to pursue an inquiry into the nature of virtue, the epitaphios presents a determinate conception of virtue for its audience to pursue. But to understand the point of the *parody* is to see the inadequacies of the martial conception of virtue and, ideally, to be moved to investigate the true nature of virtue. This is the essence of Socratic protreptic, if anything is.<sup>75</sup>

## VI. CARE, WAR, AND THE ROLE OF THE CITY

Socrates ends the speech of the dead with a brief exhortation to the city to care for the living: “We *would exhort* the city to care for [ἐπιμελήσονται] our parents and children, educating the latter decently and cherishing the former in their old age as they deserve, but we *already know* that she will care for [ἐπιμελήσεται] them sufficiently without our exhortation” (248d2–6). In describing what the city actually does, Socrates claims, “For those who have died, she stands as an inheritor and a son, for their sons, as a father, for their parents, as a guardian; she takes complete care [ἐπιμέλειαν] of all of them for all time” (249b7–c3). Some scholars have taken this passage as a serious, nonparodic expression of Plato’s political ideal in terms of care and, recalling the *Republic*, family relationships (most notably, Monoson 1998).<sup>76</sup> This interpretation fails to adequately appreciate, first, that Socrates praises Athens for *already accomplishing* such care and, second, that the model of care is articulated in primarily military terms and takes no account of the education of the soul. On my view, this passage completes the parody of the tendency of epitaphios to idealize the actual city, with an emphasis on its relationship to its citizen-soldiers.

Socrates’ insistence that Athens *already* provides adequate care to its citizens provides a strong presumption in favor of parodic intentions. While earlier praise of Athens focused on her military achievements, here the parody focuses on the city’s relation to its citizens. In enumerating the components of state care, Socrates makes clear that the city’s concern kicks in *only after* someone has died in battle (248e). There are three basic elements of this state care, which do not, it seems to me, add up to a legitimately Platonic conception of care.

First, Socrates claims that the parents of the dead are protected from injustice by the highest magistrate *more than* (διὰφερόντως) the other

citizens (248e8–249a3). The unspoken implication seems to be that the others are inadequately protected from injustice. Notice too that one is protected from suffering injustice, not from becoming unjust. The latter, a task for moral education, Socrates consistently argues is worse than the former.<sup>77</sup> Second, the city “takes on the role of father” to the orphaned children and assists in raising them (249a). Again, the implication is that the city does not normally do this, that is, it restricts such duties to the children of the war dead.<sup>78</sup> When the orphans attain manhood, they are given the “instruments of their fathers’ aretē,” and, dressed in hoplite armor, they are officially recognized as full citizens and allowed to “rule their ancestral hearth with strength, decked out in arms” (249a6–b2). This metaphor assimilates the family to an army, led by a citizen-warrior. This ritual transference took place during the Great or City Dionysia, an international festival that featured not only tragedy and comedy but also stark reminders of Athens’ imperial dominance. According to Isocrates, during this festival, the annual tribute to Athens was collected from the allies and ceremoniously brought onto the stage in front of a full theater (*de Pace* 82).<sup>79</sup> The orphan ceremony cannot be divorced from this military context: it symbolized the continuance and expansion of Athenian dominance. As the final component of state care, the city “never fails to honor the dead” through its yearly celebration of the funeral oration itself (249b3).<sup>80</sup> If my analysis of Socrates’ funeral oration as parodic is right, then its celebration can hardly count as genuine care. In fact, as the parody has been implying all along, the funeral oration is actually *harmful* to the souls of the citizens.

The model of care that Socrates articulates in this section, contra Monoson, is hardly Platonic. By describing Athens as actually caring for its citizens adequately, Socrates’ parody exposes her as remiss while at the same time pointing toward an ideal in which the city actually would care for its citizens *in the relevant sense*. The glaring omission in Socrates’ account is moral education or care for the soul. Surely, any genuinely Platonic account would feature care for the soul in a central role. The final component of state care, the funeral oration itself, surely does not accomplish such care. Quite the opposite: as I will presently argue, the parody reveals the funeral oration to be harmful in three main ways.

## VI. PLATO’S IDEAL OF POLITICAL RHETORIC

At the very end of the dialogue (249d–e), Socrates asks Menexenus if he is grateful to Aspasia for her speech. The young man claims that he is grateful

for the speech—whoever composed it—and asks Socrates to continue to report such speeches to him. One wonders what Menexenus has taken from the speech. He does not seem transported to the Islands of the Blessed, but nor does he seem to get the critical point of Socrates' parody. What exactly is he supposed to get? In what follows, I turn to the task of bringing together the criticisms and the implied ideals. In my view, the parodic criticism shows that funeral oratory encourages self-ignorant complacency, an indifference to truth, and the pursuit of false goods. A political rhetoric that genuinely cared for its audience would attempt to foster self-knowledge, an orientation toward the truth and the pursuit of genuine goods, like wisdom and virtue. Further, I try to show, albeit briefly, how both Socrates and the *Menexenus* itself attempt to live up to these ideals.

Plato's critique of the genre of epitaphios is part of his critique of "encomiastic discourse," the discourse of praise in general (Nightingale 1993).<sup>81</sup> Socrates claims that praising the dead and admonishing the living to virtue are the central elements of the speech (236e), but, as his acerbic remarks at the beginning of the dialogue show and as Pericles' oration most clearly exemplifies, the living in fact are praised for already having virtue rather than prodded into acquiring it. This is why Socrates feels "taller and nobler and more beautiful" after hearing a funeral oration. But insofar as the funeral oration praises its audience, it actually harms them. The citizens listening to an orator praising them will be deceived about themselves. Indeed, when it is one's own self-conception that is at stake, as Socrates points out, the bewitching and deceptive effect of the praise has the greatest chance of success. The self-knowledge of the Athenian citizens is in greatest peril when they are praised. Made self-ignorant in this way, they become complacent and lazy—exactly how Socrates describes them in the *Apology* (30e). While epitaphios seemingly desires to encourage virtue, its praise wholly undermines this task by causing self-ignorance. The alternative ideal of political discourse would *actually* encourage virtue by occasioning genuine self-knowledge; to do so, it must engage in criticism. Indeed, both the rhetoric of Socrates, ironic praise, and that of Plato, parodic criticism, set up counterideals to the epitaphios's praise-based model of political discourse in the *Menexenus* itself. By revealing through criticism the deleterious effects of praise, they both attempt to encourage self-knowledge in their respective audiences, in this case, Menexenus and Plato's fourth-century Athenian readership.

The funeral oration's lack of concern for truth is shown in the indiscriminate praises it bestows on both the war dead and the audience

members (Coventry 1989, 8). The audience's ensuing feeling of superiority rests on false premises with even further psychologically damaging effects. The logic of the funeral oration requires that the city and the war dead be praised whether they deserve it or not (234c–235e). The rhetorical effect of the speech, making its listeners feel good about themselves, depends on this distortion. The emphasis, as in democratic politics, falls on appearances, on how things seem—as long as the orator makes Athens seem praiseworthy, he has done his job well. This lack of concern for truth has a harmful effect on the psychic health of the listening audience. Because the funeral oration prefers an attractive but false appearance, it fosters an indifference to truth in the audience. By contrast, the ideal of political discourse would engender in its audience an orientation toward the truth. Socrates and Plato, through the critical exposure of the deceptive rhetoric of funeral oratory, attempt to instill such a concern for truth in their respective audiences.

As we have seen, funeral oratory in general and Pericles' oration in particular encourage a militaristic conception of virtue and civic identity. This is because they are both indexed to the alleged good of military conquest. It is not so much the figure of Pericles that is the concern of the parody but, rather, the glorification of aggressive imperialism in Athens' civic ideal, to which Pericles gives the clearest expression.<sup>82</sup> The parodic oration's silence on the matter of the fifth-century empire speaks volumes as a rejection of the imperialist ideal. Its insistence on Athens' defensive posture distorts the history to absurdity and so implicitly suggests that aggressive military campaigns are not praiseworthy and that wars can only be justly waged when made necessary by some outside force. This runs directly counter to Pericles' insistence that the growth of the empire is the measure of a generation's success (Thuc. 2.36). By creating a fictional history that rejects not only the reality of the fifth-century empire but its ideal as well, Socrates rejects Pericles' accomplishments both as a statesman and as an orator. According to the parodic critique, not only were Athens' historical actions on the whole not praiseworthy, but her aspiration to a Periclean ideal of aggressive militarism was misguided as well. Those who listen to Pericles' oration feel taller and more beautiful for all the wrong reasons.

By exposing the glory of military conquest as a false good, Plato's dialogue implies that political discourse should attempt to orient its audience toward a genuine good, like wisdom or virtue. But neither wisdom nor virtue can be transmitted through the medium of funeral oratory, which dictates a determinate conception of virtue to a passive audience. The end of Socrates' oration, by contrast, does not end the dialogue—Menexenus

is given an opportunity to respond, to think critically, and to engage in a philosophical discussion. So too does Plato's *Menexenus* invite its reader to respond critically and engage the issues philosophically. Thus, both Plato and Socrates attempt to motivate a philosophical examination into the nature of virtue.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The three interpretive difficulties I mention at the beginning can be resolved by understanding the rhetoric of parody in the *Menexenus*. First, I show that the parody in the *Menexenus* has serious philosophical implications, which are both critical and constructive. My interpretation of the *Menexenus* preserves its unity in that it accounts for both comic device and serious philosophical content, without splitting the dialogue up into a sequence of comic and serious parts. Second, I show that the parody has multiple and overlapping targets, including but not limited to Pericles' funeral oration, and that the Aspasia reference need not have univocal significance. Finally, I show that the anachronism is a consequence of the parodic strategy of amplification to absurdity and that it is meant to draw our attention to the historical inaccuracies of the speech.

This approach to the dialogue not only provides a unified interpretation of the dialogue that gives philosophical content to Plato's use of parody but also potentially offers a more general model for understanding the parody in other dialogues. As Plato employs it in the *Menexenus*, parody takes a critical standpoint against its target, but it does not annihilate or subvert the target entirely. Rather, the criticisms aim at particular determinate features. In fact, Plato situates his particular criticisms in terms of implied counter-ideals, which the genre and its exemplars fail to live up to. Furthermore, the target genre reflects the intentions and possibilities of the philosophical genre as well. Plato's parodic criticism functions as a kind of inverse mirror for the genre of philosophy. By identifying the specific features of a genre or text that Plato singles out for his parodic criticism, we can attempt to locate his ambitions for his own dialogues. The parody in the *Menexenus* shows that Plato attempts to care for his audience: through criticism, he hopes to encourage them to pursue self-knowledge, to seek the truth, and to strive to be as virtuous as possible.

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NOTES

1. Clavaud's survey of the literature divides the modern scholarship into "les partisans du sérieux" (1980, 45–48), "les conciliateurs" (1980, 48–66), and "les partisans du comique" (1980, 66–74).

2. Kahn argues that the *Mx.* is a "kind of political pamphlet" (1963, 229), which "praises Athens as she should be praised" (1963, 224) and makes an appeal for Panhellenic unity (1963, 230). Ancient writers tended to take the oration seriously as well: see Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Dem.* 23–30). Cicero apparently claimed that Plato's oration was read annually in Athens (*Orator* 151). Kahn takes this as evidence of the seriousness of the funeral oration. However, even if we grant that "there is no reason to doubt" Cicero regarding the yearly recitation (Kahn 1963, 229), it is not obvious what exactly Cicero means here. Since the context is a discussion of the avoidance of hiatus, it is not clear *to whom* the speech was delivered every year. If, for example, it was read in the Academy, then there is no reason to think it serious in Kahn's sense. Further, the sentence itself has been suspected as the interpolation of an annotator who mistook the custom of delivering the speech annually for an annual recitation of the *Mx.*: see Sandys 1885, 162–63. Huby (1957, 105–6) attempts, unsuccessfully in my view, to discredit this argument. Given my misgivings, contra Kahn, I do not take the annual recitation as one of the dialogue's main puzzles.

3. Even Clavaud's "conciliateurs" only manage to acknowledge both comic and serious elements by splitting the dialogue and the funeral oration into serious parts and comic parts (1980, 48).

4. Aeschines, a minor Socratic, wrote a dialogue called "Aspasia": see Clavaud 1980, 253–58. On Antiphon as a target, see Clavaud 1980, 263–77. On Lysias as a target, see Henderson 1975.

5. A fourth difficulty might have been added, but the authenticity of the dialogue, once in doubt, is no longer questioned: see Aristotle *Rhet.* 1376b8, 1415b30.

6. Long (2003, 50) seems to think that the recognition of the comic elements in the dialogue amounts to a disavowal of the need for a unified interpretation of *Mx.* This inference is hardly justified—what follows is rather that a unified interpretation must take the comic elements into account.

7. The last claim is most crucial. Instead of dividing the dialogue into serious and comic parts, I propose to understand the serious point of the comedy. Cf. Salkever 1993, 133–34. On the conceptual confusion often attending the failure to understand comedy as serious, see Silk (2000, 310–20), who has an extremely instructive discussion of the meaning of the word *serious* and the various equivocations that are prevalent in discussions of the seriousness of Aristophanic comedy. To summarize his position, *serious* has three senses: (1) "solemn" as opposed to "humorous," (2) "honest" as opposed to "pretending," and (3) "substantial" as opposed to "trivial." Comedy and tragedy can be serious in the third sense, even if only one is serious in the first.

8. This characterization is intentionally broad. It has been historically difficult to pin down what exactly counts as a case of parody: see Rose 1993. Even in antiquity, the word *παρωδία* had multiple senses: see Householder 1944.

9. Henderson claims that the presence of multiple parodic targets makes the *Mx.* a “pastiche” (1975, 33). Since a pastiche can be merely imitative or parodic, I retain *parody* for clarity’s sake.

10. For other sorts of parodic distortion, see Rose 1993, 37–38. My analysis of the *Frogs* passage relies on Silk 1993.

11. There are several kinds of parodic inversion. For example, the literal understanding of an abstract concept is a kind of parodic inversion employed quite liberally in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*.

12. All translations are my own. For the *Mx.*, I have consulted Paul Ryan’s translation in Cooper 1997.

13. Silk (1993, 482, 486–87) notes that the ornate compound adjectives, simplex verbs, Doric alphas, verse vocabulary, and suppression of articles in this passage are literary features typical of tragic lyric that are not specific to Euripidean tragedy.

14. Cf. the following excerpts from Euripidean monody: δάκρυσι δάκρυσιν, ὦ δόμος ὦ δόμος (*Pho.* 1500); ἔριν ἔριν τάλαιναν ἔθετο (*Hel.* 248); ὄς ἔτεκεν ἔτεκεν (*Or.* 987). In the Phrygian slave’s long frantic monody in *Orestes* (1369–1502), there are no fewer than *eighteen* such repetitions.

15. Some scholars see Aristophanes’ comedy as mere entertainment with no serious political intention: see, e.g., Heath 1987. For a clearheaded diagnosis and criticism of the tendency of modern scholars to impose an artificial separation between art and politics in Aristophanes, see Henderson 1996, 65–69.

16. The debate in the literature on the *Mx.* has been marred by the thought that the comic and the serious must be mutually exclusive. Kahn exemplifies the speciousness of such reasoning: he argues that the speech cannot be parodic or satirical because “the intended effect is not primarily comical” (1963, 226). On his account (1963, 229ff.), the dialogue aims at a *serious* attack on Athenian imperialism and an appeal for Panhellenic unity. To rephrase his argument: “If the *Menexenus* is serious, it cannot be parody; it is serious; therefore it cannot be parody.”

17. Nightingale (1995) seems to think that parody, or at least Plato’s use of parody, involves a full repudiation of the targeted object. I will show that she is wrong about Plato and, *a fortiori*, about the larger claim. I do not want to deny that parody can involve a full repudiation. In fact, I think one only finds it in the rarest of cases. Most cases, I submit, are what I call “complex.” Rose (1993, 45–47) shows how theories of the attitude of the parodist tend toward a false choice between the extremes of *contempt* and *sympathy* despite the fact that parodies often are both critical of and sympathetic to their targets.

18. This is signaled by making the cause of the tragic fuss turn out to be a chicken. Euripides himself had earlier exclaimed, “One ought not write about a chicken in tragedy” (*Frogs* 935).

19. In Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, Euripides is mocked precisely for putting beggars and cripples, i.e., "low" people, on the stage (384ff.).

20. Another way to put this same point would be that parodic criticism can operate *dialectically* (in the Hegelian sense): such parody criticizes but does not jettison its target. If parody is dialectical, then the target genre or text is partly preserved in the "higher unity" of the parodying text. By using the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, or determinate negation, as a paradigm for understanding the "negative" aspect of parody, we avoid an overly simplistic account of parody and avoid the unfortunate dilemma between understanding the negation as either annihilating or merely playful, i.e., as born out of either contempt for or sympathy with the target. See Hegel's *Science of Logic* (I.I.I.C.3 [106–8]).

21. Henderson (1996, 66n2) describes the didactic function of tragedy as an "assumption" of the *Frogs*. He also claims that the *Frogs* conceives of "tragic poets as exemplifying and shaping the moral and civic character of their times" (2002, 5).

22. Cf. Arist. *Poet.* chap. 15. The protagonist should be "good" (*Poet.* 1454a17) but not "preeminent in virtue" (*Poet.* 1453a8).

23. Indeed, in the *Grg.*, Socrates describes most rhetoric as a species of flattery, of which epitaphios emerges here as a particularly egregious example.

24. In detailing the effects of the speech on him, Socrates invokes motifs found commonly in Aristophanic comedy's portrayal of the effect of praise on the Athenians both in the Assembly and the law courts. See, e.g., *Ach.* 1–204, 626–718. Loraux claims that "there is not a single element [of this playful praise] that Plato does not borrow from" Aristophanes' *Wasps*: the exhaustive character of self-celebratory speeches (1986, 636–37), the illusions of grandeur felt by the audience (1986, 637–38), the euphoric effect caused by eloquence (1986, 641), and the imaginary voyage to the Islands of the Blessed (1986, 639–40). Loraux goes characteristically too far in saying that Plato "plagiarized" Aristophanes (1986, 311).

25. Cf. Lysias 2.I. Ziolkowski (1981, 68–70), in his excellent work on the structure of the funeral oration, claims that mentioning the *difficulty* of the task was a common way that funeral orators tried to gain the sympathy of their audience. Plato notably omits this commonplace. Kahn (1963, 231) sees Socrates' comments here as indicating that the Lysias oration is also one of the parody's targets. Henderson denies this, though he (1975, 30–33) does argue that Lysias is a target of the parody for other reasons.

26. See, e.g., *Ar. Ach.* 520–30.

27. On the derogatory sense of *συγκολλάω* and its comic origin, see Loraux 1986, 469n282.

28. See Henderson 1975, 28. On the significance of Aspasia being a woman, see Loraux 1986; Salkever 1993.

29. Aristophanes uses this strategy of attributing well-known Periclean actions to Aspasia in *Ach.*, where Pericles is made to have started the Peloponnesian War essentially because of Aspasia.

30. Menexenus remains skeptical of Aspasia's role even after the speech (249d–e).



31. This anecdotal evidence is dubious at best, but Thucydides does call Antiphon “one of the ablest Athenians of his time” who had a “powerful intellect” and gave “the best and most helpful advice,” and he judges Antiphon’s defense speech to be “the best one ever made up to [his] time” (8.68). On the stylistic similarities between Thucydides and Antiphon, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De compositione verborum* 10, 22. See also Lamb 1914, 178–83.

32. To refer to Spartans, Thucydides uses “Peloponnesians” (257 times) far more often than other authors, though he uses “Lacadaimonians” (630) even more frequently. Cf. Xenophon and Isocrates, who both use “Peloponnesians” (twenty and seventeen times, respectively) infrequently and “Lacadaimonians” (484, 168) frequently. Plato uses “Peloponnesians” three times in the *Lg.* but nowhere else. In his oration, Socrates refers to the Lacadaimonians nine times and never to Peloponnesians. These statistics are from a search of TLG-E. See Monoson 1998, 491–92.

33. He takes on the role of Strepsiades, the slow and aged student in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. On the “late learner,” see Diggle 2004, 477. Cf. Theophr. *Char.* 27. On the late learner in Plato, see Tarrant 1996. Cf. *Sph.* 251b; *Rep.* 409b.

34. My thanks go to Stephanie Nelson for pointing this out to me. On the chorus’ practice of stripping, see Sommerstein 1980, 188. Cf. *Ach.* 627; *V.* 408; *Pax* 729–30; *Lys.* 615, 637; *Ibesm.* 656.

35. The solemn tone of the parodic funeral oration should not be wholly surprising, since the parody must substantially reproduce the tone of its target. That said, parody often does have a mocking or playful tone, which this one surely lacks.

36. The other extant orations are Lysias 2, Demosthenes 60, Hyperides 6, and a fragment from Gorgias (preserved in Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Dem.* 1).

37. The connection was recognized also in antiquity by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Dem.* 23).

38. For other alleged parallels, see Monoson 1998, 492–95.

39. See also Wickkiser 1999, 66–67.

40. The use of antithesis became widespread among Greek writers and orators, but its popularization is typically attributed to Gorgias. On the Gorgianic style of Socrates’ oration, see Coventry 1989, 7; Kahn 1963, 230; Wickkiser 1999, 67. On Thucydides’ use of antithesis, see Lamb 1914, 183–89; Parry 1970. On the influence of Gorgias on Thucydides, see Lamb 1914, 149–63.

41. The word order, reproduced in my translation, sets “beautifully spoken words” in between “deeds bravely done” and “remembrance and honor,” thus emphasizing the mediating role of words in honoring deeds. See Wickkiser 1999, 67.

42. By itself, the endorsement of the tradition would not recall Pericles, since such approval was a common feature of the prologue: see Ziolkowski 1981, 68–72. The seemingly conventional nature of Socrates’ opening should not mislead us. We know from the beginning of the dialogue that he cannot possibly mean what he says here. See Clavaud 1980, 110; Coventry 1989, 5.

43. Cf. Lysias 2.18–19; Demosthenes 60.25–26.

44. On the connotations of the word *demokratia* in the fifth and fourth centuries, see Sealey 1987. He argues that the Thuc. passage cited above shows the “deprecatory force” of the word (1987, 101–2), which Pericles wants to disclaim. On Pericles’ meaning in this passage, see also Gomme 1956, 107–9.

45. In conjunction with *Ap.* 22a2–6, this point gains more force. In describing his search for a wise man, Socrates claims to have found that “those with the highest reputation were nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior were more capable with respect to knowledge.”

46. As is clear from the *Grg.*, Plato took a dim view of Pericles’ political stewardship (515dff.).

47. In discussing this section, Kahn (1963, 225–26) argues that, since there is a serious protreptic intention, the passage cannot be parody. This is clearly fallacious, as my own interpretation will show that the parody does have protreptic intentions. Kahn glosses over the emphasis on seeming noted above and insists that the passage is an instance of “tendentious protreptic” (1963, 226), though exactly what he means by this remains obscure.

48. I will omit discussion of the autochthony section in this article. On autochthony as a commonplace of the genre, see Ziolkowski 1981, 120–21. On Athens as freedom fighters as a commonplace of the funeral oration, see Ziolkowski 1981, 106–8. For Athens as philanthropic in general, see Ziolkowski 1981, 102–10. In Lysias’s long historical section (2.3–66), he really emphasizes the notion of the Athenians as freedom fighters, and he is likely a target of Plato’s in this section: see Henderson 1975, 30–31, esp. 30n22. On the importance of the Persian War for Athenian orators, see Pownall 2004, 40–42.

49. For various accountings of the particular inaccuracies, see Clavaud 1980, 127–67; Henderson 1975, 39–45; Pownall 2004, 49–58; Shawyer 1906, xi–xv.

50. Because of these misrepresentations, epitaphioi are not considered reliable sources for fourth-century history. Since the orators were not historians, they were not bound by, e.g., the historical methodology that Thucydides lays out for himself (1.20ff.). Worthington claims that, regarding historical information, “the orators lie, distort, deliberately deceive, suppress the truth, and prevaricate as a matter of course. ... [F]acts, persons and events were exploited, manipulated and even, if necessary, created to persuade the audience” (1994, 109). So I am in full agreement with Kahn’s (1963, 224–25) caution against taking every historical inaccuracy as evidence of parodic distortion. See also Pownall 2004, 49–50.

51. Henderson describes the cumulative effect thus: “The other orators may be wrong on details—even hopelessly so—but Plato excels all. ... [N]one can rival him either in the number or degree of errors, omissions and distortions. Plato insists upon the righteousness of the Athenians in the past, willfully distorting history to prove his point. Whatever stands in the way of this rosy picture is ruthlessly discarded” (1975, 40). Kahn calls it a “systematic distortion of Athenian history” (1963, 220).

52. I agree with Coventry that it is implausible to view this section as a “noble lie” (1989, 9n33).

53. Coventry claims that the descriptions of Persia “could apply equally well to the Athenian empire” and that this parallel is being drawn intentionally as a subtle way of undercutting the omission of Athens’ empire (1989, 9–10). See also Pownall 2004, 55.

54. To take the last case for example, though it is true that the Leontini was an Athenian ally, who appealed to Athens for assistance against Syracuse, and that the issue of Leontini comes up several times in Thuc. (3.86, 5.4, 6.6), Thucydides himself clearly regards the motive of sending help to allies like Leontini as merely a pretext and the true aim of the Sicilian expedition to be control over the entire island of Sicily (6.6).

55. That Athens had an empire, properly speaking, is not considered controversial: for a classic exposition, see, e.g., Meiggs 1972. The character of that empire is a matter of some dispute. I am inclined to agreement with scholars who clearly face up to the ugly side of the Athenian Empire. See, e.g., Samons 2004. Thucydides himself sometimes paints an appalling picture of Athens as an imperial power (e.g., 5.84–115) but sometimes seems to glorify it: on this, see de Ste Croix 1954. For a summary of views concerning Pericles’ responsibility for the imperial character of Athens, see Rhodes 2007.

56. Cf. Lysias 2.47, 55.

57. On this point, see Henderson 1975, 42–43, 42n72.

58. Lysias also makes disunity an explanation for defeat (2.65–66).

59. For example, he blames the Sicilian disaster on the length of the voyage, which prevented Athens from sending reinforcements. Never mind that they sent reinforcements twice—on Socrates’ account, because of the distance, they “gave in and were unlucky” (243a). See Thuc. 7.16, 7.42. On bad luck as a theme, see Henderson 1975, 42–43.

60. Contrast Lysias, who more elegantly acknowledges and slips past military defeat in his oration (2.58–59).

61. Both Kahn (1963, 227) and Rosenstock (1994, 338) overstate the importance of the anachronism, conceiving of it as the key to understanding the whole dialogue. I see no reason to generalize Plato’s use of this anachronism, as Pownall does: “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” (2004, 59).

62. Kahn claims that in this passage, one finds “the real meaning of the speech” (1963, 226) and that it is a “truly Platonic funeral oration” (1963, 229).

63. The significance of this tone shift is typically assumed without argument, following Kahn 1963, 229.

64. See Ziolkowski 1981, 138–40. Beginning with Kahn, commentators have also claimed to notice a “bitter” tone in the *Mx*. Kahn (1963, 229–30) thinks that the narrative of the Corinthian War is the most bitter part of the speech but that the overall effect is bitter as well. Coventry (1989, 14–15) finds the exhortation to be particularly bitter but, like

Kahn, thinks the speech as a whole is bitter. Monoson (1998, 502) also notices a stinging tone, though decidedly not in the exhortation. I cannot see how either the exhortation or the praise section can be reasonably described as bitter, unless one is attributing complex parodic intentions to Plato. On the surface, no bitterness is apparent. As no textual evidence is ever given to substantiate the “bitterness” claim, I will not endeavor to prove the negative.

65. Coventry also argues that the conception of virtue in *Mx.* is not genuinely Socratic, but too much of her argument relies on *Ap.*, and she does not provide a substantial analysis of the model of virtue provided in *Mx.* except to claim that it is deficient “in its intellectual level” (1989, 14–15).

66. It is present in every section: see Ziolkowski 1981. In his oration, Pericles mentions *aretē* twelve times; in the Platonic parody, there are fourteen instances; and in the funeral oration of Lysias, it occurs thirty-four times.

67. Thus, Coventry (1989, 14) is in error when she claims that the protreptic of the *Mx.* is addressed only to children, as opposed to genuinely Socratic protreptic, which, following *Ap.* 30a, is addressed to both young and old. Addressing the children and the parents of the dead was typical of this section: see Ziolkowski 1981, 154–16.

68. Cf. Lysias 2.77; Thuc. 2.44; Hyp. 6.42.

69. Coventry calls the moral sentiments expressed in the exhortation “bland conventional moralizing” (1989, 14); however, she does not fully appreciate the military inflection that Socrates has given to virtue.

70. On this point, see Samons 2004, 187.

71. Though Pericles does advise a cessation to the expansion of the empire in order to win the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 2.65), given what he says in the funeral oration about imperial expansion as the measure of a generation's success (2.36), it seems clear that Pericles envisioned his strategy as a temporary measure to be jettisoned after the war was won.

72. None of this implies that courage is not a virtue or that citizens should refuse to serve when called upon by their city. Socrates' own hoplite service, particularly in the retreat from Delium, seems to have been distinguished: see *Ap.* 28e; *La.* 181b; *Symp.* 219e–221b.

73. Indeed, those who want to make the exhortation genuinely Platonic tend to make just this mistake, often by insisting that this part of the speech is different (in tone, intention, etc.) and can therefore be understood in isolation from the rest. Kahn, for example, refers to the “mixed tone” of the entire work (1963, 229).

74. Coventry describes Socrates' elenchus as “more painful and more intellectually demanding” (1989, 14).

75. Other scholars have noticed the protreptic intention here but have insufficiently appreciated the role of the parody in executing it: see Coventry 1989, 2; Kahn 1963, 225–26.

76. Monoson claims that, in this passage, *Mx.* “appears to make sincere use of this form of discourse and this public occasion”; she relies on the change in tone argument

(see note 73 above) and claims that, from 246a forward, one finds “more straightforward and apparently heartfelt argument” (1998, 502). I think Monoson is right to think that Pericles’ oration is one of the targets here, though perhaps not for the reasons she thinks. Among our extant funeral orations, only Pericles’ elaborates on the relationship between city and citizen to the same degree (Thuc. 2.43). Thus, it is plausible that Plato has that section in mind. Attention to the greatness of Athens, Pericles argues, should make the citizens lovers (ἔραστὰς) of Athens and its power (Thuc. 2.43.1). This erotic model of citizenship is tied to a militaristic conception of virtue. Monoson (1998, 495–97), in my view, relies too heavily on Plato’s *Lysis* to make her case. She (1998, 511n27) mentions but does not emphasize the stronger evidence of the politician as lover in the *Grg*. Recall that Callicles is described as having two lovers, both of whom are called “Demos” (*Grg*. 482c–e).

77. See especially the *Grg*., in which nearly the entire discussion with Polus and Callicles is dedicated to the defense of the preferability of suffering to committing injustice.

78. Though I do not agree with Huby’s (1957) argument that the *Mx.* is intended as a political pamphlet on behalf of war orphans, if she is right that Athens was neglecting, or considering neglecting, her duties in taking care of the families of the war dead, then the parodic point here gains more force.

79. There is some dispute as to whether the text indicates that the whole of the tribute or the surplus of the tribute was carried onstage: see Raubitschek 1941, 359–60. For the relation of the festival as a whole to Athenian political ideology, see Goldhill 1987.

80. For evidence regarding the frequency of the public funeral ceremony, see Ziolkowski 1981, 22–23. Socrates mentions athletic and poetic contests in addition. Though I will not pursue the point here, the purpose of these contests, in this context, was arguably to promote military readiness and to celebrate military deeds, respectively.

81. See also Loraux 1974, 173–77; Nightingale 1995. Ziolkowski (1981, 132–37) identifies thirty-nine commonplaces of praise in the funeral oration.

82. Pericles, in a different speech, describes the Athenian Empire as a “tyranny” but quickly brushes aside any moral misgivings (Thuc. 2.63). He asserts that Athens will be remembered eternally for the greatness of her power: for “having spent more lives and work on warfare than any other city” and for “having ruled over more Greeks than anyone else” (2.64).



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